

Regional Korean War and Oral History Research¹

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In this paper, the oral history methodology on the Korean War in the regions is defined as “a research on oral life history of local residents and their experiences and memories of the Korean War.” I try to unite previous researches with three codes: the Korean War, regional studies, and individual history by an oral history methodology. It treats the process of carrying out research on oral history centering on the issues of the Korean War in the regions in order to suggest the limits and tasks of the research. It is important to note that this article is a reflection on the practice of an oral history methodology, not on a theoretical or methodological discussion.

Keywords: oral history method, the Korean War, fieldwork, regional research, Sokcho, the Korean Division

Introduction

Recently a silent revolution is taking place in academia. It has been a while since “the *minjung*” (people) have become the universal concepts in the Korean social science, but now the voices that have remained an academic rhetoric are beginning to make themselves known taking a firm ground in intellectual field. Oral history methodology has played an innovative role in establishing “the popular

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character of learning” and “the academic character of the *minjung*” (Kim Gwi-Ok 2005). With the gradual extensive of the scope of an oral history methodology, the interest of the methodology for the establishment of Korean studies has also increased.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, a new approach to the Korean War sciences has been developed in the field of human or social. The political approaches have monopolized research on the Korean War, until my doctoral dissertation came out in February 1999 under the title of “Jeongchakchon wol-naminui saenghwalgyeongheomgwa jeongcheseong: Sokcho ‘Abaimaew’ gwa Gimje ‘Yongjinongwon’ eul jungsimeuro” (The Life Story and Identity of North Korean Refugees at Settled Villages: Centering on Abai Village in Sokcho and Yongji Farm in Gimje). Other areas of social science (except politics) have neglected research on the Korean War. After the *Sociology of Division* (1979) by Yi Hyo-jae, the roles of Park Myeong-seon (1983) and Kang Jeong-koo (1992) were conspicuous in bringing forth a new human-oriented recognition on research of the Korean War in the field of sociology. Not until recently have researches on the Korean War had an interest in the actual people who lived through those times.²

The encounter between research on the Korean War and an oral history methodology has opened a new horizon of learning in the activation of regional studies. It is difficult to measure the total impact of an oral history methodology in the study of revealing how the Korean War progressed in different regions, how it went among local residents, what the results were, and what implication how it has on us. In South Korean situation, an oral history methodology could have relative importance in researching the meanings and facts on the Korean War in the regions. First, the bibliographical data and researches are insufficient to map out the regional movements or the relations of the communities after the liberation from Japanese Imperialism in 1945, a turning point in modern Korean history up to the Korean War period. This situation is recorded in local newspapers as local histories. Second, due to the irregular management of the divided country between the liberation and the Korean War period, the production and maintenance of records were not sufficient, satisfactory, and even less so in the regions. In many cases, produced data were lost or scattered. Third, the regional

2. In the latter half of the 1990s and at the turn of the 2000s, the history of the people, a research on actual life and oral history in the research on the Korean War developed. It was closely connected with sociopolitical elements such as the “democratization” of Korea.

documentations and records on the South - North displacement of populations and conscription caused by the fratricide of the Korean War are disappearing. Therefore it is difficult to study the movements of population without the testimony of local residents.

In studying the relation between the Korean War and regions the oral history methodology sets up a close relation with Korean situations.³ In comparison with other researches such as political, diplomatic, military approaches on the Korean War, oral history methodology can take advantage in dealing micro-history, and life history of the unrecorded people in the Korean War and can approach “the community of memory” that contains various experiences of the people inside.

How to define “region” in research is most important. Whether it can be defined as “the country” in opposition to the capital city of Seoul or as “part” in opposition to “whole.” Either way, it will lead to different conclusions. According to the former definition, research on Haebangchon (Liberated Village) in Yongsan-dong, Yongsan-gu in Seoul cannot be categorized regional, but according to the latter, it can be included in regional research. As the central government and the City of Seoul can be seen as both center and region in an administrative sense, regional research cannot be confined to local areas, the opposite of the capital city. From the traditional viewpoint of sociology or anthropology regional research is meaningful as a of fieldwork research and even as an area of ethnography.⁴ This paper approaches the subject with the understanding that a region is not the opposite of the center but rather of the whole, and simultaneously, taking regional study as a way toward the entirety through a smaller part. The oral history methodology of this article on the Korean War in the regions is defined as “a research on oral life history of local residents and their experiences and memories of the Korean War.”

This article tries to unite previous researches with three codes: the Korean War, regional studies, and individual history by an oral history methodology. It treats the process of carrying out research on oral history centering on the issues

3. In the West, an oral history methodology is given little value in regional studies. Since the formation of modern states, most of the bibliographical records or research was made from the viewpoints of the central government, lacking or having insufficient regional viewpoints. The local records were sometimes dropped in the central records (Counce 1994).

4. Recently, ethnography has been used as “Munhwagisulji” (Yoon Taek-Lim 2004; Bak Hyeon-su 2006). However, this word is used to show the history “ethnography” was translated in “Minsokgusulji” or “Minjokgisulji.”

of the Korean War in the regions in order to suggest the limits and tasks of the research. It is important to note that this article is a reflection of the practice of oral history methodology, not on a theoretical or methodological discussion.

History of Research

The history of research is composed of two parts: a review of the Korean War in the regions centering on the applied research to the oral history methodology and the historical research of individual stories.

1. Previous Research

Researches of oral history methodology on the Korean War in the regions began ten years ago. Researches on local history have been intermittently carried out in sociology, anthropology, history and geography but they have not dealt with any problems or influences of the war on the community.

