




# Discovery and Revitalization of “Feeling of Hometown” from a Disaster Site Inhabitant’s Continuous Engagement in Reconstruction Work: Ethnographic Interviews with a Radiation Decontamination Worker Over 5 Years Following the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** After hometown loss due to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant accident, many radiation decontamination workers started to engage in the reconstruction of their hometown. However, little is known regarding the meaning of experience of engaging in such work. We describe the process of such experience through a series of ethnographic interviews over 5 years with a radiation decontamination worker. The process was classified into the following three periods: “recovery of lost land by inhabitants’ own hands,” “goal loss and semiotic trap in pursuit of recovery,” and “revitalization of feeling of hometown.” Consequently, the informant overcame the contradiction theorized as a “semiotic trap” that radiation decontamination for physical recovery would make his return to home impossible, and updated his narrative to the revitalization of “feeling of hometown” through continuous engagement in the work by creating a sense for transplacement, in which the individual focuses on the psychological aspects of his/her hometown instead of the physical aspects. Psychological reconstruction for disaster victims requires the discovery and revitalization of feeling of hometown rather than the completion of physical reconstruction.

**Key words:** cultural psychology, disaster psychology, home loss, trajectory equifinality approach, place attachment.

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Following the mandatory evacuation due to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (FNP) accident in 2011, many disaster victims were faced with the loss of their hometown. The psychological impact of forced home loss on life has been studied in the context of threat to place

attachment (Pickover & Slowik, 2013) and a past study pointed out that home loss is one of the most serious causes of psychological distress (Fried, 2000). Active engagement in the recovery process to restore stability in life, such as joining a self-help group (Zheng, Zhang, Guo,

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Zhang, & Qian, 2019) or working to recover resources that were lost (Shing, Jayawickreme, & Waugh, 2016) are ways of effectively coping and adapting to such loss. As past studies have indicated, residents' engagement/participation in reconstruction of their home and hometown after disaster contributes to enhanced future bonds and resilience of the community (Kamani-Fard, Ahmad, & Ossen, 2012; Kulig, Edge, Townshend, Lightfoot, & Reimer, 2013).

In Fukushima prefecture, Japan, where the FNP accident occurred, radiation decontamination work has been conducted since 2012 as an initiative of the Japanese government. From the environmental or public health viewpoint, radiation decontamination work is an indispensable procedure for reducing radiation dose rates and promoting the return of evacuees to their hometowns. In terms of the workers' lives, such work has psychological benefits that give them a meaning of life, enable them to consider future plans (Mimura, 2014), and make social connections with local communities (Ono, 2014). Given the fact that many of the radiation decontamination workers came from Fukushima (Hidaka et al., 2016), it may be possible that engaging in reconstruction of their hometown may be considered more than a source of income.

The workers' narratives about their engagement in radiation decontamination work enable the understanding of how disaster survivors construct the existential meaning of the experience of losing their homes through their involvement in reconstruction work. The experience of home loss is a traumatic loss, which affects the individual's values and beliefs, and such loss can radically disturb one's sense of self, perhaps forcing individuals to reassess who they are, and calling for a new life story (Lejano, 2018). Notably, scholars in cultural psychology who explore the meaning of having a home argued that building a home is an existential part of what it means to be human (Joerchel & Dietrich, 2018) and is the affective marking of the space that differentiates home from surrounding meaning, such as "non-home" (Valsiner, 2014). An important suggestion emanating from these studies is that home and its loss are experienced as crisis connected with affect. On the other hand, Harvey and Miller (1998)

pointed out, in their review regarding loss and psychology, that loss of resources when an individual had engaged in affective investment was experienced as a major loss, and emphasized the importance of methodology to study the meaning in a psychological loss study. In light of these previous studies, a study on the meaning of the experience of losing a home would provide a practical example about the "acts of meaning," making a confusing life event contextually comprehensible by narrating it (Bruner, 1986); the questions about how individuals construct the meaning of such an experience that demands an update of their life story and is affectively rooted and what is the consequence of such meaning construction should be investigated employing an adequate methodology, which the current study does by analyzing the narrative.

To justify our focus, it is important to clarify the distinction between radiation decontamination workers and other people who are involved in disaster recovery/reconstruction in their hometown in a broad sense. In past studies regarding residents' participation in disaster reconstruction of their hometown, the disaster focus was wide-area disasters, such as earthquake and flooding (Easthope & Mort, 2014; Kamani-Fard et al., 2012), and the participation in reconstruction from said disaster is assumed to promote the return of inhabitants. Whereas, for radiation decontamination work, the return of inhabitants may not be promoted even after reduction of radiation dose rate by finishing such work due to health anxiety over radiation, reputational damage on the region, and labor shortage (Do, 2020). In fact, approximately 80,000 evacuees did not return as of April 2017 after the evacuation order in their hometown was lifted (Do, 2020). Therefore, radiation decontamination work in hometown may not contribute to the return and thus to reconstruction of the hometown. Although radiation decontamination work is considered to be characterized by this uncertainty, little is known regarding the meaning of experience of engaging in such work in the hometown.

