

## Video Installation Project: Pear Trees of Longevity

### Dual-channel Video Installation

2020

“Pear Trees of Longevity” is the video project I’m developing in 2020, which includes the “Shuho Pear Tree in 31<sup>st</sup> year of Heisei” I filmed in 2019 in the Akiyoshidai Art Village and the film project of the farmers of Taiwan Hengshan grafting pear farmers, which I started this year. The production will be shown in the Taipei Art Village in December.



Top: Snapshot of “Shuho Pear Tree in 31st year of Heisei” for 2019 Dual-channel Video Installation.

In 2019, through the exchange program of the Taipei International Art Village, I visited the Akiyoshidai International Art Village in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan and stayed there for more than two months. It was my first time to have a long stay in the countryside. Maybe it was because it was the end of winter or beginning of spring and the surrounding environment, all the resident artists had great appetite all day long as they gulped down the all the crop products purchased in the supermarket run by smallholders. The locally produced great burdocks and sweet potatoes tasted so good after simply being steamed or boiled. As a consumer accustomed to buying foods at the end of the supply chain, I could see the familiar objects such as houses, roads and woods mingled with logs with mushrooms almost sprouting, secretive olitory and all kinds of orchards where the trees were bald in winter.

Immediately after exiting the art village, a walk straight head or a U-turn down the two roads for 3-5 minutes would each take me to several orchards of pear trees and some were

hidden behind the small hill trail. The trees were much shorter than I imagined. Like the radiating root, the branches were pulled long on both sides with the twigs crossing one another on the neatly installed grid frames. This was for the convenience of farming and harvesting as the pear trees which could have grown tall were shortened and aligned neatly like chesses in the orchard. I often saw no man when I passed by riding a bike but could faintly hear the talks and music from the radio in the spacious orchards. I only saw two men from afar working busily in one super large farm and helping with other orchards when necessary. The serene and lonely winter scene against the backdrop of a mountain gave me a feeling completely different from cities and a sophisticated and complicated sense of time.



**Top left and right: Pear orchards near the Akiyoshidai International Art Village.**

The Akiyoshidai International Art Village maintained a good relationship with the residents nearby as many of them participated in the residential art projects every year. With their assistance, I interviewed the owners of the pear orchards-the Inoues, Ms. Horigana and Mr. Sasaki and people from the agriculture cooperative organized by the local farmers ( Mr. Nagamine of Shuho Nashi Cooperative) and the agriculture cooperative in charge of long-term development of local agriculture ( Mr. Yoshimura of the Jusan Agricultural Cooperative). To survive in the business, the farmers established strict standards for pear growing and fruits selection and came up with their own brand. Their distribution channels even included a high-grade fruit stores in Shinjuku, Tokyo with the pears becoming the selection fruits for autumn. The farmers I met during my visit were aged. The graph line shown in the demographic census table hand-made with dot stickers by the agricultural

association, like the pattern of aging population discussed in the geography textbook, formed a wave shape like an upside-down flower vase.

The only young pear farmer in the village was a beginner Mr. Tokiwa from Osaka. He took over an orchard of which the owner could not continue with the farm work. During the interview, they told me many things a pure pear consumer would never know. The thing farthest beyond my imagination was the production of pears was just like a never-ending marathon, any pause would make the trees sick and even cause contamination in the neighborhood. If the pears cannot grow, the trees of the whole parcel would have to be hewn down and it is impossible to rehabilitate or restore the land. The pear tree orchards on the large parcel of Akiyoshidai began cultivation around a century ago and more than half of them have vanished. Some trees have made it through over three generations to become the centennial pillars of the brand as they continue to be highly fruitful. Behind such success were the farmers who strictly abode by the working schedule day in day out. Leaving behind the urban life in Osaka for production of pears, Mr. Tokiwa was always catching up with the pear growing schedules which rotated like meshing gears all year long. He adjusted his everyday life to fit into the “universe of pear timing”.



