



Research Article

The Sociocultural Meaning of “My Place”: Rural Korean Elderly People's Perspective of Aging in Place

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Aging in place becomes an important concept in elderly care plans worldwide. It pursues to enhance quality of later lives and maintain dignity in older adults. However, one's own place may have some kinds of symbols and meanings to an individual in accordance with the culture he/she belongs to. Without considering it, many cultural conflicts can emerge when policies are realized. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the sociocultural meaning of “my place” for elderly Koreans ahead of enacting a policy for the so-called “integrated community care” in South Korea, pursuant to aging in place for the elderly population.

Methods: This study used an ethnographical methodology. The data were collected by observation, in-depth interviews with 10 informants, home visits, field notes, and photos, and analyzed using Spradley's ethnographic approach.

Results: As a result, the cultural theme of “my place” in elderly Koreans was “A place that makes me be present.” Three categories representing the meaning of “my place” were emerged: keeping me safe and comfortable, representing my life, and maintaining my control and influence.

Conclusion: Researchers and policymakers should carefully consider the sociocultural perspective when planning, moderating, and implementing a new long-term care policy to achieve aging in place in South Korea.

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Introduction

As life expectancy increases, many countries encounter demographic changes in which the proportion of the aging population grows rapidly. In this regard, policies and care systems worldwide are focusing on enhancing the quality of life (QOL) or dignity in older adults [1–3].

“Aging in place” (AIP) is a popular term related to aging issues. It refers to an elderly person's ability to live independently and safely in his/her own place for as long as possible [3]. Many countries are adopting this concept of AIP in their policies for the elderly, aiming to enhance QOL through community-based care. Indeed, it is known that older adults prefer to live in their own homes, which

are more familiar and comfortable. As such, AIP ensures a more independent life, preserving a certain level of competency and autonomy [4].

South Korea is experiencing rapid demographic changes as well. Korea officially became an “aged society” in 2017, meaning that the proportion of the aging population reached 14% of the total population [5]. The rate of aging in Korea has been fast in that it took just 17 years to go from an “aging society,” meaning that the elderly represents 7% of the total population, to an “aged society.” At this rate, Korea is expected to become a “superaged society” by 2026. This rapid increase in the older population is expected to trigger sharp increases in medical costs and efforts to manage chronic diseases for the elderly, sequentially increasing the burden on families and the country [6].

Considering this situation, the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Korea has announced a blueprint of care service plans for the elderly called a “community care” (CC) policy. CC refers to a community-based and regional-driven social service care plan in which housing, health care, and various supports for independent living are all secured in an integrated manner so that older adults

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can receive services based on their individual needs while remaining in the community where they have always lived. Pursuing the idea of AIP, CC respects the elderly's right to live in their own places by providing adequate community-based care [6]. CC particularly targets vulnerable elderly people returning home from hospitals or facilities and needing consequent care. Thus, it is anticipated that CC will prevent their families from sending them to hospitals or facilities as a way to reduce the burden of care [7].

However, AIP is not always the best option, especially in a society such as South Korea where the proportion of elderly people living alone is increasing (19.7% in 2008 and 23.6% in 2017), as is the suicide rate in older adults, which is much higher in South Korea than in other countries (21.1% of elderly people showed depressive symptoms; 6.7% showed suicidal ideation) [8]. They may suffer from loneliness or a lack of support when living in their own places by themselves. Delayed access to resources such as medical facilities is also possible [9]. This is especially true when residential areas are marginalized or isolated and when the elderly person lives alone.

To compensate for the negative aspects of AIP and enhance the feasibility of the policy, the cultural peculiarities of South Korea should be considered. For instance, in Taiwan, which also faces the issues of a growing elderly population, the elderly find it most ideal to be cared by family at home; thus, adult children feel guilty about sending their parents to a facility [10]. Taking this strong family-oriented tradition and other cultural values, Taiwan's government developed a community-based care system (Long-Term Care 2.0) according to which older adults can receive various care services within their own homes and the communities in which they reside [11]. Still, a wide range of academic and practical efforts continue, aiming to enable as many households and older adults as possible to use the services without cultural value conflicts [10,12].

Meanwhile, despite the rapid changes in policies and systems along with the increasing aging population, there has been no attempt to explore sociocultural meanings in the concepts related to aging in South Korea. Although CC and AIP are the main concepts that the national policies and care plans pursue, the cultural meaning of home—not merely the house itself but also the community—has not been explored. For the policies and systems of CC to take root in Korean society, it is essential to understand the sociocultural meanings of one's own place for elderly Koreans.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the sociocultural meaning of “my place,” including home and community, for older Korean adults. This is an essential part of the development and implementation of the policy, the goal of which is to enable people to stay in their homes and communities as they age.

