Interviewee: Kudo

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Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: When did you start farming?

A: It was like four years ago, back in 2015.

Q: When did you start?

A: That’s something I always wanted to do. Before I moved here, I lived in Tokyo. I had been living in Tokyo for over 10 years, but I was kind of tired of it, it was not just Tokyo but city life. You basically ... all the jobs you can get is like office job or construction stuffs like that, nothing to do with farming, like the fundamental for mankind...it is only the surface of humans. So...and also like I play Sakuhachi, it is supposed to connect you to the nature, that kind of instrument, it does not really make sense to play that instrument in big city. My feelings built up for over a year, and finally I decided to move here.

Q: What did you do before you moved to the countryside?

A: You mean the job?

Q: Yes.

A: I was actually working for multiple companies, but what I was working were basically the office jobs.

Q: When did you start play Sakuhachi?

A: 15 years ago something, when I was 23, so right after I graduated from university.

Q: Why did you want to learn it?

A: It's kind of a long story, but I'm not very sure. My friend's dad was sakuhachi player, I heard that and got interested, and I went to his parent's house to check it out, that was the first time I heard the Sakuhachi sound, it was really cool. I was like... this is a really cool. His dad was really shocked to hear that I like it, he gave me one of his sakuhachi to me, 'I gave it to you if you like it', 'Really?! Wow!'. And then I moved to London, with that Sakuhachi, and then I ran into the flyer for JAS festival, and it said that there is a Sakuhachi player, he learnt from this guy, Kudo Yokoyama. I shared the same name with his master, Kudo, it is kind of weird, it is so much like coincidence happening. So I went to the show, it was good, and after the show I went talk to the sakuhachi player, and then I told him I want to learn Sakuhachi, that's how I started.

Q: So you started learning it in Vancouver?

A: Yea, it's kind of weird, right? And after a year I realized there are two different kinds of Sakuhachi, the modern one and the original Edo style. I was doing the modern one, I kind of started feeling tired of it because of the formality like you have to follow certain rules, it is pretty much like you have to play exactly the same as your teacher, be the same as your teacher. I didn't think that leads to the enlightenment, because you just get yourself into that mode, no freedom at all, ah...this is lame. And then I found out the original one, it was like more true, like more free, I can see the connection to enlightenment. And also that culture is dying in Japan, so...that's why I decided to come back to Japan to learn the original Sakuhachi.

Q: You just mentioned the enlightenment, could you elaborate more on what it is?

A: It's hard to explain... Enlightenment is the ability to observe yourself objectively, and in real life the nothingness... cause everything is changing, and you know...the present, past and future, like...even the present is not the real thing, it is real but once it comes...once the future comes to present, and then the same moment it became the past. It's kind of weird, in English there is now and here right? When you combine them, it is 'nowhere'. So... kind of like that.

Q: Is it similar to the Buddhist concept of mindfulness?

A: Yes, it is basically the same.

Q: Let's go back to the farming part. You mentioned that you always wanted to go farming when you were in the city, when did the idea start? Where did it come from?

A: Hmm... I think originally it came from the experience.... actually my friend back in Tokyo...she was originally from countryside from Ibaraki, and her parents are kind of hippies, so they are kind of gypsy you know...so really hippish, they were living a half self-sufficient life. They farmed but not so seriously, they worked three months a year, after that they just relaxed and farming, it is really a cool lifestyle. I see that my friend grew up in that environment and became such a lovely woman, so you can actually raise kids in this lifestyle, the kids can be this good. So... oh man...maybe this is the life that I should be living, so I always wanted to move to countryside, and the real trigger was the earthquake...for a lot of people I think...and the nuclear plant explosion. I totally realize how fragile it is to live in big city, so...but i have to wait three years after the explosion, because I have to get ready, and also I was making a film, so I kind of have to stay in Tokyo. Basically, right after I finished editing of the film, I moved to here.

Q: What is the film about?