The research of Yi Mun-ung (1966) on Liberated Village in Seoul is the inception of research in this field. Through in-depth interviews from the viewpoint of urban ecology, it shows how the community has changed since the influx of “North Korean refugees”; a populace group formed by the division of the Korean peninsula and the Korean War began to live in the Liberated Village.⁵

Previous researches following the codes of the Korean War, regions and oral history include the doctoral dissertation of Yoon Taek-Lim, “Koreans’ Stories about Themselves: An Ethnographic History of Hermit Pond Village in South Korea” (1992) and the revised article, “A Journey of an Anthropologist to the Past: In Search of the History of a Communist Village” (2003). In South Korea, similar researches consist of Kim Gwi-Ok’s “Jeongchakchon wolnaminui saenghwalgyeongheomgwa jeongcheseong: Sokcho ‘Abaimaeul’gwa Gimje ‘Yongjinongwon’eul jungsimeuro” (The Life Story and Identity of North Korean Refugees at Settled Villages: Centering on Abai Village in Sokcho, Kangwon province and Yongji Farm in Gimje, North Cholla Province, 1999) and a separate volume, *Wolnaminui saenghwalgyeongheomgwa jeongcheseong*:

5. Although not oral history research, the articles of Oh Se-chang (1979), Nam Sang-jun (1982), Kim Hyeong-jae (1988) and Yi Sin-cheol (2000) can be included in research books of a similar category.

Miteurobuteoui wolnamin yeongu (The Life Experiences and Identity of North Korean Refugees: A Bottom-Up Study of North Korean Refugees, 1999). Yoon Taek-Lim treated local residents as subjects on the subject of “a communist village” in Yesan-gun, Chungcheongnam-do, Kim Gwi-Ok treated both local residents and North Korean Refugees at the same time as subjects in Sokcho, Gangwon-do and in Yongji-myeon, Gimje-si, Jeollabuk-do in order to approach the history of community change through the identity of local residents.

After the publication of these articles, other important works with code-patterns have been presented. Yi Yong-gi’s *Maureseoui hangukjeonjaeng gyeongheomgwa geu gieok—Gyeonggi-doui han “Moseukeuba” maeul saryereul jungsimeuro* (The Experiences and Memory of the Korean War at a Village—Centering on the Case of a “Moscow” Village in Gyeonggi-do, 2001) revealed through oral history how the structure of Odu-li community, Yicheon, Gyeonggi-do had been reconstructed during the Korean War. Kim Gwi-Ok’s “Ireobeorin tohanau yeoksa: Hangukjeonjaengsigi gangwon-do yangyang-gun migunjeong tongchiwa banseong”(Another Lost History: the U.S. Military Government in Yangyang-gun, Gangwon-do during the Korean War and Introspection, 2000a) demonstrated, by taking the methodology of oral history how the regional character of Sokcho had changed under the U.S. Military Government during the Korean War.

Researches in accordance with three codes have been carried out under the auspice of the Korea Research Foundation. The most typical research was the result of major projects of the Institute for Honam Culture, Jeonnam University. Among the recent publications of this Institute are *Jeonjaenggwa saramdeul: Araerobuteoui hanguk jeonjaeng yeongu* (War and People: A Bottom-Up Research on the Korean War, 2003) by Pyo In-ju et al. and *Jeonjaenggwa gieok* (War and Memory, 2005) by Kim Gyeong-hak et al. Jung Keun-Sik’s *Jiyeok jeongcheseong, sinbuntujaeng, geurigo jeonjaenggieok* (Local Identity, Class Struggles, and Memory of the War, 2004) and *Hangukjeonjaeng gyeonghyeomgwa gongdongchejeok gieok* (The Experiences of the Korean War and Communal Memory, 2003) are the results of regional studies. Also, *Jinggyemaenggaengoemitdeul saramdeul: 20segi hangukminjungui gusuljaseojeon 6* (The People of Jinggyemaenggaengoemitdeul: The Oral Autobiography of the 20th Century Korean People, Book 6) (Sohwa Publishing 2006) published by researchers at the Institute for Life History of the 20th Century People (Park Hyeon-su, a chief researcher and professor of the Department of Culture and Anthropology, Yeongnam University) is meaningful

as an autobiography and valuable as a research topic.⁶ These achievements give detailed description of how the Korean War had an influence on the formation of the identity of residents, and the community of memory, and how war experiences charge influence the formation of the community.

One excellent report that is in accordance with the three codes such as the Korean War, region and oral history, is *Hangukjeonjaeng jeonhu minganin haksal siltae bogoseo* (A Fact-Finding Survey on the Massacre of Civilians before and after the Korean War, 2005) compiled by the Pan-Korea People's Committee for Inquiring into the Massacre of Civilians before and after the Korean War. This survey divides South Korea into eight regions and deals with 669 incidents of massacre that occurred during the Korean War. Each incident was examined through the narration of witnesses together with recorded data. Afterward, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea in accordance to the Ground Act on Truth and Reconciliation (2005) is now accumulating the data and facts on the massacre.

2. History of Individual Research

Students studying abroad choose particular research topics when looking for subjects for their research methodology. Regional studies and oral history methodology are attractive as a tool for approaching a particular topic from the beginning. I have come to learn about regional studies and oral history methodology by coincidence.

Many Korean undergraduate or graduate students in the 1980s never heard about oral history methodology in the lectures of sociological research methodology. Things changed with the introduction of new lectures on qualitative research methodology and oral history methodology that focus on in-depth interviews and participant observations. These methods are nothing more than a secondary instrument to practice a quantitative social survey.

Participant observation or in-depth interviews were adopted as auxiliary when I participated in social survey making interviews through questionnaires as a research assistant. The methods of social survey for establishing relations

6. The Institute for Life History of the 20th Century People published a series of six volumes, *20segi hangukminjungui gusuljaseojeon* (The Oral Autobiography of the 20th Century Korean People) (Sohwa Publishing 2006). The sixth volume is the autobiography based on oral life history of the residents of Gwanghwal-myeon, Gimje, Jeollabuk-do.

between the community and the residents were also applicable to regional studies. I participated as a research assistant in a regional research of Nangok under the direction of Professor Heo Seok-yeol (Department of Sociology) Chungbuk University and made a non-structured social survey through in-depth interviews. Thanks to this experience, I came to realize the reality of human beings, the center of social science, as well as the attraction and the value of research methodology.

In the latter half of the 1980s, oral history methodology formed a connection with the process of modern historical research. After the Korean War, the study of history has been greatly influenced by the Cold War and the long period of dictatorships. The practice of oral history methodology is often used to inspect or directly carry out projects on recording the politically alienated. In 1995 when I left for Mexico for the purpose of a research on Korean Mexicans, I read basic reference books on participant observation, which was very helpful. Far more important are honesty, courage, the forming of credibility with local residents, the construction of networks, thorough preliminary research on regions, and the reconstruction and representation of fragmentary facts.

