"In My Lifetime"

Toshihiro Takami, Founder and Honorary Director of ARI
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August 31 in memory of his birthday.

Other 1996 Award recipients were two honorees from India, one from Korea, and one from the Philippines. When the then President Fidel Ramos handed a certificate and a medal to each of the award recipients, I felt especially honored and humbled.

Before I left Japan to attend the ceremony, I was advised to dress in traditional clothes, which I did not own. I borrowed an outfit from my friend. I was also requested to make an acceptance speech in English. Since I had spent some time abroad, I felt comfortable expressing my joy and appreciation in English. Of the $50,000 award money, I gave ¥1,000,000 to an NGO in the Philippines and the remaining prize to ARI.

I was so happy and thrilled to learn that about 30 ARI graduates came to congratulate me on winning the award. After the ceremony, the graduates from the Philippines, Korea, and India gave me a celebration party. I was really touched and grateful to them, knowing that they were not rich, but that they made an extra effort for me.

The party was held at the Shangri-La Hotel, one of the best in the Philippines. The graduates laughed, “We would never walk into such a luxurious hotel, if not for your party!” We had a great time.

I was born in Manchuria to a poor Japanese family. After returning to Japan at the age of 10, I had been fortunate enough to meet many good people and to have opportunities to study in the United States three times.

When I visited Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia in 1963, I learned that Asian countries did not have a good system to educate rural leaders, who were left to survive on their own.

Farmers are the providers of food to all people on the Earth. I thought that we needed to do something about the situation, which prompted me to start up ARI.

Nishinasuno Church, through the church fellowship network, introduced me to the current site of ARI.

When my name was called aloud, I stepped into a blinding spotlight on stage, feeling strangely detached from the scene but filled with millions of memories and emotions. On August 31, 1996, I attended a ceremony to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award, which is considered the Nobel Prize of Asia, at the Philippine Civic Center in Manila. The award was granted for my contribution to the training of rural leaders from over 50 countries in Asia and Africa.

The award is granted to the individuals and the organizations that have made major contributions in public services and enhancement of peace and international understanding. It is named after the 7th President of the Republic of the Philippines, Ramon Magsaysay, and is presented every year on

No.1 The Magsaysay Award
I felt privileged and acted big because I was a “Japanese child,” and looked down on Manchu. It took me a long time to realize how foolish I had been. Actually the War was over by the time I came to my senses. It is an experience that will remain with me throughout my life as an admonishment.

In Manchuria, as more Japanese immigrants came and the number of children increased, new elementary schools were built. Every time a new school opened, I was sent to a different school. Six times in total, I was forced to change schools.

We ate as ordinary Japanese do in Japan: steamed rice, miso soup, and boiled dishes. We had no food problems. I played with kids in the neighborhood: sword fights, tag, marbles, and Menko. I was just an ordinary kid.

My life changed drastically when I was 10 years old. My father co-signed a large loan, which became his responsibility to pay back.

Creditors, demanding payments, came to our home every day, which put great stress on my father. He became ill and could not deal with his life in Manchuria. To escape from creditors, our family of eight returned to Japan.
I was surprised to see a distinct division of yellow and blue in the sea water.

In two days, we arrived at Shimonoseki Port and headed to Miyazu in Kyoto on the coast of the Sea of Japan. We counted on my father's cousin, a fishery engineer who lived near Miyazu, to help us start a new life in Japan.

Our family lived in a small fishing village by the sea. After returning to Japan, my father seemed to lose his interest in life and did not take up a job. My mother, Toshi, took over the responsibility of supporting the family by selling fish and pawning her kimonos.

I transferred to an elementary school in the village. Because of the higher living standard in Manchuria, my clothing was much better than that worn by the village children in Japan, although our family was poor. I was dressed in a formal school uniform with a school cap, while the village children were wearing threadbare kimono and straw slippers. I was always the top student in the class and mistaken for a child from a rich family because of the way I dressed; therefore, the village kids did not bully me.

After elementary school graduation, there were only two choices, either to find a job or continue on to a 5-year high school. I wanted to go to high school, but my family was too poor to afford it.

I was ready to give up schooling when I came across encouraging news. A charitable man who owned a kimono shop in Kyoto had set up a scholarship fund. I could receive a scholarship and continue on to high school.

