Interviewees: Yoshida san, Keto san

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Q: Interviewer Y: Yoshida K: Keto A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did they start farming?

Y: He started 7 years ago, he studied architecture, he was originally from Kanazawa city, but the city side, not the mountain side. He went Niigata city for studying and working, he was working there as an architect, and he wanted to come back and involve in nature or conservation related work. He actually had a job in an environmental conservation NGO before he became a farmer. He met Sukisan at that time.

Q: What was he doing for the NGO job?

Y: At the Joetsu city, there is a biotop, it is like a sustainable natural cycle in a small space, e.g. in a garden or a park. In limited area, they make a sustainable space where a variety of creatures can live in before humans destroy the nature.

Q: His job was to build the biotop?

Y: There is a space like this in the city, and the city has to take care of it, the NGO got the job and he was the one who was taking care.

Q: Why did he start farming?

Y: While he was working at the biotop, he was mainly working with local farmers and hunters, they worked all together to conserve the area. By working with those people, he got really interested in making food, he thought that it would be fun.

Q: What about Keto

san?

K: 2014, so it is four years ago.

Q: Why did he start?

K: He came up with the idea that he can live enough when he came back home. (T: he sounded like he was working outside, but he did not mention that.) He thought that he could be living happily enough when he comes back. His family was running the takeaway, so coming back to this place and not using so much money in his life, it would be a happy life. He likes to make things too, like cooking, raising chickens, he likes doing things from scratches.

Q: Why did he do before?

K: He was a teacher in handicapped people school.

Q: Where did the idea of moving back come from?

K: First of all, he was tired of being a teacher. After teaching there, he took a job at a handicapped centre, they are making bread for school meals. He felt that he has so many responsibilities on what he provided for the school meals, if anything happens to those meals and the kids eat it, he will be responsible for it. He felt that it is something too much for him, and it became a bit stressful for him. He thought that if he came back here, maybe he can handle everything himself, like he knows where the materials come from, or he could grow them himself. It means all the responsibilities are on his own, not from somebody else that he has to take, that was the important thing to him.

Q: Why did he get tired from the teaching job?

K: It was such a labour for him about the relationship with kids, their parents, other teachers and local community, he loves to have the communications with kids, but other things became annoying to him, that because such a labour and stressful thing to him, that's why he got tired. In Japan, we have a word that the parents have so many attentions on their kids, they know think about their kids, they are called the 'monster parents', that is something that made him tired. His position is not a permanent one, he has a temporary contract, he is supposed to have less responsibility in that case, but he had to do so much, considering about the contract, it was too much.

Q: I want to get back to Yoshida san, he is interested in making food, what part of it is he interested in?

Y: He was born in non-farming family, so he does not have any farmlands. He wasn't interested in just being a farmer, but after meeting Sukisan, he was interested in what he is doing in his hometown, everything is in natural cycle, he is not doing a big business so he can take care of everything by himself and he can interact with the customers too. He was attracted by Sukisan's farming way, he was an architect, so he likes making things by himself too. It raised his attention that he could even make food, that idea just became really attractive.

Q: It is a question for both of them. What kind of farming are they practicing now? What is their farming mode?

Y: He is making rice and wheats. For the rice, the water only comes from rain or mountain, he wanted to reduce the chemical usage on wheats, he is looking for a good way to use them, i.e. not using too much. By seeing the organic rice terraces of Sukisan, it is taking too much labour and time, he thought that he couldn't do all the them by himself, so he has to use the chemicals to weed. He always enjoys farming in the mountain, he likes it and it is also where he works. About the weeds, he is doing the same thing as Sukisan, he is taking abandoned farmlands for making wheat so that he can protect the Satoyama landscape. He is proud of conserving the landscape, he just mentioned that his products are made in such a beautiful mountain.

Q: What does he mean by enjoying working in the mountain?

T: He mentioned that he enjoys farming in the mountain, even though he sometimes use chemicals, he said his rice and wheat come from those beautiful mountains.

Q: What about Keto san?

K: He mentioned about his business first, his business is about the wild edible plants, collecting them and using them. He had the devil plants, he is making it by himself, and he is selling the takeaway food in the city. About the wild edible plants, he collected them in Spring and warabi, he put them in a sauce, he used it little by little. He is making vegetables that he uses for those dishes. Actually what he buys for his dishes are only soy sauce, miso, or something like that. For the veggies, he grows most of them. He just put a whole bunch of them for one patch of land and he just harvested them all and used them all for that season. He just keeps growing and using them in each season, so the consumers can always get seasonal food. That's what he is doing for his business. He mentioned the cooking part too, he is trying to make those dishes a little bit different from what they can do at home so that people would but them. All these veggies...people are able to get the same veggies, so he makes one or two steps more, or add something, to make people buy it. For some dishes, it may be easier if he makes a large amount of them, so he came up with ideas like that.

Q: How did he come up with this business model?

K: His mother made this business model. He thinks that in Kakizakiku city, there are people moved to this place and village like this, those people used to have this kind of dishes that he and his mother are making. But right now they do not have farmlands around, they have less chances of having what they had before in the city, so that's why one of the business motivations of her mother, this made their products well sold. When he came back, he told her that she is doing something worthy and he suggested him to reduce the amount and increase the price, but the basic model of the family business is from her mother.

Q: Now they are running the business together in the family?

K: Yes.

Q: For Yamasaki san, he has started farming 7 years ago, did he also farm in the same way as how he is doing now?

Y: Basically it hasn't changed, his mentor is the same person. If you tried what you want to do in farming for a couple of years, it wouldn't make you really feel confident about what you do because the weather is different every year. It is now the 7th year, but he thinks that he needs to do 2-3 years more of doing the same thing, then he could go to the next step.

Q: What does he mean by the next step?

