

The Meaning of Experiences in the Permanent Return Movement of Sakhalin Koreans

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Abstract

This study focused on permanent return movement of Sakhalin Koreans, explored the fundamental meaning of such movements, observed and conducted in-depth interviews with 5 Sakhalin Koreans, who were previously selected as research participants. Data analysis was done on the interview data using the life history method. Special focus was made on the analysis to comprehend activities on permanent return movement as well as interpretation for understanding the meaning of experiences. In other words, this study focuses on analysis through experiences and actions. The results of the study were drawn into two components which are "finding roots" and "permanent return," which were also divided into 6 subcomponents which are "nostalgic song filled with longing: making a home," "at least a letter: correspondence," "short meeting, long parting: homeland visit," "first button sewn wrong," "homesickness passed down," "separation not yet finished." And those results were proposed in integrated situational structures. The results of this study will provide a chance to reconsider the permanent return system of Sakhalin Koreans, and is expected to be used as baseline data for the provision of policies and system.

Keywords: Home, Diaspora, Photo telling, Ethnic media

1. Introduction

In the Sakhalin Koreans are those Koreans who went to Sakhalin in search of a better life, or deported by the Japanese, and could not return home even after the liberation (Lee, 2011) Koreans who were detained to Sakhalin got separated from their families and had to live as a minority race and foreigners. Determining to go back to their homeland, Sakhalin Koreans with ethnic media have formed Dispersed Family Association as well as Senior Citizens Association for the purpose of indemnification and permanent return of 1st generation Koreans (Park & Kim, 2016)

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There are about 4300 Sakhalin returnees in 24 establishments throughout the country at present. However, for them, permanent return creates another separation from their families, as they leave their living foundation they have built all their lives. Due to the series of separation, their problems such as social maladjustment, health worsening, and emotional loneliness are intensifying (Park & Lim, 2015; Lee & Kim, 2008) Is this contradiction the kind of permanent return the Sakhalin return activists wished for?

In this study, we selected 5 Sakhalin returnees who have lived as historic witnesses of return movements of Sakhalin Koreans, as research participants. Their experiences in the past, starting from the return movements up until the present when the permanent return is accomplished, were studied. How were the activities done by these people accepted in the Russian society? Also, what efforts did they make for the permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans, and what is the meaning of those experiences? These are the questions this study will focus on while conducting research. The result of this study is expected to be used as baseline data for legal and systematic purposes.

2. The home and permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans

For Sakhalin Koreans, an important symbol and metaphor for cultural identity is “homeland”. In order to provide grounds for their own identity, they make a substitute similar to homeland, and perform ceremonies they performed in their homeland, and cultivate their ethnic community (Relph, 197; Park & Kim, 2016) Hereat, the “homeland” metaphor unites Koreans dispersed in various places, and through the interactions of the people in the region, while performing ceremonies, the homeland is expanded. With the help of rituals, the weariness of losing one’s home, is sublimated into festivals, and the poor, persecuted and sad memories as well as dark memories of homeland were transformed into homesickness. That is the process of making present the memories about homeland. The operation of calling out subjects intimate with homeland, as well as homeland scenery, it is an earnest wish to confirm and awaken the identity of Koreans (Park, 2016)

To them, home is not a place of residence but the area of origin. Home, to them, surpassing the gap of Sakhalin as a space and of the past as time, intimately connects with the present (Park, 2016)

3. Research method

3.1. Research participants

The main research participants of this study are 5 senior Sakhalin returnees. The basic information on the research participants is shown in [Table 1] below.

Table 1. Information on research participants

Name (Sex)	Year of birth	Place of birth	Profession before permanent return	Return movement period
Participant 1 (M)	1935	Japan	Company employee	1990-1995
Participant 2 (F)	1943	Sakhalin	Volunteer	1993-2007
Participant 3 (M)	1938	Gyeongnam Ulju	Company employee	1991-2007
Participant 4 (F)	1938	Gyeongbuk Kimcheon	Accountant	1990-1995
Participant 5 (M)	1936	Chungbuk Chungju	Korean teacher	1990-2008

The participants of this research are as shown in [Table 1]. They were born before the year 1945 and permanently returned to Korea in 2007 and live in Incheon Namdong-gu Nonhyeon-dong. The criteria for the selection of participants for this research is as follows. First, they have experiences in activities as members of dispersed families association. Second, they have a free command of the Korean language. Third, due to the detailed exposure of their life history, they have agreed active and voluntary participation, especially making the pictures of their families' public.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The data collection for this study was done from June to September of the year 2016. In order to fully explain the phenomenon of this study, data was collected mainly through interviews with 5 Sakhalin returnees and the photographs provided by them. In order to guarantee the rights of informants as it is said in the qualitative research by James P. Spradley (1969) and to gather good quality data corresponding to the purpose of the study as shown in Merriam (2009), photo telling technique was used for the collection of data.

