Interviewee: Shuji san

Date and location: 28 March, 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee T: Translator

Q: When did he start farming?

A: About 10 years ago.

Q: How did he start?

A: He moved here and started farming.

Q: Under NPO?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did he want to work in the NPO?

A: Before he moved here, he had been visiting here because of the art festival, he got the recruitment information that they want someone to take care of farming so that those projects in the farming sites would improve and expand. He knew the one who has been taking care of those farmlands too, that was the one he came to visit here together, he knew the whole situation of what they want and what is needed. He got the job and he moved here.

Q: What was needed from his understanding at that time?

A: An actual person who worked in the farming sites. There were some misunderstandings between the company and NPO, and local villagers, they have a Tanada Bank that they raise money from people in the city and they take care of the rice terraces, the Tanada Bank who organized those projects wanted to ask local farmers to take care of the rice fields. NPO was thinking that if somebody can handle the communication between those farmers and Tanada Bank, it would be good. Actually, there was a lack of farmers to take care of the rice fields, he kind of knew that what the Tanada Bank was thinking, he thought that he would be a coordinator to run the project, but what was actually needed was someone to do actual farming on the rice fields. He kind of knew that there are misunderstandings between the company and local farmers, so he kind of knew what he was going to do.

Q: He mentioned that he has been visiting the art festival before he moved here, why did he visit here?

A: He is an artist and he is interested in art itself, he wanted to do something that invovles art. After knowing this art festival, he was impressed by what they are doing, e.g. the purposes and the aims, he thought that it is really amazing and worthwhile, he is really interested in the art festival. He happened to know the recruitment, so it was good timing for him, that's why he took the job.

Q: Was he interested in the farming part? Or he just wanted to work for the art festival?

A: He was interested in the art festival itself, but he wanted to be involved in it, he kind of knew that he had no choice of not doing the farming through the communications with locals and people in the NPO, he had to do it to make it work well and better.

Q: How does he see the connection between the farming part and the art festival? Why does he feel that he has to do the farming part in order for the art festival to work well?

A: At first, the art festival was understandable things or something local people do not like, but the original concept of the art festival is to be known by the locals, it is not just about locating here geographically but it should be known by locals as well, it should be all about engaging local people and show to the others how this region is like and how local life is like. But most people just do not understand what the art pieces are, they do not like them, they think that the NPO or the project is selfish. Through communicating with locals, he thinks that it is important to do something that locals are doing here, to have the common language with them. He understood that no one really needs helps on farming, because they are not farmers doing big business, but about the rice terraces, he heard a lot that they could not take care of them anymore, they are going to abandon the rice terraces. The locals are sad to abandon the rice terraces from their ancestors. If he has to do something about farming, he thinks that it should be rice because it is the most needed one, he heard a lot about the tough part of not having people to take care of the rice terraces. Because he likes the original concept of the art festival, so it should be something worthwhile to the locals too. He also mentioned that even though the locals do not really understand what the artworks are, they are glad to have people visiting, so he thinks that they are actually very generous, so he wanted to make them understand what it art and what the art festival is about, so he came to the conclusion that he has to do the same thing as what the locals do so that he could communicate better.

Q: What did he do before coming here?

A: He was doing something called science art. He was introduced to a researcher who is researching about the deep sea, he wanted to get into the submarine, but eventually he got a job about watching movie of the deep sea, it is actually very dark most of the time and sometimes...only sometimes the shrimps went through. They watched the films in a group, there were three of them but they got sick one by one mentally. In the end, all of them just quitted gradually. The researcher is an elderly, he is research about the hot stream coming from the bottom of the sea, he was researching about whales and other creatures too, he did not understand why he got into those creatures in the deep sea. It was not something that is easy to understand, the researcher was saying that the researcher is not expanding because many people did not understand it. To raise the interest and attention of the public, he wanted him to do something as an artist so that people can see the interesting part about the research. He had an exhibition about it, but what the researcher is doing is not dynamics, there is little changes, he has tons of films of the deep sea, but it is something that is really hard to make it interesting.

Q: How long did he work for the job?

A: About a year, he started before graduating from college.

Q: What is science art?

A: There was a professor who does science art, he called it science art and he was under him. It is like drawing that shows the details of insects, it could be science art. He just mentioned that maybe his professor is just calling it science art, it's something about science.

Q: Is it about observing something in details and then...

A: Thinking about Da Vinci, he shows a lot about scientific things too, maybe those things could be relating to art. He just couldn't give me examples of an artist who draws insects. He was saying that maybe we could not find any definition of science art on the internet, it is just his professor is calling it this way.

T: But I kind of understand...for some artists maybe science and art are the same.

A: The professor was saying that...before the division of art and science, scientists were recording their research by themselves, it was like... scientists could be the artists. Somehow it is now divided that scientists are doing the research while artists are drawing the pictures.

Q: Is it like using artistic means to present scientific things?

T: Yes, people are doing it now.

Q: Is he still doing it now?

A: He is not doing scientific art, he is more interested in involving in the art festival and doing the farming too. His attention is more into that because he really likes the art festival.

Q: What is his farming feature now?