A: It's about Sakuhachi and skateboarding, it's such an odd combination but ...it makes sense if you watch, it is about how the things are changing over time. Like...Sakuhachi has two different kinds, it is basically about modernization. In a modernised society, how things change in pretty much the same pattern, like ... first it started really small and core, and then expanded to the parts, you have to break it down to make it easier to understand...so for Sakuhachi, it is not just an instrument, it is also a tool for Buddhism, for the enlightenment and meditation. And then, it became just a musical instrument, so they changed how they make sakuhachi. This one is the original one, you can see the bamboo inside, it is really rough inside, just like raw bamboo. And then this one is the modern one, it is really smooth and then it is tuned to western scale. So basically, the combination of modernization and westernization, it is like everything changed and it has to be like easy to play. For the original one, you have to adjust yourself to each bamboo, because every bamboo has different shapes right? But this one...it is like factory made, standardized...so.... basically the philosophy is like...you have to adjust yourself to the bamboo. And this one, you adjust the bamboo to humans. So...it is such a big difference, and people now think that it is just an instrument right? And the same thing is happening in Skateboarding, it is a street culture, I believe. It is not the sports, we don't need having a coach...and we skate whenever we want, even when we are not supposed to skate, like in the office building. But now...it is becoming a sports because it is going to the Olympic, so in the future people will see skateboarding as a sports but it gonna lose the core element of skateboarding...like the philosophy...basically the 'fuck you' attitude that we had as a skateboarder, we gonna lose that...the spirit. It is pretty much the same way... it is also the same as agriculture. Before there was no organic farming because everything was organic, you don't really have to say that it is organic, but now...using the chemicals and fertilizers are normal, it is losing the connection to the nature, so it is same as Sakuhachi, and skateboarding too. Skateboarding...you basically skate in a wild street, so you find the obstacles to skate in the wild, but now you have to skate only in the skate park, you know what I mean? So...it is really boring, pretty boring.

Q: In your farming, what is your farming features?

A: Simply organic...I do not use any chemicals or fertilizers...I also do not use any chemicals or machines. So....I tried to avoid using machines as much as I can, cause it costs money and puts you in debt easily. You know, it is so expensive, so many farmers are struggling to repay the debt for the machines.

W: You have to purchase it, you have to fix it when it is broken, it costs a lot.

T: It happens a lot, something is wrong with that machine every year. Isamu san has a lot of machines, that's why his rice gets expensive I think.

Q: In farming, how do you see the changes between modernization and traditions?

A: It has been only three or four years, but as far as I'm concerned, I just feel good about farming this way. I don't really compare myself to the others, everyone can do whatever you want, I don't really say...this is the way, you guys should follow me. It is like...cause I understand why they use fertilizers and chemicals. Basically less people...we don't have so many people doing farming, but farmers go bigger and bigger. Lots of people get older and give up, so slightly young guys, like 70s, not like 80s grandpa give up, and the 70s guy takes over, but they are also old, so they have to use machines and fertilizers to cover all these rice fields. I understand that to keep this environment, you need to use those kinds of stuff, I understand both sides.

Q: Why did you start with that method? No machinery, no fertilizers, no chemicals...

A: I wanted to be an organic farmer, I had no experience of farming, I had to find the teachers first. Luckily for me, I came to this area because Seppuku Pistols had a show because of the exhibition at Nobutai two years prior to I came to this village. I met one guy who is an organic farmer and used to a professional photographer, his name is Kikuchi san anymore, he is kind of famous in this area because he is kind of weird. He is living in a mountain literally and he can maintain the straw roof, he follows the older style of life. So...it was really interesting...if I have a teacher, I wanted to have some cool and interesting guy to teach me. So, yeah...I was like...maybe he is the man, that's why I came here.

W: Even before you met Kikuchi san, you wanted to do the organic way.

A: Yea, because of the Ibaraki family.

W: We already wanted to grow our own rice for self-consumption, we didn't want to sell it. We wanted our food to be safe...

A: yes, safe...and kind of feel more independent. But yes, safety is a big factor.

W: You wanted to grow our own food, that's why we are looking for our own place to live like the hippie family.

A: Yes.

Q: What do you mean by more independent?

A: Because if you live in a city, you don't really have choices. You only can go to the supermarket and pick stuffs from there. It looks like you have a choice, like the food is from different areas, but...that's it. It doesn't mean you have a choice. Also, I found myself avoiding the veggies from Fukoshima area, and I felt so lame...cause I did not do those farming stuff, but I'm being like picky...like 'who am I?'. If you want to have veggies, rice and food, people like to say that I have to bring food and veggies to the family, that's why I have to work, then why don't you do farming? Why are you sitting in front of computer and doing that stuffs, it doesn't really make sense...so...yeah... that's why.

Q: I see...so true...did you face challenges in your farming?

A: No actually...only in nature...like last year, no rain, it was really tough but it was also kind of fun to realize that nature is way stronger than us, and it is so much things to learn.

Q: Do you have any positive experiences from farming?

A: It's easier to find friends who think similarly as I do, it is easy to become friends with other organic farmers because we shared the same values.

