Rural Revitalization with Sunflowers as Amenity Crops in a Japanese Countryside

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Abstract Rural landscapes attract many tourists in Japan. Urbanization improved exchange value of the rural landscape for urban consumers, resulting in this landscape became a commodity in the market. However, most rural economies in Japan face the challenge of the globalization and an aging population. This paper explores the process of commodification of a rural space where sunflowers were introduced as new crops for enhancing rural landscape. To achieve the research goal, this study empirically scrutinized the landscape in both the supply side and the demand side of the tourism. Sunflowers are neither native to Japan nor cash crops for post-productivist Japanese agriculture. The urban desire of the demand side is the prerequisite for the rural tourism, but most tourists do not care about the history, background, and authenticity, and therefore this landscape with sunflowers can be regard as a simulacrum. However, regional, agricultural, and political factors of the supply side also need to be constructed the landscape for rural tourism.

Key words landscape, rural tourism, simulacrum, rice production control policy, post-productivist agriculture

Introduction

Rural landscapes attract many tourists in the developed world like Europe (Hall 2004), North America (Gartner 2004), and Japan (Iguchi et al. 2008). Urban residents particularly enjoy seeing picturesque countryside, relishing local foods, and staying at a real working farm. However, this rural tourism or agricultural tourism is a relatively recent popular activity in Japan. The Japanese government, specifically the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), began to promote so-called “green tourism” in the early 1990s, aiming at economic revitalization for agricultural regions and convincing urban consumers that agriculture plays a vital role in Japanese society and daily life.

Urbanization has detached the younger generation from rural life. Although most urban residents are descendants of farmers, grandparents or great-grandparents of recent urban children are from nonagricultural households. Children even in metropolitan Tokyo were familiar with rural amenities a couple decades ago. Urban families used to go back to their native homes to celebrate the New Year or Bon festivals. Children played around in the farm land and natural setting, in turn understanding natural beauty and cherishing slow life. These travels are still Japanese seasonal custom, but the connotation of homeland is no longer synonymous with that of countryside.

Rural landscapes nowadays are a commodity in the market. From the vantage point of Marxist theory and recent literature in political economic geography and socio-cultural geography, commodification represented an inversion of exchange value over use value (Marx 1867; Cloke 1993). An object may have high use value but extremely low exchange value, so this object is not a commodity because no one wants to buy it. Rural landscape was not a commodity until recent years, because it was too mundane for consumers. However, most city-dwellers are delighted to pay some money for rural tourism in the early twenty-first century. As a result, rural space is gaining commercial value per se. Put simply, exchange value varies across time and space.

Multifunctionality is a key concept for post-productivist agriculture. Productivist agriculture was dominant in the developed world including Japan, where farmers had to invest large amounts of capital and labor power in order to maximize their profit. Since WTO (World Trade Organization) drove neoliberalism in agricultural trade, small family farms in less favored areas could not compete with transnational agribusiness corporations. Along with an aging population, this relentless global competition made farmers withdraw from their business, thus proliferating abandoned farm land in mountainous regions. This deterioration of regional agriculture harms not only local residents
but also the entire nation, because agriculture has multifarious functions other than producing food and fiber. These functions include preventing floods or mudslides, conserving the water supply, biodiversity, and cultural heritage, educating children and adults, and enabling people to spend pleasing and relaxing time in a pastoral landscape. These functions are comprehended as external effects in general. One can enjoy scenic landscape free of charge and no one else is excluded this activity. In addition, more than one consumer simultaneously can get benefits from the landscape, because it never goes away, unlike other material goods. Landscape has non-excludability and non-rivalry; hence it falls into the category of public goods (OECD 1999). Numerous researches on the economic value of the environment are conducted using cost-benefit analysis in environmental economics and agricultural economics (Fujimoto et al. 1993; Muranaka 2002; Randall 2002; Campbell et al. 2009). Urban consumers, however, cannot directly get the benefit from the landscape unless they access the rural area. In addition, if a designated district is surrounded by a fence and installed gates on the access road, the authority or the private company can charge an admission fee to customers. Indeed, most national parks in the USA are paid tourist attractions. In this sense, rural landscape has the nature of commodity as well as of a public good.