Methods

Study design

Ethnography pursues to describe a culture to understand a life from the native's perspectives [13]. Therefore, researchers used an ethnographic qualitative approach suggested by Spradley [13] to examine the meaning of “my place” for elderly Koreans. Specifically, researchers used diverse methods such as conversations with many elderly people in the community including 10 informants who provided rich data, observation of their natural lives, home visits, in-depth interviews, field notes, and photos. Researchers adhered to standards for reporting qualitative research to report this study [14].

Informants and data collection

To collect the data, researchers targeted a suburb located in the city of Gimcheon, called Bu-Hang. Gimcheon is one of the cities in

South Korea that has been challenged by lower fertility rates and a higher aged population. In particular, Bu-Hang, which is located in a rural area of Gimcheon and has an area of 82.64 km² and 1,322 dwellers, is one of the superaged towns in South Korea in which 43.3% of the population was 65 years old and older, and the mean age of the population was 59.2 years in 2019 [15]. The town is quite a remote area where there is a lack of transportation system and no city gas line. The people in the town mainly do farming for their living. Researchers chose this town because there are many older adults who had lived in the same place their whole lives, so researchers considered it to be a suitable place to examine the sociocultural meaning of “my place” from the perspective of AIP.

Researchers visited Bu-Hang once a week from May 9 to August 9 in 2019, along with a local social worker who regularly does the round visit twice a week to check up on the older adults in the community. Researchers spent about six to eight hours in the community per visit. Researchers did the round visit of elder people's homes with the social worker and often worked together with the elderly in the fields. Researchers also spend many times in the community halls where many elder people spend most of their times. While staying in the community, researchers observed the older people's lives in natural settings, freely asked questions, and spoke with the people in the community. Researchers took photos of the older people in their ordinary lives and wrote field notes about all of the information researchers heard and observed. Unfortunately, researchers were able to speak with few older male adults in the community because the majority of the older population was women.

In addition, researchers selected informants among the people in the community to collect rich data. The inclusion criteria for selecting informants were as follows: (1) aged 65 years and older, (2) able to communicate, (3) understanding the purpose of the study and agreeing to participate in the study, and (4) willing to invite us to their home and provide information under informed consent.

A total of 10 informants were recruited. The demographic information of the informants is listed in Table 1. Researchers made prior appointments with the informants before visiting their homes and then visited each informant's home at the time of appointment. Researchers spent one to two hours in each home. During the home visit, in-depth interviews were conducted with each informant. The semistructured interview lasted between 40 and 50 min. Examples of open-ended questions included the following: (1) How is your life going? (2) What does home/community mean to you? and (3) What are your feelings or thoughts when you think of your home/community? To clarify their thoughts on their home/community, researchers also asked about their honest thoughts on senior facilities, such as retirement homes, senior nursing homes, and hospitals—to contrast with the concept of their own home/community. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Photo elicitation was also carried out. With permission from the informants and the social worker, one or two photos of each informant were taken to reveal their natural lives in their own homes during observation. Researchers discussed the photos with the informants during the interviews (Figure 1).

Ethical considerations

The Institutional Review Board of Inha University approved this study (Approval no. 190222-1A). In addition, the administrator of Bu-Hang understood the purpose of this study and gave permission to collect data from the community. A social worker in charge of taking care of the elderly population in Bu-Hang accompanied us while collecting the data. Finally, researchers obtained permission

Table 1 Characteristics of the Informants Participating in the In-depth Interview through Home Visits (N = 10).

ID	Gender	Age (yrs)	Years of living in the community/house	Cohabitant	Family	
					Spouse	Children
1	Woman	80	57/57	None	dec. in 2005	1 son and 3 daughters
2	Woman	83	63/7	None	dec. in 1999	2 sons
3	Woman	81	38/18	None	dec. in 2015	2 sons and 2 daughters
4	Woman	77	55/55	None	dec. in 1995	3 sons and 1 daughter
5	Woman	75	56/40	None	dec. in 1995	1 son and 3 daughters
6	Woman	74	50/50	None	dec. in 1975	1 son and 2 daughters
7	Woman	78	57/57	None	dec. in 2017	3 sons and 1 daughter
8	Woman	85	60/60	None	dec. in 2009	3 sons and 1 daughter
9	Woman	84	64/10	None	dec. in 1984	2 sons and 2 daughters
10	Woman	87	87/37	None	dec. in 2015	2 sons (1dec.) and 4 daughters

Note. dec. = deceased; yrs = years.

from the informants of this study to visit their houses, conduct and record interviews, and take photos and notes.