Through brief but various experiences, I discover that regions are the sources of sociological research which tried to figure out the creative life-stories of the *minjung*. Regions are full of complicated and diverse desires with dominant and oppressed memories extant. Although I came from the same society I equipped myself with the theory of knowledge and instruments to listen to and approach life-stories of the people when I went to the people again. And I came to find that witnesses are the teacher to break the boundary between the elite and people or to correct the shallow knowledge between subject and object.

Since I entered the graduate courses at the end of the 1980s, I have concentrated on the main themes, i.e., the Korean Division and anti-communism ideology between people and society. One was the conception of North Korea “society of the people” as tainted by the anti-communist ideology of the National Security Law and the other was the realization of the lack of an open mind toward the division and the war in South Korean society of sociology.

I came to rediscover regions while staying for seven months in Sokcho, Gangwon-do and in Yongji-myeon, Gimje City, Jeollabuk-do to prepare for a doctoral dissertation. After finishing a doctoral dissertation I made an intermittent survey in Sokcho from a broader point of view than that of doctoral dissertation, carrying out a survey of Liberated Village in Seoul several times. Also, in 2003 I made a survey of Garibong-dong and the state of labor work in order to

investigate the history of laborers between the 1960s and 1970s. As of 2005 I am committing myself to study the topic of “Recalling the War Experience: Legacies of the Korean War and Its Impact on Life World in South Korea” in collaboration with researchers at the War and Peace Institute⁷ affiliated with the Institute for Social Science, Hansung University, while surveying Gyo-dong, Ganghwa-gun in the City of Incheon a lower research subject.

The Developing Process of Case Studies

This article is a case study centering on research experiences in Sokcho, Gangwon-do. The research is composed of two parts. One is the process of collecting, analyzing, and assimilating recorded data with secondary materials of literature; the second process practices participant observation with the oral history methodology through field work. This process is not confined to field work but deals with the formation of recognition for oral history methodology, investigation to: analyze, supplement write and enter into a connection with oral history.

Fieldwork collected and discovered primary recorded data. Except for the newspapers and the stenographic records of the National Assembly directly relevant data about regions are only obtained through serious research. Only a few regional data about the Korean War are left in Sokcho City Hall, the District Office of Yangyang-gun, the Cultural Institute of Sokcho, the Cultural Institute of Yangyang, the Village Offices of Sokcho, the Bureau of Military Affairs and the Institute for Compilation of Military Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense. It was fortunate to get data on Sokcho during the Japanese colonial rule and right after the Korean War from a scholar of the local history and officials concerned. Some of the issues of *Donghae sinmun* (Donghae Newspaper), a local paper in Sokcho during the Korean War are hard to find although I met an ex-reporter to the paper and the chief of the bureau of civil affairs during the military government. Photos or past writings about the Korean War period from North Korean refugees were included in the research.

This article develops the process of regional investigation centering on oral history methodology.

7. The website address of the *War and Peace Institute*, Hansung University is <http://www.warandpeace.or.kr>

1. The Fieldwork Full of Chance and Inevitability

I was an outsider concerned about regional studies as background to the fieldwork. My interest in the problems of the war and the existence of North Korean refugees led to the importance of regions. It was necessary to approach North Korean refugees in a person-to-person way to investigate problems deeply, and this necessity led to the visit to the settled village. I choose “Abai maeul” (Abai Village) Cheongho-dong, Sokcho and the North Korean refugee residents were suitable to the subject from the critical viewpoint. The first investigation in Sokcho lasted for six months and it was followed by several additional investigations. In particular, the fieldwork centering on the natives of Sokcho in 2001 became the base of regional studies of Sokcho afterwards.

When I went to Sokcho, I was a total stranger to the region. But I did not care about whether the space was Seoul or other places. I assumed that North Korean refugees gathered around Sokcho because their native places are near Sokcho, and I had no interest in local problems at all. The departure for Sokcho without any knowledge of the region and regional studies impeded the investigation. This led to a revelation about the region. The investigation became tense because I asked North Korean refugees such basic question “Why and how was the settled village of North Korean refugees established in Sokcho?,” “Why did the settled village survive?,” and “How did Sokcho, nothing more than an adjacent myeon to Yangyang-gun, Gangwon-do come out of Yangyang-gun and become a ‘city’ in such a short time?”⁸

The fieldwork was carried out with participant observation and the auxiliary analysis of literary data. As is stated in my doctoral dissertation, the participation observation was helpful to the understanding of the managerial system and communication network of the settled village of North Korean refugees, as well as the relation among North Korean refugees concerning self-identity and attitudes towards the natives of Sokcho. It provided a chance to observe how the adaptation to the customs and livelihood of the natives went, how different the consciousness and practice to adaptation was, and what opinion, standpoint and action they took on government a little bit different from their political situations. Cheongho-dong, Sokcho City, was on the point of “developing a new

8. The background and interest in how Sokcho community was formed is shown in *Another Lost History: the U.S. Military Government in Yangyang-gun, Gangwon-do during the Korean War and Its Introspection* (Economy and Society 2000 Summer Issue).

waterway” at that time. Participant observation helped show how the residents reacted and coped with the possibility of dismantling the settled village of Cheongho-dong.

Participant observation is essential in the preparation for the use of oral history methodology. Social and power cognitive maps play the role of weft and warp in developing oral history methodology. When power cognitive map is regarded as weft and social cognitive map as warp, the roughly mixed fabric of dialogues and interviews between narrators and the interviewer could be woven into an embroidery of “forgotten,” “hidden,” and “distorted” individual experiences and identity. Accordingly, the regions of Sokcho and Gimje are accidental but inevitable spaces for the purpose of pursuing life experiences of North Korean refugees and approaching the identity through oral history methodology. The cognitive map discovered through participant observation makes it easy to carry out the oral history methodology.

