



Commentator

“Home” and the People of Fukushima

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Listening to four panelists today brought to my mind the theme of “home” (kokyô), but before I speak of this theme, let me say a few words about my discipline, anthropology. Anthropologists have long resisted the study of migration, as they regarded migrants locating in between cultures: they are to be acculturated, so while they are on the move, they are not appropriate subjects for anthropologists to study. Considering that humans have constantly moved since the time immemorial, anthropologists’ “allergy” to migration seems strange. Today, however, “migration” has become one of the most important and popular topics among us. Yet this “migration” is not, or no longer, the migration from one place to another; rather, this “migration” represents the increase of the so-called “nomadic people,” who are constantly on the move and thus seen as people who lost homes.

Mr. Chinen spoke of the Uchinanchû returning to Okinawa from around the world once a year. Here, “returning” does not mean to return to Okinawa permanently and live here. Rather, they go back again to the place where they live now. This is more of the “making” of a home. For example, one Uchinanchû made a home

in Los Angeles; he would make a temporary home in Okinawa when he returns to this island; he nourishes his soul on this island; but he will go back again to Los Angeles, another home for him. “Home,” then, is not a place to “return” to; rather it is a place to “make.” If so, the so-called “nomadic” people are by no means the people who lost homes; they are the ones who “make” homes as they move. I too am one of those nomads. Having been moving back and forth between Japan and America, I no longer know which one is my home. I think I have made a home in America but make a home in Japan whenever I return.

The man-made disaster of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, however, has created the situation in which people cannot make homes any longer. Those people who have lived near this power plant made homes many decades or even centuries ago. However, they had to leave due to something they do not even see—radioactive isotopes that have contaminated and continue to contaminate for millions of years from now on the place where they lived. Can they imagine their home when they return to Fukushima, as the Uchinanchû can do so when they return to Okinawa? I doubt

they can, for the land has already been contaminated to the point at which the complete decontamination is not possible. This is extremely sad, but if we understand that “home” is a place to make, we feel a bit, only a bit in this situation, better. The people of Fukushima should be allowed to make homes wherever they want, and the

Japanese government and the TEPCO should assist them in this process. And if they want to make Fukushima as their home again, the government and the TEPCO should also assist them to do so. Home is to make, yet everyone needs home however temporary it is.