

In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for?

Part 4: Non-commercial farming villages

"Nobody has ever done anything bad. We were simply looking for the Blue Bird."

One of the most serious problems that local areas today are facing, is the unification which is reaching out to every corner of the world due to the global economic system (WTO) which promotes mass production and mass consumption of commodities under the name of economic liberalization. The associated environmental or resource problems include the growing structure in which the resources are brought from rural villages in the South to urban areas and developed countries in the North as raw materials for industrial production and food stuffs, while only a damaged environment is left behind in the farms and fishing villages. While the school of thought which approves of such commodity flow on a global scale is very strong, at the other end of the pole is the idea of focusing on a more local material flow, to supply and consume goods within a very limited locality.

In terms of agricultural production, the trend of globalization is to replace the traditional agricultural activities of a local area with monoculture cash crop cultivation in pursuit of agricultural modernization and economic feasibility. The new agricultural modification accompanying such cash crop cultivation can cause not only environmental degradation in the locality, but also such other problems as dependency on the outside world and impoverishment. That is, the farmers who used to practice agriculture within the independent material flow of the locality start being dependent on the introduction of new materials from outside industry sectors, which weakens their agricultural and economic independence. Those farmers who have lost their independence, or in other words are now subjugated by outside forces, are without freedom in their farming activities. Then, however enriched materially, they cannot be considered rich and content in the real sense of the words. Moreover, the environmental degradation would in due course destroy the agricultural sustainability in the locality, which in turn would threaten people's livelihood in the local community.

Some farming villages avoid taking such a course, refusing to produce any commercial crops. Introduction of cash crops for the sake of economic and materialistic gain does not necessarily bring increased income for farmers: such change may lead to drastic falls in productivity due to land degradation, outbreak of replant failure and weakened adjustability to droughts, or to low prices of the produced crops due to the competitiveness of the international market. Furthermore, persistent pursuit of economic profit turns a blind eye to agricultural sustainability and environmental conservation, leaving wasted farmlands as an aftermath of development. Realizing such a danger, some villages in Thailand and Laos have started "farming for livelihood", namely engaging in agricultural activities which sustain themselves within the local ecosystem and material flow.

In the past, agricultural production everywhere was conducted in accordance with the local environmental conditions, making use of the traditional local culture and knowledge which had been inherited from generation to generation. Resources management based on the local material flow, which enables the local community to conserve and utilize its local natural resources for the sake of its own locality, would rely only on the resources and energy within the local farming society, and can realize a sustainable livelihood. The non-commercial farming villages are trying to do just this in practice. It is not an attempt to go back to the self-sufficient local economy of the past. What needs to be aimed at is achieving the livelihood which is suitable for present-day circumstances. And, this is an ideal not only for developing countries.



"So, it is not that business is brisk. But it is also not the case that we are having difficulty in living....how shall I put it? We don't make money but still we have sufficient to eat. That is what is different from the past."

Ryu Murakami; "Exodus from the Country of Hope"