A commodity is evaluated with prices by consumers. They by no means intend to pay for a low exchange value commodity. Commodities have an inherently market-oriented character, therefore there are best sellers on the one hand but many commodities drop out of the market on the other. By the same token, rural areas do not have a uniform value for urban consumers. Terraced paddy fields are quite popular with tourists because of their spectacular scenery in recent Japan. Urban residents cannot directly view the landscape with terraced paddy fields on a daily basis. On the other hand, ordinary rice paddy fields in plains regions cannot attract many tourists unless the fields have a special feature. Terraced paddy fields have high exchange value because of their rarity.

Popular tourist destinations are unique areas which have traditional culture or aesthetic quality. These characteristics are defined as the rural ideal, which contains nostalgia, naturalness, purity, and tranquility. The countryside has been symbolized historically by urbanization and industrialization and this idealism is driven by urban decentralization, flexible accumulation, amenity commodification, and environmental consciousness (Bunce 1994). That is to say, this rural ideal exists in the bourgeois imagination of urban discourse (Bell 2006), and rural communities or enterprises therefore must tailor the rural settings to urban desire. Woods (2005) suggested that rurality is a marketing device to sell the countryside, exemplifying farm parks, country style theme parks, and novel locales. The tourists can easily recognize that they are blatant commercialism.

This paper explores another type of rural ideal: simulacrum landscapes, which are scattered through contemporary rural areas in Japan. Simulacrum is an image or a symbol of a copy, which represents more genuine reality than reality itself (Baudrillard 1981). When the simulacrum can not be distinguished from its original, it hides the history, labor process, and social relationships (Harvey 1989). Typical examples of simulacrum for postmodern tourists are Disneyland, world fairs, and shopping centers (Urry 1995). These are in the urban setting, but there are also tourist simulacra in the rural atmosphere, because the rural ideal is constructed by the image of the urban consumers. Meanwhile, tourism industry promotes the idealized imagery and rhetoric with romanticism or sentimentalism for added value (Markwick 2001).

As stated above, these conceptual studies have been devoted to research on rural tourism, but few attempts to empirically scrutinize the rural landscape in terms of regional economic revitalization have been made. Since most rural economies in Japan are exhausted by globalization and the aging population (Takayanagi 2006; Imazato, 2008), economic revitalization is an urgent issue. This paper examines the process of commodification of rural spaces, where sunflowers were introduced as new crops for enhancing the rural landscape, through a case study of Nanko that is an epitomized Japanese countryside.

**Spreading the Cultivation of Sunflower**

Rural landscapes full of sunflowers are currently quite popular with tourists in Japan (Figure 1). Sunflowers were introduced to Japan in the seventeenth century, but they did not become ordinary crops until recently. While most farmers in the world grow sunflowers as oilseed crops, Japanese people plant sunflowers as ornamental flowers. However, the cultivation of sunflowers has spread since the early 1990s. Although we have no available statistical data, we can recognize that sunflower cultivation areas are scattered around Japan. Figure 2, which is drawn on the basis of the collective data from newspaper articles and websites, shows the distribution of acreage under cultivation of sunflowers by municipalities. The largest
area is Nanko (Hyogo pref.), followed by Hokuryu (Hokkaido), Hikawa (Shimane pref.), Nogi (Tochigi pref.), Kasaoka (Okayama pref.) and Sambongi (Miyagi pref.). However, most farmers do not earn enough income by selling the seeds. Why do Japanese farmers grow sunflowers recently, even though sunflowers are not cash crops? The following sections discuss this issue through a case study of Nanko.