**Left: The Shuho pear centennial tree commemoration can, 500 yens each. I bought one and can't bear to eat it.**

**Source: <http://minecolle.com/nashi.html>**

Under the globalized cooperation model, the “pear timing” in Taiwan has been developed into a miraculous compound product. Relying on the significant difference in temperature

and superb grafting technique of the pear farmers, in the wake of complaints about the Hengshan pears, nicknamed as “coarse pears”, produced under the subtropical climate conditions, for being not sweet and tender enough, Japanese pears are grown from the shoots purchased from Japan as an attempt of innovation.

The fruit of temperate zone cannot be supplied in stable quantities as a lower temperature cannot always be maintained only by relying on the major temperature gap to avoid the limitation of latitude and longitude location. Through experiments, the farmers found it possible to graft the Japanese pears in the branches of Hengshan pear trees which do not require low temperature for cultivation. The pruning and grafting which take place year after year is a lengthy labor. The pear trees, flowers and fruits each operate within a separate controlled timeframe and transferred to different positions after sea transportation and pruning for several days and finally combined into a creature called “commercial pears”. The tourists, however, only see the rural scenery as they pass by the farms.

People living in cities would imagine that the whole system supporting the cities should operate in a perfect way, including the pears transported to the markets in the season or the imported pears packed in gift boxes. The imagination, however, only contains 3 to 5 steps while the transportation process from the farms to the markets across several hundred miles can be broken down into many stages. The products are sold in the reorganized image of pears after going through the interactions between men and the nature and among men such as defoliating and grafting, refrigeration and storage, land and sea transportation, import, export and tariff procedures. It is more than just eating as these are the all the results of the hand work of the farmers as they skillfully adjust the timing and the trees, which are hidden scenarios unseeable and unimaginable for the general consumers living in urban areas.

This ongoing time-based procedure has been tremendously impacted over the last 10 years, including the continuous decline of farming population, difficulty in finding successors due to highly demanding and cumbersome techniques for growing grafting pears and shoots being no longer easily obtainable due to natural disasters. For example, Fukujima, one of

the major import sources of pear shoots for Taiwan has not been able to maintain the same export amount as before since 2011 and the local farmers doing pruning work have not been able to travel to Japan in groups since the pandemic. The impact on the crops due to the turmoil of the globalized cross-border support system is relatively unobvious for the consumers.

