Interviewee: Watanabe san

Date: 12 March 2019, 10am

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: When did he start farming?

A: 43 years ago, when he was 27 years old, right now he is 70 years old. But he was helping his family, he was helping farming since he was a kid, but starting by himself, it was when he was 27 years old. He came back from Tokyo to his hometown here, when he was 27 years old. That's why he kind of started by himself.

Q: What was he doing before that?

A: He was working at the lawyer office, right now his job is surveying. He was doing job like preparing paper work for clients to claim the ownership of their properties. It is related to the job he is doing here now.

Q: When he moved back, he started with surveying or farming? Why did he move back?

A: He actually wanted to come back from the beginning, but thinking about how to earn money from here, he said the... it’s too small business for living only by farming, he is actually looking for other jobs to support the incomes or living, other than farming. He went to Tokyo to see what he can do as a supporting job for farming, he was actually thinking maybe he could have cows, he could raise some little fish or little creatures to eat the weed of rice terraces, he was thinking about maybe doing these could help the living, but in the end, he met the job he is doing right now, measuring the land for the people to claim what they own, he learnt it and came back with the skills of doing the job, he can come back to farm and support his incomes.

Q: Why he chose to do the job of measuring the land? Is it just a skill to earn money, is there a special meaning about the job?

A: He actually had a relative at the city hall of the next town, that relative was talking to his dad about those license to measure the land and how to do the paper work, there is the possibility that there will be demands for that license, he could have many jobs, it was kind of an advice from the relative. When he was in Tokyo, he went to the school to get that license while working at sushi restaurant, he was interested in having his own restaurant as well. He was into a lot of things, but the advice from his relative about what is needed in the future in this region, it came to real since he got the license to do this job.

Q: For the reason why he wanted to come back, is it just because he wanted to farm?

A: He is the oldest child in the family, he always thinks that he is the one to take care of his children when he got older, it did not really make sense to him to take them to Tokyo, he did not think that it is right to take them to Tokyo. It naturally came to him that, he can come back here and take care of his parents, then he is going to farm, that’s why he wanted something to support his living other than his farming, it's all connected. At his generation, a lot of people just went to Tokyo with their parents and family, it was kind of like popular to move out from the countryside to the city, but he did not think in this way, even though his generation or his friend... a lot of people think in that way but he did not think in that way.

Q: Why he didn’t want to bring his parents to Tokyo?

A: It did not come to real that the living in Tokyo, he felt that it was not his life in Tokyo, he likes farming.

Q: How he started farming when he came back?

A: The scale of farming is not changing when he was a kid, it is family business scale, it is not really big. He mentioned that people can earn enough money by making rice here in his previous generation, the life was self-sufficient. But because of the change of price, it became more luxurious, the farmers couldn't get enough living only from farming, that happened in his generation. He was thinking even if he came back to take up the farms, he would not do the same thing as the previous generation was doing. At that time around 30, he had some health problem, maybe some kind of serious diseases, the doctor just told him that his sickness wouldn't be healed with the medical treatment at that time, he had to try some alternative ways to heal himself. He met a guy told him that maybe Asian treatment would be better than the European one, he met macrobiotics that kind of stuff, oriental medication. All the food has positive power, negative power...the nature of the food, it's called macrobiotics. He met those methods at that time, there was a South African doctor of those alternative medication, what to eat, how to breathe, something like that, he was here looking for countryside life. He met that doctor, it was life changing, about way of thinking, eating and lifestyle, it changed him completely and his body got much better. Those methods make sense with the life in countryside and farming, all those just became connected and all came together to him. His decision of coming back for farming, having life here, it all matched to him.

Q: What kind of farming is he practicing now?

A: It is all based on the method from macrobiotics, it’s about living naturally...he is running an accommodation right now so that people can experience farming and life in countryside. Actually the HK teams were staying at his accommodation three years ago, he thinks that all those...including running the accommodation for people to experience farming and countryside life is his farming. All he thinks is what farming is to him.

Q: Did he do this since 40 years ago?

A: It was not like that at the beginning, he got some diseases and had some problems with his health, and met the method, it just completely changed him and everything, lifestyle and farming, not using any chemical fertilizations, etc. He just tried to have the life that the method tells him, the doctor just gave up on his health, but he recovered completely from it, it changed everything in him, that’s how he started this farming style he has right now.

Q: What are the changes of his health and body?

A: First of all, it is the food. it is about recovering his health from the disease, the basic thing is what you eat, and the living style like when to sleep and when to wake up, the basic human living is what he has to care about. But it definitely changed his health and he got recovered. Through that experience, he thought that he had to start...here is a really important place to communicate to the city that life likes this is really cool, maybe it is a really good place to do this kind of communication here.

Q: Did he face any challenges in his farming?

A: Physically, there is nothing hard, it is just fun. He has no time for everything, making time to do proper things in proper timing is so hard for him.

Q: I saw from the flyer that he is also making miso, sake, where did those ideas come from?