Nanko represents quintessential Japanese rurality. This rural town is located at the piedmont that has a gentle range of hills along a river, and therefore has little flatland (Figure 3). Most of this region is a less favored area for agriculture, but the main crop is nevertheless rice. Rice is the most laborsaving crop in Japan, though the average labor power input is still more than other countries such as the U.S. or Italy. The farm size in Nanko is a mere 59 a of paddy fields on average. As the sales of rice are too small to support their livelihood, farm management is subsistence level. Therefore, farmers have to work for nonfarm businesses or depend on a pension for their primary income. In addition, the labor power relies on elderly retired persons or housewives.

Sunflowers have changed the landscape of Nanko since the new crops were first introduced to Nakamikawa, the northern part of this region, in 1990. The farmers or the local government officers did not have a definite intention for regional revitalization with sunflowers at the beginning of the planting. The reason for introducing...
the sunflowers was involved with the farm land consolidation project. Parcels of rice paddies in Japan have been extremely small and not shaped straight in rectangles in recent decades. In addition, the farmlands of each landholder were fragmented. Accordingly, the operation efficiency was so low that the parcels had to be consolidated in a large allotment and their ownership swapped. This project in Nakamikawa was planned to start in the late summer. The farmers were not able to plant rice, and they needed to seek alternative crops. They just happened to choose sunflowers because sunflowers usually finish blooming in the early August. They did not intend to make a profit with the alternative crop in the first place. The farmers sowed 4 ha of sunflower seeds.

A bunch of full blooming sunflowers astonished passing onlookers as well as the farmers by creating spectacular scenery. Since such scenery was uncommon in Japan, this rural landscape became a popular topic of conversation and news stories. In the following year, sunflowers were planted in another village, Hayashizaki, located in central Nanko. This introduction was also involved with a farm land consolidation project. After finishing the project in the summer, the farmers planted sunflowers instead of soybeans, because they missed the sowing season of soybean due to the prolonged rainy spell. Blooming of sunflowers in autumn was exceptional, also resulting in attention of the public. The MAFF granted an award to Hayashizaki for the annual beautiful rural landscape contest in 1993. The more the media covered this landscape, the more urban tourists visited it. The cultivation of sunflowers in Nanko was expanded, culminating in 1999 at 50 ha. The acreage plunged to 36 ha in the following year and thereafter slightly declined (Figure 4). Many farmers in other villages started to grow sunflowers from 1993. As of 2008, sunflowers are cultivated in 30 ha of farm lands in 8 districts (Table 1).

The clue to the spread of sunflowers is that the cultivation was carried out in paddy fields, not in dry fields. The total rice production in Japan started to decrease from the late 1960s because of reduced demand. However, the pricing process of rice was not conducted on the basis of a market mechanism, and consequently the supply outstripped the demand. As a result, the Japanese government asked farmers to reduce the planted acreage of rice with farm subsidies. This rice production control policy started in 1970, mainly by converting from rice to other crops, such as wheat, soybeans, fruits, vegetables, and forage crops (Matsumura 2001) in order to improve Japan’s food self-sufficiency rate. However, the persistent surplus stockpile and the reluctance of farmers to accept this policy diversified the measures to reduce rice acreage. Fallow paddy fields filled with water and non-harvest crops were started as measures...
that granted subsidies to farmers in 1990. These non-harvest crops, for example sunflowers, rape blossoms, cosmoses, and Chinese milk vetch, were called amenity crops that enhanced the rural landscape. The promotion of multifunctionality of agriculture by the MAFF and agricultural economists encouraged more farmers to plant amenity crops. The additional subsidy from the Hyogo prefectural government that was started in 1996 also increased farmers’ motivation. However, the reduction of this subsidy decreased the acreage of sunflowers in Nanko in 2000.