Photo telling is a qualitative method based on "photo" and the "telling" part of Storytelling, where using the photographs provided by the research participant, his or her narrative is recomposed (Park, 2016) Thus, in understanding the topic of the research, photographs are not an answer, but rather a tool for data collection, and are useful in communicating with research participants and used as a stimulant (Schwartz, 1989)

Photograph as a media, being able to record the truth of a particular time, can be reproduced as a realistic reminiscence, and can draw a psychological effect of securing and restructuring the memories of research participants. In addition, due to the explanation of memories related to stories of a particular time, when combined with stories, not stopping at the basic properties of photographs, which are "temporality and factuality," the internality of a research participant interlaced in the pictures, can be shown and serve as a ground for healing (Park & Kim, 2016)

It was explained to the research participants that files recorded and transcribed as interview materials will be in storage for 3 years from the moment the research is completed according to parts 1 and 2 of "Bioethics and Safety Act," and the raw data will be discarded after the 3 years are up.

In order to eliminate stereotype and prejudices about the research participants, the researchers constantly criticized and reflected on themselves. Also, to verify the credibility of the research, the researchers received a review on the raw data as well as the research text from a qualitative researcher from the outside and a fellow researcher.

4. Conclusions

In this study, the results of the analysis of the meaning of permanent return movement experiences of Sakhalin Koreans was divided into two themes: finding roots, and permanent return, which were in turn divided into 6 subcomponents and proposed as integrated situational structures. The results of the study are shown in [Table 2].

Table 2. Research results

Theme	Subcategory
Finding roots	nostalgic song filled with longing: making an imaginary homeland
	at least a letter: correspondence
	short meeting, long parting: homeland visit
Permanent return	First button sewn wrong
	homesickness passed down
	separation not yet finished

4.1. Finding roots

“Home” is a motivation which makes one think of their homeland which was forgotten all the while, and together with the people from the homeland, making a village similar to homeland, one searches for the answer to the question “Who I am?”

4.1.1. Nostalgic song filled with longing: making a home

Koreans detained to Sakhalin became dispersed families and were forced to live as a minority race and foreigners, forgetting the embrace of their home country and bearing harsh adversity for tens of years. However, performing the rites of passage just like they did in their homeland, and opening the movements, they shared the pain of diaspora. With these interactions, the ethnic community was cultivated and expanded through making together a village similar to their homeland.

4.1.2. At least a letter: correspondence

According to the passing of time, they make efforts for correspondence to confirm life and death of dispersed families in the homeland. For the Sakhalin Koreans who became dispersed families, they help with the correspondence to confirm life and death of family members and relatives.

4.1.3. Short meeting, long parting: homeland visit

The 1st generation Sakhalin Koreans visit their homeland, and in order to demand their indemnification, they come and go between Korea and Japan, making demonstrations. Although Sakhalin Koreans are activists for the permanent return, they do not receive salaries. Even though they spent their nights in slice rooms when going on demonstrations, it was discovered that because their goal was clear, they did not get tired.

4.2. Permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans

The results of movements for the permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans are continued into permanent return. This is the answer to the question of whether it was the wish of activists for the permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans.

4.2.1. First button sewn wrong

The results of the movement for the permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans is the elderly living alone in Sakhalin moved to the homeland which they dreamed about throughout their lives. However, it is the start of a misfortune, where they come back to their homeland alone and live as another foreigner.

4.2.2. Homesickness passed down

Permanent return is the brief joy of finding one's home, but leaving the living foundation where they lived throughout their life, and another type of dispersed families were made. Although they came leaving their children, their parents have already left this world, and the home could not be found as it was before, due to the changes it went through. As did their parents in the past, they yearn for their close friends and children who live in Sakhalin and homesickness is passed down.

5. Conclusion

From the Sakhalin returnees, this study focused on the permanent return movement experiences, and the interpretation of the meaning of experience showed the results in two parts, finding roots, and permanent return. The metaphor "home" brings together the people dispersed people in various places, and through performing rites and activities done in homeland, making their village similar to their homeland, nostalgic sorrow was comforted.

Also, in order to confirm the life and death of dispersed families, correspondence was done and they were informed of life and death of relatives. Through the visit to home, they attempted short meetings. Visit to homeland was not enough to be comforted. Their movements were continued into permanent return.

However, permanent return also requires them to leave their family in Sakhalin, making them miss their entire family and makes them homesick. In the end, some of Sakhalin returnees go back to Sakhalin. However, once they go back, there is much discomfort, which pushes them to come back to Korea, they became wanderers who couldn't settle anywhere.

This way, in this study we tried to explain the permanent return movement experiences of Sakhalin Koreans. The results of the study can be used as baseline data for provision of law and system for the permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans.

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