How Can We Better Understand the Place-Identity of a Regional Community? —A Psychological Approach

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Introduction

The key word in this presentation is \textit{Genfukei}. It’s Japanese word. In Japan, it has been translated into a number of English phrases, such as original-scape, psychological landscape, inner landscape, landscape dear to one’s heart, and primary landscape, etc.

We often recall many experiences from our childhood and talk about them with someone. These experiences can include landscapes, places, experiences of play, and interactions with other people in our hometowns. We would like to approach such experience using the term “\textit{Genfukei}” (original-scape). We can define \textit{Genfukei} (original-scape) as those memorable landscapes that consist of our experiences of the past about actual places, spaces, landscapes that strongly remain in our memories. However, \textit{Genfukei} dose not merely refer to past experience, but also to the effects of past experience that help support ourselves in the present and future.

The term \textit{Genfukei} has been used in areas such as psychology, geography, architecture, anthropology, etc. in Japan. We think the term \textit{Genfukei} can be useful when trying to understand personal identities, the identity of a regional community, and even the development of a region, such as referring to “my \textit{Genfukei},” “regional \textit{Genfukei},” “national \textit{Genfukei},” etc.

The purpose of this study was to focus on the shared \textit{Genfukei} of members of a local community and examine place-identity. Therefore the first question we must ask is how can we better understand the \textit{Genfukei} of a regional community, and the second question is what kind of things can we describe as the \textit{Genfukei} of a regional community. In the current research, we attempt to conceptualize and define the structure of \textit{Genfukei} through qualitative analysis research methods in order to explain how it forms and what is common among individuals of a particular group.

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Method
Field interviews were conducted on Jeju Island, located in the southern extremity of South Korea.

Four groups of 4 to 6 adults participated, and the participants in each group had been in touch with each other for years. They talked about many aspects of their childhood experiences, which were related to spaces, places, and landscapes, through stories about where they used to play, their feeling and thoughts at particular times and interactions with other people, etc.

Result
How can we better understand the shared *Genfukei* of a regional community?

1. First, the concept of participation type of individual members during the group narrative was used to better understand the groups’ *Genfukei*. These types can be categorized into the following four fixed types of narrative participation.

   We can see in table 1 that how actual narrative data were analyzed to obtain 4 types of narrative participation.

   Table1. Examples of types of narrative participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>The narration</th>
<th>Participation type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Nechang</td>
<td>① “Long ago, the <em>nechang</em> (dried-stream) was very…” (Mr.K)</td>
<td>New topic introduction type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>② “Taking a bath” (Mr.Y)</td>
<td>Elaborate explanation type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>③ “Yeah” (Ms.E)</td>
<td>Recceptive reaction type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>④ “What is the <em>nechang</em>?” (Ms.U)</td>
<td>Acceptive questioning type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⑤ “Stream, a small stream” (Ms.S)</td>
<td>Elaborate explanation type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⑥ “That is called as a dried-stream. Because usually the bottom of the</td>
<td>Elaborate explanation type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dried-stream can be seen.” (Mr.Y)</td>
<td>Recceptive reaction type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⑦ “That’s why we call it the <em>nechang</em>!” (Ms.S)</td>
<td>Elaborate explanation type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⑧ “Yes, if it rains, we play in the <em>nachang</em>” (Mr.Y)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   **New topic introduction type:** First, a new topic is indicated as a personal experience.
We could see that there were many uses of “I” as a subject in this context.

**Elaborate explanation type:** then, the next speaker makes an addition to the previous comment and widens the range of topic of the first speaker. We could see that there were many occasions where the subject of the contextual situation was “I also” and “we.” In these cases an expression of similar opinion or agreement was made, flowed by the connection of explanation from one’s own personal experience.

**Receptive reaction type:** In this type, participants show a reaction to the offered topic, and they explain and give a deeper significance to the topic. They confirm the topic through repeating certain words mentioned throughout the narrative.