All the sunflowers (except in Hokkaido) as shown in Figure 1 are planted in paddy fields. The farmers’ intention for the cultivating of sunflowers in these areas was chiefly to get the subsidy, not to sell the product. While one third of paddy fields are converted to other crops on national average, almost half the fields are forced into an acreage reduction in this region because the quality of rice was not so good (Figure 5). Under the surplus supply of rice, the national government allocated a large acreage quota for producing areas where high quality rice, for example Koshihikari in Niigata, was produced at one time. As a result, rice and sunflowers are alternately planted in the paddy fields in Nanko every two years. Each farmer does not have an individual option, and the districts of each crop are rotated in the entire fields of a village in order to ease the farmers’ discontent with the adjustment and improve the productivity. These amenity crops, however, play a certain role in preventing the spread of farm land abandonment (Figure 6). The amenity crops are suitable for elderly farmers, because they need less effort than cash crops. The population pyramid of the people mainly engaged in farming tells us that Japanese agriculture can not be sustained without the elderly (Figure 7). However, vulnerable elderly who can no longer work in farming ask for the operations to be entrusted to the agricultural cooperative. This situation demonstrates that the sunflower landscape was basically generated by the post-productivist agricultural policy.

Table 1. Sunflower cultivating in Nanko by village

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<tr>
<td>Nishi-Shimono</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Early August</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urushino (Honmura)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Middle August</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urushino (Dan)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Early July</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higashi-Tokusa</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Middle July</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Corporation</td>
<td>53,200</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayashizaki</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Late July</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoneda</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Early July</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hozoji</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Early July</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td></td>
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<td>85,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
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Source: Interviews and information provided by the town of Sayo.

Figure 5. Rate of paddy fields set aside in Hyogo (2006).
Source: Calculated by the author using the data from the MAFF.
Economic Performance of Sunflowers

Oilseeds and processed commodities

Most of the income from the sunflowers is from the subsidy, but nevertheless farmers in Nanko get other money in different ways, and they utilize the seeds for the development of special local products. They anticipated the scarcity of sunflower oil and explored the possibility of a new market. Although they outsourced oil milling to a factory in Izumo City (Shimane pref.), which originally milled rapeseeds, in the first stage (Hyogo Noson Kasseika Kosha 2000), they used their own facility, built with 140 million yen in 1995. This milling factory, in a complex with a retail store, was funded by the national (50%), prefectural (10%), and local government (40%).

The sunflower oil features purity, naturalness, safety and healthfulness. They use neither agrochemicals nor genetically modified seeds, and press the seeds without any additives. One bottle (280g) of oil needs 160 thousand seeds that are the equivalent of 80 flowers. The strained lees are fertilized back to the fields.

They regularly sell one bottle of sunflower oil for 900 yen. This price is extremely high, as ordinary food oil that contains double the volume is sold for around 250 yen at supermarkets. They also sell a wide variety of products, such as salad dressing, udon noodles, ice cream, beef curry, candy, rice crackers, soap, and cosmetic cream, which are processed with the sunflower oil or seeds themselves (Figure 8). Although most products other than

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Figure 6. Rate of abandoned fields in Hyogo (2005).
Source: Census of Agriculture and Forestry 2005.

Figure 7. Population pyramid of the people mainly engaged in farming in Nanko (2005).
Source: Census of Agriculture and Forestry 2005.
Notes: 1) Black parts show people who are more engaged in work than domestic affairs, child care, and other activities.
2) ‘Mainly’ means people who work more in farming than in non-farming.
ice cream are produced outside of this region, these are sold as local products. Annual sales are about 40 million yen, except in FY2005 when a popular TV show covering this sunflower oil boosted the sales up to 46 million yen. Half of the sales come from the direct retail store, 24% from wholesale, 16% from festival stalls, and 10% from mail-order. These sales figures are a considerable amount for special local products.

