

The Agrarian Dream of a Former 1960s Student Protest Leader

KATO, Sadamichi

This article introduces the ideas of a Japanese environmentalist called FUJIMOTO Toshio (藤本敏夫 1944–2002) who was a leader of the student protests of the 1960s.¹ In May 2002, Fujimoto submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan. His proposal was titled “To Create Sustainable Cyclical Garden Cities and a Half-Farmer-Half-X Lifestyle, Shuttling to *Satoyama*, with Cooperation Between ‘Eco-farmers’ and ‘Wellness-farmers’” (*Essays on Agrarian Happiness* 186-202). I realize this is a very long title – and in fact this is simply my translation of the original Japanese² – but I hope I can explain each of the terms and the underlying philosophy as I go along.

To begin with, I should tell you that the rather unusual expression “Half-Farmer-Half-X Lifestyle” refers to a person who spends about half his time farming and the other half engaged in some other occupation.³ And the Japanese word *satoyama* (里山) simply refers to hilly, forested rural areas which are a traditional and characteristic part of the Japanese landscape. Despite its long title, I think the proposal embodies Fujimoto’s philosophy very well and reflects important aspects of the general social transition in Japan from the 20th into the 21st century.

This transition has been marked by two important laws relating to agriculture. The first was the ‘Basic Agricultural Law’ (農業基本法) enacted in 1961; and the second was the ‘Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas’ (食料・農業・農村基本法) enacted nearly forty years later in 1999. The ‘Basic Agricultural Law’ of 1961 was based on the guiding principle of modernizing, by which was meant industrializing farming. According to Fujimoto, as modernization in general is characterized by tendencies toward economies of scale, the division of labor, and standardization, the ‘Basic Agricultural Law’ pushed Japanese farmers toward mechanization, heavy use of chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides), and single-crop farming (Fujimoto *Understanding* 125).

From the agrarian point of view, the result was a disaster. For example, in regions

where productive large-scale industrialized farming was impossible, many people simply gave up farming and moved to the cities, much as happened everywhere else in the world. In the forty years following 1961 the total area of farmland in Japan decreased by 20 % (from about 6 million to 4.7 million hectares; or from 15 million acres to 12 million acres), and Japan's self-sufficiency rate in food decreased by half (from 79% to 40%). Most shockingly of all, the farming population decreased by 80% (from 14 million to less than 3 million).

Of course, industrialization took place not only in farming but throughout the economy and affected every aspect of society. It was not by chance that the effects of the 'Basic Agricultural Law' of 1961 coincided both with Japan's high rate of post-war economic growth and the radical student protests, as well as the rising number of environmental pollution problems, of which Minamata Disease is the most well-known. In fact, Minamata Disease was caused by a chemical company called *Chisso* (meaning *nitrogen*), which started as a fertilizer producer and supported the development of industrialization in 20th Century Japan. From the standpoint of the 60s student protests, it seemed that the political-industrial establishment revealed its true nature in its destruction of life not only at Minamata but also in Vietnam and on farmlands throughout the world.

Turning now to the contemporary situation, while the former 'Basic Agricultural Law' focused solely on productive efficiency, the new law of 1999, the 'Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas,' contained four policy aims: (1) to ensure a stable supply of food by improving the self-sufficiency rate; (2) to promote fulfillment of the multifunctional roles of agriculture; (3) to promote sustainable agriculture; and (4) to develop rural areas. Like many other environmentally-minded Japanese people, Fujimoto valued the ideals of these four policies very highly when they were originally announced. In practice, however, since 1999 there has been very little progress on implementing these policies and so very little has changed.

The harmful changes brought about by the 'Basic Agricultural Law' of 1961 still continue and indeed the present situation may be getting worse because of the aging population of farmers. Meanwhile the Japanese government, despite the 1999 law's ideals, still sticks to an agricultural policy that prioritizes productive efficiency and the city-centered, technology-dependent emphasis of the 20th century. Fujimoto's proposal, on the other hand, "To Create Sustainable Cyclical Garden Cities and a Half-Farmer-Half-X Lifestyle," is unique in its attempt to enliven both cities and the hilly rural hinterlands that we Japanese call *satoyama*.

