Interviewee: Nakano san

Date: 26 March, 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did he start farming?

A: From when he was born, it was family business.

Q: How many years ago?

A: 77 years.

Q: Is he from here?

A: He is from this village, this village is called 'small mountain.

Q: What was his father growing?

A: He made him...

T: It's going to go like that, I'm kind of worrying! It will go forever.

A: Rice and some veggies, veggies were for self-consumption and rice was for sale. They had animals, chickens.

Q: When did he start by himself?

A: When he was a teenage, he was the one starting to have chickens in his family business, the chickens were from his relative. The chickens were not able to give eggs as many as before, so they were about to kill them. He took three of those chickens, the relatives told him that if he fed them well, they might have eggs again. He fed them and they had one egg in three days, eggs do not turn rotten quickly, so you can keep them to make a pack. Eggs worth a lot of money around 60 years ago, when people went to hospital to visit the sick people, they brought eggs as a gift. Right now, eggs are about 10 Yen, 60 years ago it was 10 Yen too, it means they worth a lot because 10 Yen worth much more in the past. He though that it was interesting and he could make some money too. He was explaining how worthy it was, at that time, if you went to the construction work for a day, it was 245 Yen per year, it could buy 25 eggs, so 25 eggs were really expensive. He was doing that as a sub-income for making rice.

Q: For his family or himself?

A: For his family. To feed the chickens, he used rice scratches and vegetables they made, there was not much cost to have chickens as a side business. Because the farmers can only get the money after they harvested, before that they did not really get any income, so the chickens really helped for the incomes. When chickens are in good health, they can give egg every day, but when they are sick, it takes a couple of days for one egg. When those farmers wanted to get rid of the unproductive chickens, they just abandoned them, he was collecting those chickens.

Q: When did he start growing rice?

A: When he was 11/12 years old, his father was sick, he got a kidney sickness and he got in the hospital. One day his mother told him that she was going to see him and told him that she will be back, she went to see him but she passed away on that day suddenly. When he grew up, he found that his mother was pregnant at that time, but she had four children already at that time, he is the oldest and the youngest was two years old, and his father got really sick. They decided to do an abortion, but the surgery failed, that's why he suddenly lost his mother and his father was still sick. He got economic help from the government, but he father was still sick and he had to take care of his brothers and sisters. So when he was twelve, he decided that maybe he should do more egg business. He can stay home, he did not need to go somewhere to earn money, he was also making rice and vegetables at that time.

Q: How did he learn how to do all these?

A: All the relatives just helped each other on farming, they just kept doing.

Q: What method was he using at that time?

A: When the snow disappeared, they draw a line on the soil and sow the seeds after selecting them, they tilled the land with cultivator, that is a tool by hand, and they transplanted the seedlings by hands.

Q: There was no machinery at that time?

T: Yes, because that was 60 years ago, they only had tools.

Q: When did he change his method?

A: When he was around 20, revolutionary things happened and machinery came in to their farmlands, but they did not own the machinery by themselves, they asked some organizations that have the machinery and borrow from them to cultivate. It was not only revolutionary in machinery, the government also tried to make the farmlands around here bigger and standardized in square. Before that, the rice field was so deep and muddy, but they wanted to fix that part too, he said it was like a reform of agriculture.

Q: I wanted to know how he developed the method of what he is doing now.

A: 26 years ago he started the no dig farming, he does not what is going on in his life, it just happened. Because he had been really lazy (T: He said a local word, I did not understand it when I was in Tokyo), he kind of started.

Q: How did he come up with the method?

A: When he was a kid, there was a weird guy about the age of his father, he was the one doing no dig farming stuffs, he weeded and planted the rice from seeds and somehow the seedlings were really good, he kind of remembered what he was doing. That weird guy told him to look at what he did, that was how he remembered the way. If he does not have to do that much, it is better to him, that's why he was calling himself the lazy one and started decades ago.

Q: What triggered him to change to that method?

