Interviewee: Tanaka san

Date: 24 March, 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did he start farming?

A: 10 years ago.

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A: There is someone who rent him a rice terrace nearby. He came here 10 years ago, someone just rent him the rice fields so he just started.

Q: When did he move here?

A: He is originally from Kyoto, he wanted to move to countryside, that's one of the main reasons. He was in Tochige Prefecture, which is near Tokyo, it was not countryside enough to him. He was in that Prefecture, it was not like countryside enough, this place is more like countryside. There are a lot of countryside in that Prefecture too, but where he was in was a little bit town-ish.

Q: Why did he want to live in countryside?

A: His previous job was to sell things, he thought that what he was selling was meaningless, he kind of got bored so he wanted to make and sell something that is more meaningful. In that way, he thought that countryside would be better to do it.

Q: What was he selling?

A: In the end, he was selling Internet broadband, before that he was selling solar panel for electricity. Before that, he was organizing people the jobs of workers to different sites. He was doing that kind of jobs before and he felt bored.

Q: Why does he think that living in the countryside can create something meaningful?

A: He looked for some companies which are making something meaningful for him, he could not find any companies in the city. He was looking for something that has a meaning, like about houses, we need a house to live in. But right now in Japan, we just keep building houses that are not needed, that is the kind of the jobs that they are doing. Maybe decades ago, people need a house, that's why people build a house, but right now they just build it but there are not many people to live in. In that case, that kind of thing is not meaningful to him. This maybe is also the reason he started to think about making food himself.

Q: He wanted to make food so he moved here? Or he moved here first and found out about making food?

A: About getting woods for energy and heating, he wanted to live this kind of life, getting some food and energy by himself, living a sustainable life for himself, he knew that it would be easier to do it in the countryside than in the city. For the woods, it is super easy to get one, in the city you are never able to reach those woods.

Q: How about rice farming? How did he start?

A: He has a teacher too, he is doing such a great work in rice planting. He knows him and has been visiting him before he moved here. He was in the preparation for rice planting before he moved, he got someone renting him the rice fields, so he started immediately after moving here.

Q: In the beginning, he just followed what the teachers do?

A: He tried to follow his methods as much as he can.

Q: Is he still following the same method?

A: He tried to change a little, he kind of came back to the original way, he is feeling in this way.

Q: What changes did he make?

A: He tried to use the dryer to dry the rice by machine, about weeding, he tried to make it easier and used a little bit of machine. In the end, he goes back to the same way, not using any machine, he found that it is easier in the end for him to do everything by hands.

T: I just asked him if that is because it did not work well, or there is something he did not like. He said, it is more like he did not like something in that process.

Q: What is that he did not like?

A: He is saying, this is the curse of his teacher, so something does not feel right.

T: It is not something in cycle to him, when he changed something, he said it did not look straight. In the whole process, something is ugly to him, that's why he did not like it.

Q: What method is he using now? What is the feature of his farming now?

A: No chemicals and fertilizers, but he put rice straws and weeds back to the soil, so he is not really sure about 'no fertilization' this part, but in general this is his feature. He wanted to grow the rice in the cycle of nature around here, not from somewhere else.

Q: Does he think that rice farming is creating meanings?

A: He thinks so because he is selling rice to his customers, he is selling something meaningful.

Q: How about the process of growing the rice, where are the meanings that he saw in the process of growing the rice? In the process of creating the rice, does he see any meanings?

A: He thinks by himself, he is doing something meaningful, even if the rice is not meaningful to anyone else, he is still working in the natural cycle here, not breaking the cycle, he thinks that he is doing something meaningful, and it will be forgiven. Even though what he sells is not making any meanings to anyone, he is not breaking anything and he is in a sustainable cycle, he thinks that it is going to be okay.

Q: How does he see the differences between selling rice and selling the things he sold before in the city?

A: It's hard to tell. He thinks that maybe part of the reason that he did not see any meanings of what he is selling is that, for selling those things, he had to make people to want that things, he needed to create the needs even though it is not necessary, he did not like that. He did not see the worth of doing it, he got tired and bored. He mentioned that it might be easier to see about organizing people to work at actual working sites or companies, people have to go to work anyway even though his company does not offer the service. He thinks that those companies would hire anyone anyway, even though his company does not organize it.

T: I asked him if it is something that is important for your living, he said it could be a reason, you need food to live, but you don't actually need the service to live.