At present about 80% of the Japanese population live in cities. However the total area of these cities amounts to only 20% of the land in Japan. So, of the remaining 80% of the land, most is either agricultural land or mountainous-forest, both of these are increasingly neglected today. In Fujimoto's view it is on *satoyama* lands, the hilly, marginal areas where mountainous forest ranges meet flat grasslands, that early people in Japan lived for almost all of their pre-history: first hunting and gathering, and later practiced settled farming. This type of lifestyle, closely adapted to the ecology of *satoyama* lands had lasted for hundreds of thousands of years before people started to build cities on the flat lands facing large rivers. *Satoyama* lands are endowed with excellent conditions for hunting, gathering, raising livestock and cultivating crops, and therefore good to live in, and also they hold historical-cultural value, attractive enough to provide people with a source of both repose and hope. In other words, *satoyama* lands are regarded as a homeland even by many people of today who have never lived in hilly rural areas themselves, because such places satisfy fundamental needs buried in the depth of their being and their cultural history.

Fujimoto himself was passionately attracted to an agrarian lifestyle on *satoyama* lands. In one of his books, titled *Essays on Agrarian Happiness* (農的幸福論), he has said that he began to dream of farming during hungry days in prison in the early 1970s while he was serving a sentence of three years and eight months for his involvement in student protests against the government and Japan's Self Defense Forces (12-27). After his release, he devoted himself throughout the rest of 70s to promoting the distribution of organic produce. At the beginning of the 1980s he moved from Tokyo to a *satoyama* region in Chiba Prefecture. Initially he organized a chicken farming cooperative, but later he established an ecological agricultural cooperative named "Kamogawa Nature Kingdom (鴨川自然王国)" to realize his agrarian dream and to promote sustainable agriculture across Japan. There he started a free-range chicken farm, terraced rice paddies, various vegetable fields and a charcoal making enterprise to support his family and at the same time to galvanize the exchange between urban people and rural people. As he was an amateur farmer, he naturally experienced the ups and downs of a life on the land, a series of unexpected events at times troublesome at other times joyous. Fujimoto was realistic, however, to the extent of not advocating that people completely abandon their city lives and jobs to return to farming. His proposal was to encourage and aid city people in starting the so-called "half-farmer-half-x lifestyle." This meant people spending half of their time living

and working in cities while periodically “shuttling” to *satoyama* to dwell in groups and engage in farming in cooperation with resident farmers, thereby increasing the food self-sufficiency rate and deepening their understanding of life.

In one of his books, titled *Understanding Organic Agriculture Today* (現代有機農業心得), Fujimoto remarks that what people need today is not only to eat healthy foods produced on an organic farm but also to incorporate farming into their lifestyle (3). He also says that much of his efforts have been focused on the need to drag people out of their fixed frame work of self-identity either as a consumer or as a producer (191). These remarks are based on his notion of the farm as multi-functional: a place for producing foods, a place for improving environments, a place for life-education, a place for mental and physical health care (a kind of hospital or sanitarium) as well as a place providing the leisure to develop one’s potential abilities.

Fujimoto coined the term “wellness-farmer” to refer to three types of amateur farmers: firstly, those people who have changed careers to become farmers; secondly, those who are engaged in farming as a side-job while having some other regular job, and thirdly, those people who enjoy an agrarian lifestyle sheerly as a hobby.

He worried over the contemporary situation in which as the number of both fulltime and part-time farmers are rapidly decreasing and those that remain are growing old, more and more food has to be imported and Japanese people are forgetting where their food comes from. Consequently, we are faced with a society in which rural communities are deteriorating while urban people are forgetting what communities are at all, or rather, are actually stirring up suspicion against the concept of community. To counter these trends, Fujimoto thought it important to increase the levels of interest in nature and farm work as widely as possible among people, rather than rush around recruiting fulltime commercial farmers directly. One might say that wellness-farming is a sort of lifestyle concept, aimed at safeguarding the integrity of health and the environment by introducing agriculture into people's lives, improving the lifestyle and the health of family members, helping children to foster a deeper and happier understanding of living things and their own life in the actual world.

If it is to foster health and safeguard the integrity of the environment, then any new model of agriculture must aspire to become sustainable farming. That’s why Fujimoto’s proposal emphasizes the idea of “sustainable cyclical garden cities” which should be created on the flat lands surrounding large cities, and also the importance of “cooperation between ‘eco-farmers’ and ‘wellness-farmers’.” I should perhaps

mention here the term “cyclical” has been used in Japan almost in the same sense as “sustainable.” It is used for example, in such expressions as “cyclical society” or “cyclical lifestyle.” In Japanese the concept of “cyclical” is always accompanied by an image of circular movement and is based on an understanding of the cyclical processes in the natural world, like the hydrological-cycle, the carbon-cycle, the cycle of the seasons, the cycle of birth and death and so on. “Eco-farmer” is a name given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to those farmers who are publicly approved as practitioners of sustainable agriculture.⁴ Also, I should point out that “sustainable agriculture” here means techniques effective for improving the quality of soil and for reducing the application of synthetic chemicals. By means of such techniques, sustainable agriculture optimizes the inherent productive capacity of nature. Thus in effect, Fujimoto’s proposal is an attempt to promote organic farming both on farms in hilly rural areas and on farms around cities.

