Interviewee: Yokohama san

Date: 25 March 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did he start farming?

A: April of 2016, it was almost three years ago. He is from Hiroshima Prefecture; it is at the western part of Japan.

Q: Why did he start?

A: He was born in Hiroshima Prefecture, he came from a farming family there, but he had never done it by himself, but his father is making rice. Right now he is 46 years old, he had a plan to make rice by himself after 40, it had been his dream to make rice for himself and sell it. It was already in his life plan to grow rice before moving here.

Q: What was his job before moving here?

A: He got the license of handling the antique, a license is required to sell and buy antique in Japan, he was doing his own business.

T: It's so cool.

A: He has done many other jobs, but that was his last job before moving here.

Q: Why did he have the dream of making his own rice?

A: He wanted to have a sustainable life that he makes his own food, he wanted to have a life like that, making what he eats by himself. If you could make your own food, you do not have to rely on imported food, you could be really independent if anything happens to the world, that's why he wanted to have a sustainable and self-sufficient life here.

Q: What triggered this idea?

A: After the huge earthquake we had in 2011, we saw a lot of death and unexpected accidents like the explosion of nuclear plants. Overall in Japan, most of the young generations were shocked, he was one of them. He was in Hiroshima at that time, it was far away but the whole Japan was shocked, it triggered him that people could die so easily and anything could happen to the world. Japan has a lot of natural disasters like that, most of the people already knows that anything could happen, we did not have the earthquake here for maybe ten years, maybe it's time to have another one, something like that, so people just think that we have to be prepared all the time.

Q: He mentioned that he planned to move here when he was in Hiroshima, what did he do for the planning?

A: It was actually his wife, she is working in Aeon, she is working in the back office, the company made her to move all around Japan. 8 years ago she was working in Chiba Prefecture where the head office was there, but the company made her to move to Niigata city, then he kind of visited her in Niigata, that took him 12 hours by bus from Hiroshima. For having a sustainable life, he preferred to do it in the countryside in Hiroshima because family is close. The main reason he came here is his wife, when he visited here, he thought that this is really a good place to have a sustainable life, that's why he moved to this area. Before that, he had no idea of what it is like in Niigata because it is too far away from Hiroshima, people would not come here if there is no reason to come here.

Q: How about farming part, did he have any idea about rice farming before?

A: He actually did not know anything about it, when he moved here, locals taught him how to do it with machines and chemicals. Mr. Koube also lives in this village, Tanaka san's teacher, he started with the mainstream method, but seeing Koube san's rice terraces he realized that there is another way as well, without using any machines and chemicals. He actually wanted to do both ways, so he is doing both of them now.

Q: Why did he want to do both of them?

A: One of the main reasons is that he wanted to conserve the rice terraces here, they are about to be abandoned because no one is taking care of them, that is one of his main concerns, he does not want to just leave them abandoned. He is trying to take care of those lands, but you cannot do it by hands. If he does so, he cannot only work on limited scale. He is working on 4 hectares of land (T: It's super vast!), those are not big rice terraces, they are divided into small one. He is calling some of the people who agree with him to work together, maybe he is not going to do it all by himself, but he is trying to conserve the rice terraces. (He is planning to organize rice planting activity this year, but in general he will manage the land by himself. When he needs help for harvesting, he will ask locals for help.)

Q: Why he wanted to maintain the rice terraces?

A: He is planning to live here for a long term, in all over Japan, we are facing the problem of aging population, he is worried about it too, he wanted to encourage more people to move here before it disappears. In that case, he needed to maintain the environment around, if it is abandoned or too natural, people would not move here. He wants to maintain the Satoyama landscape so that people could still make a life here in the future. That's his hope.

Q: About the no chemical, no machinery rice farming, is that just for self-consumption?

A: Yes, that is for himself, family and relatives in Hiroshima. He might sell it but right now the amount is not enough, so it is only for self-consumption. He is planning not to use chemicals for weeding, even though he will use machine, he wanted to reduce the use of chemicals in the future.

Q: Did he face any challenges in the past three years?

A: It is difficult to maintain the water level, his rice terraces are only using spring water and rain water, it has been tough really. Last year there was no rain for more than a month, his rice terraces got so dry and a lot of rice just got dry out.

Q: It is tough, then what motivates him to keep going and even thinking about expanding the farmlands?

A: He is making his own seedlings, when the harvest season comes, it is such a joy, maybe that's the moment that motivates him.

Q: Overall, what are the positive experiences?

A: (He has to think about it...) He keeps doing it for three years because it is something worthwhile to him, some people just started and quitted rice farming because it is too tough and just lose their motivations. He keeps doing it because of the helps of locals, it has been quite smooth in the past three years, in terms of renting lands and learning how to do it, it is going to be the fourth year for him, those experiences and everything are so good and that's why he wanted to expand the rice terraces this year. Overall, what he has been doing is something that he feels really grateful for.

(Showing him pictures of artworks)

A: That's the famous one (The Rice Field). He likes the performance (Seppuku Pistols). He does not know this (The Rice House). There are a lot of artworks in Matsudai, but not really in Matsunoyama. He thinks that it is good to have artworks on these farming sites, there are some negative feedbacks that there are too many visitors to the farmlands, but the positive thing is that you can see how beautiful the landscape it and people can see it, that might fill people's heart, there are more people who is willing to come and visit.

A: Maybe it is also the uniqueness of this place that there are art pieces on rice terraces and farmlands, it is a good opportunity.

Q: Is there one that he finds most interesting and impressive?

T: He mentioned the Seppuku Pistols.

Q: Why?

A: He likes the rhythm and you can automatically move your body. It's Rakugo, it is a traditional comedy, he likes this Rakugo, they are good at talking and they talk about funny stories and make their audiences laugh. When they come on the stage, there is a music to tell people that the artist is coming and ask people to pay attention to it, those guys also arranged this kind of music too. He knows it because he likes Rakugo, he likes the part about the music arrangement too.

Q: In general, does the art festival give him any opportunity as a farmer?

A: Maybe not as a farmer, he just mentioned that they have some events in the Eden Garden, he arrangement a group of people in this village, mostly young people, to organize those events, this also helped this village to be more active. They are also aware that so many people are coming for the art festival, it becomes their motive to hold those events by himself. This is because if they could reach people from the art festival, those people might just come to join their events, that was the opportunity that they kind of used to organize something for themselves.