Y: He is trying to use chemical and organic fertilizations all together, he is looking after Sukisan's rice terraces, Sukisan is using organic fertilizations even though not all of them are organic, but for some rice terraces only organic fertilizations are not enough. In that case, he is trying to use a combination of chemical and organic fertilizations. Next step means what other than Sukisan told, but he needs a couple of years more of experiences, a lot of things change the condition, soil, water, weather and everything, he wants more confidence of what he is actually doing, then he could move.

Q: Where does he think that such confidence would come from?

Y: Because the crops are planted and harvested once a year, every year accidental things happened. He feels that, maybe he said that he wouldn't understand in 2-3 years, but if he experiences 2-3 years more, what he learnt from books or what Sukisan told him would be more in his body and experiences, so the confidence may come from that, he wants more feelings and actual sense of what he is taught.

Q: Feeling and sense? What does it mean?

T: I think that is something from experiences that will show you... He works on practical things maybe two or three times more, he would have more experiences and be more confident about it.

Q: Does it mean more embodied?

T: I think so...Let me check...Yea, kind of ... he used the word that is more in his body, he said something blurred, but he explained in that way.

Q: What about keto san, is there anything that he wanted to try in his farming and business?

K: He mentioned about the incomes, related to the materials he used. The basic veggies that he is making, he collected from the mountains, so it kind of depends on his motivation and physical conditions, like the harder he tries, he will get more food, and it is easier to break even, the cost of what he made would be cheaper and cheaper because all the wild edible are free. Actually, elders are passing away and they are having physical problems, so less people are going to the mountains right now, so it makes him easier to collect the food and it is really good. That's the good part about it. About the future vision, apart from the traditional dishes he is making, he wanted to make new dishes, maybe a fusion.

Q: Do they face any challenges in their farming?

Y: Every day, it is just hard. Mentally it is really fun, living in the mountain and he could learn how to grow food, but physically because the rice terraces are all in the mountains, he had to do all the jobs before Touta kun came, so physically it was such a labour, it was really a tough time, but it was just so physically, mentally it is fun.

Q: What about keto san?

K: He gained weight, he is having troubles about working with family.

Q: Are there some conflicts or disagreements?

K: He wanted to make it like a business as he is working, but his mother is making it like part of the everyday life. When they worked, he wanted to be in business mode, but his mother was in everyday life, so there is a bit of disagreements on how they want to do the job. As a family, it is ordinary thing that you are more straightforward to the family members in communication, it could be harsh sometimes. That's the hard part. He also mentioned about efficiency, because he is young so he could be more efficient but his mother is getting old and those judgements and efficiency are getting worse, he needs to adjust. But he also mentioned that the issue of efficiency happens in any occasions if you work everywhere with other people.

Q: Both of them mentioned in the beginning that they want to engage in the process of making food, after 7 years and 4 years respectively, what do they think about the motivation?

Y: He is having the same motivation too, but through those farming process and making flour from wheats, he got more connections with people and relationships, getting those new customers and new relationships become a motivation for him to work harder.

K: He actually feels really happy about what he made and sold. He experienced the cycle of how to get those veggies, preserve them and make them a product, he could see how much is needed to prepare for Spring and how much he could get, he could see those visions in a short term. For long term, he is confident about his business, he has the confidence that he could live through well happily if he keeps doing what he is doing right now, this makes him relieved and motivates him to keep on going.

(Showing them pictures of artworks)

K: He said this is communicating the old people, these scarecrows are everywhere, some people are trying to make jokes of them, it is like a joke on the rice terrace, he kind of like that. He likes the idea of putting scarecrows in general.

Y: He likes this art piece (Human re-entering nature). At first, it was just like art piece standing on the field, but gradually it is like overwhelmed by nature physically. It was kind of like losing itself in nature. He was interested in art festival, he has been visiting the art festival since the beginning, at that time he was working as an architect, he wanted to see the architecture or pieces that architects made. After he moved here and farmed here, he started to see the art pieces in different ways, like maybe if the artwork is on the rice field in such way, he started to worry about it. It is the same thing that the girls mentioned, it could be annoying practically. He sees it differently from the perspective of farmers.

Q: This one was also made by architect (Rice House), how does he feel about it?

Y: As an architect, he sees the logic, for them they see the whole view, if you cut this view inside the frame, it is logical about what he wanted people sit here to see. But he feels that maybe what those people feel and what artist wanted people to feel maybe different, he kind of sees the awkwardness of the art piece right now. He can see the view of the artist too because he was an architect, he sees that it is logic, he just wanted the frame to be here. Maybe people would feel the warmth or reflection of the water in summer if they sit there, he is not sure if the architect is aware of those feelings.

Q: He is also not sure whether people would get the same view? I don't quite understand about this point.

T: He mentioned that architect sees the whole view, like the location and landscape, these are the things that think about when they build something, they see like whole things from above. He understands that maybe the artist wanted this view to be seen, like this picture, framing the view is what the architect wanted to communicate, but maybe there are so many other things going on, that's he wondered if the artist was aware of it or if people really see what the artist wanted them to see.

Q: In general, how do they feel about having artworks on the rice field?

Y: He does not really care about having those art pieces on the field, he wonders if the one who sees the art sees the beauty of the art pieces, or the beauty of the Satoyama landscape itself, he likes the landscape from the bottom of his heart, he said that if the art piece can show the beauty of itself and the beauty of nature, it is going to be a great one. He wishes that more of the art pieces that can achieve this.

K: When he sees the view, it is always nice and it reminds him of the efforts that farmers and people from the Nobutai working on the field. But on some pieces, they just abandoned the fields and wait until the next art festival, it is overwhelmed by nature, he mentioned about the responsibility of having art on nature, if they made them on purpose, they should take care of them.