The scholarship stipulated that the recipient must live in a Zen temple to study Zen for 5 years while he attended high school. He must not contact or visit his family. The terms and conditions of the scholarship were severe and restrictive, but my desire to continue my education was stronger. My family also complied with the severe conditions, wishing that I would receive higher education. I left my family at the age of 12 years and went to a Zen temple to study Zen while attending high school.

In May, 1937, our family of eight closed a chapter in our life. My father, Taitsuke, who was left holding his friend's debt in Manchuria, was good-hearted, but also gullible. Because of his pleasant personality, he had been asked to serve as manager of a dormitory for Japanese workers in Manchuria. However, some of the Japanese youth who went to Manchuria to find a job thought it all right for my father to leave his debt for others to take care of. And so we left Manchuria for Japan, my parents' home country.

For a while after we left Dalian Port (大連港), the Yellow Sea was literally yellow because of the soil and sand carried out by the Yellow River. However, as we approached Genkai-Nada, the water became deep blue.
In the spring of 1938, I began dormitory life at Senbutsuji in Kyoto in compliance with my agreement to live in a Zen temple in order to receive a high school scholarship. Only 1-2 Kyoto students received the scholarship every year; therefore, only 5 of us lived in the dormitory.

A usual day began with a bang on a wooden board hung from the temple ceiling. We got up at 5 o’clock in the morning, swept a garden, weeded, and prepared a vegetarian breakfast. After school, we prepared supper and went to bed between 9 and 10 o’clock in the evening.

At the time when militarism was advancing in Japan, Kyoto 3rd High School was unusually liberal. Army and special police forces kept closer watch on Kyoto schools. However, being adaptable in mind yet tough in spirit, the people of Kyoto maneuvered to keep liberal academic traditions intact. My school achievement was only average, and my favorite subject was writing.

When I attended the Asia Pacific Cultural Award ceremony in Osaka-city in 2006, I stopped by Senbutsuji.

Mr. Takatsu Meikyo, now the priest of Senbutsuji, and I shared dormitory life when he was trained to be a priest and I studied Zen while attending high school. It was the first time we had met since I graduated from high school. "I could tell immediately who you were," he said. "I thought that you would be a writer or a journalist because you were good at writing." Since that meeting, we write to each other.

When I was 15 years old, World War II started. I did not understand well what it meant to fight against the Allied Powers. The newspapers and radio reported that the Japanese army was winning in the war front in Southeast Asia, but I did not know where that was on the world map.

Since there were no air raids in Kyoto, we did not feel that we were losing the War. Even at the end of the war when many Japanese were suffering from lack of food, we had plenty of food at Senbutsuji because the temple members brought in food and sweets as offerings.

In April, 1945, after graduating from high school, I entered the Navy Electric-Engineering School at Fujisawa-city in Kanagawa Prefecture. I learned the then-most-advanced technology, radar, and how to pack explosives on my back to go under enemy tanks. On August 15, when the Showa Emperor pronounced over the radio that Japan had lost the War, it was a shock to me because I had been told that Japan was winning the War.

My father, Taisuke, and my youngest brother, Yasuo, died around the end of the War. My father died in May due to malnutrition, but we could not afford to grieve over his death in the midst of the War. In autumn of the same year, Yasuo died of ruptured appendix. He was a smart boy and only 14 years old.

With his fellow students at Senbutsuji temple
Takami is the boy on the far right side of the group of students in the center
Income from Selling Fish

On August 15, 1945, at the Navy Electrical-Engineering School at Fujisawa-city in Kanagawa Prefecture, we heard the Showa Emperor pronounce on the radio that Japan had lost the War.

Our senior officers, who had acted big during the War, raided the school storage rooms, heaped trucks with food and valuables, and left with no instructions for students. We were simply dumbfounded but followed suit and packed our rucksacks with the remaining food and went home.

I was afraid that I would be in trouble if I got caught by Americans or Europeans because it was widely believed that they were like devils. In order to evade the Allied Powers, who were expected to land on the Pacific coast, I decided not to take the Tokaido-line to Kyoto but to detour through Niigata. The train schedules were in chaos, and I had to catch whatever came along. It took me two days to reach home.