In the current study, we qualitatively describe the process in which radiation decontamination workers explore the meaning of engagement in reconstruction work of their hometown.

## Methods

### Study Location

The study location was municipality X, where three designated evacuation areas remained from 2011 to 2017. Following the FNP accident, the Japanese government designated the three evacuation areas in Fukushima Prefecture according to a series of different radiation dose rates in 2012: the “difficult-to-return zones,” with 50 mSv/year or more; the “restricted residence zones,” between 20 and 50 mSv/year; and the “evacuation order cancellation preparation zones,” with 20 mSv/year or less (Ministry of Health, Labour, & Welfare, 2012). The “difficult-to-return zones” were severely contaminated by radiation and thus decontamination work in those zones is now in progress. Work in the other two zone types was completed in April 2017.

### Theoretical Background of Inquiry

We employed the Trajectory Equifinality Approach (TEA; Sato, 2016), which is one of the approaches in cultural psychology for gauging individuals’ experiences through qualitative research. As Sato (2016) explained, TEA describes the meaning processes of how individuals live their lives in relation to social, historical, and semiotic conditions, considering that people are active, goal-oriented agents. In the present study, we describe and interpret the informant’s meaning process for continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work as a trajectory from the past to the present and future by applying TEA to the narrative; as we indicate later in the Methods section, the interpretation framework used in this study was an analytic tool from cultural psychology as well as TEA.

### Data Collection

**Interviewee recruitment: Historical structured inviting.** The interviews were held with the employee of a company that has been operating the radiation decontamination work in municipality X, Fukushima Prefecture, since 2012. Most of the workers employed by the company were comprised of individuals from

municipality X. Although the company originally was in the business of research and development of farming products, it began to participate in the radiation decontamination business after acquiring the license required for such work in 2012. The interviewee was selected based on the notion of Historical Structured Inviting (HSI). In HSI, the informant, who has a psychological state or life event on which the researcher’s interest is focused, is invited to participate in the research, and then his/her real or possible life event experiences are investigated (Sato, 2016).

**Interviewee.** The interviewee, Mr. Suzuki, was male and in his forties at the beginning of the study in 2014; note that he is described with a false name throughout this manuscript for the purposes of readability and anonymity. The first and third authors have been involved in the company for monthly occupational health support since 2013. Thus, although the authors and employees, including Mr. Suzuki, knew each other before the beginning of the present study, the relationship was that of supporter and support recipient. Through daily conversations with Mr. Suzuki, the following facts were discovered: he was born and raised, and lived all his life, in municipality X, the home of his ancestors, along with his kith and kin; he was employed in the radiation decontamination company as a manager and also worked as a part-time farmer on the family farm; he has also been a member of the neighborhood community association since before the Fukushima plant accident. For these reasons, Mr. Suzuki was a person who knew the state of municipality X and its inhabitants well before and after the plant accident. Thus, we considered that he was a suitable informant for study purposes and invited/recruited him to participate in the present study.

**Interview procedure.** Data collection was conducted longitudinally in time between Mr. Suzuki’s tasks using an ethnographic interview method (Spradley, 1979) by the first author. An ethnographic interview is a method used to gather information in a naturalistic

setting by informal interview, investigating the context of the informant's daily activity (Spradley, 1979). An ethnographic interview method was employed because Mr. Suzuki had no time to be interviewed other than during business hours due to his busy private schedule, and because it was expected that we would come to understand the geographical, spatial, and historical characteristics of municipality X by accompanying him on his work. The following two core questions were used in the interviews: "how did the company engage in radiation decontamination work and how did your role develop in the company?" for understanding the relationship between his psychological state and the company; and "for you, what is the goal of radiation decontamination work?" for pursuing the transformation process of ascribing meaning to the engagement in radiation decontamination work. In addition to these core questions, information such as his personal attachment to municipality X, his relationship with his parents and other residents, and the conflicts he has had with the decisions made by the government and local administration regarding evacuation and reconstruction were collected in the interviews. The form of questions and interview locations changed and remained flexible depending on the interviewee's preferences. Interviews were recorded with notes and, if possible, by IC recorder, and then produced as a transcript.<sup>2</sup>

**Study period, interview times and lengths.** The study was conducted over the period from 2014 to 2019, and Mr. Suzuki was interviewed 16 times: April 24th in 2014; March 24th and April 16th in 2015; April 11th, May 9th, June 6th, November 24th, and December 14th in 2016; March 3rd, July 20th, and September 26th in 2017; February 15th, June 7th, and November 11th in 2018; and February

8th and October 10th in 2019. Although the interview lengths were inconsistent, average interview lengths were 66 min, and the total length was 1,050 min.