The farmers receive 210 yen per kg of the seeds by selling them to the oil mill factory. In addition, they get 200 yen per kg as the subsidy from the municipality, which had provided seeds for sowing to farmers free of charge until 2007, but changed the subsidy policy in order to encourage more sales of sunflowers. However, the revenue from the sales of the seeds is extremely small because the yield is so low. The yield of sunflowers in Nanko is from zero to 60 kg per 10 a depending on soil and weather. The minimum target yield is 30 kg, but it falls a long way short of the world level, for example 120 kg in Russia and Ukraine. This low land productivity stems from the following three reasons: first, extensive farming (most farmers are not willing to work for increasing harvest); secondly, poor drainage (watery paddy fields are not suitable to grow sunflowers); and finally, pest damage (birds eat the ready-to-harvest seeds).

Tourism

Recently, about 100 thousand tourists visit Nanko to see the rural landscape with sunflowers every season, although the actual numbers of visitors changes by the year depending on how the flowers bloom. To expand the period of tourist season, they adjust the sowing season. As a result the blooming season is from the early July to early August. Most tourists come from Osaka metropolitan area including neighboring regions, but some come from Okayama and Hiroshima. The central district of Nanko holds a festival over two weeks, featuring a maze made of sunflowers, a botanical garden with sunflower varieties from around the world, fireworks, food stalls, and local agricultural products. That is why Hayashizaki and Higashi-Tokusa attract so many tourists. Most of them come by car and the rest by train or package tour. To take an example of one tour, a one-day trip departs from Umeda or the terminal station of Osaka and its main destinations are fields with sunflowers in Nanko, somen (Japanese vermicelli) lunch, and a pick-your-own peach farm. This style of bus trip is quite popular with couples and groups, especially elderly, at the reasonable prices of 5,900–6,900 yen (depending on travel dates).

The parking lots near the festival venue have a capacity of 750 autos and 50 buses. However, the parking fee (500 yen for auto, 1,000 yen for microbus, and 2,000 yen for coach) can not bring income to the farmers at all. That revenue is spent for the operation of the festival, mostly payroll cost of traffic controllers or parking attendants and the operation cost of the free shuttle service from the nearest rail station to the festival site.

The farmers earn from the tourists in two ways. One is the 100 yen admission fee per person under the pretext of a cleaning cost. The visitors are not obligated to pay, but most are cooperative. It is a good deal because the visitors can get a small bag of sunflower seeds as well as enjoy the beautiful scenery. Another is cut sunflowers for ornamental use. They sell the flowers for 50 yen each.

Profitability of sunflowers

Do farmers get enough income by cultivating sunflowers? According to the author’s estimation based on interviews and provided information, they can get a net income of 46,500 yen per 10 a (Table 2). This amount seems to be very small by comparison with other developed countries, but the income is a considerable amount for a small family farm in this region. When they grow rice, they earn 41,407 yen per 10 a. We can not confirm that the sunflower is more profitable than rice without careful consideration, because the data does not include all of the subsidies. Conversely, despite the fact that the management size is extremely small, each farm has invested very heavily in fixed capital such as a rice transplanter and a combine harvester.

The important point here is that the cultivating of sunflowers is in deficit in operating income, even though the farmers contract out many essential operations for saving the costs of machinery. As mentioned earlier,
The local government provides 200 yen per kg for seed shipping, multiplied by 33, which means average yield, is 6,600 yen. The rice production control policy was modified in the 2000s. First, the national government changed from the quota system based on rice planted acreage to setting a target supply quantity in order to be balanced with demand in 2004. Second, the policy had been determined in detail in a single uniform way across the country before the reform, but the national government delegated the concrete measures of this policy to local councils consisting of farmers, a cooperative, and a municipality in 2007. In Nanko, they decided that sunflowers are the regional leading crop and farmers who cultivate sunflowers are paid 35,000 yen per 10 a. In addition, another subsidy that is ruled by the prefectural council of Hyogo is providing 10,000 yen per 10a for sunflower farms. Furthermore, if the fields are located in a sloped area, the farmers receive 10,000 yen per 10 a through the Direct Payment System to the Hilly and Mountainous Areas. These subsidies are indispensable for the sustainable agriculture of sunflower production.