A: He had a worker under him, they were constructing the fire places, but in Spring, the worker wanted some days off because he needed to cultivate rice. It happened a lot here, they worked but they farmed, so they have to take days off and do those jobs. He was asked by the worker to give him days off. Because he had construction works as well, if the worker was taking days off, he could not finish all the works by himself. He just told him... you do not need to do all those things, you can just put the seeds in the soil and leave it there, you do not need to do all the tasks and you also do not need to take the days off. The worker said, 'show me', if you can show me and it succeeds, I'm not going to take any days off next year, that was the trigger. He said, life is like that, it is the same as marriage, you never know who to marry.

Q: Why did he decide to continue until now?

A: It is fun. Right now we know there are people doing no dig farming things, but more than 26 years, there were not many people knew it, so people paid attentions to what he was doing. People came here and helped him with his works to see how it was, people just kept coming, that was part of the reasons he thinks that it is interesting.

Q: How did he think about the method of using machinery vs no dig farming?

A: Because uncultivated rice is hard to maintain, in terms of not getting weeds, it is hard to take care of the rice and it involves a lot of physical labour. He is also doing the normal machinery rice planting too, he cannot do all the lands by the uncultivated way. He mentioned that because of the weeds he cannot do all of them.

Q: Which part of the uncultivated method that he sees as fun or interesting?

A: All those weeds are different between the cultivated land and uncultivated land, and the rice straws look really different too, they look much healthier and taste differently. It is the example of taking care of children, if you take care of a child too much, the child would become weak, but if you just let the child be, s/he could be tough. After fertilization, those chemical fertilizations give the plants mainly nitrogen, (and the three elements), there are other materials that they rice straw could draw in. If you give them fertilization, they don't need to have other elements because they are given enough, they just do not take other things. They seem to get stronger, the taste has more layers because they get the taste of the soil.

Q: What are the challenges he faced in farming?

A: Every day is tough; every day is challenging. He just mentioned that there was a year that they could not harvest the rice from the uncultivated rice field, there were too many Japanese millets, they just gave up harvesting the rice, they did not even know whether they should cut it or leave it here.

Q: How does he feel about using an alternative farming method? He started doing it many years when no one was doing it.

A: It turns out that it is really tough to do the uncultivated rice planting, it is easy to just plant it, but the seed itself has to struggle a lot in the soil, it is a tough thing to do and he also has to take care of the weed. (T: He got away from your question, so I asked what do you think about doing the uncultivated farming) He said, I am an idiot. He also mentioned the machinery rice planting, he can see when to do what, when will they divide the leaves, he can tell. But from the uncultivated farming, he cannot tell, it is new to him every year, I think that is also part of the reasons that it is challenging, and he loves the challenges. After you failed, you can succeed on your projects. He loves the process of failing, getting better and succeeding.

(Showing him pictures of artworks)

(Nakano san showing the taro he grew and pictures of the uncultivated vegetables)

A: He had been visiting those artworks before, but lately he does not really go. He does not mention the art pieces (Seppuku Pistols), but those people do not look like typical people, he thinks it is good to look unordinary, to be in a shape of something under a certain frame, it is more interesting to be in this way, not obeying the rule, out of the frame of society and certain methods, it is interesting. (T: That kind of shows his spirits)

Q: Does he like this one (Human re-entering nature)?

A: He thinks it is good, it is a good way to show something, he said the artist thought well.

Q: What message did he get?

A: It is more like a picture to him, in the same direction there are different seasons. He thinks that it is interesting (Rice house), but something is lacking from that art piece, but he does not know what it is. Maybe putting some elders or old women in a mysterious look, showing that the girl would be like the elder woman in the future, and that's a story about aging. He thinks in a funny way, he always wants to have fun.

Q: In general, how does he feel about having artworks on the rice field?

A: He said it is really good things to have the art festival, it gives a lot of opportunities for the locals to communicate with foreigners, otherwise there would be no chances for locals to interact with foreigners. He does not know what art is about, he thinks that the interaction is part of the art.