My mother and my brothers and sisters were overjoyed to see me, saying "How lucky that we have you safely at home!" They were also grateful for crystal sugar that I brought home from the school, since sugar had been rationed and was hard to get.

After the War, when everything was in short supply, our first priority was to eat to live. My elder brother, Shintaro, collected fees for NHK (Nihon Hoso Kyokai, the national public broadcasting corporation) and sold the radios that he repaired. My sister, Yasuko, worked for a maritime shipping company.

I bought sardines and mackerel at the local market and took the first train to Kyoto and Osaka to sell them. Since food was very scarce in the cities, I could sell fish quickly. With the proceeds from fish sales, I bought clothes and processed goods to sell in Miyazu, and used the proceeds to buy fish the next day. It was my daily routine in those days. In addition, I sometimes loaded and unloaded shipments at Miyazu Port to earn additional income.

My life went on like that for three years. One day, on the Hankyu local train on my way to sell fish, I glanced at a newspaper the person next to me was reading. An advertisement said that a British couple in Toyonaka-city of Osaka was looking for a servant.

I memorized the contact phone number, got off at the next station, and called them. I was so eager to get out of Miyazu.

The couple had a big shepherd dog, and my duty was to walk the dog every day. The dog barked at me a lot, and I was losing my temper. It seemed to me that the dog was the master I was serving. After a year, I quit the servant position.

Again on the train, I noticed an advertisement. An American man in Nishinomiya-city of Hyogo Prefecture was looking for a cook. I did not know yet that the encounter with him would change my life completely.
I applied for the cook position advertised in the newspaper and became a live-in cook at the house of Dr. Albert Faurot, an American who lived in Nishinomiya-city in Hyogo Prefecture. It was 1951.

Dr. Faurot was a Christian who taught piano at Kobe Women’s College. He was about 40 years old and a bachelor who lived with his sister. He wanted a cook because as a pianist, he valued his fingers and wanted to insure that he would not carry anything heavier than music scores.

I lied that I was a cook in order to get the job. But it was not a total lie; I had cooked vegetarian dishes when I lived in Senbutsuji and could use cooking utensils.

In addition, for a while I had served as a house boy in an American military family’s house where I learned to cook meat dishes, cookies, and cakes from the mistress of the house. She spent her time playing cards and left the house work to me. So I was confident that I could handle cooking and daily conversation in English.

I do not know if Dr. Faurot liked my cooking, but we did get along very well, and he cared for me. He had a roomful of classical records which nurtured my taste in music.

I went with him on his performance tour to Osaka, Kyoto, and Kyushu and carried his heavy baggage. I also translated for him because not many people in rural areas understood English.

In about a year, Dr. Faurot left Japan for a new position with a college in the Philippines. His successor was a woman. As I did not think it wise to share the house with a woman, I resigned.

Dr. Faurot was very much concerned about my future and suggested that I should go to school in the States. But I could not afford it. He was so kind that he negotiated with a foundation to grant me a scholarship to attend Doane College in the state of Nebraska.

In those days only a few Japanese could leave Japan to go abroad; it was a great opportunity that promised a change in my life. I had been so impressed with Dr. Faurot that I was baptized at Koto church in Nishinomiya-city.

Encountering Christianity and studying abroad formed the basis of who I am now. Dr. Faurot was my benefactor.
In August, 1952, I boarded a ship to San Francisco to start my education at Doane College in Nebraska. I could barely afford the cheapest fare to stay in a stateroom below deck. The propeller sound was so loud in the room that I spent all my waking hours on the deck.

The trip took one week to Hawaii and an additional two weeks to San Francisco. When I saw the land from the ship’s deck, I became excited and anxious about college life. I stayed overnight at a San Francisco hotel and then spent three days on a bus to reach the college.

After completing the registration process, I met with a professor in charge of freshmen. When I told him that I had already completed differential and integral calculus in high school, he said that I did not have to repeat them at the college and excused me from calculus classes on the spot, which was unthinkable in Japan.

I majored in History of Civilization because the professor who taught this history course was the students’ favorite at Doane College. In American colleges, many campus matters were left for students to decide, while in Japanese colleges, it appeared to me that decisions were made by the professors. In America students took the initiative in pursuing their interests in academic subjects. I liked the American way better.