### Analysis

The transcript was coded using open coding (Holton, 2007). The first and second authors summarized the narratives in the responses to the core questions and related information about other inhabitants and about municipality X into codes by inductively gathering similar responses in five steps. Numbers of codes were 926, 304, 88, 30, and 11 in each step. The unit of coding was comprised of the combination of information regarding a certain event and responses, such as a feeling or evaluation of that event by the informant.

To identify the narrative content and its transformation process, we placed the codes in steps 4, 5, and/or the raw data of the narratives in chronological order using trajectory equifinality modeling (TEM; Sato, 2016). We used the following explanation regarding TEM and its related concepts adapted from Sato (2016). TEM is a model for depicting the moments when changes occur in the human life trajectory, exploring the social factors that affect those changes within chronological and experience-based periods. We used the following six analytic tools of TEM. Obligatory Passage Point (OPP) is a phase and/or event persons inevitably experience. Equifinality Point (EFP) is the point at which diverse trajectories converge, and is classified into the following three types: Zero EFP, which directs the informant's behavior since before the beginning of study; 1st EFP, which reflects the researcher's a priori interest; and 2nd EFP, which indicates the informant's experience-based time and meaning inductively discovered. Polarized Equifinality Point (P-EFP) is the notion of complementary set of 1st and 2nd EFP to relativize the EFPs. Bifurcation Point (BFP) is the point at which more than two trajectories diverge; in the current study, we depicted the diversity of trajectories by virtually setting the possible trajectories that are actually not selected based on the narrative.

<sup>2</sup>In regard to ethical procedure, this study was approved by the Ethics Committees of first author's affiliation (Application No. 2530). For informed consent procedure, the interviewee had the purpose of the study explained to him and he provided informed consent on a written form.

Social Direction (SD) and Social Guidance (SG) are the forces working in a BFP; SD is the force that obstructs to go toward EFP and SG is the force that helps to go toward EFP. If both SD and SG are present at BFP, the stronger one is considered to be contributing to the actually selected trajectory.

Then we reviewed the raw narratives and the codes in order to theoretically interpret Mr. Suzuki's experience. Our initial research question was “Why has he continuously engaged in radiation decontamination work?,” and thus the event “Continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work” was employed as the 1st EFP. It should be noted that narrative contents were diverse; there were negative narratives that implied reduced motivation or negative feeling regarding radiation decontamination work, rather than the intention of continuing such work. For example, the following excerpt implied that the informant was disappointed in other inhabitants and then reduced his motivation for his work: “there were inhabitants who were uncooperative to reconstruction of this municipality X. I want to say them ‘this is your hometown where you grew up! Don't you think joining in the reconstruction?’ Facing with such situation, I feel tired” (April 11, 2016). Codes generated from such negative narratives were placed near the P-EFP or used as SD. As the interview progressed, the data suggested that continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work did not reflect the informant's focus, but rather mediated his experienced-meaning; thus, we updated our research question to “What has he gained through experience of engagement in radiation decontamination work?” and studied the process from the perspectives of loss and adaptation of hometown based on the narratives. Finally, the 2nd EFP “Revitalization of feeling of hometown” and its corresponding 2nd P-EFP were set.

We inductively determined the following interpretation framework, the Semiotic Trap (Valsiner, 2007). As Carriere (2018) summarized, the semiotic trap is a mechanism by which an individual deals with the tension of facing some kind of symbolic imperative and the recognition of violating that imperative. An

example would be a situation in which an individual makes an unfair, negative assessment of his or her present or future state by remaining trapped in a past value system that is no longer valid, despite the fact that such assessment should be positive. At first, Mr. Suzuki's goal of radiation decontamination work seemed to be guided by the story produced from municipality X before the FNP accident and it was assumed that his future perspectives narrowed and his feeling of hometown loss was manifested. For instance, his narrative, “Hometown is a place where our ancestor is, and thus hometown is special and precious. We (all inhabitants) should be very proud that we can restore our hometown municipality X” (April 11, 2016), emphasized his attachment to municipality X and also indicated normative, or even imperative, feelings that the inhabitants “should” participate in reconstruction work. However, the narrative then seemingly transformed to a tone of loss: “Past residents hardly have returned to here, hometown. There are no longer persons enough for enabling mutual support. Communication among residents for supporting each other, which existed in past, has disappeared” (October 10, 2019). Since the content of these narratives matched well with the concept of the semiotic trap, we employed it as an interpretative framework.