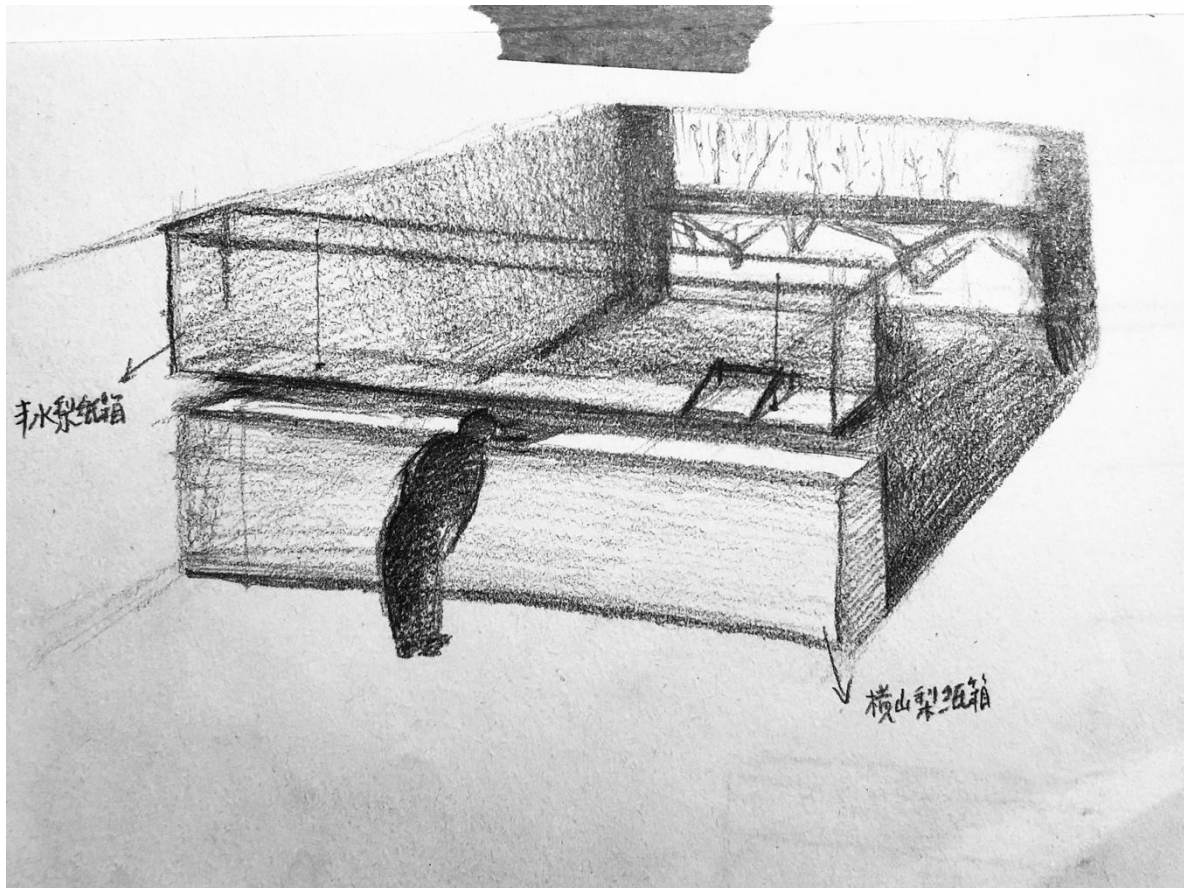


**Left: The burls are numerous in grafted pear trees. The cutting marks on the burls are the results of grafting of shoots from Japan by the pear farmers in Chuolan over the decades.**

**Right: Now (Sept.) is the time for the farmers in Chuolan to prune the succulent sprouts in the mother tree. The branches to be grafted will be selected and other branches seeking to grow upward for sunlight are trimmed as this will serve to streamline later operations and preserve nutrients for grafting. The upper and lower parts of the tree come in sharp contrast after trimming.**

In the next few months, I will be working with the grafting pear farmers in Chuolan, Miaoli County by filming their cumbersome and audacious grafting process and ordinary and mysterious moments between their labors. This, however, is not a research documentary after all. Nor is it a promotion program depicting the production of crops. It is not my intention to narrate the busy work on the farm, but to shoot the journey of pears including the trees tidy-up (the burls of grafted pears are multitudinous), the group chatting during the grafting of shoots and the end of the production chain - delivery of the “pear” products to the consumers (the pears need to be stored for some time if the prices are far from ideal) based on my filming approaches such as repetitive framing and re-acting. The film is mainly about daily activities, recording a wondrous grafting and combination process across

different regions and times in the contemporary world and centered around the lives of many people involved. The production does not only include the joys and pains of farmers and crops production but also urban policies and cross-border activities. Though I do not know how the finished work will look like and how much I will be able to record during the pandemic, this is the film project I'm working on now.



Above: One of the video installations exhibited in the Taipei Art Village. The lower walls engulfing the exhibits are formed with the stacking of the paper boxes for the Hengshan pears, the most grown variety in Taiwan, which has seen decrease in sales due to disliked texture. The paper boxes hung above are used to contain the grafted varieties from Japan, "Housui" and "Kousui" and "Shinseiki", etc. A small seam is placed in the middle. The orchard above and farm works such as grafting below can be viewed from the openings on different sides of the paper boxes while other parts are shielded and only trees can be vaguely seen.