A: If you have too much food, it is also not meaningful. He did not want to involve in doing things that are not really needed, in the city about making food, having clothes, those things are necessary. They only have meanings if they are necessary and needed, if you are not needed to have those things, it is meaningless to do those things, but the companies in the city just hired those workers, they just have to keep on doing that. Originally, they were supposed to be needed, jobs should be like that, but to him what he was doing is not really needed, but they just kept doing it.

Q: What about growing rice and selling rice?

A: It is a tough question for him. If you only say rice, maybe there is too much rice in Japan in general, but what he does...someone really wanted his product. When the customers buy his rice, it is more than just supporting him, but also bringing healthy food to them, and actually his rice is needed in the market, so he sees the meanings in there.

Q: How does he promote his rice?

A: He is only using Facebook to show what he is doing in the process; this is the only thing he is doing.

Q: How does he describe the process because he documented it...What messages he is communicating? And how does he communicate them?

A: He just showed what he does, and he is trying not to say organic or something like that, he does not say it but he shows it with some cynical loving stuffs. If you see his Facebook, he has some cynical comments in a funny way, he just makes himself funny. Maybe he is trying to sell that it is more worthy to sell that he is living this kind of lifestyle than selling the rice. He is showing that it is possible for having this kind of lifestyle being a rice farmer.

Q: Earlier he mentioned that even if his customers think that his rice is meaningless, he still finds it meaningful because he does not break the cycle of nature. How does he see his role in nature and rice farming?

A: He does not see any roles in nature, it is kind of meaningless. He just wanted to preserve the nature as it is to the next generation, so future generation has the choices of what they want to do in there. If you affect a lot in nature, the next generation is not going to have choices of what they can do or what want to do in nature. He thinks that we should not do whatever it is to narrow their choices in the future.

Q: Does he face any challenges in his farming?

A: Economically, there is always a problem, that's all.

Q: What about positive experiences?

A: He is moving his body a lot, it is good for him physically.

T: I thought his body is becoming better and better as he ages, but he said that he is a little bit not in shape right now because it is winter, he does not move as much as in summer. He thinks that he is like a piece of shit, but he has children now, they follow everything their parents do, like growing rice, making woods for fireplace. His wife has the hunting license right now, she made the wild boar and cut it, they saw all the process of what they do, he hopes that they will have more sense of what is good and what is not than himself, he is looking forward to what kind of person they would become, and they would have a better sense to know what is worthy to them.

(Showing him the pictures of artworks)

A: He is not really interested in the artworks and what they do in the art festival, but that makes the opportunity for people who wouldn't be here or living to be here, these are the opportunities that the art festival is making, they are really meaningful. He does not like traditional festival we have in summer, the Bon Festival, it is like those ancestors’ spirits coming back, we dance. He thinks what we are doing right now in the festival and dancing around, he does not feel like those gods are coming down, it is not happening by doing those things. People do not have the spirits of welcoming those spirits or gods, he does not feel in that way from people.

Q: What does he feel then?

A: Something you just doing it without any meanings, inertia...you just keep on doing because someone is doing it. Because it is traditional, so you are just doing it once a year. He just suggested that people should think whether they really wanted to do it every year. People just love to make a group to do something, those groups are increasing in number, he is wondering if he has meanings.

T: When I am translating his words, he mentioned a lot about whether it has meanings or not, it is really interesting.

Q: In general, how does he see about having artworks on the rice field? Is it meaningful?

A: He does not care. He is not really interested in artworks but it does not mean he denies it, he just accepted it. It is not like he likes it or dislikes it, he just let it be.

Q: Why he does not care?

A: Because he does not want to be in a way of the things that someone else might be interested. He is not interested in this artwork, but someone else might be interested in it, so he does not want to be in a way of someone. Because if he is interested in something, he does not want someone to be in way, so that's why he just let it be as he does not want to interrupt someone else's interest.

Q: Why he is not interested in those artworks?

A: He loves music but art in general, he is not interested but he likes music. About those art pieces in the art festival, he does not feel that the artists wanted to make specific art in that place. He feels that the places and situations are provided to the artists to think about what he can do on that site, he does not feel the spirit that the artists wanted to make an artwork on those site. He loves the music performance (Seppuku Pistols) because they do not make money, they just do it because they wanted to do. He mentioned that there are more beautiful things and great things in the nature than artificial things, there are rice fields and rice terraces which are so beautiful, so he mentioned that...there are more great things in nature, that's why he is not interested in art.