When I was at Doane College, the only other Japanese on campus, Mr. Chokuro Yoshida, was my senior by one year. Americans were curious about us. He was from Hiroshima-city and had lost his parents by the nuclear bomb dropped at the end of World War II. Since we were from the same country, we talked a lot but he never mentioned the bomb. He became a medical doctor after graduation and still resides in the States.

I worked as a student in the college library which closed at 5:00 pm. I proposed, as the president of the student body, that the library should be kept open until midnight for students to study. The college accepted my proposal, provided that I would take responsibility after 5:00 pm. I ended up working in the library from 5:00 pm to midnight on weekdays.

Right before graduation, I sat for the Graduate Record Examination. The upper 5% of the high scorers were granted the privilege of entering graduate schools of their choice. I was fortunate to make the upper 5% and chose to go to Yale Divinity School (YDS).

But before starting at YDS, I decided to take a leave of one year to return to Japan to see my mother.
In the autumn of 1957, as I had planned, I went back to the States to attend Yale Divinity School. I chose to study theology because of the Reverend Jacob Balzer who was pastor of a church near Doane College. Having been baptized in Japan, I attended Sunday service at his church while I was a student at Doane. He was a well-informed, excellent person. Another reason I chose to study theology was that I was having doubts about the human-centered view of the Renaissance.

Soon after I returned to the States, I received news that my mother had passed away. I could have gone home, but the funeral was already completed, and I could not afford the round-trip fare. So I stayed in the States, praying that the previous one year with my mother in Osaka had been a good memory for her.

During three years at Yale Divinity School, I received formal training in Christianity. Shortly before graduating on June 16, 1960, I was certified as a minister by the Reverend Bolzer’s church. In the autumn of the same year, I returned to Japan to serve as a minister. I was excited to start missionary work.

In the autumn of 1956 when I returned home for one year, I lived with my mother and sister who had moved to Tennoji in Osaka. Family is precious; we were so happy to be together again. However, I could not just stay at home. So I went to the American Cultural Center, then located in front of Osaka station, to find a job in which I could use my English skills. The center’s manager called the English Mainichi Newspaper which was looking for a reporter.

Having returned from the States only a short time ago, I was still thinking in English rather than in Japanese. Mr. Matsunaga, the editor of the English Mainichi Newspaper, was very interested in me and put me to a test - to correct an article written by a Japanese news reporter. I found many mistakes and made so many corrections that the red ink covered the whole page. Obviously, the editor liked it and hired me immediately.

In the office, I corrected articles written in English from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Sometimes, I was sent out to write an article, such as covering high school baseball games played at Koshien Baseball Stadium. This was the only period when I was employed to work in an office.

As I had planned, I resigned from the job after one year, although the president of Mainichi Newspaper offered me a position. “You would be a good reporter; probably better to be a reporter than to be a minister. Why don’t you continue the current job?” My desire to be a minister was so strong that I did not change my mind. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I had continued working at the newspaper.
The following morning, Mr. Ken Muto, the principal, was surprised to find a stranger sleeping on the couch in his office.

Tsurukawa offered courses on farming and courses to train missionaries and nursery school teachers. I thought that I was accepted as a student, but to my surprise, they offered me a position of section manager to train rural leaders for Southeast Asian countries. Perhaps it was because I could speak English. I felt somewhat perplexed, but started teaching. There were about 20 students from Southeast Asia at that time. Before I arrived, classes were conducted in Japanese; therefore, the students were from countries where many people understood Japanese, such as Taiwan and Korea. When I started teaching in English, however, students from other countries, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, began to come to the seminary.

I had worked unexpectedly at this rural missionary school for 12 long years until 1973. Eventually, I became the director of the training course. Working at the seminary was a great opportunity for me to gain the basic knowledge and experience needed to open the Asian Rural Institute.
I was destined to marry Shinko when I was a teacher at the seminary. She was five years younger than I and working as a secretary of Rev. Alden Mathews who also taught at the seminary. When I had worked in the missionary post in Osaka, I met her for the first time at a weekly Bible study group that I led. She was a Seiwa kindergarten teacher at that time and later moved to Tokyo to help take care of her family. It was a real surprise to meet her again, and we started dating.