## Results and Discussion

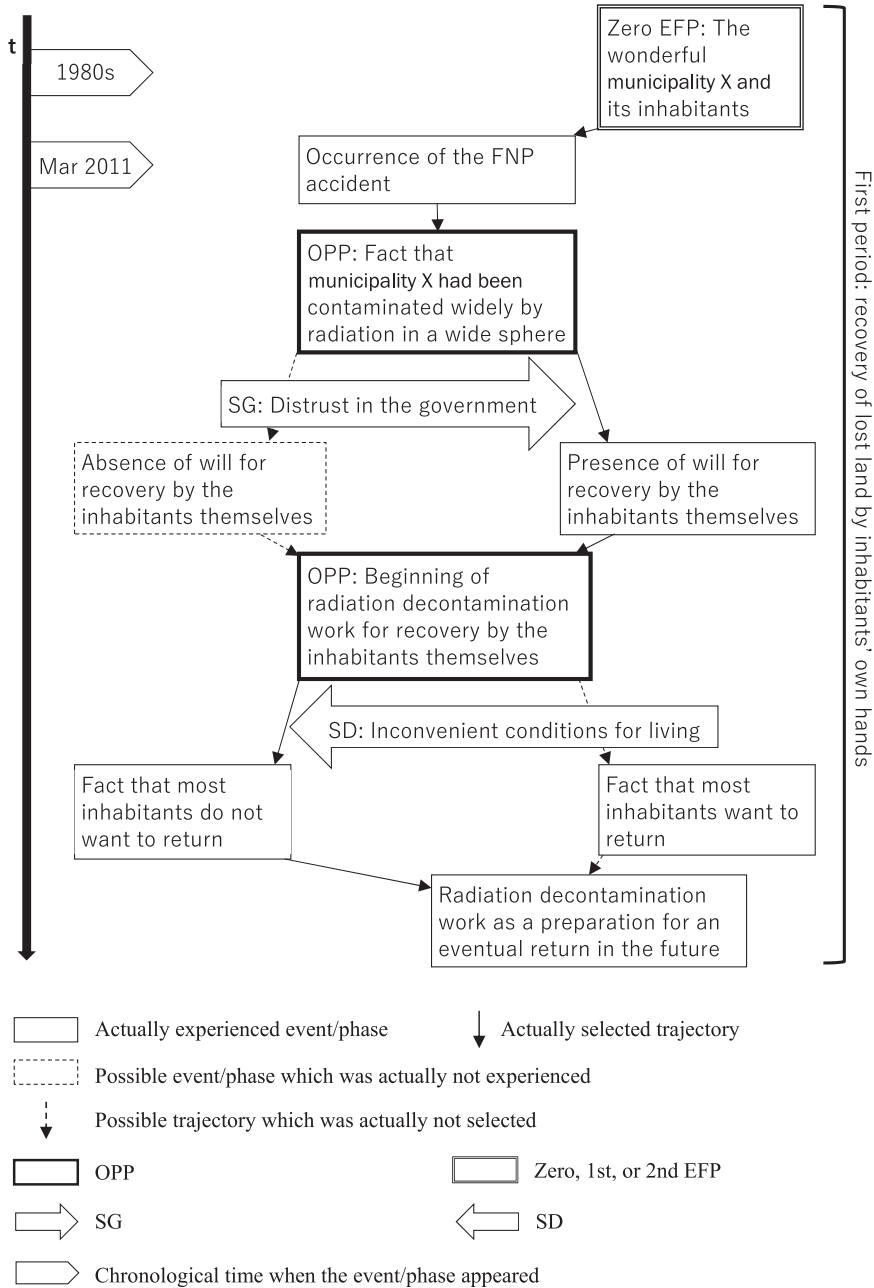
Mr. Suzuki's narrative was classified into the following three periods based on the content: “recovery of lost land by inhabitants' own hands,” “goal loss and semiotic trap in pursuit of recovery,” and “revitalization of feeling of hometown.” The process and its legend are shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3. For the purpose of readability, the code is noted in square brackets and excerpts of the narrative are placed in quotation marks with interview date.

### First Period: Recovery of Lost Land by Inhabitants' Own Hands

The first period began with the Zero EFP [the wonderful municipality X and its inhabitants].

This Zero EFP suggested the presence of shared signs among the inhabitants of municipality X. Past administrative chiefs of municipality X