What was the result of Fujimoto’s proposal? Well, the response of the Agricultural Ministry was quite favorable. In a sense the Ministry could not help but be favorable because Fujimoto’s proposal was perfectly in accordance with the new Basic Law of 1999. On top of that, his proposal represented and consolidated ongoing movements among people concerned with organic farming, *satoyama*, terrace paddies, as well as with healthy food and slow food movements all over Japan. Since Fujimoto’s early death in 2002, his wife, Kato Tokiko, a famous singer, has succeeded him as leader of the Return-to-Farming School at Kamogawa Nature Kingdom, and it is flourishing as many of their friends are supporting the movement. Thanks to Fujimoto and his successors, sustainable agriculture is apparently on the rise and slowly spreading in Japan.

However, it appears that the core of Fujimoto’s proposal to establish a “half-farmer-half-x lifestyle” is as yet not fully accepted in official circles. What he meant by this expression was the switch from a mind-set fixed on job-specialization to a freer mind with a half-farmer-half-some-other-occupation lifestyle, to realize an agrarian communities where work-sharing is incorporated. Unfortunately, however, the Ministry of Agriculture in Japan remains firmly focused on the growth of fulltime commercial farms which are of larger size and greater efficiency, powerful enough to compete in the international market.

Clearly, Fujimoto’s proposal is currently viewed by the bureaucrats as too radical. However, there are some hints which suggest the feasibility of his proposal. One such hint is the population shift which has begun to happen since the recession in

the 90s. People have started abandoning large cities and returning to the countryside. A population shift like this is often called a U-turn, J-turn or I-turn. The U-turn is where people leave a city and return to their native rural area. The J-turn is where people leave a large city to settle in a town somewhere between the city and their native place. The I-turn is where people who were born in a large city move to a rural community to start a new life, a certain number of whom take up farming, often under guidance of local community members. This is a sign of a current trend toward decentralization which is indispensable for the “development of rural areas.” (As I mentioned earlier, the fourth aim of the ‘Basic Agricultural Law’ of 1999 is to develop rural areas.) Decentralization is ultimately indispensable because to revitalize a local community requires the cultivation of human resources. Also remarkable is the recent phenomenon, much commented on in the media, of an increasing number of young Japanese people not wanting to work in a fixed occupation. It is reported that their number now exceeds two million and is still rising. Worrying their parents, these young people shun the idea of working as a specialist tethered for life to one corporation. Indeed they are a source of headache, yet this phenomenon is at least a sign of changing attitudes towards the work ethic. In addition, eight million baby-boomers are expected to retire in the next few years and it is said that a considerable number of them are hoping to take up a half-agrarian lifestyle in a rural region after retirement.

These contemporary social trends suggest that the half-farmer-half-some-other-occupation lifestyle advocated by Fujimoto might well become prevalent in the 21st century. Although the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan, on a mission to increase the nation’s self-sufficiency rate (calorie-based self-sufficiency rate: from 40% to 45% by 2015; volume-of-production-based self-sufficiency rate: from 70% to 75% by 2015) (Ministry of Agriculture 19), talks a lot about the necessity to increase the number of fulltime commercial farmers while decreasing the number of part-time farmers, they may be wrong. Perhaps we should remember that for almost the entirety of human history in Japan the food self-sufficiency rate was 100%. Almost all Japanese people used to have a half-farmer-half-x lifestyle, such as half-farmer-half-fisherman, half-farmer-half-forester, half-farmer-half-carpenter, half-farmer-half-textile-craftsman, half-farmer-half-teacher, even half-farmer-half-priest, or half-farmer-half-samurai. Even today, the ‘half-farmer-half-x’ lifestyle is not uncommon in Japan. Many Japanese city-dwelling office workers go home to their family farms to cultivate rice and other crops at weekends and holidays. The

future envisioned and championed by Fujimoto, then, has plenty of models in both Japanese history and the present day. But history suggests that half-farmer-half-x lifestyles can only subsist where cooperative and flexible local communities have been kept intact.