2. Application Process of Oral History Methodology

Both Sokcho and Gimje were not target regions at the very beginning since they were chosen for financial reasons. After investigating the first research site, Sokcho, I decided to investigate the secondary target Yongji-myeon, Gimje. The motive for investigating Gimje comes from the confidence about the fieldwork on Sokcho. And I do not want it to be seen as bias confined within one place. I began the fieldwork on Gimje with a process similar to Sokcho. This article concentrates on Sokcho and reveals the experiences of Gimje as well.

a. Preliminary Research

1) Preliminary Fieldwork

In January 1996, the subject of North Korean refugees was chosen as a research subject. After the decision data were collected on North Korean refugees for selecting what and where to investigate. The data on North Korean refugees could be obtained through collecting and reviewing the existing literature. This stage saw the visitation of the Five Do North Korea of Committee and its affiliated Dongwha Institute to confirm the data. They had various chronicles of provinces according to *li*, *myeon*, *eup*, *gun*, *si* and *do*, but did not have any concrete data on the settled village of North Korean refugees. There were no con-

crete data except for the existing outcomes of research and various articles of public mass media.

The investigation site has to be confirmed. In the early spring of 1996, Cheongho-dong, I chose Sokcho as the first investigation site. There was a rumor that the village would be dismantled because of the development of a new waterway. It was difficult to carry out my research not knowing whether the village remains or not. When I asked the existence of the village of the Department of Urban Development of Sokcho City Hall, its staff told me that though Sokcho City had the plan about Cheongho-dong, starting date was uncertain.

In July 1996, a preliminary survey was made of Sokcho and Cheongho-dong for four days resulting in three major works during the fieldwork. I formed a rapport in Cheongho-dong that started on the first day of my visit by opening a “Night Study Room for Juveniles in Cheongho-dong; I called it Little Library in this article.” The three volunteer teachers at the study room were natives of Cheongho-dong and the second generation North Korean refugees. I thought it was very important to make them understand my research motive and then persuade them to help me. On the night before I left for Seoul, they promised to help me. I regarded one as my helper, R1.

Data relevant to Sokcho and Cheongho-dong were found at the morgue. The morgue is the data room of *the Seorak Newspaper*, a local paper in Sokcho. I reviewed and copied articles and the basic data related to Sokcho, Cheongho-dong, and North Korean refugees. Through this process basic data were secured. The names of residents of Cheongho-dong were memorized in accordance with the data found.

I had to find a process map in order to make a survey of Cheongho-dong, Sokcho. A mental map was drawn first in my brain and then in a research log. I got accustomed to Cheongho-dong by drawing a map with roads, particular places, and rough sketches seen in the process of survey.

2) Preparatory Stage after Preliminary Survey

After the preliminary survey, preparations were made for departure for Sokcho. The expected period of research is about six months and the preliminaries are complicated.

Various documents were prepared to make a survey of Cheongho-dong, Sokcho. A list of data was compiled about Sokcho, Cheongho-dong and North Korean refugees. A simple research plan was made on the basis of the data. The

plan was mediocre at best, but it signaled the start of my research. I made my name-card with which I could introduce myself in Sokcho. Questions for the oral history questionnaire were also drafted. I prepared copies of my personal history and “a written request for cooperation”⁹ in the name of the chair of the Department of Sociology.

I confirmed the request for renting a boardinghouse through R1. My confirmation made R1 believe I would go to Sokcho absolutely.

The list of items to be prepared was enormous:

Two tape-recorders,¹⁰ cassette tapes, microphone, camcorder, notebook computer, 8mm videotapes, abundant battery, two cameras (black and white),¹¹ black and white films, computer discs, abundant memo pads, copying paper, writing implements, family map, map, two kinds of presents (for narrators and respondents),¹² personal history, and a written request for cooperation.

Among the necessities, recording tapes were quickly used up and I purchased then as needed. The tapes of one hour recording capacity were adequate but two-hour tapes were also used for economical reasons.

3) The Preparatory Stage after Settling in the Region

On September 1, 1996 I arrived at Cheongho-dong, Sokcho. This stage began with the safe arrival in Cheongho-dong. R1 informed R2 of my arrival and R2 prepared for a boardinghouse. R2 was a member of the maternal association of Little Library, my boardinghouse landlady, and the most important agent, a

9. At that time, I finished the doctoral course in sociology and was unemployed. Therefore, the department of Sociology provided a letter of request for cooperation. The written request for cooperation in the name of the chief of the Department of Sociology was a formal and an important document for personal references.

10. Two tape-recorders I always prepared for research. Since 2003, I have used digital recorders and always carry two extra recorders for emergency.

11. It is essential to take cameras in fieldwork. A camera is useful recording what the narrators will say, can naturally contain the culture of narrators and, moreover, can play a role of a temporary copy machine.

12. These presents have dual meanings. They are “return presents” for investigation and also effective ones to promote “credibility” for investigation using school souvenirs.

patron, and an advisor I had. On arrival, I became a volunteer teacher of Little Library, and the office and space of Little Library became a kind of base-camp for me. Soon after arrival, I met pupils of Little Library and for several days I called their parents for explaining an outline of my research and asking favors.

A personal history (statement of credibility) and a written request for cooperation made my research plans to be an issue. I introduced myself and asked assistance from the following: the head and clerks of Cheongho-dong Office, the head of the Joyang-dong Police Box in charge of Cheongho-dong, the heads of ten tong in Cheongho-dong, the head of Cheongho-dong branch of the Korean Senior Citizens Association, the chair of the village fund, the head of the Women's Association, the head of the Squid-Drying Association, and instructors at Cheongho Elementary School. I introduced myself with R2 and the clerks of the social welfare section of Cheongho-dong Office. I stated my research depending on the familiarity with the community and on the formalism of the Dong Office.

Research items prepared at the preliminary stage (Kim Gwi-Ok 1999 Appendix b: A Guideline for In-Depth Interviews) were completed. Without anyone else to consult with, R1 and R2 played an important role in smoothing out possible hostility. The story of R1's growth and his parents and the story of R2 helped reveal the characteristics of the village and prepare the research items and a guideline.

The main survey was launched after the process.

b. Commencement of the Main Survey

Before the main survey, "A Guideline towards Narrators" was made by mixing the information attained in the preparatory stage and general survey principles.