Data analysis

Researchers continued to visit the community until researchers completed the data analysis to fully ensure data saturation. The data were analyzed by ethnographic methods suggested by Spradley [13], which consisted of domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and discovery of cultural themes.

Above all, interview transcripts were read carefully several times along with reviewing other collected data, including field notes, photos, and official data from the websites. Then, domains—categories of cultural meanings—were discovered from the collected data. Researchers began by extracting culturally

meaningful domains related to our research questions from the interview transcripts. At this point, other data (e.g., photos, field notes, and official data) were used to help us understand and identify additional culturally meaningful domains. Various domains emerged showing how the elderly Korean population perceived their places, including home and community. Similar domains were merged, and specific details were categorized into relevant domains. For a taxonomic analysis, researchers built a domain structure with the domains based on semantic relationships. Thus, several related domains were categorized into cover domains, and those were again merged into broader categories. Next, for a componential analysis, researchers clarified and refined our results by asking the elderly people additional questions during our visits. In particular, researchers tried to reveal a cultural meaning of “my place” for elderly Koreans by contrasting the 10



Figure 1. Ethnographic photos presenting the sociocultural meaning of ‘my place’ in rural Korean elderly people. (A) Still being productive: A Korean older adult in the community is working in the fields. (B) Being able to be a good parent to my children: One informant is making pickled garlic (Korean food) for her son. (C) A place where I can meet my people: One informant is serving a cup of tea for the researchers who visited her home. (D) Family-like relationship with neighbors: Older people in the community are playing a game at the community hall.

informants' thoughts regarding senior facilities, which researchers asked about during the interviews.

After spending considerable time in this cultural context and rigidly analyzing the data researchers collected, researchers confirmed that three categories, eight cover domains, and nineteen included domains had emerged to describe what “my place” means to elderly Koreans. These are shown in Figure 2, and researchers tried to use in vivo codes (informants' exact words and expressions) when labeling them. Finally, researchers discovered a cultural theme presenting the sociocultural meaning of “my place” for the elderly Korean population: A place that makes me be present.

Trustworthiness of the study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, researchers tried to enhance its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [16]. To ensure credibility, researchers spent a considerable time at the site where data collection took place. This helped us to develop a familiarity with the culture and understand the cultural meanings [17]. In addition, researchers used a peer debriefing method in which a qualitative researcher with a PhD in nursing confirmed the cultural theme as well as the categories and domains by going back and forth between the conceptual coding scheme and the interview data. To ensure transferability and dependability, researchers provided detailed descriptions in terms of research design, procedures, and results. Finally, in regard to confirmability, a social worker who had worked with the elderly in Bu-Hang for three years agreed with the results of this study, including the cultural theme and the conceptual coding scheme.

Sensitivity of the researcher

The authors of this study began to wonder how elderly Koreans perceive their homes when the Korean government announced a blueprint of CC policy. In particular, the corresponding author, who is a psychiatric nursing specialist, had been highly interested in the lives of the Korean elder population residing in rural areas as she performed dementia prevention programs for Korean elderly people few years ago. Both authors have expertise in conducting qualitative studies. The first author taught ‘qualitative methodology’ in the graduate program, and the corresponding author of this study has several experiences of conducting in-depth interviews with vulnerable people for a qualitative study, such as violence victims and people with mental disorders.

Results

From the ethnographical data, three categories, eight cover domains, and nineteen included domains emerged to present the sociocultural meaning of “my place” for the elderly Korean population. The cultural theme of “my place” is “A place that makes me be present.” Three categories that show the meaning of “my place” are (1) keeping me safe and comfortable, (2) representing my life, and (3) maintaining my control and influence.

Keeping me safe and comfortable

While visiting the community, researchers saw many elderly people spending time at home taking a nap or resting. Thus, the first category represented the basic functions of the house and