Roads around the seminary were not paved in those days. Every time when we went out to Shinjuku or Ginza on a date, Shinko had to wear rubber boots to the nearest bus stop before changing into a pair of high heels.

After approximately six months of dating, I proposed to her. I asked her to take time to think about my proposal. However, I was confident that she would accept and had already told Rev. Mathews that I was marrying Shinko. On the morning after my proposal and before Shinko’s reply Mrs. Mathews blurted out, “Congratulations!” to Shinko. It is a fond memory now. We were married in July 1962.

Shinko’s parents were in Shanghai before World War II to facilitate China-Japan relations through church. She told me once that she did not want to be a minister’s wife because she knew how little her father’s dedication and hard work seemed to be rewarded. But she became a minister’s wife probably because my dedication to Southeast Asians reminded her of her father.

The following February (1963) Shinko and I traveled to Asian countries for three weeks to increase our understanding of Asia. Starting from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and ending in Singapore, we observed the status of agriculture in Asia. The Asian farmers were very poor, but they offered all the food they had to welcome us. They followed the traditional farming practices based on their local experiences. Experience is important, but depending on experience alone limits improvements and the development of viable possibilities.

We found no leaders in rural areas. Each farmer thought that his method was the best. I thought that rural leader education was urgently needed. I believe that the observations and experiences that I gained during this trip were the seeds for establishing the Asian Rural Institute.

When we visited the Philippines, one male teacher told us, “My parents and brothers were killed by Japanese during the War.” He did not show hatred toward us, but calmly stated the fact. We apologized from the bottom of our hearts. At the same time, I felt deeply that I needed to do something to compensate for what the Japanese had done to Asian countries.
of burglars. We were welcomed everywhere; many local people came to visit us at night to share food. They did not have enough to feed themselves, but they brought us rice and chicken, which we shared under a lamp. Our group stayed for four months, performing the kind of work that NGOs do nowadays.

During my stay in Bangladesh, I noticed that many farm tractors donated by the Japanese government were left rusted and piled up at ports because no instructions on how to use the tractors had been given. The people were so happy when we taught them how to use the tractors. I learned it is very important to identify people’s needs.

In April 1972, I led a volunteer group of approximately 50 Japanese and American youth to Bangladesh. In autumn of 1970, Bangladesh suffered from severe floods which destroyed agricultural fields and houses and left many Bengalese in poverty.

Mr. Paul Munsh from Bangladesh was a student at the seminary where I taught. He told us the situation in detail and urged me to organize a group to help farmers recovering from this disaster. In response to his request, I placed an advertisement in a newspaper to raise funds and recruit volunteer farm youth. We received many Japanese responses and a few from sons of American missionary families.

After arriving in Bangladesh, we divided ourselves into groups of three to do farm reconstruction work in as many areas as possible. There were so-called leaders in rural areas but they only gave orders and performed no field work. However, when they saw me leading the actual field work, they began to lead work in the farm fields, also.

After a devastating civil war, Bangladesh became independent in 1971 and was one of the poorest countries in the world. Poverty hit the children hardest; many newborn babies died from malnutrition and disease. I often saw their bodies thrown away into rivers without a funeral.

Due to the breakdown of civil order, our safety was in jeopardy, our lives in danger. Local church members stood guard holding spears at night to protect us from groups
After returning from Bangladesh, I launched my plan to start the Asian Rural Institute, a school to train rural leaders in Asia. My experiences during my visit to Asian countries and volunteer work in Bangladesh compelled me to resign from the seminary, where I had worked for 12 years in order to start this new school. I also had another reason.

When I was at the seminary in Tsurukawa-city, one of the professors in the Theology Department was very antagonistic toward me. As the Head of the Southeast Asia Department, I was convinced that strengthening the department and accepting more Asian students were of vital importance in order for the seminary to fulfill its purpose. But the opposing professor was very outspoken. “Takami is converting the seminary into a school for Southeast Asian students.” I am afraid that he misunderstood me and thought that I was trying to abolish the Theology and Kindergarten Teachers’ Training Departments to leave only a Southeast Asia Department at the Seminary. He gathered the support of many faculty members and the alumni association. The director of the seminary at that time had to respect the majority opinion and asked me to leave the seminary.

