



Title	サハリン韓人の下からの共生の模索：樺太・サハリン・韓国を生きた樺太移住韓人二世代を中心に
Author(s)	中山, 大将
Citation	境界研究, 5, 1-27
Issue Date	2015-03-04
DOI	10.14943/jbr.5.1
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/61162
Type	bulletin (article)
Additional Information	There are other files related to this item in HUSCAP. Check the above URL.
File Information	01Nakayama_10Summary.pdf (英文要旨)



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Summary

Co-existence from the Base of Society of Sakhalin Koreans In Karafuto, Sakhalin and South Korea

NAKAYAMA Taisho

East Asia has many borderlands where the national borders have shifted. Sakhalin Island is one such borderland. The border between Japan and Russia/USSR has changed several times on Sakhalin Island and the nearby Soya Straits. Not only the majority populations (i.e., Japanese and Russian), but also other ethnic groups have migrated to the island after each change in the border. Moreover, every border shift meant a change in regime.

These migrations have formed over 99% of the island's population. What kind of inter-ethnic relations did the migrants build under each regime? How did the migrants form their definition of self in conditions of co-existence from the base of the island's social hierarchy?

About 3,500 elderly Koreans have returned from Sakhalin to South Korea since Perestroika began in 1986. These Hanin had migrated to, or were born in Karafuto, the southern part of the island under the Japanese Empire. Hanin have been well known as some of the victims—as “mobilized Koreans”—under the Japanese Empire. However, we can find another group that is different from these mobilized Koreans among Hanin.

In 1910, the Japanese Empire formally annexed Korea. Labour and merchandise markets in the Japanese Empire were opened to Koreans. Koreans also began to migrate to Karafuto directly or via the Japanese mainland and other areas. The population of migrating Hanin had reached about 8,000 in 1938 just before the start of the wartime mobilization of Koreans. It is said that many Hanin migrants were manual labourers. However, not all of Hanin migrants were employees; some were employers or got other higher socio-economic positions.

In contrast to Zainichi Koreans (ethnic Koreans in Japan), Hanin can be distinguished by their education under Japanese colonialism, their complaints against the USSR government that followed the Japanese, their cultural differences from Koreans on the mainland and their pro-Japanese feelings.

This paper aims to analyze how these pro-Japanese Hanin formed their definition of self in

conditions of co-existence from the base of society under each regime (the Japanese Empire, the USSR/Russia) from their narratives by focusing not on what occurred inside their ethnic community but on their inter-ethnic relationships with those outside that community. The narratives of these Hanin will be discussed based on life-history interviews with ten Hanin living in Gohyang Maeul, South Korea. In addition, the existence of Hanin who returned or wished to return from Sakhalin to Japan will be discussed based on official documents of the Japanese government and private documents of a civic group.

The interviewees thought that they could be appreciated in the same way as the majority around them under both the Japanese Empire and the USSR if they had enough ability and made enough effort. It was because they had room to live as part of a multi-nation state and a migrant society as an ethnic minority and migrants. They have set personal effort and relationships with the majority above ethnic solidarity. In turn, they have had few exchanges with South Koreans after returning to their “home country” because of their age, their cultural background and their socio-economic situation.

The interviewees didn't feel that there was so much difference between them and the Japanese under the Japanese Empire. They acquired Soviet citizenship under the USSR and South Korean nationality on returning to South Korea in a strategic fashion.

They felt different from the Japanese, Russians and South Koreans. Their memory and education under the Japanese Empire and their lives under the USSR for over half a century make it hard for them to integrate themselves into their home country, South Korea. To be precise, they do not have any motivation to integrate because they have been supplied with funds to cover their living expenses and medical bills, and maintain not all but a large part of the social capital and relationships that they have built up in Sakhalin.