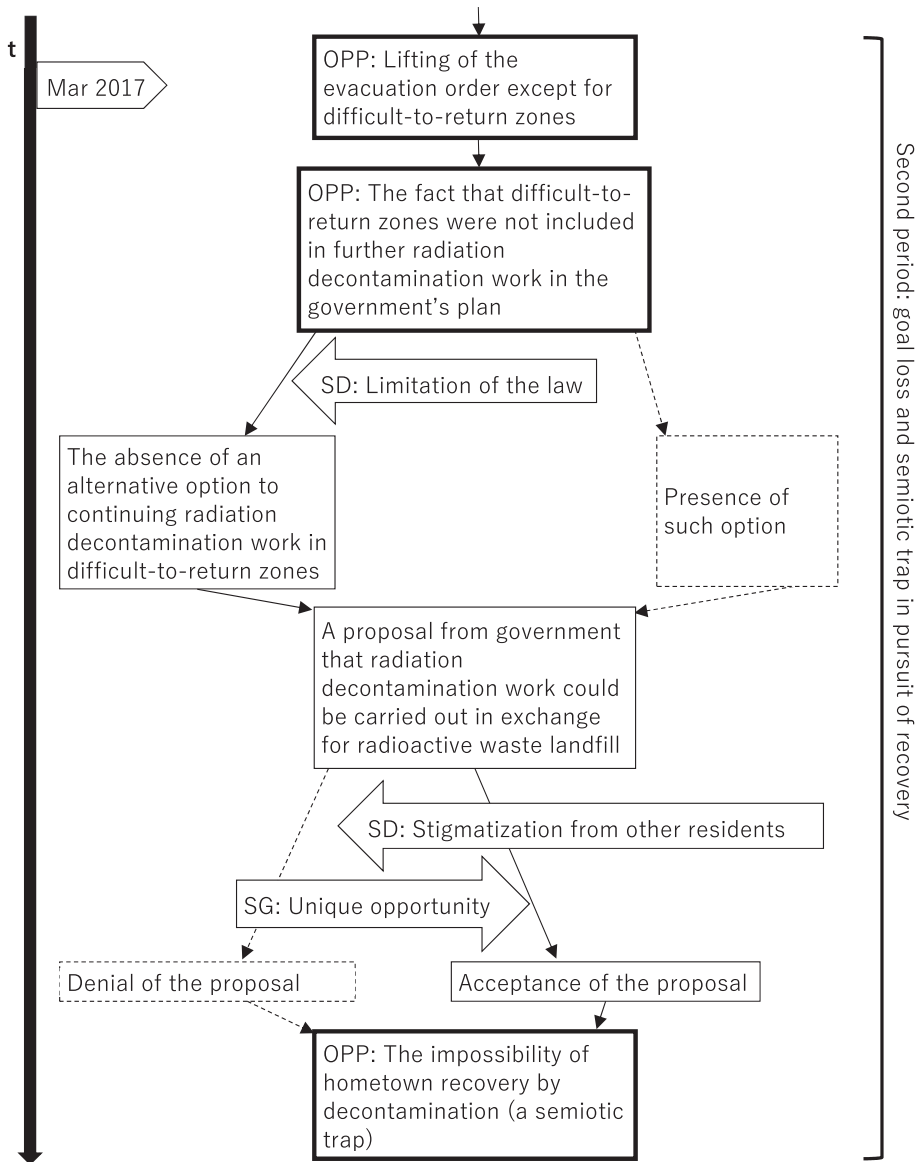
had employed a strategy of appealing to the richness of the natural environment and the goodness of people in municipality X as industrial and



**Figure 1** The process of continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work (first period).

tourism resources as before the FNP accident occurred, the economic status of the area was very low. It is assumed that this strategy was internalized by the inhabitants, including Mr. Suzuki, and was connected with the value of “municipality X is where we should be”: “We inhabitants worked together to improve and to brand our products, such as high quality beef, so that we