A: it is about the same method, studying about that method is kind of like going back to the traditional Japanese meal that we have had before, it’s about going back to those Japanese food that we have had thousand years ago. That’s our culture of food, through studying the method, it just goes back to those basic traditional Japanese food, that’s why he started to make it himself. He started 30 years ago, the method is telling that you shouldn't eat any meat, egg or milk, but 30 years ago it was just weird to tell people that he is not eating meat, milk or egg, but now it is normal to have people who do eat those food and allergic to them. Right now, it is normal, but 30 years ago, especially in the countryside, it was weird. What he made is actually what farmers are making in their house many decades ago, so it is kind of like what the farmers here were doing before, just looking for the method that makes his body cure itself easier, it was kind of natural for him to do the same thing as what Japanese farmers used to do in this countryside. He got a call a few minutes ago, that was from a cooking class in Tokyo, they are doing macrobiotics cooking, they actually do the rice farming here with his rice terraces and they use his miso in their cooking class, it is connected with people who believe in this method.

Q: What are the positive experiences when he tried to promote these ideas in his farming?

A: His basic idea of living is based on the macrobiotic method, he did not mean to be the one touring this region, he is just having life here based on that method, but looking at that method, it is not possible to make it happen in Tokyo, the life that method recommends is not possible in the city. People who want to live that kind of lifestyle just connected with him and came to this place, he did not mean to be like an ambassador, he is just doing what he thinks is connected to his life but he met people who think in the same way and they kind of come to this place to do what he is doing. Those connections are really precious to him, and those people are buying his products or asking him to make some more with different sizes, these connections are also doing really good for his business.

(showing him pictures of artworks)

A: He likes their performance (Seppuku Pistols). These are from the first Art Festival; he has a lot of memory about them. It is kind of like...the presence of the artworks highlights the life of old Japanese style, especially the first Art Festival, it featured those views and memory a lot from those artists, it reminded him of their old life too. This one is the same (rice field) ...He does not understand this (human reentering nature), he couldn't even remember if there is a tree besides the figure. This art piece (Rice house) is blended with nature, he sees it as connected to nature...in farming, he also thinks in that way, like connecting to nature, being in nature, or life in nature, he kind of understands the situation of this art piece. He feels how strong and how big the nature is, when he goes to the rice terraces and doing farming, he feels the power of nature, he feels that the artwork gives people the opportunity to think. He has been to the site, there is a wall, he kind of likes the space with the wall but he does not get any ideas of the art piece, he just felt that seeing the wall and stuff, he kind of likes it, but as an art, he does not get it at all, maybe that’s the way it is, who cares... He does not know this place, but he started explaining what he is doing in his rice terraces, he started making a space besides his rice terraces so that people can play around in his place, maybe having lunch there so that they can feel the nature and farming. he wanted to show you the picture, this is what he wants to do so that people can feel what he feels in the nature. He feels that people feel more room and more relaxed in his farming site.

(Watanabe san showing us the picture of his rice field)

A: That’s what he built besides his rice terraces. He believes he took better picture of that but he cannot find it. It also reminded him the view of farming in the past. (Scarecrow Project)

Q: I want to ask him the last question, he mentioned that when he makes those food products, he is also trying to do what people did many decades ago at home, how does he feel about what he is doing, the memory of the past, way of life in the village, what does he think about it?

A: It is obviously that we cannot have the same life as the old one, maybe winter is too cold, the house is too uncomfortable, it is too harsh. He mentioned about my house because it is old fashioned, you know without good heating system, of course I can live in. he has a modern style house, it is comfortable to live in. As you see, it is not reasonable to have same life as before. But he tried to have a really important basic life from the life of the past, he got a modern house but the materials he used for his house ... he only used wood and traditional Japanese materials. Maybe like having older things as what people used to have before, it is not possible, he tried to have some important things...basic important things from those life before, to conserve lifestyle, food and dishes, and the really important parts. That’s what he keeps, but other parts, maybe he cannot.

Q: Is it the same idea from macrobiotic?

A: It is kind of ... in a way...because the basic philosophy of macrobiotic is that you live in harmony with nature, in this way you can keep your health. It is like basic idea of how he keeps it. Like miso and some fermented food, it is really good for your body by science right now, but for people from before, they do not really know science, but they know how good it is to their body, that’s why we keep it in our traditional culture. What they are doing without knowing, now we can see how good it was scientifically, it is proved by science so we can understand better by how good it was by science.

Q: Does he think that it is important to have science to prove that how traditional things work nowadays?

A: it’s good to be proved. He really thinks that the basic idea of how good natural life that people had had before, science develops a lot to control life but, in the end, he believes that what controls us... living in nature naturally is going to be proved. Maybe modern science and medicines just look at some diseases that you have, if you have stomach cancer, they just pick up that cancer and try to cure the cancer. Like oriental medicine, if you have cancer in your stomach, it is not about stomach but about the whole of your body, the mind and everything, it’s about harmony and balance. That’s the things he believes that matter, but not picking up the details, trying to do something and taking control of it, this is not the true thing. He believes that the truly important thing is looking at the whole thing, and looking at harmony and balance, that’s kind of like concepts of macrobiotic. All things just go back to what you eat, what you grow... Through learning the method, believing in the philosophy and practicing it, it just connects everything to him, people coming to him to visit this region, it is also revitalizing this region too. He is not trying to make this place a tourist spot, but people just keep coming because of what he believes and does. All the things kind of fit in that philosophy, all things have surface and the back of that, he mentioned that people moving from city to countryside is a reaction to his generation going to the city to live in. actually our generation is not the first one to think that it would be better to move from city to countryside, it is that Kikuchi san...his generation, maybe around 50-60, is the beginning of the reaction to the movement of countryside people wanting to go to the city, maybe it’s too much. Right now, I’m the second generation of moving from city to countryside, the number is increasing, he believes that it is the reaction of the mainstream to people’s movement.