Interviewee: Kikuchi san

Date: 23 March 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: When did he start farming?

A: 2003, 16 years ago.

Q: When did he start?

A: There was a rice terrace just in front of him, it was abandoned for a long time, so it did not look like in good shape.

Q: Is it just outside of here?

A: In front of this house, there is a patch of rice terraces, when he got here, there was a strong weed called Yoshi, like at his height or over his height.

Q: When did he move here?

A: He moved here in 2002, he knows how to maintain the straw roofs, he is the craftsman. At first, he did not mean to farm, he just came here and started working as the straw roof craftsman, so he went somewhere to repair the roof, he was doing it before.

Q: He was already doing that even before he moved here?

A: At first, he wanted to move here because he wanted to record the life here, about this village, that was his original reason of coming here. He is actually the professional photojournalist in Tokyo.

Q: Is that his own project or he was paid?

A: That is his own project.

Q: When did he want to do it?

A: In general, he was interested in the village life. It was not specifically in this village; he was interested in the community life in village in general. When he got here, there was only elders here, he knew that it is going to disappear in ten years. He wanted to record how it is going to disappear.

Q: Is he still doing the recording?

A: From the beginning, he did not do it, maybe just a little bit, he actually did not do any of it. When he got here, this house was not like this, there was rain coming down from the roof, there was a hole from the roof, there was no floor, maybe some parts...Actually the walls have holes too, it was just about to collapse. It was his most urgent mission to repair those parts, so he could survive in the winter. Before winter came, he had to do all the works, this is what came to him in the first place. When he started it, he just realized that maybe it won't happen in one or two years, it was not that easy. He actually had no ideas about architecture, any of the carpenters’ work, the last time he used hammers and those tools was maybe when he was a primary school kid. He thinks that maybe the reason why he came up with the idea that he would do it by himself, otherwise if he knows even a little about the carpenter work, nobody would try to do it by himself because it is too much. That's how he started his life here.

Q: Where did the recording idea go?

A: He said it is a good question, the passion is the same, but at same point maybe taking pictures is not exactly what he wanted, he wanted to preserve all those old things, like this house, the straw roofs, the mud walls, the Japanese old culture and techniques, and with those rice terraces. He changed, he wanted to preserve those actual things by himself.

Q: How about the farming part? How did he start?

A: He did not mean to do any of the farming when he came here, he knew it is going to be really tiresome, he did not want to do anything about it, there was not even a slight idea of starting it. The rice shoots boxes were piling up at the entrance, he threw them away, he had never thought that he would start farming. The former owner has all the tools for rice farming. There are a lot of reeds all over in front of his house, it was too high and annoying, he had to cut them for the first year, and second year as well. Actually, if he just leaves them there, they would come up again. He started to get rid of the roots of the reeds, but his neighbour just told him that he has the rice shootings for rice planting, he kind of cultivated the land there, how about just planting those leftover rice shoots. He did it and he found it interesting to do the farming.

Q: That's interesting. How did he feel from his first rice farming experience?

A: At first, it was not really fun, he just did it because the neighbours asked him to, it was more about the relationship with the community. But two years later, he tried to start growing rice from seeds, that was life changing to him. From the seed, it turns from the thin, white seedlings, if you move them to the rice terraces, they just begin to grow so much. Seeing how they grow, it impressed him so much, he never thought that it could be that impressed. He thought it is life itself, from seedlings to the shootings. It is like having children too, looking at how they grow from the beginning, it was something he was really impressed, that was the change.

Q: Where did he learn how to grow the seedlings, the transplantation and all these?

A: He learnt from his neighbours, he did not really ask them, he looked at them and tried by himself. It happened to all newcomers, they do not know anything about something and they just do some strange things in the eyes of locals. If we do too many strange things, the neighbours will just help us. They can't look at it anymore; they have to help you. It happened a lot to him.

Q: What methods did he use at the beginning?

A: For the first year at the little patch of rice terraces in front of his house, he never used anything because it is a little patch and he was weeding by hands, not using any machines and chemicals, he just planted it and let it grow. For the third year, the neighbour who taught him a lot on farming, he was really nice to him and he asked lived next door, he passed away suddenly by heart attack, he was doing rice farming around here, around 50 acres of rice terraces. He passed away in the middle of rice planting, there was no one to take over his farming, his family just asked him to take over it. He kind of had no choice, so he took them all. He did not do anything like that before, he did not have any confidence to do 50 acres of land in organic way, so he kind of used the machines the elder had and he used chemicals to weed. In a month later after putting chemicals on the rice field, he still preserved the little rice field in front of his house in the same way, he did not use any chemicals on his own land, but for what he took over from the elders, he had to use chemicals and machines. A month later, he could see how different those rice shoots look like, the one that he did not use chemicals was stronger and more lively, it was obvious, that is his observation.

A: He just explained that, maybe the mainstream farming in Japan, they have to use chemicals, fertilization and machine, if all three of them work together, then they produce good yield. What he had done was only using chemicals for weeding and using machinery, so no fertilizations, so that was maybe why it looked really not lively. Actually what he was doing in front of his house, by no chemicals and machinery, he had more room for each of the seedlings, they look much more lively. He just described the one with chemicals and machine as not lively, like they do not want to do anything, it's like the depressed one. He wanted to have fun on what he does, having those that is not using chemicals and machines was much more fun for him. For fertilization, he got to spray them on right timing, when JA told you. I have heard someone talking about it, I missed the timing so I did not do that, something like that. It was too complicated and annoying to him, it was more fun for him to have his own way. He said, he may be an idiot that he did not do anything about it, but it's natural.