**Rural Landscape for Urban Tourists**

Why do sunflowers attract urban tourists? The landscape of Nanko, which consists of paddy fields, forested mountain, and traditional farmhouses, is ubiquitous in rural Japan. This countryside landscape does not induce urban residents to travel, because it is too mediocre. However, sunflowers are not native to Japan, and have not been commonly grown crops until recently. First of all, the rarity captured the hearts of urban tourists.

Most urban consumers, in particular those who are interested in environmental issues and agriculture, are willing to pay some money for a beautiful landscape. The author conducted a simple questionnaire survey to 51 urban residents of the Tokyo metropolitan area by interview. The question was “how much would you pay for the rural landscape with sunflowers, if you travel to such the place?” This kind of research is similar to the
Contingent Valuation Method (CVM), which is used extensively to evaluate the value of environment or landscape by environmental or agricultural economists. However, this research was not accurately based on the CVM, because it was conducted in order to clarify the difference in the value of the rural landscape between urban residents and rural farmers. Although this survey was not performed using the random sampling method, the results are considerably suggestive for this study. The interviewees were the visitors who came to the poster presentation of this tentative report at the campus festival of Tokyo University of Agriculture. Most of them are ordinary people who live in the neighborhood, and are at least interested in agriculture and rural life. This questionnaire was conducted before explaining the necessity of the admission fee in Nanko, in order to eliminate the bias.

The survey results are summarized in Figure 9. Forty-three persons noted willingness to pay 100 yen and more for the rural landscape, while 8 persons refused payment. The median was 469 yen excluding the resistance answers. The reason of this exclusion is that those who refused the payments would never go to see sunflowers in any rural fields. Although this figure seems to come out higher, it is no doubt that the pricing of Nanko is too low. The farmers in Nanko undervalue their rural landscape.

Sunflowers in bloom are symbolic summer scenery. In particular, we were able to see sunflowers only in private gardens, parks, or flowerbeds at elementary schools, not in agricultural fields. Japanese people traditionally love to feel the change of seasons by subtle nuances. For example, they enjoy viewing the beauty of seasonally blooming trees and flowers, tasting the freshness of vegetables, fruits, and fish in season, and expressing imagined scenery by composing a haiku (the world’s shortest poetry with a seasonal phrase). The appearance of sunflowers, and their name⁹, reminds Japanese people of vigor, passion, and hope. A blanket of sunflowers therefore attracts many tourists in summer. However, most urban tourists do not know the history of the rural landscape that was formed by the strenuous efforts of local farmers (Sekido 2007). In addition, most of them are not willing to learn the story behind the scenes of the sunflower landscape. The cultivation of sunflowers has never traditionally existed in Japan. The sunflower landscape in Nanko may not have authenticity, but the cultural landscape which was invented through the intertwined relationships is neither genuine nor spurious (Fukuda 1996). If nobody in urban regions had traveled to Nanko, the sunflower landscape would absolutely never been formed, because the farm management of sunflowers would have been in deficit without the subsidies and the tourists.

The refusal of payment to the rural landscape is also an important aspect. Why do people not want to pay? Some have no interest to the landscape in the first place. However, some accept the use value of rural landscapes, but do not think it deserves money based on the exchange value. An interviewee in his 60s stated: “Why on earth do I have to pay? When I return to my homeland, similar landscapes surround me. They are all free.” Even if people now live in an urban area, they grew up in a rural area in their childhood, and they do not generously pay for rural landscape. In other words, the fact of refusal of payment suggests that the sunflower landscape can be an attraction mostly for urban consumers, but not for rural residents. Although sunflower fields are rare in Japan, the value of the landscape can not be equal for all the consumers.

The value of tourism grows out of the stage direction of non-daily life whether in the atmosphere of a luxury hotel or in never-before-seen agricultural fields. Most urban tourists do not expect real rural life. Even rural restaurants for tourists often serve fabricated attractive contemporary dishes which have all the appearances of the traditional local foods (Tellstrom et al. 2005). In addition, we consume the signs that the tourism industry promotes as the rural ideal in post-modern society (Hopkins 1998). Rural tourism will never become successful unless it meets the self-centered needs of urban consumers. The rural landscape has been invented by the rural ideal of urban consumers, and therefore the landscape is a simulacrum.