First, the relation between narrator and surveyor is not the relation between object and subject but the relation between subject and subject.¹³

Second, be as courteous as possible to a narrator even if the survey is

13. A survey reward was not given because I was a poor student economically and even narrators took it for granted. But in case of recent researches a reward fee is included in the financial support of outside institutions and even a little reward fee is usually paid, still leaving a problem to a researcher.

refused.

Third, make the narrator trust the interviewer by sharing the information from the survey. It is better to make an effort to have a deep mutual confidence.

Fourth, it is better to conduct a survey at the house of the narrator whenever possible.

Fifth, make contact with the narrator before visiting them.

Sixth, visit the narrator with some gifts, beverages, and fruits. Enjoy the meal with the narrator because it is a good chance to understand the daily culture and to become intimate with them.

Seventh, before the main interview with the narrator make sure of the schedule and explain what stories would like to be listened to.

Eighth, guarantee that the results of the survey will be used only for academic purposes with pseudonyms.

Ninth, during the interview, make the narrator feel free and comfortable avoiding arguments.¹⁴ If the narrator were indulged in the interview to the highest degree they would describe the situation concretely and also tell the names of the places and the persons concretely. If there were any dialects or inharmonious stories, I would just listen to them and ask again after the daily survey or during the next interview.

Lastly, it is best to talk as much as possible with the family of the narrator during or after the interview. The correct selection of a narrator would make them have a sense of sovereignty. After the interview, maintain the relation of confidence with the narrator or family and if requested show the memo pad.

The main survey was carried out according to three categories on the basis of these principles. Three categories were first, oral history methodology, second, the collection of literary data, and third, a structured questionnaire and a survey. This article focuses on the first category.

14. If a narrator did not say anything during the main interview and would ask my opinion on a subject after the interview. I judged I could not avoid this moment. Although it was difficult to have a deep discussion with the narrator, I would express my opinion at a minimum and listen to his story several times. I thought neglecting the suggestions of the narrator would desert the principle of mutual relation.

1) Who to Be Interviewed

(1) The First Trial and Error

At the stage of the main survey, the first obstacle was “Who should I interview?” When I came to the Senior Citizens’ Hall at one o’clock in the afternoon, most senior citizens just received greetings but were not willing to take an interview. On the second day, I found an alienated old man who was born in 1921 and came from Bukcheong, Hamnam. I cordially introduced the purpose of this survey and asked for an interview. I began to ask about personal particulars about his hometown while other old men played games. In spite of the negative impression from the shabby way of dressing, he has an excellent memory. In the explanation of how Japanese colonialism exploited Korea there was a demonstration of a lucid political and economic argument.

The interview lasted about two hours. During the interview there was confusion about his age as there was a discrepancy between the age told at first and the age during the Korean War. When asked about the discrepancy he explained that his age was made up. According to the story the age was falsified to avoid recruitment into the army.¹⁵ Whenever personal particulars were reported the same story of avoiding recruitment was repeated. The interview lasted three hours.

A second interview was conducted at his house the following day. During the interview the wife came home from the market for lunch. Although I revealed who I was and introduced myself, she grumbled, “What do you want to know from an old man?” or “There are many suspicious men nowadays.” When the interview focused on the experiences before the Korean War, the stories about land reform, democratic reform and even the story about Kim Il Sung, she voiced dissatisfaction to the highest degree. Besides her fury, the old man did the same saying, “I don’t like this interview. You urged me to have an interview again and again. My wife got angry with you.” I was embarrassed but tried to explain the situation once again. But she bluntly said, “Get out of my house. My son is a policeman.” I was exhausted and left. When I came to the boarding-

15. At first, he could have calculated and told his age according to a National Identity Card for some time. But when he was indulged in his story, he got relaxed and told his real age. Afterwards, whenever I met North Korean refugees, I talked to them about “rubber band age.” Rubber band age could be found among the same ages from South Korea.

house, I sighed with frustration that there would be nothing more to do but return to Seoul and asked the host of the boardinghouse for help. For the first time, I seriously began to think about “Who and how will I interview?”

(2) An Approach through Introduction and Snowball Sampling Method

The same thing did not happen again since the first trial and error. I realized that mere courtesy and presenting a written request for cooperation would not be enough. I changed tactics. While I met some people in this region and talked with them, I draw a “cognitive map” mentally. I noticed social or power connection to some degree. I came to judge that it would be more desirable for the “supporters” of the village to introduce narrators to me. Those¹⁶ who I wanted to interview were directly introduced through the heads of public organizations in Cheongho-dong or ten heads of *tong*, and I was able to finish a survey. They were agents on my behalf.

I was well known to the villagers for my survey at the turn of the third month of survey and some people voluntarily joined in interviews. I realized how important it was to form “the relation of confidence.” Also, I even asked previous narrators to introduce other interviewees. When playing a game with friends, it would be useful for me to call a person by name and a caller would be happy. The antecedent called another man by name and was willing to introduce me.

b. The Location of Interview

Where to interview a narrator depends on the decision of the narrator. It is best to have an interview at the house of the narrator but, if not possible, another place such as a tearoom would be used. If a close relation is formed, it is possible to ask for a re-interview at the house. In this case, there are sometimes a few discrepancies between the story at the house and the story in a public place. If other people listen to the story, “the right answer”¹⁷ will be told. But in many

16. I did not ask them for an introduction unconditionally. I gained a list of the members of the Senior Citizens' Association, arranged it according to *tong* and asked the head of *tong* for the introduction of a certain person. I wanted to arrange them equally according to hometown, occupation, and gender.

17. As a lot of reporters of the broadcasting companies and newspapers visit Cheongho-dong, the

cases, the narrator accepts the interview at the house because they know about the seriousness of the story and want to keep it secret. Also, the opinion of an interviewer is usually respected. The narrators become more courteous in a private space rather than in a public space.

The interview at the house of the narrator is convenient in many senses. It is important to offer to pay for the first time at entertaining. But many people regard the interviewer as a guest and the narrator wants to pay the first time. While having a meal together I can understand the personal background in a more intimate level. In case of being treated, I always give a present in return. An interview at home provides an opportunity to see photos, private records and materials if a rapport is formed.