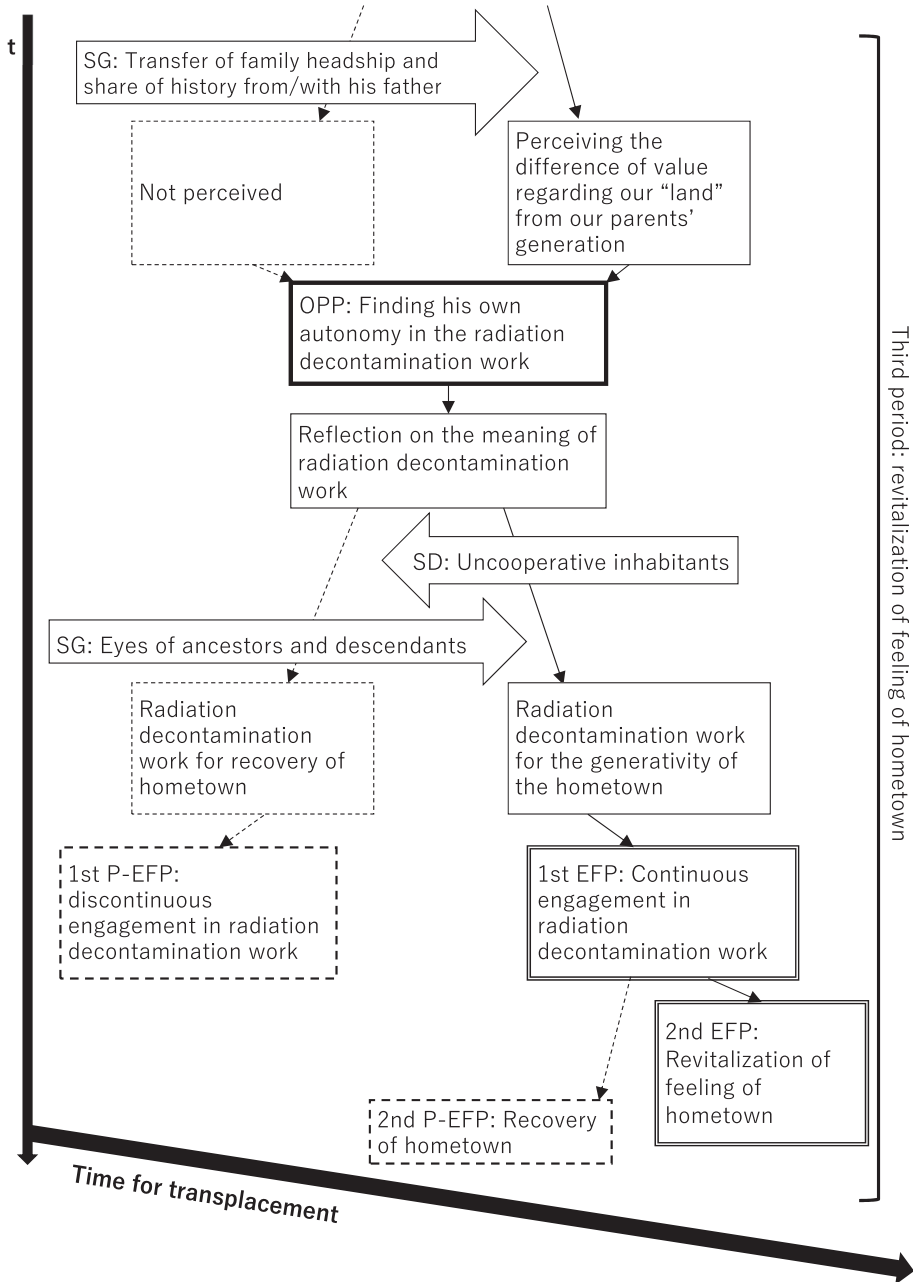
could increase market share even though we lived in this small and inconvenient location (March 24, 2015),” and “the countryside has advantages which the urban city could never have. I will tell you of an episode. When an inhabitant once lost his home in a fire, his neighbors cooperated to support him by lending him a temporary house for free” (October 10, 2019). This code was



**Figure 2** The process of continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work (second period).

considered to be suitable as a Zero EFP because it indicates the presence of a sign which promoted Mr. Suzuki's engagement in radiation decontamination work and determined its goal.

After the [occurrence of the FNP accident], the company began its radiation decontamination business to resolve the [fact that municipality X had been contaminated widely by radiation]. He



**Figure 3** The process of continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work (third period).



had a feeling of [distrust in the government], which led to the idea that the hometown should be restored through the inhabitants’ own hands: “government personnel might not be interested in the reconstruction because they are not inhabitants. In addition, the decontamination plan looked good on paper, but it actually did not meet our needs” (May 9, 2016). The code [beginning of radiation decontamination work for recovery by the inhabitants themselves] indicates that Mr. Suzuki’s initial goal of radiation decontamination work was “recovery” for municipality X. Even when such goal became unstable, he kept working toward “recovery” through a transformative process [radiation decontamination work as a preparation for an eventual return in the future]: “I know evacuees do not necessarily return soon after the completion of radiation decontamination work. Our hometown is in an inconvenient place. But radiation decontamination opens up the possibility of the inhabitants returning home whenever they want to” (June 10, 2016). Although the SD [inconvenient conditions for living] and code [fact that most inhabitants do not want to return] seemed to inhibit his engagement in radiation decontamination work, he continued to engage in such work by setting his goal to a non-specific time or date in the future, an “eventual” return.

### **Second Period: Goal Loss and Semiotic Trap in Pursuit of Recovery**

The first event in this period occurred in March 2017 when there was a [lifting of the evacuation order except for difficult-to-return zones], where Mr. Suzuki’s home was located. In addition to this, there was [the fact that difficult-to-return zones were not included in further radiation decontamination work in the government’s plan]. Therefore, he lost the opportunity to return to his home even in the future. He confronted the issue of [the absence of an alternative option to continuing radiation decontamination work in difficult-to-return zones]. This situation was changed by [a proposal from government that radiation decontamination work could be carried out in exchange for radioactive waste landfill]: “We, the residents of a possible candidate site had the government explain to us that radiation decontamination in difficult-to-return

zones was possible only as part of landfill construction. We would not have a chance to clean up our land if we let this opportunity slip. But I might be regarded as a ‘strange person’ living in a home situated on dangerous radioactive waste if I accepted the proposal ... it could lead to discrimination in the future” (February 8, 2019). Eventually, he accepted the proposal: “Even after acceptance, I remain unconvinced. The point is the lack of discussion on how not to leave the difficult-to-return zone behind. We, residents do not need another reconstruction plan such as industrial revival but want the radiation decontamination. But, I have been asked lots of times by other residents to accept the government’s proposal. I cannot help accepting it and keeping in step due to my position in the community” (October 10, 2019).

