

Impressions on the trip to Kamogawa Shizen Okoku and Tanjoji, Tai no ura
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Moving over a hundred kilometers from IDE by bus, we reached Kamogawa City Oyama Senmaida known for its terraced paddy fields. At Kamogawa, the terrace paddy fields' yield ranges around 70-80 percent of what one realizes on the plains, one reason for which could be the factor that the cultivation is completely dependent on a single source of water – rain. The clayish soil retains the water for long and thus sustains the rice crop. However the tradeoff is that the dry fields are rendered unsuitable for vegetable cultivation, the soil turning hard when dry. The fields were quite broad, indicating that the sloping gradient of the mountain side here was less compared to the steeper Indian context where narrow strips of paddy rest one above the other, with the human efforts to produce food under such conditions appropriately christened as step cultivation.

Viewed from above the mountain side and the valley below threw up a bewildering array of greens – the pale green, the dark green, and a multitude of shades in between, all broken into relief by the occasional yellow and freshened by showers – treating us to a visual delight along with inexhaustible supplies of sweet fresh air.

Behind all this lay a singular vision of revitalizing Japanese agriculture. Conceived by Fujimoto Toshio in the early 1970s, one time student radical after his imprisonment as a punishment for the role he played in the student protests in the turbulent 1960s, the larger philosophy was one of harmony between the bustling urban areas and the declining countryside with inputs from one enriching the life in the other through the human medium. What set Fujimoto thinking were three inter related trends of Japanese agriculture that began earlier but stood out in bold relief in the final four decades of the twentieth century and which vitiated the vitality of Japanese agriculture. These were the decline in the area of farmland cultivated, a drastic worsening of self-sufficiency rate in food and a significant fall in the farming population.

Viewing the area where the mountainous forests interface with grass lands – the *satoyama* lands – as the ideal place for ecologically friendly human lifestyle which would as well revive agriculture, and coupling this with conceptions of organic farming Fujimoto built the Kamogawa Shizen Okoku. Realistic enough to not expect people to give up urban lives and move to the rural areas, he rather advocated constant movement between both places which would result in an incorporation of farming into

the very lifestyles of people. In his view, the farm was not just a place where one produced food but one where one could attempt to improve the environment, develop one's innate talents at an easy pace, raise health levels of both body and mind and engage in life-education.

In real terms this philosophy has resulted in an agricultural cooperative where people from urban areas rent out parcels of land (on an annual basis) on the mountain side and cultivate them while intermittently shuttling to their urban homes. The very small size of the farms becomes a positive attribute as the city folk find the scale manageable. The local aging population finds this a viable solution which ensures their farmland does not go to waste for want of scarce labor. The city folk relish the joy of being able to cultivate and create food which is theirs to take; in the process they remind the actual owners of the value of life-sustaining land – making them shed their view of ownership of land as burdensome.

The success of the idea of the deceased Fujimoto is seen in 1. the fact that the numbers of those coming to enjoy life at Kamogawa City Oyama Senmida has risen over the years with a number of them renewing their annual contracts indicating that they find merit in this lifestyle and in 2. the fact that similar experiments have mushroomed in other parts of Japan. The cross fertilization of ideas at either end, urban and rural done by the human agency, to the benefit of both, is the larger outcome. Narrowly viewed, it is payback time for industry and urban centers, having grown rapidly in the past through vital contributions from agriculture, which having thus brought up both was now floundering for want of nourishment.

Next on the itinerary was a visit to the birthplace of Saint Nichiren. First we took a boat to the sea when on the way back we saw the *Tai*, the Japanese sea bream, come up to a feet near the surface affording us to see white bodies against the dark recesses of the ocean, as feed was being sprinkled on the surface. Once we entered the temple built to celebrate the birthplace of the priest, the guide pointed out how the fish rose to the surface not for the feed but in response to the tapping sound made on the fore of the boat. And in reverence and gratitude to the same *Tai* that had risen to the surface *en masse* attempting to peep at the newborn, which act signified as one of the three miracles heralding the birth of the priest centuries back, the helmsman had offered some feed.

In the sedate surroundings of the temple we saw the image of the saint as well as the burial ground for the *Tai* that is revered and which none could ever contemplate consuming; those that are accidentally caught or killed are preserved the year round to be cremated and the ashes put on the receptacle atop the tomb. The day was a tour of

the immaculately maintained and impossibly green countryside and a serene experience at the birthplace of the founding father of a religious sect.