In this process many people (in particular women) were worried about the meeting in a private space. During the interview, I never felt an atmosphere of sexual harassment. Before entering into an interview it was said that old men would easily tell the story in a drunken state. I completely neglected this suggestion. Sometimes, I bought rounds of drinks but abstained myself if possible even during a tense survey where old men were alone during interview. I concluded that alcohol would obscure the relation between narrator and interviewer and spoil the interview itself rather than help the interview.

c. The Time of Interview

The time of interview depends on the narrator. The narrators preferred the daytime because they knew I was a volunteer teacher at the night school. Also, the daytime was much better considering the age characteristics of the narrators.

I always confirmed how long narrator could spare time. I judged I could have an interview with them as long as wanted unless they had a particular appointment. At first it was difficult to decide how many times I could have an interview with them, and it was often arranged spontaneously during the interview. Some narrators did not want to continue interviews because they were tired of having interviews, but most narrators were glad to meet several times.

residents have already known what the reporters want to listen to and what they should say. In case of a person who came from Gyeongsang-do and immigrated into Cheongho-dong during the 1960s, he often dissimulates that he came from Hamgyeong-do and sought safety in flight during the Korean War and what the culture of Hamgyeong-do is.

Unexpected events could cause interviews to be cancelled or postponed. In spite of interruptions, it was important to be patient, to understand the situation, and to help at times deepen the relation between narrator and interviewer.

d. The Process and Contents of Interview

The actual interview was composed of two stages, i.e., the interview stage of the fundamental and individual information and the main interview stage. During fundamental interview, the narrator drew their family tree and the route of migration on a map. On the map prepared beforehand, the place of departure, stopover, period, fellow travelers, and method of transportation were recorded. During this process, the researcher became familiar with the situation and the information about the narrator and was able to enhance memories before the main interview. Such information allowed for the preparation of an appropriate questionnaire that did not leave out things that should be asked. Details were thoroughly documented as to make efficient use of the time spent in this area during the research.

The main interview began with reminiscences of hometowns, childhood, and family story. These first formal questions were very important during the first few interviews as they showed what meaning “hometown” had to the narrator and to past livelihoods. This process made interviews smoother. During this process narrators would go back to the past with very concrete description of the relation between things and human beings.

The memories of narrators in the case of those who are at the age span of late teens to mid twenties during the liberation. The reminiscences of this period are not precise because they are related to the present evaluation. Concerning this problem narrators were asked a difficult question about experiences in North Korea. For example, some North Korean refugees joined The Democratic Youth Union and the reason given was blunt: “they had been forced to join the union, and they had done nothing.” For five years before coming from North Korea, they seemed to have joined in the union but were afraid to talk about it. The narrator was asked once again, “Talk about what you did in that situation at that time.” What happened to his head? The memory at that time could be more vivid than that of childhood. Can the avoidance of narration be due to a “self-controlling defense mechanism” inside his head? What would happen if they were remembering that time in their hometowns?

Questions about the Korean War period, including the breakout of hostilities

were most difficult to ask. Some narrators tended to skip over this period only to confirm rumors of assaults and harm during the war without mentioning how deeply they had been involved. Some narrators would stop the narration as it was disturbing to remember that time, and it was often accompanied by physical expressions of remorse. Breaks would be taken but it was necessary to carry on and has narrators remember the situation. It was a key point to grasp the interrelationships between the events and catch the important moment to ask questions in comparison with other parts.

It was not comparatively difficult to rebuild the settling process in Sokcho, the changing aspects of Sokcho, and the family relations. In the beginning of an interview, the stories were lengthy but after a time the narration went quicker.

e. Asking Questions

Narrators often said that life stories would constitute “ten volumes of novels.” But telling the actual life stories would be a different matter. Narrators should be made to tell stories on a fixed subject and not be allowed to digress the discussion. Stories that did not find an orientation by the middle point would often come to nothing. It is professional to make narrators remember events by asking appropriate questions at the right time and keeping the stories flow spontaneously.

The questionnaire can be made as stated in a guidebook for interview. As this guidebook was prepared by general standards, the questionnaire can be changed according to the interviewees. It is not easy to ask narrators appropriate questions so that they remember specific periods¹⁸, situations, and persons well.

There are difficult questions to ask such as those related to “Kim Il-Sung” when the discussion reaches the topic of North Korean refugees’ life stories in North Korea. Such approaches often caused the first interview to come to nothing. It was important to design a questionnaire about life experiences, the policy of North Korea, and various facts without mentioning Kim Il-Sung.

18. It would be more accurate to ask age, not the year as for the period. Accordingly, when following the story of a narrator, it is important to keep several personal data on the interviewee in mind. For example, keep the year, the month and the place of his birth in mind. When he can not remember them precisely, it will be effective to ask according to four seasons or the 24 seasonal divisions of the year. As most of the old men are likely to remember them according to the lunar calendar, it is necessary to keep the lunar or solar calendar in mind.

f. The Record of a Narrator

I attempted to gain the handwritings of narrators whenever possible. If hard-to-understand dialect or words were used, I requested the narrators to write them down in *hangeul* or Chinese characters. This request for a precise accounting resulted in the confirmation of the illiteracy of the interviewee. In particular, the sketch of the residence or POW camp was very precise, which enabled a judgment of the accuracy of his memory and heighten the credibility of the individual. An attempt was always made to collect and arrange the letters, photos, and other data of the narrator. The photos collected during the research were later offered to Sokcho City Hall and the Sokcho Institute for Culture with the consent of the narrator.

g. Recording a Research Log

A daily personal log was kept since the previous research takes into account works by other researchers in the regions. Spradley (1988) wrote in a personal log all the experiences, ideas, doubts, mistakes, confusion, breakthroughs and problems that happened during research. It was advised to write down the responses to the narrator and the feelings about other people. A personal log makes it possible to keep the track of the people met during the day (with a brief memo or address), feelings about them, particulars, interview appointment time, questions for the next interview, quotations from reading, follow up points, and the data to search. At times, some cards or data were attached to the personal log. This personal log made research easier and memory more accurate.

h. The Situation of an Participant Observer

Spradley (Spradley 1988: 81-5) divided the participant observation into five types according to the degree of participation as follows:

- ▶ Non-Participation: a type of complete observation without joining people, without object of research and activities, and even without letting them know about the observation itself.
- ▶ Passive Participation: a type of observation not having relation skip with other people and activities in spite of being at the scenes; spectators, onlookers, wanderers; it is an early type of fieldwork and can be changed

into another type.