In my effort to start a new school, I first visited the Rev. Haruo Fukumoto of Nishinasuno church, with whom I had been acquainted when he studied at the seminary. There he invited the students from Southeast Asia to learn bamboo craft from the late Mr. Keizo Yagisawa in Otawara (a famous bamboo craft artist in Tochigi prefecture). In response to my request, he introduced me to a building lot in Yabuki-city in Fukushima prefecture. But I had to decline his recommendation and reiterated my request that the land must be close to an international airport and a church. He recommended a six hectare lot in Tsukinokizawa in Nasushiobara-city.

I liked the six hectare lot in Tsukinokizawa at the first visit, but I had a big problem. I always held my ideals high but was usually short of funds. I visited many banks in the Nasushiobara area, but none accepted my loan request. However, I was extremely fortunate and received support from the Rev. Fukumoto and Mr. Tokuji Tajima, a prominent figure in Nishinasuno. Mrs. Asa Gunji and her son Masayoshi, who owned a farm machinery sales company in the area, also helped us. Their staunch support made it possible for me to receive a loan.

On September 16th, I finally signed the contract to purchase the lot. I had made a big step toward my dream to start a school. There were still many hurdles to overcome, but my heart was full of hopes. I decided that this day should be celebrated always. Every year on that day, we hold a brief Foundation Day ceremony and I, or someone else, reminisces about the days when we were struggling to start up ARI.
to ARI. Because their values and social manners are varied, some feel disgraced and angry when they are advised publicly in front of many people. We had to take special care to respect such customs and schedule time to give advice individually.

There are two dormitories at ARI, one for men and another for women. A room is shared by two persons from different countries in order to facilitate understanding of different cultures. Morning Gathering is held on week day mornings to share individual experiences, thoughts, and beliefs including Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Birthdays are celebrated, and sorrow and misfortune are shared.

So many conflicts are caused by religious disputes. It is so important for us to understand each other.

In May 1973, the Asian Rural Institute was finally approved as an educational foundation to train rural leaders from Asia and Africa. Among many choice names for the school, "Asian Rural Institute" was selected as the most suitable for an Asian organization for Asian people.

In the first year, 16 students attended; 6 from Japan and 10 from five countries including Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Korea. The staff included an American missionary and others who followed me from the seminary. The classes were held in English, and the topics included farm products, food science, farm cooperatives, leadership, and anthropology. On-campus, hands-on experience included crop production and raising hogs, poultry, and fish.

The principles of organic farming, a method that does not contaminate soil and preserves nature, were taught in classes and practiced in campus fields. But such farming methods were ignored in Southeast Asia in those days. The mainstream farming method depended on agrochemicals promoted by many big trading companies of the world, including Japan. Our focus was on a sustainable farming method that insures local self-sufficiency.

Ms. Cha Teresa from Swaziland in Africa once told me about her experience. In her area, the use of agrochemicals resulted in an accumulation of saline in the soil which produced no crops. But she tried organic methods that she had learned at ARI to nurture the soil and harvested beautiful strawberries. She came back to ARI to learn more.

People from different countries with dissimilar customs and religions come
We held high ideals for ARI, but the first ten years were filled with continuous trials and errors. Participants (ARI students) were not (and still are not) required to pay any tuition to ARI. Their tuition, room, and board are covered by contributions because I believe, "ARI is the only school in the world to train rural leaders; therefore, the world should support ARI."

The initial funds to open ARI were borrowed from a bank and had to be repaid. I travelled often and to many places within Tochigi prefecture, surrounding prefectures, and Tokyo to give speeches on ARI. In some years, I travelled more than 100 days for speaking engagements. I do not remember all the details of my speeches but I believe that they were mostly about what was going on in Asia in those days and my experiences.

High schools were among those I visited often; one of the student audiences included Ms. Tomoko Arakawa, the current Associate Director of ARI.

At ARI, we tried to provide staff with compensation at the level equivalent to that of the public high school teachers. However, payments were delayed sometimes, and the customary annual bonus (usually equivalent to one-to-two-months compensation twice a year in Japan) once turned out to be a chicken. But no one complained. I am ever so grateful to the staff of those days and feel very much obliged to them for the hardships that we all endured.