Q: Now I'm going to show you some photos of artworks nearby, could you pick one that can most illustrate your farming?

A: OK. These two are my rice fields (Scarecrow Project).

Q: So which one would you like to talk about, that most illustrates your farming?

A: Maybe this one... (Scarecrow Project)

Q: What messages did you get from the artworks?

A: Ah...it has been here for a while, so I don't really think about it. I don't really mind this kind (of xxx), it doesn't really get in the way. There is other artwork which is sitting in the middle of the rice field, yea...for example this is the field, and this artwork sitting by here, so annoying...The most important of this stuff is...this artwork is supposed to connect you to the nature, feel the nature, but I'm like 'fuck this shit', it is so much ego of the artist.

Q: Do you have to work with those objects in your rice terraces?

A: Yes.

W: Those are okay...

A: That kind is okay...in the art festival last year, so many people came to my rice fields.

W: They just came say hi and took pictures of him because he dressed like this, so they think he is part of the artwork.

A: Yes, they said 'can I take a picture', my answer was 'no'.

Q: So for you, you never thought what the artwork is telling? Do you think it is an art?

A: Hmm...I don't know...I don't mind it to be there, but so much ego I think...

Q: You mean the ego of the artist? Do you think there could be a better way to combine art with farming?

A: Not necessarily, but I think I appreciate the art festival very much, because that's the reason why I am here. If there is no Nobutai, I wouldn't be here, that is the first thing. So... I know that other people came to this area because of the art festival, and decided to live here and they are doing the farming here, that is the good thing I think. But not really directly...for example these artworks they have nothing to do with farming, they are just sitting there.

Q: How about the Sakuhachi you are playing, do you see any relationship between playing Sakuhachi and practicing farming?

A: Yes, I think so. It is kind of the same philosophy, that is Sakuhachi is about connecting the nature, it is basically collaboration with nature. You know...it is raw bamboo, but to some extent it is artificial, there are holes and stuffs that I made, it is not 100% natural but it is natural too. I don't know how to explain...If there is no bamboo, or if there is no me, then there is no sound.

T: Part of them is natural, part of them is artificial.

A: Yes, so it is a kind of collaboration. You can say the same thing with this modern instrument too, but the main difference is using the chemicals, it is too artificial, it does not really have to be the bamboo, it can be anything in this style, because inside is not a bamboo, they use Lacar to make it smooth, so that's why there is plastic one for beginner, and it does not matter because it is the same thing. But if you play this kind of Sakuhachi, like the original Edo style, plastic does not make sense, so it is a huge difference I think. The same thing with farming, if you use machines, chemicals and fertilizers, you feel like you are making these food, not nature. I am in a control, this is 'ME, making THIS food!' But organic farming, you have to rely on all these, the creatures, the bacteria and stuffs like that, you can realize that it is not just you to make this life...So this is the huge difference, it makes sense for me in playing this instrument and doing organic farming.

Q: After you started farming, do you think the practices of farming also influence how you play Sakuhachi?

A: Yes, I think so, like feeding each other.

Q: Could you elaborate more on this point?

A: So...by farming in an organic way, it is kind of back up my Sakuhachi too, it's like...it makes more sense for people, not just me. I feel good about myself, not working in office, just working outside and farming on the field makes me feel good. Also, if you are audiences and see the Sakuhachi coming up and explaining how he is connected with the nature and stuffs, and then you found out he actually does not know what he is talking about, this is so lame right? 'Actually I don't really know about nature', so lame, right? So....now I can say, to some extent, with some confidence.

Q: How about from the perspective of feeling...do you feel the difference when you practice Sakuhachi now and before you started farming?

A: Ah...can't really tell, but maybe yeah...like more confidence.

Q: Can I hear the difference between the modern sakuhachi and the traditional one?

T: It's really cool...the story about controlling the nature, it makes sense you know.

T: It's more like instrument with that one, and more like wind...like nature sound (for the traditional one).

A: The sound is really big, once you played the modern one, the audio is big. Once you play it with the traditional one, you cannot really hear it. That's another big difference too. Originally, the Sakuhachi is not just for instrument sound, it is also the surrounding, it becomes like part of the environment and the environment becomes like part of the sakuhachi music, vice versa, so there will be no ego.

T: I kind of remember that he was playing Sakuhachi in the older house, when we listened your music, we have to be so quiet. Everyone got really quiet so we can listen to that sound or that sound of nature, or someone making sounds outside. It's so clear that we concentrated on the sound so much because we have to listen to it. It's really like wind, we have to listen to it. It was a really interesting experience.