- ▶ Average Participation: a type of observation only, allowing participation itself but not joining, balancing between a complete observer and a complete participant.
- ▶ Active Participation: a type of being admitted, “acting” what the others are doing, and learning cultural regulations on activities; at first this case also follows the previous types.
- ▶ Complete Participation: a type of the activities of researchers as a daily participant.

The degree of participation depends on the character and the stage of research. In this study the methodology is the oral history which requires close relationship with the residents in Cheongho-dong. I believe that research would be impossible without informing them of the purpose and content of the research. The research contains politically sensible problems concerning the anti-communist ideology. If proper identification were not made, misunderstandings could develop and the research would be difficult to be carried out by the intervention of civil authorities reacting negatively to the study.¹⁹

The degree of participation in Sokcho differed a little from that of Gimje. I stated as an average participant in Sokcho and became an active participant as a volunteer teacher during the research. But I was nearly an average participant in Gimje.

During an interview North Korean refugees often asked whether the interviewer came from that region or was a descendant of North Korean refugees. When I answered that I did not come from Sokcho nor was a descendant of North Korean refugees they looked a little satisfied. I did not understand what it meant but I suppose that not being a descendant of North Korean refugees would often be helpful for the research. It is likely that this would make it difficult for them to break the silence, but it also makes it comfortable for them to tell secrets. In Gimje, the fact that I came from Gyeongsang-do worked as an

19. In fact, this happened in Sokcho. Someone became suspicious and accused the author to City Hall. My landlord was questioned and vouched for me without informing me. In Gimje, this happened in “an uproar of branding a person as a communist” among the residents. I didn’t reach the situation but in 2006 the residents in Gyo-dong, Ganghwa-do were very sensitive to the research on the Korean War and were also afraid of the word “a communist.” Also, Vansina (1985) had such an experience in a regional research. At the beginning of the research, the residents suspected her of a “witch.”

advantage in enabling North Korean refugees in the Yongji Farm to vividly reveal the local color. This is the ironic outcome of the long regional discrimination in modern Korean society and was similar to the research of a foreigner on the culture of a strange country.

The Principle and Conflict during the Research

1. The Ethics of a Specialist

Sociology and social science require ethics from a researcher. We have a shameful history that sociology and anthropology research played a role of a scout for imperialism invasions. Thus the American Association of Anthropology adopted *The Principle behind Responsibilities of a Specialist* in 1971 as follows:

Anthropologists work while establishing close human relations with people and research situations. Therefore, their working conditions are peculiar, diverse and complicated. They are all connected with their field of learning, associates, students, supporters, their subjectivity, the local government, particular individuals and groups as objects of their fieldworks, and the research process and subject having an influence on the general welfare of human beings.

Such complicated relations, misunderstandings, conflicts, and the choice of values causing conflicts creates a dilemma in ethics. It is an important responsibility of anthropologists to predict such things, devise solutions and not to harm people as objects of research in the field of learning. Where these conditions cannot be fulfilled, it is admirable to advise the anthropologists not to carry out such a particular research. (Spradley 1988)

I would like to examine how faithfully I followed important items of the principle during the interview.

Article No. 1 of the Principle: During the research, an anthropologist should take the utmost responsibility of target people. These individuals should be taken into consideration first when a clash of interests happen. An anthropologist should do the utmost to protect physical and mental

health.

There are no problems keeping the principle but, at times some conflicts happen. When information was published, various reporters, broadcasting companies and writers asked for introductions on some of the cases. In most cases an official contact route is introduced to them. In some cases, I always come into contact with an object of research and confirmed the opinion in another interview.

Article No. 1 a of the Principle: When researching with things and information obtained through credibility, it is an iron rule to protect rights, interests and sensitivity safely.

One narrator asked to erase some data after an interview. It was of no use to tell them that the interview would be published anonymously. One narrator asked to stop recording at some point and some people refused any recording. Not to accept these requests meant the breach of trust.

Article No. 1 b of the Principle: Let the informant know about the purpose of an interview.

Letting the object of research know about the purpose of an interview made the interview possible. This principle is an iron rule to all the researchers. The questionnaire was always shown to the objects of research. The important thing to consider is to what degree the purpose or intention of research should be revealed. I still ask myself whether those who consented to the interview would agree to be interviewed if I told them from the beginning that the interview would be on “the historical fallacy of anti-communist ideology,” which was the motive of my research. I cannot but acknowledge my breaking an ethical principle on this point. This point still leaves some room for doubt.

Article No. 1 c of the Principle: Informants have the right to remain anonymous. Whether they are promised openly or not, these rights should be preserved. These prohibitions are applicable to the collection of data through camera, recorder and other instruments as well as through face-to-face interviews and participant observation.

All the informants were treated anonymously so as not to harm personal prestige

or pride. If anti-communism had been the dominant ideology (in that case the research would be impossible) and I had not treated them anonymously during the interview, they could have been put in jeopardy for the violation of the anti-communist National Security Law. In fact, some informants were worried that they might be imprisoned because of this interview. Whether these worries were true or not, all effort was made to permanently protect the informants from any possible incidents.

Article No. 1 g of the Principle: Let the informants see the reports.

The thesis was shared with the participants after completion. It was not necessary for all of them to read the thesis even though it was recommended. It was desired that they approach the thesis like academic advisers, associate researchers, and public organizations. As usual, during the course of interview records were revealed when requested.

2. Discrepancy Problem

Discrepancy between the contents of an interview on the first meeting and those on the second meeting was always followed up to clarify inconsistencies. Although the discrepancy would be an interesting subject of research, I was still more interested in “the fact.” Discrepancies were not left unanswered and effort was made to find out if they are due to either misunderstanding or a lie. A certain narrator at the Yongji Farm confessed that he had lied about the name of a place on the third and last occasion of interview. It did not matter what the name of the place was, but the person must have felt the sting of conscience.