I am also very grateful to the area residents who have been of great help to ARI since the very beginning. We needed to learn from the local farmers about the soil and climate in the area. When we took ARI students to the area farmers, they were very kind and shared their knowledge and skills on how to grow rice and vegetables in the area.

Since ARI did not, and still does not, have sufficient funds, we have depended greatly on volunteers. Some retirees in the area, as well as volunteers from abroad, have helped us. Nowadays, we usually have over 30 volunteers each year.

Since the opening of ARI, we have held Harvest Thanksgiving Celebration (HTC) in October. The participants prepare dishes of their home countries and sell rice and vegetables harvested at ARI at HTC. In the earlier years, we prepared udon (Japanese noodle) and Japanese curry for the HTC visitors who may not eat Asian and African dishes. However, we soon learned that many visitors preferred ethnic food which they do not have opportunities to taste, so we stopped serving udon.

In March 1991, 18 years after the opening of ARI, when I was 64 years old, I resigned from the position of Director and in 1994, from the position of Chairman of the Board of ARI. I always thought that I should retire at the age of 60. When a person remains the head of an organization for a long period of time, complications always arise. However, when I submitted a resignation letter at the age of 60, I was strongly asked to serve three more years and I agreed to do so.
I was born in Manchuria, have lived in Kyoto, the United States, and Tokyo, and visited many Asian and African countries, but I have stayed in Nishinasuno for longer than any other place.

I am so grateful for the many people who helped me: the kimono-merchant in Kyoto who granted me a high school education, Dr. Albert Faurot who sent me to Doane College in the United States, Mr. Donald Tarr who was my senior student advisor at Doane College, the colleagues of Tsurukawa Seminary and the people in Nishinasuno who helped me to start up ARI. I would like to take this opportunity to express my most sincere appreciation.

In 2013, ARI will celebrate its 40th anniversary. When ARI was started, I was so proud that it was only school in the world that trained rural leaders from diverse nations, faiths and generations in servant leadership and environmentally-sound, sustainable agriculture. The training of participants, already recognized as grass-roots leaders in their own communities, is funded by a global network of individuals and organizations. After 40 years, to my knowledge, ARI remains unique in the world.

Farmers support our life. To let the world know about farming and farmers' lives is, and will continue to be, one of the major activities of ARI. I pray that ARI will continue its work through the next century.

When I retired from the positions of director and the chairman of the board, the Asian Rural Institute gave me the position of honorary director of ARI. Although I was not involved in the daily operation of ARI, I was busy visiting the States, Germany, England, and Korea to give speeches.

In 1994, I received the Yoshikawa Eiji Award for my contribution to education. In 1996, I received the Magsaysay Award, the so-called “Nobel Prize in Asia,” and celebrated the occasion with ARI graduates from Asian countries (ref. Part 1).

I was delighted to learn that the Magsaysay Award was granted to the mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatoshi Akiba, in August 2010. I am against any kind of weaponry, including nuclear weapons. Japan, as the only country that was atom-bombed, has to play a major role in building a world without war.

I was diagnosed with Spinocerebellar Degeneration 28 years ago. Recently, I have some difficulty with speech, but I must communicate my experiences and thoughts to the next generation. The number of ARI graduates has grown to more than 1300 from over 50 countries. Many graduates have returned to their home countries, taken leadership roles, and promoted organic farming. One of the first year graduates, Mr. Jerome Sardar Dwijen from Bangladesh, who is over 60 years old now, came to visit me. “ARI taught me many things and changed my life.” He came to introduce his successor to me and to introduce him to ARI.

I relocated to Nishinasuno town in 1973. I

Takami with participant at the commencement service day, 2010
Toshihiro Takami, Founder and Honorary Director of ARI

Photo: Pam Hasegawa
"In My Lifetime" Toshihiro Takami, Founder and Honorary Director of ARI

Since 2007, Shimotsuke Shinbun (Newspaper), published daily in Tochigi Prefecture, has been introducing people in the prefecture who have made extraordinary achievements under the title of "Watashi no Ikita Toki," (In My Lifetime.) The articles featuring Toshihiro Takami were published between July 24 and November 20th, 2010 (15 weeks).

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