Q: What is he doing with all the rice fields right now?

A: He has been doing the mainstream method for a couple of years, but after that, he did not have much fun. He just changed the way, he is still taking care of all those lands now, because he had done a couple more years of doing the alternative way, he got some experiences and confidence in what and when he should do for weeding. He thought he could do that on other farming lands too, so he started doing all of them in an alternative way.

Q: What does farming mean to him now?

A: It's a major income to him, but most of all, it is like living, we have the word ' *hyakushō* ', it is Japanese word for farmer, it means the one who has a hundred jobs. Farming is like living, for those ‘*hyakushō’* life, it is not divided by how you earn and how you live, it is not separated, it is the same. The thing you do is for living, but it is also for incomes. For him, it is living.

Q: Is the recording idea still here?

T: His recording kind of changed to the record of things.

Q: Can he describe more his recording of farming? At the beginning, he wanted to record the life here, but now he is living this kind of life here, how does he feel about it?

A: It is kind of the same thing for him, recording as photo means that you want to spread your view and spirit to the world, or the next generation. Having this kind of life, preserving the old Japanese culture, is just the same to him. Someone maybe pass by and see his work and this house, then that's kind of communicate something to him and the next generation, it is all the same for him. If you draw picture on the canvas, you communicate something. Living in this village...the village itself is a canvas for him. Living is like art to him, and the village is the canvas for him, it is a tool to communicate what he thinks to the people. He has the spirit to communicate the life here to other people. He wants to communicate and show life here and all the Japanese culture to someone else and the next generation.

Q: Overall, did he face any challenges in his farming?

A: There is no actual challenges to him, but the most challenging part to him is that all the elders are leaving this village, and the villages around here. Elders for him, they are such a big treasure to him, their existence is really important to him, that is the hardest and saddest thing to him. Maybe they moved, or they passed away, something like that, that's the part that hurts.

Q: What about the positive experiences?

A: He feels good, he feels comfortable, safe and easy about this country life. Everything is in good life cycle, the life here...about energy and everything, like food...every cycle of living is in nature, and he is in there. Nothing is unreasonable, city life is full of unreasonable things, everything costs something, everything has some unnatural energy...But in here, if you go into the mountains, you have woods for fire, even though you do not have money and you are not so rich, you can just survive in some ways. He described the life in countryside as reasonable... (T: I cannot really translate in English, but there is no such thing that you have to be involved in something that is too much for you/stressful, even in relationship too. There are too many things that you have struggle with in city life, but in here...it's like wasted, or unreasonableness.)

T: Everything is in cycle and sustainable, ecologically maybe it is sustainable, but more like he feels sustainable as a human being. Life in city is not really sustainable, there are so many things that you do not need in city life, but you got to be involved a lot. Like getting warmth, if you go to the mountain, get woods and make a fire, you get warmth. But in city, you cannot do that, some kind of energy is created by some unsustainable materials. It's really simple thing, but the simple thing is hardest to explain.

A: Life in here, everything is in cycle, if you put fire on here, you can dry something above, but if you want help their fireplace, it is such a reasonable thing to have this kind of roof. I can pretend to make a fireplace in my house, but my house is covered by walls and roofs, they cover all of it, so smoke and air wouldn't go out from my house, it is not in cycle, but in here, everything is so reasonable, everything exists for a meaning and it could be used for something.

(Showing him pictures of artworks.)

A: He is not interested in those artworks and the Art Festival. He is interested in how the life becomes like this, in this village, or villages around here. Because people do not mean to make those rice terraces and houses in the first place, it just happened naturally because they needed to eat and feed their children, or they needed to raise their family in a house but not in nature. It just happened without any purpose but just became to be a style here, he is interested in those life and how people, that kind of living things around here. Maybe about those artworks, he might think that it is beautiful, funny or strange, it is not interesting to him. He does not have any words about those art pieces, he is interested in life itself.

Q: Is that because those art pieces are disconnected with the life here, or the previous memory of how people live their life here?

A: Yes. He thinks about the cycle, everything is reasonable, and the artworks are out of the cycle.

Q: How about art in general, but not the artworks, did he see any connections between art/taking photos and living the life here?

A: He thinks every creature, and human being itself is art. Everything can be art, he does not deny seeing those artworks have an impact, he loves seeing them too. But for the Art Festival, it is more about making profit, so he does not like it. He does not agree with how they put countryside like a product, because it is so beautiful here. Like the Yayoi Kusama's artwork in front of the station, that's the famous one, he felt hat the artwork is incredible when he saw it in a museum, it was so lively and he can feel what she wanted to describe. If the artwork is in Tokyo or the middle of the city, he would feel the same way. But in front of the Matsudai station, even if it is the same person making it, it is just so miserable, compared to the actual life around, so he was wondering why he did not realize that.

(Sayako explaining why I'm interested in the topic)

T: People would feel sorry if they are interested in the art festival, I just explain to him that you are not the person who loves the art festival.

Q: He mentioned that living this kind of life and farming here is his way to communicate to people, but some people think that having artwork on the farm can also be a way to communicate farming here, what does he think about it?

A: He just doesn't deny anything, he thinks that a variety of thoughts and ideas is really important. Even though he is doing an alternative way of farming, he does not deny the use of chemicals and mainstream farming. Without those practices, food crisis would happen to a lot of people, so it is in a way important too. We have to be aware of those variety of things and accepting it, it is really important because nobody is going to know what's next in the future. He just described his life as miserable, it looks miserable but he is having fun living in here.