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What can lead to new meaning in the life of older people?

Aging is inherently autonomous contrivance that works for human beings to enjoy life either with other people or nature in a lovely way, just like eating, talking, singing, walking, sleeping, and loving others. Since human beings were put under a product economy, aging as well as other human autonomous doings or devices has transformed into needs, and become a product. Thus, 'aging' is socio-materially constructed as a problematic life period with decline in health, increase in dependency, a drop of the productivity, and a loss of hope.

By presenting results of ethnographic field studies, I offer evidence against 'problematic' aging, and explore what can lead to a new meaning in the life of older people.

I describe the life of old women farmers living in a small mountain village, who engage in agriculture in conjunction with ICT and manage profit-earning work. Their average age is over 75. Each of the farmers picks leaves from the growing trees and flowers of her farmland, packs the leaves neatly, and sends the leaves and flowers to the market. Those leaves and flowers are handled as a garnish of the dishes in a market.

Each person of the old women farmers reads market information in the Internet and estimates the movement of the products and decides what kind of the leaf and how much quantity of it she sends to the market every day. After the market closes, each farmer checks her own takings of the day and the rankings of the sale in the Internet. Using those kinds of information, the old women farmers plan what kind of trees and flowers they grow next on their farmland.

After their orange farm was destroyed by damage caused by cold weather, the leaf - business by the old woman farmers began in 1987. At first those farmers rejected the proposal of selling leaves to earn money. It did not make a meaning for them who were a farmer to sell a leaf growing anywhere to get money.

Finally, four women farmers who cultivated trees in flower before long were persuaded to receive the suggestion of selling a leaf. Now, approximately 200 farmers from 60 generations to 90 generations participate in leaf - business in this village. As the result of long-term effort, the sales figures of them, today, reach to an annual total of 26 hundred thousand Euro. I analyze what made the old women farmers think that it has a meaning for them to sell a leaf.

Those old woman farmers live in the village in the mountainous area in southwestern Japan. People there have strongly had a preconception about "aging" and "women". For example, the old women are going to never operate a PC, old women are unconcerned about gaining the fashion and the money of the times, or it is difficult for old women to discover sufficiency in their life by themselves. However, as mentioned above, the old woman farmers made clear by themselves that those preconceptions were not true. Then, what has changed those old women farmers? I try to describe it.

It seems that for those old women farmers, there is close relation between the purpose in life and making much of the quality of the product. So, I also discuss that what kind of living is 'convivial' life for older people, and with what kind of socio-technical arrangements 'convivial' life can be achieved. 'Conviviality' here means by living together with joy.