A: He thinks that he should do the same things as locals, lately NPO began that it is important to have some special features to brand their rice, they are trying to make it organic or JAS. What he does is actually the same thing as how locals do. (T: He kind of misunderstood my question) He mentioned the feature of rice farming here, it is important to have snow that makes it special. In other areas in Japan where they have rice terraces, the rice terraces are just around the rivers, but in here, because the snow is heavy and mountains are steep, the rice terraces are all over the mountains, so it is different from other regions. Because we have the snow in autumn, they kind of mix up the soil after harvesting before it snows.

Q: Just now he mentioned that he knew in the beginning about the original concept of the art festival and he wanted to communicate with locals through farming, now he has been doing it for 10 years, how does he think about the original purpose of why he came here?

A: About farming itself, he has been having hard time since the beginning, he said it is not changing a lot and it is still tough, he has only done ten times so he does not feel like he has done a lot, he is also having hard time of organizing and taking care of all of them. He said it is tough, so he cannot say much improvements or changes. (T: Though his talking, 10 year ago the art festival was something that people did not like, but i have been here for five years, I kind of felt from the beginning that ... I kind of know the reason of why people do not like the art festival, I kind of feel that but I did not feel that much hatred to the art festival as how he mentioned it. I asked him if that is something that you wanted to do, like having people like him can change their attitudes.) He mentioned that he moved to Taihei village, he kind of realized that Matsudai is too much like town, too many people and too many different opinions. Towns are always like that, he wanted to do some rice farming in certain areas that are not scattered around, it may be better to live in certain village which has rice terraces around and it would be better to do it in the village. After a couple years of moving there, he realized that some locals became very cooperative. From the beginning, he did not feel it, they just let him be but not so cooperative. But after a couple of years, he is surprised to see that locals changed and they helped him a lot. In the beginning of this year, the leader of this village mentioned that they wanted to back up the Tanada Bank through the cooperative of the village, it kind of changed a lot in this way.

Q: Why does he think that there are such changes?

A: He did not mention about himself (T: but I think what he has done changed the area, I heard about him a lot when I came here, but he did not mention anything he has done), he thinks that maybe the situation of the village has changed a lot in 10 years, the population is decreasing, and the village also closed the elementary school, it is shocking to people all the time, and these things make it obvious to them that the population is decreasing ad there are not many children. These made the villagers aware of what is going on, it is like a warning of what is going on and what is the future is going to be... that makes people rethink what they can do for the community in the future.

Q: He mentioned that farming has been tough, which part is he referring to?

A: The concept of Tanada Bank is to save those abandoned rice terraces, they are taking much more than they can handle, and their fields are always located at some inconvenient locations, that's why they are abandoned. They are trying to save those abandoned rice field, that's the original concept for having Tanada Bank. The system is not really organized yet, it is too much for what the workers and what they have to do. Basically, they have too many lands to cultivate.

Q: But they are still trying to do organic?

A: The JAS certificate has some easy one too, he is trying to do the easy one, there is a way to put paper on so that the weeds can grow. He is going to try those things and change it little by little.

Q: What are the positive experiences about farming?

A: He works outdoor every day and moving his body, that is good for him.

(Showing him pictures of artworks)

A: This is the most impressive one (The rice field).

Q: Why?

A: He knows the elderly who is the owner of this land, he has passed away but that elderly took care of him a lot and taught him how he farmed. He heard that the elderly at first was hard to accept the art pieces on his own land, but he became to accept the idea and what is going on. He mentioned that it was in a really good way, he kind of knew by having those pieces on his field, he was able to relate to other people who are connected by those art pieces. People coming to see the artworks, or like him who just came to take care of the rice terraces, that is something what the art pieces connected... the relationship. He knew the fact that he is relating to people because of the art pieces that he has on the field, in what So san got from the elderly, the impressions and those histories and by spending time with him, he is the most impressed by this artwork.

Q: How did he know that the elderly became accepted to the artwork?

A: He has people coming up to see the art pieces, the field is in bad condition because it is north facing and there is not much sunshine. The rice field itself is small and there is no road, those are all the bad conditions for a rice terrace, there is nothing good physically about this rice terrace. But people just came to see the art pieces and kept telling him it is such a good place and fantastic rice terraces, he gradually understood the worth of his rice terrace. He thinks that probably this is how the elderly changed his idea about the artwork.

Q: Is he also managing this rice terrace now?

A: Yes, he is involved in it because no one is willing to do it.

Q: How does he feel about having the artwork on the field when he was working on the land?

A: Honestly it is just so annoying, practically it is super annoying. He knows the difference between what is ideal and what is the reality, he understands it well himself, but still it is super annoying. But he has no choice because this art piece and rice terrace do mean something, it is not a normal rice terrace that does not have any reasons to exist.

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

A: He thinks it is good to have those art pieces, but those art pieces should be the opportunity to make people know about this local area and life, culture and background of locals, there are so many stories beyond the artworks. He is willing to have artworks that deepen those interesting backgrounds and history of this local region, that would be more interesting, maybe it is not working well enough, it is just showing the surface of the stories here, he knows more about the interesting aspects of what is happening around here.