Interviewee: Morita kun

Date: 20 March 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: Q: When did he start farming?

A: From 2015, it was four years ago.

Q: Did he start here?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did he start?

A: He was hired by NPO, his job was meant to farm, it is included in his job, that's why he started.

Q: What did he have to do in his job, apart from farming?

A: Basically it is about rice farming, but not vegetables.

Q: Apart from farming, what did he have to do?

A: Mainly it is about maintaining the permanent art pieces around, they have to maintain the houses where the art pieces are exhibited, they have to dig the snow, for example, they just moved all the art pieces right behind Nobutai, so that kind of maintenance job. He also has to help the performances at the performance event, or he also has to organize the art events, maybe art festival itself, like sending all the goods and rice to the events hosted in Tokyo. He has to sell the rice, this is the kind of jobs that he is doing.

Q: How does he understand the farming part of the job?

A: His primary job was junior high school teacher. After graduated from university, he started to be an art teacher, but it was only for a year, that was his primary job. Through his job, he had to communicate with the kids, through the communication with junior high school students, he kind of realized that he just attended high school, university, and then became an art teacher, it was like ... a narrow vision of his life (T: but it could be too ordinary, too standardized). Normally, Japanese students just go to high school, university and then get some jobs, it is like standard, he kind of means the narrow choice too. He got an offer from the NPO if he wanted to join them for the job, he could come...Actually the recruitment was not very official, they did not do any advertisement, they did not say who they want for what to the public, they did not say that, they go with people's connections. They just asked around if there are people interested in working in this area, this is their way of recruiting people, it is not official.

Q: Does it mean that he did not really know what he had to do here in the beginning?

A: Yes...He is from Nagasaki prefecture, it has its own culture, then he had been working in Tokyo as an art teacher. His brother, sister and parents are so against him for joining the NPO, because people don't know really know what a NPO is doing.

Q: You mean the nature of NPO?

A: Yes, because it is non-profit making, a lot of people think that...they don't really know what is going on. His family was so against him for going to Niigata Prefecture, because he is so far away from where he was born. He didn't know what he is going to do, he kind of knew that he will be involved in a variety of things, like organizing events, helping those artists, organizing all the art schedules and stuffs. He kind of has the blurred ideas if he joined the NPO, he is going to do a lot of things by himself. He was interested in that situation because he had been thinking that his life and choices were too limited, it was like he had been only doing certain things, so he was interested to be involved in more different things.

Q: He was interested in the art part?

A: Yes, he was interested in being involved in this art festival, that was the beginning of the story. He had a blurred idea of taking care of the rice field.

Q: Did he have any farming experiences before?

A: Not at all. It was his first time.

Q: I wanted to ask him more about his background. Did he study art in college? Why did he become an art teacher?

A: He was in the art school, he was working on sculpture, he is still working on his pieces, so he is an artist. It was his dream to be an art teacher when he was a high school student, so his dream kind of came true.

Q: Why did he quit after one year?

A: It was really fun. He thought that he couldn't teacher anything to the students, he felt that he has nothing to teach...he hadn't experienced many things in his life, he kind of felt he couldn't teach much to the junior high school children. (T: I think he was kind of stuck...because he felt that he hasn't experienced much things in his life, he felt that he is not really someone who could teach things to students through art).

Q: Is it like...he is not talking about the knowledge of art, but more about...

T: It's not knowledge I think...if you want to teach something to students, especially art, I think they have no textbooks, like they can teach the technical parts, like what to draw, etc. But what he wanted to make them to draw is the point, how to make it fine, how to inspire them.

A: He kind of grew up in a standard Japanese way, he went to high school, he went to university, that was like being in school and being a student have been his experiences mostly. There are many things that he wanted the students to do, but he wasn't really sure how he could help them to work on the art, to help those students to figure out what they wanted to do, what they wanted to be.

Q: So it is not the art, but what kind of person the students want to be?

T: Yes, but he wanted to use art to help them, that's what he wanted to do as an art teacher, maybe he thought that those projects and artworks would help them to understand who and how they want to be, or their goals...He wanted to help them to figure those things out by working on the art. He had been mostly a student, he wasn't sure if there are students who wanted to be someone he has no idea of, he thought that he couldn't help those students, he did not know a variety of people, or many life experiences.

Q: Where did the idea that art can help students to figure out what kind of person they want to be come from?

A: He thinks that in this world, art is everywhere, no matter what you are going to do, you are going to be surrounded by art without knowing it. Any kind of jobs involve art in any ways, he wanted to tell them that...knowing art could make their future different, seeing things differently, or actual benefits to their future. Because no matter what they gonna do in their job, that job is going to be surrounded by art, or some kind of influences are there, he wanted to tell them about that. He thinks that it is pretty close to the basic idea of the art festival.

T: The previous topic about the experience as an art teacher, it is my mom's friend's story. She came to the art festival to look for new ideas for her teaching, she is a famous one. She always made the students do interesting things to help the students to communicate themselves, she needs new ideas to help her with that, or some inspirations from outside. So she visited the art festival every time, when she saw the art pieces, it is not only if she likes it or not, but more about 'maybe I can do it with the students in this way'. Art teachers...because they don't have any textbooks about teaching the art, they need to have their own ways to tell the students the important things. It's kind of different from other subjects, that's one of the hardest things about being a teacher, or a difficult part that he was considering. He needs some inputs...

Q: He has been working here for four years now, did the experiences here give him some new ideas when compared with four years ago?