**Acceptive questioning type:** In this type, participants ask a question to the speaker and other participants. There are many questions asked in order to form a better understanding of the topic or in order to facilitate the discussion of the same topic further.

2. Second, it was found that the common *Genfukei* among group members is formed, or manifested, through a combination of “new topic introduction-elaborate explanation” during narrative participation.

At first, the speaker of “new topic introduction type” utters “I,” but then the speaker of an “elaborate explanation type” talks as if the topic is his own topic by using “I also.” Moreover, through continuing the same topic and providing deeper explanations related to the topic, the speaker of an “elaborate explanation type” recognizes the topic introduced by the first speaker as if it describes his own case, and changes the word “I” to “we.” In short, the speaker of “new topic introduction type” and the speaker of “elaborate explanation type” become the storytellers of the scene and therefore start to create a common *Genfukei* (fig 2).

![Fig2. The function of narrative participation type](image-url)
What kinds of things can we describe as the *Genfukei* of a regional community?

The common *Genfukei* of the local region (Jeju Island) was identified through that a feeling of “shared we” in the “new topic introduction- elaborate explanation” narratives described by Jeju citizens. We will now show some photographs that we describe the *Genfukei* of Jeju Island.

The *Badang* (sea), where people enjoy bathing and fishing, is a very familiar part of daily life. A *Deulpan* (field), with a good view of an *Orum* (a parasitic volcano). One of the many *Donggul* (cave) of Sara Peak, a popular place of an exploration by children. A *Sanso* (graveyard) located on a farm. A *Nechang* (dried stream), which is a typical example of the streams of Jeju. Many neighborhood children play here in the summer.
Pangs (outdoor seats made of stone) are popular places for resting for the people of the neighborhood. They are typically found at the intersections in rural towns. They are still in use today. A golmok (a path, alleyway) in the countryside. A Madang (yard) in front of a home. This is a place where the residents can hang fruits and vegetables to dry and also where children can play safely. Family events are sometimes held here as well.

![Fig.9 Golmok (a path, alleyway)](image)

![Fig.10 Madang (yard)](image)

It is clear that when citizens narrate experiences related to places, spaces, and landscapes, the more they use proper nouns instead of general nouns, the stronger their feelings “shared we.” At the same time, when they use the local dialect, they are feel a stronger “shared we” than when they use standard language. Thus, during these instances during the narratives when proper nouns and the local dialect are used, we can see the appearance (reflection) of place identity.

**Discussion**

If we look at Figure 11 we see that each “my Genfukei” (represented by a capital letter “I”) intersects with the others and changes in appearance to “our Genfukei,” and that “the evaluation of the places, spaces, and landscapes experienced by children today” can be seen as a contrast to “our Genfukei.” This kind of transfiguration of subject from “I” to “we” is shown in “new topic introduction-elaborate explanation,” and then in “receptive reaction and acceptive questioning”, “we” is adjusted and a shared understanding becomes deeper.

I would also like to stress the importance of narrative. In the case of personal narrative, one can relate the past and the present in the form of “In the past I was ○○, so now I am ○○.” But in group narrative, the subject of the story changes from “I was ○○” to “I was ALSO ○○,” to “at that time WE were ○○.” Finally, these shared experiences, expressed by the “shared we,” are used as a basis for evaluating the present. For example, “At that time we were ○○, but children today are ○○” “the present
environment is ○○." 

Now, being here and talking together  
Narration based on each’s own experience  

Creation and shared-understanding  
From “I” to “We”  

Taking together  
New topic introduction type  
Elaborate explanation type  
Receptive reaction type  
Acceptive questioning type  

Shared-understanding  
To evaluation together  
From “we, long ago” to “now”  

Fig11. Creation and transfiguration of shared Genfukei

That is to say, this “feeling of a shared WE” works in the narrative to create and change the structure of place when we talk about Genfukei. There is a psychological effect in talking together, about right here (this place) right now. This effect functions to create a type of place identity, or regional identity, which is shared and based on experiences and memories related to common spaces, places, and landscapes.