(appendix)

Chronology of Toshio Fujimoto's Life

- 1994 Toshio Fujimoto was born in Hyogo Prefecture (Jan 23).
- 1963 Majored in journalism at Doshisha University.
- 1964 Joined the student protest movement.
- 1968 Served as Chairman of the National Federation of Students Self-Government Association (Zengakuren).
- 1968 Arrested for protesting against the Defense Agency on International Anti-War Day (Oct 21).
- 1969 Criticized the increasing violence among radical factions and deserted the student movement.
- 1969 Served as Secretary-General at the Research Laboratory for Cultural Exchange between Japan and Cuba.
- 1972 Sentenced to three years and eight months in prison for involvement in student protests (April 21). Married singer Tokiko Kato, daughter born in December.
- 1976 Served as Chairman of *Daichi-wo-mamoru-kai* (Association to Save the Earth).
- 1977 Founded *Daichi Limited Company*, a corporation distributing organic farm produce and additive-free foods.
- 1981 Moved to Kamogawa, Chiba Prefecture. Founded *Kamogawa Shizen Oukoku* (Kamogawa Nature Kingdom), an ecological agricultural cooperative.
- 1985 Founded *Nefuko Ltd. Company*. Organized *Earth-Natto Club*.
- 1992 Founded *Kibo* (hope), a political party. Stood unsuccessfully for the House of Councillors.
- 1995 Organized *GLS*, a group to study the supply and demand of agricultural produce.
- 1997–2000 Held “Talk & Live Session: Live with the Soil” in twelve places across Japan (together with Tokiko Kato and Yae).
- 2000 Coordinated a farmers rally to promote sustainable agriculture in cooperation with young farmers and distributors across the nation.
- 2001 Founded the *IRM Association* to promote Sustainable Cyclical Society.
- 2002 Submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan to revive agriculture and urban life (May). Died from pneumonia (July 31).

Fujimoto is the author of twelve books including two books posthumously pub-

lished. Among them are *Essays on Agrarian Happiness* (2002), *Understanding Organic Agriculture Today* (1995), *Japan, a Country of Unhealthy Longevity* (1988), *My Nature Kingdom* (1987), *How Can Humans Survive the Times?* (1972). The foregoing chronology of his life was mainly based on *Essays on Agrarian Happiness*.

Works Cited

- Fujimoto, Toshio. *Understanding Organic Agriculture Today* (Gendai Yuki-nogyo Kokoroe 現代有機農業心得). Tokyo: Nihon Chiikishakai Kenkyujo, 1998.
- . *Essays on Agrarian Happiness* (Noteki Kofukuron 農的幸福論). Ed. Tokiko Kato. Tokyo: Ienohikari Kyokai, 2002.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. *Food, Agriculture, and Rural Area White Book: Statistics* (Shokuryo-Nogyo-Noson Hakusho: Sanko Tokeihyo 食料・農業・農村白書 参考統計資料). Tokyo: Norin Tokei Kyokai, 2005.
- Shiomi, Naoki. “Work on Your Vocation While Carrying on Farming as a Basis for Your Living.” *Seinen Kino*, August Extra Number of *Gendai Nogyo* (2002): 204–217.

Note

¹ This paper was presented at the Sixth Biennial Conference of ASLE held at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, June 21–25, 2005.

² The original Japanese title of the proposal was “「持続循環型田園都市」と「里山往還型半農生活」を「エコファーマー」と「ウェルネスファーマー」の連携で創出する：農林水産省の20世紀の反省と21世紀の希望.” The proponent was Fujimoto Toshio, the representative of Kamogawa Nature Kingdom (農事組合法人・鴨川自然王国 代表 藤本敏夫).

³ The term, “Half-Farmer-Half-X Lifestyle (半農半Xライフスタイル)” was originally used by Naoki Shiomi who set up “Half-Farmer-Half-X” (半農半X) home page on the web in April 2000. (<http://www.geocities.co.jp/NatureLand/3673/Entry.htm>) The lifestyle Shiomi advocated in his homepage and also in his article “Work on Your Vocation While Carrying on Farming as a Basis for Your Living” (*Seinen Kino* 204–217) is identical and concerted with the lifestyle proposed by Fujimoto. Therefore this paper applies the same expression to the naming of both.

⁴ Official statistics indicate that the number of ‘eco-farmers’ recognized by the Ministry increased from 1,126 at 2001 to 62,866 at September 2004. See *Food, Agriculture, and Rural Area White Book: Statistics*, page 3.