The story of the narrator was accepted with any discrepancy between the contents of an interview and rumors.²⁰ This is what happened in Sokcho, while having an interview with a narrator I heard about him or her from another person. There was a discrepancy between his or her narration and a rumor. I would like to know about the truth of a rumor but I did not ask them if they want to correct the fact. I put confidence in the story of the narrator and valued this expe-

20. It is this problem that the existing oral historians often face. Stehan Counce agreed to this standpoint: “It is important to memorize that direct experiences are more valuable than rumors. I can evaluate with confidence what I can testify or what others told me. But what others say they heard from someone else is just rumors.” (Counce 1994)

rience is more than a rumor. To confirm the truth, I must be satisfied with asking repeated questions in the same context. A certain narrator said, “Just believe only 70% of the story.”

3. Familiarity and Strangeness

The strangeness toward research regions and residents often leads a researcher facing difficulties but to see things vividly. Distancing allows precise observation of things, people, and affairs. After starting a research, I let two months pass to keep a certain distance. The “less” the people are accustomed to the social situation, the “more” inner cultural regulations of the society can be seen (Spradley 1988). I asked R1 and R2 as many questions on the region as possible. Most of the questions they took for granted. I could find which questions they took as regulations. Strangeness needs a certain degree of tension. I maintained aloofness toward pupils of the study room in order to give a stimulus to them.

Strangeness or the feeling of distance is an opposite concept to familiarity and makes it hard to build up confidence among people. Walter J. Ong (1996) thought that in the research of oral history it was important to be empathic or participatory than to keep an objective distance. Many researchers in this field agree on this point. Although I was not a Christian, I used to go to church every Sundays to make my regional research known to the residents. Whenever I met people on the street I always greeted them laughing to become familiar with them and at times this made the author look rather foolish. In fact, as local people were not accustomed to greeting, an intentional action of familiarity with them resulted in recognition of strangeness in a sense. In three months of research, I became familiar with people and surrounding and fast became tired of everything. Then I got sick and lay in bed for about a week.

At any rate, familiarity or strangeness was one of my important tasks during the research period. Be familiar but keep distance. I refused to serve alcohol during the interview in order to keep a distance. The outcome of this interview may have been different if I were male and drank during the interview.

Conclusion

When I opened the door of the community of memory to the Korean War with narrators, I was terrified at the thought of an atomic bomb, a biological war and

the power of anti-communism. I came to know that a lot of North Korean refugees had been mobilized as agents sent back to the North and that the South Korean Army had established brothels and used women as sex slaves for South Korean soldiers. I also came to know that in modern Korean history, the American Military Government in Korea has been installed three times, while a small town near the DMZ became a “city” for the purpose of propaganda toward the North. I found that the Korean War had dissolved agricultural society and caused farmers to leave native villages before the “industrialization.”

The publication of the thesis brought challenge as well as encouragement. Oral history methodology becomes popular but still strange to most of the studies in the latter half of the 1990s. The most frequent question in the field of sociology is the problem of generalization and credibility. The problem of credibility is directly connected with the consistency of memory. Does the testimony dependent on the memory of participants actually approach the truth? How can the consistency of memory be guaranteed? These questions have been raised continuously since the beginning of the research. I have witnessed several times the same narrator talks to another interviewer, mainly a broadcast journalist, a different narration from what I had been told. At first, I was embarrassed at the inconsistent content. I realized that they could tell an inconsistent narration when they were exposed to the narrating situation that the power relation different from the relation with the narrator and credibility had not been formed. Except for the difficulty of maintaining the consistency of memory due to old age or other particular situations, I had no difficulty accepting that memory could not help being influenced by the power relation. This question was answered in my work “Fieldwork Research and Oral History Methodology” (Kim Gwi-Ok 2000b). The tactics of thick description, authenticity of research and sincerity were preferred to the tactics of generalization. I believe in totality reflected through partiality.

In the research of oral history methodology, another basic question occurs. The fact based on realism can be different from that of oral history methodology. Most literary data realism depends on the data produced by intellectuals (elite intellectuals in particular). Even the facts of the literary data produced by elites are inconsistent and have problems of interpretation. A ruling ideology forged lots of facts or interpretations during the past dynasty period. In the comparatively verifiable literary data during the Japanese colonial rule and after the liberation I found that a ruling ideology polluted literal records. Without any recorded documents fill the gap of modern Korean history or local history, we can utilize

the oral history methodology among several ways.

Another question is whether the life-history of the people or cultural history should be secondary compared with political history. It is often pointed out that the life history of the people or cultural history deals with only a part while political history deals with the whole of society. But it is difficult to see that oral history methodology tries to weaken the importance of political history or macro-history. On the contrary, it aims to introspectively reflect on the trend of Korean studies unthematized in political history or macro structural history, and attempts to destroy the boundary between macro and micro with the academic ambition to restore the totality of studies.

Oral history methodology faces the lack of literary or quantitative research. It resulted from the laziness of researchers who often neglect literary or quantitative research and the specialization of the research of oral history methodology, not from ignoring the merits of each methodology. A balanced research is the dream of a researcher. However, while literary research with data can be put off until tomorrow, oral history research is urgent because the narrators testifying on the division and the Korean War are fast dying out.

While carrying out oral history methodology on the topics of the division and the war for ten years, one of the problems that I faced was the establishment of oral history archives (Kim Gwi-Ok 2005). After the research, many oral history researchers, including me, have no chance that recorded data or transcription of oral history interview can be published because we have no oral history archives accommodated these data. Fortunately, the National History Compilation Committee, the Academy of Korean Studies and the Korea Democracy Foundation have published a collection of narration data. The narration data collected by individual researchers and sponsored by the Korea Research Foundation are on the brink of disappearance. Accordingly, it is urgent to establish oral history archives and to foster the next generation of oral history researchers and the managers of oral history data.

There are problems and limitations concerning the oral history methodology. It seems that this methodology will break off the stronghold of anti-communism, the ideology of patriarchy, the centralization of government, and authoritarianism. The experiences and identity of the people in real life will make important database. This methodology is to help set the local residents free from the trauma, the silence, and the terror of the Korean War.

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