Recently, “participation in city planning” or ○○ citizen participation” movements are becoming popular in Japan. How can citizens participate effectively? Does it mean that they decide as a group what the Genfukei of places/spaces, or
landscapes is? Do they do the design by themselves? Do they decide the resources and characteristics of the region? Do they understand how experts plan things? Although these are all important questions that need to be asked, from our research we feel we can say the following.

We feel that it is very important that such participants talk and share experiences with each other. Through this, during the talking, personal and meaningful stories of places and landscapes of the “shared we” are created. This is not just talking to discover some common elements or some unique idea by a knowledgeable person. It is a chance to talk with one another about experiences with common spaces, places, and landscapes, and in the process create a story that can then be shared with newcomers and younger generations. In other words, it is a chance to share a regional identity that inhabitants feel is their own “Genfukei.”

Recently, we hear stories about the “loss of community,” or “loss of Genfukei”.

We feel that these stories are not only referring to a loss of space, place, and landscape, but also a loss of the opportunity to talk, to create a “shared we.”

When a city or region is developed, we normally first think about the economic value of development. Thus we tend to consider the actual value or amount of space, as in the amount of open space, etc. We think that Genfukei can be considered an important psychological value of space. Thus, we should be able to apply this concept of Genfukei toward the design of a city or region.

Here, we can think of two ways of approaching design. One is a design of co-narrative, an actual occurrence among people. The other is a design of physical objects. Thus, we can think of Genfukei as a type of facilitator in “catching” the psychological values of citizens (inhabitants), and then help them to become more aware of what is most important for them. At the same time it can act as a facilitator for aiding the design of physical objects as well.

In fact, we have introduced these concepts and ideas at discussion meetings and at a symposium held in Jeju Island in Korea, where the data for the present research was collected. At the symposium there were specialists from many fields, including literature, sociology, architecture, public administration, psychology, local citizens, and public officers.

There are currently 500,000 people living in Jeju Island, and 230,000 of them live in Jeju City. Jeju Island is a place rich in traditional culture, but last year the Korean National Assembly began a development plan for making Jeju an “Free International City.” Therefore we can assume that Jeju Island will experience very speedy regional development in the coming years. For this reason, we feel that Jeju Island needs to
actively search for its Genfukei, or place identity, in order to experience progressive and successful development. We hope to continue our relationship with Jeju Island.

Finally, we would like to emphasize the following. Talking together about Genfukei is an opportunity where people can get together to discuss and jointly construct a story about the various peoples, events, and even types of play activities related to the same regional places, spaces, and landscapes experienced as children. Through this discussion a shared-understanding among the members develops, which is then evaluated and given deeper significance. This is an occasion for talking together, where common identity with a sense of “we” is created and shared, thus becoming a psychological function of talking together about Genfukei.

Reference

Appendix
This research note was orally presented in "MERA (men-environment research association) US E-B (environment-behavior) Study Tour" which was held at the City University of New York, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and University of California Irvine from September 18 to September 26 in 2006.
要旨
地域における原風景の共同性

呉 宣児・南 博文

地域において住民の間で共有される原風景をどう捉えることができるのかに関して、語りのデータを用いて分析し、概念をつくり、構造分析を行った。原風景の共同性を捉える有用な概念として、「話題提供」「敷衍説明」「受け入れ反応」「確認転回質問」の4つの語りへの参加タイプを見出した。これらの概念のなか特に「話題提供—敷衍説明」がセットになっている語りに原風景の共同性が捉えられる手がかりがあることを示した。さらに、地域住民が語り合うなかでこそ共有するわれわれ感という地域性に基づくアイデンティティが生まれることから、語り合いの場をもつこと自体の有用性を示唆した。