A: Too many things that he gained, he is having such a good life right now.

Q: What is the most significance experience?

A: He moved here four years ago, before that, because he studied in an art university and his teacher has been visiting this art festival, he has been coming to this place so many times. He kind of knew what it looks like, before he moved here, he was interested in the houses, how they are constructed, the shapes of the houses and how they made it because of the snow. It is really different from houses in other places, like in where he was born, there is not much snow, so Mr. Berg told me that all the houses hundred years ago...this region has the most beautiful and well-structured one, all the woods that they are using for the houses are the best one, like Osaka...western part of Japan, those houses are ... the basic parts are so much thinner than here. Because of the snow, the houses have to be the strongest. He was interested in the shape of the houses; he was also interested in the shapes of the vegetables. Because he is involved in farming, he saw how those leaves come out, those kinds of things and the shapes, the plants and the vegetables. The wild edible plants are coming out from winter, he is interested in the shapes of them as well. Without involving in farming here, he would not know about all these new things, that was the new thing to him, there are so many things he realized and gained.

Q: How about the rice farming? I think he is also taking care of the rice fields that have artworks on them?

A: Originally, the rice fields originally were mountains, it is just that people made rice terraces on mountains, it is like artificial. He said that, you could think of them as sculpture of mountains, he feels in this way about rice fields. About farming, mostly people do it with machines, you can tell how they went to plant those rice shoots on the rice terraces. It's about the shape, and how they do it is really interesting to him. The old tools are also interesting things to him, the tool itself...and the old one that people do not use anymore is also fresh and interesting to him.

Q: Is there any example of tools that he found interesting?

A: The shape of ..., the tool that draws line on the rice field. Every family used to have one, and it is hand-made, everyone has different sizes based on their own land, those things are interesting to him.

Q: What is the feature of his farming/the NPO now?

A: The rice terraces that the NPO are working on are places that are deep in the mountain, or on top of the rice terraces, people do not want to use them anymore because machines cannot get in, or it is too far away from the road, so mostly inconvenient one on the mountain, like the one you guys had. He is planting normal Koshigari rice, and the rice used for sake. They are trying to do the organic way, no chemicals...for fertilization, they did not do it last year but they still have to figure out how to do it this year. They are actually trying to get the JAS mark, he is working on it.

Q: Do they use machinery?

A: Yes. They use machines but there are rice terraces that machines cannot go in, they also do it by hands. They organize events...they are doing some supporting system for rice terraces to preserve them, they invite people to be shareholder of the land and they paid money, and they will get the rice. They also hold events for rice planting, in that case, they would grow by hands so that people can experience.

(Showing Matsuyama kun pictures of the artwork)

A: He is taking care of those land (Rice Field, Scarecrow Project). They have artworks there but he is not taking care of the rice fields.

(Sayako asking the questions, explaining my experiences with the artwork)

A: It is kind of like...there is art everywhere, those art pieces are just part of the art everywhere. If he wants to relate farming with art, it is just like how he is involved on the land, or how he shaped the land. Maybe he is too connected with the artwork, it is not something special that he feels or he thinks, it is full of art in daily life. He does not really figure out the connection between what he does and those art, it is just like air, it is too daily life thing for him. He is taking care of this land, this is the field that machine cannot get in, he was wondering why the shape of the land is like this, 'why the shape is like this?!', some parts are so deep and muddy, some parts are not. He kind of figured out there was a landslide over here (pointing to the picture), that's why it became this kind of shape and some parts of the field are really muddy and some parts are steep. Through working on the field, he came to realize what it is like this and how it becomes, he thinks that it is really interesting.

Q: He thinks more about the land than the artwork?

T: Yes, because he thinks that it is full of art everywhere, every day, it is not something special that he has to feel about, it is one of the art pieces that he feels every day. He is going to involve in some places and some parts, that makes him feel interesting really. He got to know about something deeply or better, that's he thinks is really interesting, but art piece itself is just like air.

Q: Did he understand the messages of the artwork?

A: Not so much, some of them are vague.

Q: How did he understand this one (Scarecrow project)?

A: He knows that the figures are to communicate the shapes of the original owner of the rice field, it became red because it is to be seen on the field. He knows the meanings.

Q: Which artwork of the art festival does he like the most?

A: There are too many art pieces that he loves, it is really hard to choose. None of them on these pictures are his favourite. The house with craving, he likes it, his teacher was involved in this project and he was involved in the project too. There was a building called xxx, there is an art piece inside, it just shows that the art piece does not exist anymore, but it shows where are those art pieces were in Tokamachi city or Tsunan, it shows the mapping, that he thinks is interesting.

Q: Will he go back to teach?

A: It's not only teacher, he wants to be someone who can tell...for example, if nobody wants to work on those rice terraces they are going to disappear, he wants to remain them and keeps remaining people about that, he wanted to be someone who can tell the messages that they are disappearing, but he does not want them to disappear, he wants people to know about it and the culture that might disappear in the future, he wants to be the one who communicates those things. It's not just about being a teacher, he does not want to be a teacher, he just wanted to be someone who can communicate those with people. It's not just like a job for money, it is just who he wants to be.

Q: How does he want to do it? By art?

A: Through art pieces by himself, it is not going to be in that way. He wanted to be involved in actual actions about conservations, if he keeps farming, maybe it will remain for 40 or 50 years. This is the one thing he wanted to involve and communicate.