

Proposal of unique products using local resources in mountainous area in Japan

~Case study in Yogo, Shiga prefecture~

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1. Background and Objectives

Local resources in mountainous area in Japan supply not only foods and building materials but also resources of cash income to local people by forestry, making charcoal and silk worm culture. However, these functions have declined, which lead to depopulation and aging. This causes two problems. The one is the difficulty of making livelihood there. The other is that people have lost the pride of living there (Odagiri 2009). To solve them, some places in Japan have developed products using local resources because local resources are used to be closely connected with life and can recover the pride of the local people. Therefore, making and selling products using local resources could not only raise their standard of livelihood but also nurse their pride. Tada (2013) classified local resources into “hard” resources which are visible such as agricultural products and forest products and “soft” resources which are invisible such as local knowledge and techniques. He said that local products could add the value by combining with “hard” and “soft” resources. In this study, the author proposes the unique products using local resources by applying this approach to the concrete situation. For this purpose, the author conducted the survey to understand the situation in the area, search for local resources that can be used for products and consider the possibilities of sales.

2. Study Area and Methods

Study area is Yogo-town, Nagahama-city, Shiga prefecture in Japan. There is a Surusumi Wild Plant Processing Association which processes and sells the products using local resources at Surusumi-community in Yogo. Research was conducted by interviewing surusumi villagers (2013.9-11), accompanying villagers to collecting edible wild plants, interviewing the residents in Yogo, questionnaire survey at 3 direct sales shops in Nagahama-city.

3. Result and Discussion

Surusumi villagers used to earn money by making charcoal and silk worm culture and collect from surrounding mountains edible wild plants, plants for thatching, firewoods and plant materials nutrition for fertilizer in rice field. However, upon the rapid economic growth started since 1950s, and fuel drastic change in from charcoal to gas and electricity, their livelihood changed from forestry to wage labor. As livelihood changed they gradually stopped going to mountains for taking care of timber tree because wood price decreased since 1980s and utilizations of local resources in mountain have declined. However, the utilization of edible wild plants still continues in a small scale. It was found that the varieties of edible wild plants in Yogo corresponded to the varieties which were used in eastern part of Japan because of similar vegetation. Furthermore, the culture of food preservation exists because Yogo has heavy snow and preserved edible wild plants are served as precious foods in winter season. Customers in direct sales shops expected local products, especially vegetables, edible wild plants, delicatessen. Thus, Yogo could offer “the unique varieties of edible wild plants for people in western Japan” as “hard” resources, and “techniques of food preservation because of heavy snow area in Japan” as “soft” resources. By using these two resources, it would be possible to sell through a year. The value-added products are different in terms of variety and preservation method from similar goods.

Odagiri Tokumi 2009 「農山村再生～限界集落を超えて～」岩波書店：3-17

Tada kenichiro 2013 「地域再生のフロンティア-中国山地から始まるこの国の新しいかたち-」小田切徳美 藤山浩編, 農山漁村文化協会：255-256