Radiation decontamination in exchange for such landfill entailed [the impossibility of hometown recovery by decontamination (a semiotic trap)]. Although he engaged in radiation decontamination work to recover his hometown, he found that such an engagement would, instead, definitely make his hometown an unreturnable place since a landfill site of radioactive waste was apparently uninhabitable. It is assumed that this situation led to two very unwelcoming choices, a “semiotic trap,” a form of a symbolic “capture” (Valsiner, 2007). Initially, Mr. Suzuki engaged in radiation decontamination work for “recovery,” which was mediated by the sign [the wonderful municipality X and its inhabitant]; however, the meaning of engagement in radiation decontamination work in this situation changed to interference in this recovery: “I’m stuck ... The area where my home is located could regress rather than recover” (July 20, 2017).

### **Third Period: Revitalization of Feeling of Hometown**

This period began with the code [perceiving the difference of value regarding our “land” from our parents’ generation] supported by SG [transfer of family headship and share of history from/with his father]. Then, Mr. Suzuki was [finding his own autonomy in the radiation decontamination work] and was engaging in [reflection on the meaning of radiation

decontamination work]. Mr. Suzuki sought a way to generate the possibility of his descendants' returning in the future: "In future, the contamination may be resolved through the innovation of decontamination technology, though I will be dead by that time. It is not acceptable that our land should disappear, and I want to leave open the possibility that my descendants will know that the land existed even though they cannot live there" (November 1, 2018). This future-oriented narrative was considered to be consistent with the concept of "generativity" (Erikson, 1968) and, thus, we created a code [radiation decontamination work for the generativity of the hometown] using this concept. This code was supported by SG [eyes of ancestors and descendants], which suggests the presence of an internal dialogue within Mr. Suzuki: "We have inherited the land from our ancestors, cultivated the fields, and lived here. It is inexcusable if I cannot pass on these things from my ancestors to my descendants (November 1, 2018)" and "I do not have children. But, if possible, I want to explain to my descendants that their existence is due to the efforts made by their ancestors to live here" (February 2, 2019).

The end of the trajectory consists of the following two EFPs: for the 1st EFP, the code [continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work] is the superficial goal that the researchers set preemptively; for the 2nd EFP, the code [revitalization of feeling of hometown] and its opposite [recovery of hometown] are experience-based meanings generated through engagement in radiation decontamination work. The 2nd EFP deals with the psychological construction of place, while the 2nd P-EFP considers place as a physical entity. The 2nd EFP, "feeling of hometown," represents the trait of hometown in which time, place, and self were possibly integrated, instead of the term "hometown" focusing on its physical aspects: "For me, hometown is the place not where visible things are restored, but where I can find invisible things. (in answer to the researcher's question, 'what does hometown mean for you?', June 7, 2018)."

Mr. Suzuki expressed the possibility that a hometown could exist psychologically out of

sight and beyond the physicality of the place, and this suggests that he created the time for the 2nd EFP as the "transplacement." His narrative seemingly became more future-oriented and place-free in the time for transplacement compared to before. He emphasized the need for revitalization work instead of radiation decontamination work, the importance of having confidence via engagement in such work, and the option of quitting his job: "Maintenance agency service for a land in municipality X may be promising work in future because many landowners of municipality X evacuated to distant areas from here and they will have never come back. The land will be conserved if we maintain it instead of being landowners. Now I plan to negotiate a business deal with them (October 10, 2019)," "I am working as manager in this company and, thus, I assume an educational role for the workers sometimes. In lectures, I always tell workers to remind themselves that this radiation decontamination work is a contribution to the community. I hope that the experience in this company empowers the workers (October 10, 2019)," and "I have my doubts that my work truly contributes to other inhabitants and communities because the orientation of the work is determined in relation to the government and administration of municipality X. They do not necessarily respect the intentions of the inhabitants, I feel. Though I could quit the job, I cannot abandon the people in the community" (October 10, 2019).

## General Discussion

We described how Mr. Suzuki's meaning of continuous engagement in radiation decontamination work after the FNP accident was a revitalization of feeling of hometown. His engagement in radiation decontamination work began with a normative sign [the wonderful municipality X and its inhabitant] and, thus, his initial goal was recovery-oriented; however, such a goal became unrealistic in the semiotic trap that engagement in radiation work rather would make his hometown unreturnable. His focus on the psychological aspects instead of

the physical aspects of his hometown led to the creation of a time for transplacement, and such a creation helped him overcome the semiotic trap. Consequently, he could update his narrative, opening up the future possibility of retaining his attachment to municipality X. These results demonstrate that the overcoming of a semiotic trap can be promoted by thinking in a “narrative mode” instead of a “logico-scientific mode,” by which individuals can transform their acts of meaning to life events (Bruner, 1986). It is assumed that it is difficult for an individual in a semiotic trap to esteem his/her current situation; in other words, an individual in such trap may not be able to make existential meaning of their present/future life. As Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006) proposed, the meaning in life is the sense made from the nature of one’s being and existence, and meaning is essentially associated with existential aspects of human life. Thus, thoughts of narrative mode may play a role in the construction of the existential meaning for the individual embroiled in the semiotic trap, where the story for explaining the current situation can connect with the individual’s future, like when Mr. Suzuki discovered his trajectory to revitalization of the feeling of his hometown. It would have been impossible for Mr. Suzuki to escape from the semiotic trap if he was in logico-scientific mode because in this mode the individual pursues a generalized explanation of experiences (Bruner, 1986), captured by rational but negative thoughts: such as, “as a matter of common sense, engagement in radiation decontamination work is a waste of time.”