**Conclusion**

The Sunflower landscapes emerged since the
multifunctionality in agriculture was emphasized in the 1990s. The products of sunflowers are not profitable in Japan, but enhance the rural landscape and differentiate the place, marketing it for urban tourists. Although the cultivation of sunflowers has public nature, the rural landscape with them also has exchange value. The exchange value of rural landscapes in tourism is relative to personal experience. The urban people who have grown up in a sophisticated atmosphere find value in the rural life, while rural residents or those who have lived in the countryside do not want to pay for the rural landscape. In addition, urban consumers do not care whether it represents reality or imitation; or rather they prefer the aesthetic aspect to authenticity. However, attractive rural landscape does not consist only of sunflowers. Forested hills, traditional folk dwellings, and warm-hearted rural people are also needed for rural tourism. When we purchase a commodity, we not only consume the material itself but we also consume information or signs accompanied by the commodity in the saturated market (Takayanagi 2007). The sunflower cultivating in Nanko is not productivist agriculture, because its harvest cannot earn much profit. The rural landscape in Nanko represents ideal ruralness, but not reality itself. The sunflower landscape is beautiful and hopeful, but it does not convey the harsh economic conditions of this area. Also, the sunflower landscape is not formed by a traditional agriculture or lay the productivist agriculture. The sunflower landscape as a simulacrum in Nanko was commoditized by urban desire.

However, this landscape exists in the real world. The urban desire is the prerequisite for the simulacrum landscape, but the construction of this landscape needs 3 other conditions. First, agriculture in Nanko is essentially subsistence level. The management size is tiny and the farmers are of advanced age. Therefore they do not pursue the maximum profit by means of cultivating cash crops. Secondly, the growing of sunflowers is easy to introduce for semiretired farmers. The enhancement of the landscape with amenity crops does not need intensive farming. Lastly, the governmental subsidies are enough for the farmers to avoid abandonment of the paddy fields. They have to convert the planted crops from rice to others. These 3 factors of regional, agricultural, and political attributes contributed to this atypical landscape.

The detailed enforcement of the rice control policy devolved from the MAFF to local communities. We should notice that the local government encourages the farmers to sell more sunflower products. As the sunflower landscape became gradually pervasive through out rural Japan, the scarcity value diminished. As a result recent rural tourism in Nanko is on downward trend in the number of visitors. They have to compensate for decreased tourists with seeds and other specialty products. The sunflower landscapes were not the revival of nostalgic rurality in the beginning, but this simulacrum landscape can change to the novel real rural life.

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Notes

1. Homeland or furusato in Japanese means a region where someone lived in their childhood. The imagery of the homeland of Japanese people in common is an imagined scenery which is depicted in a school song of Furusato (My country home).

2. The town of Nanko was merged with 3 neighboring municipalities into the town of Sayo in 2005, but sunflowers are cultivated only within the area of the former Nanko.

3. Although Hokuryu was the first area where sunflowers were introduced in 1980, Nanko, as will be detailed below, is probably the pioneer as a tourist destination with sunflowers in paddy fields.

4. The income from rice in Nanko was 250 million yen, which accounts for 49% of all agricultural income produced.

5. Some areas in the north or the middle of Hyogo have a relatively low set aside rate, because these areas produce rice for sake brewing.

6. Sowing and harvesting are typical operations for outsourcing, but some retired farmers rely on the agricultural cooperative for all the farming operations.

7. They outsource to small and medium sized enterprises in Osaka, Okayama, and Ehime.

8. The program name is Dotchi no Byori Sho (Which is the winner cooking) that is akin to the Iron Chef. This program was put on the air on September 15, 2005.

9. Japanese word for sunflower is himawari, which literally means turn around for the sun.
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