It is definitely important that the meaning of engagement in radiation decontamination work for Mr. Suzuki was updated through the processes of relationship transformation with others and within himself, such as developing autonomy, having an internal dialogue with his ancestors and descendants, focusing on the generativity of radiation decontamination work for the hometown, and feeling that he could not quit his job due to peers in the community (see narrative excerption October 10, 2019 in third period). As Harvey and Miller (1998) mentioned, some people choose to dedicate

themselves to helping others in the wake of devastating losses, a logic that resonates with Erikson’s idea of generativity. Although their opinion covered the loss experiences in general, an explanation of a psychological mechanism specific to home/hometown loss is required. From the viewpoint of loss of home in cultural psychology, Murrani (2019) asserted that the plasticity of agency in displacement is an instrumental process in encoding new spatial practices of home-making and for differentiating the desire for a homeland leading the act of “return” from a homing desire for home-making. In other words, human plasticity may mediate the meaning construction after home loss in the form of making use of space instead of return, restoration, or recovery. For Mr. Suzuki, such home-making practices were represented as revitalization in the feeling of his hometown.

The formation of the “feeling of hometown” concept may be a good example of the notion that places belong to people, but not vice versa, in cultural psychology (Sato et al., 2012): in other words, it may represent an emergence of place in self. Autonomy and reflection in Mr. Suzuki developed after he shared the family history handed down from his father and an internal dialogue with his ancestors and descendants. This is considered to be a psychological self-willed movement, namely pilgrimage (Valsiner, 2012). Valsiner (2012) stated that pilgrimage is a cultural phenomenon that dynamically unites oppositions, and that the pilgrim’s path is not geographic but psychological. Given his theoretical consideration and our results, such psychological pilgrimage may be considered as dialogue within the self and also contribute to emergence of place within self in time course.

The presence of two kinds of times in TEM indicates the possibility that engagement in radiation decontamination work can be summarized as the following two types of experience: a chronological time, in which the work career progresses; and a time for transplacement, in which the experience of life with radiation decontamination deepens. In a time for transplacement, as Mr. Suzuki explained that radiation decontamination work was a contribution to the community

and was associated with the worker's empowerment, his meaning of engagement in radiation decontamination work seemed to become future-oriented and go beyond persistence in physical place and physical recovery of hometown. It is assumed that the commitment to work in a time of transplacement is in line with the concept of an existential engagement, in which individuals make themselves subjects of the acts of meaning a history through participation in reality (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). The results of the current study suggest the presence of a generative aspect that engagement in work in a transplacement time promotes the creation of a suitable life orientation, creating future perspective. For the association between concept of "engagement" and "work," past studies in occupational health psychology dealing with "work engagement" mainly pursued the continuous engagement in the work itself (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Further, studies on home loss over the years have emphasized the importance of disaster victims' participation in the reconstruction for improved resilience and disaster prevention (Kamani-Fard et al., 2012; Kulig et al., 2013). Whereas these studies emphasize the conditions of adaptation to/after disaster, the results of the present study may provide insight into fundamental psychological mechanisms that may result in adaptive outcomes through the meaning process, specifically, comprehending the bifurcation at which people who engage in reconstruction work, as well as decontamination workers, remain in a semiotic trap or overcome it.

### Conclusion and Limitations

We described how the transformation of meaning from the recovery of hometown to the revitalization of "feeling of hometown" led to the disaster place inhabitant's continuous engagement in reconstruction work, such as radiation decontamination, updating the narrative regarding their hometown to overcoming the loss of a goal. Importantly, psychological reconstruction for disaster victims requires the discovery and

revitalization of feeling of hometown rather than the completion of physical reconstruction; in other words, such psychological reconstruction may not be achieved without the emergence of feeling of hometown even when the hometown is physically recovered.

This study employed a qualitative study with a study design involving the interviewing of one person. We believe that transferrable knowledge could be proposed by describing the social power that is possibly common in people and which channels the human life trajectory, conducting a theoretical interpretation in the process. However, our analysis may have been somewhat superficial since we focused on a holistic trajectory of experience in the interviewee and, thus, we could not include detailed internal psychological processes. Future study should depict the said processes for further clarification of the relationship between place and human experience.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest associated with this manuscript.

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