A Sociocultural Meaning of ‘My Place’ in Rural Korean Elderly

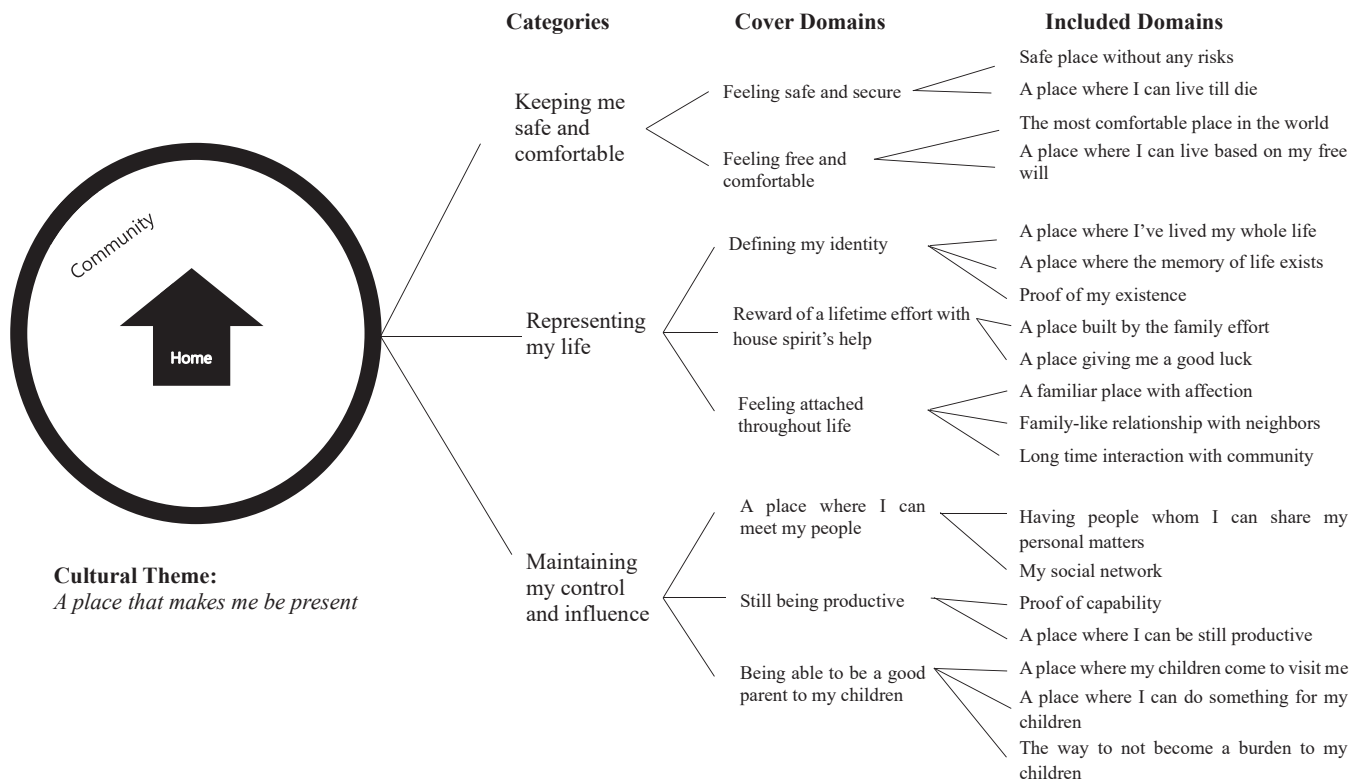


Figure 2. A sociocultural meaning of ‘my place’ in rural Korean elderly people.

community that the informants expressed, such as safety, stability, freedom, and comfort. In this category, two cover domains were included: (1) feeling safe and secure and (2) feeling free and comfortable.

The elderly people believed it was safe to live in their homes and community. Researchers could infer this from their strong rejection and distrust of care facilities such as nursing homes for the elderly. Many of the elderly people researchers met, including the informants, mentioned stories they had heard about elderly people who had died or were injured while living in a facility. Although the facts of the rumors could not be ascertained, distrust in facilities seemed to be high.

There is no freedom (in such facilities), you know, freedom. They don't even give you enough to eat. That's what people say. They say when you or your relatives bring snacks for you, the facility people do not give you enough because they are afraid you are going to poo and pee too much. (informant 1)

Stability was another issue for elderly Koreans in terms of living in their homes. They believed their home gave them stability; however, this seemed to be achieved only when the ownership of the house was secured. Indeed, almost all informants mentioned that the ownership of their houses was what mattered. The informants who owned their houses were relieved when they said that they had no fear of being evicted while alive. In contrast, those who did not own their houses showed anxiety, and they felt a great threat that they might have to move when they are older.

It is good to have this house under my name. It feels good and comfortable to own a house. (informant 3)

Because I live in someone else's house, I always feel anxious. I don't know when they will ask me to get out because it is someone else's house. (informant 2)

The elderly also felt that their homes and communities were free and comfortable places. They were in places where one could cook and eat according to one's preference without having to adjust to others or go out according to one's own will without having to get permission from others.

In my house, I can do whatever I want. I go where I want to because no one stops me from doing that. But, you see, (in the facilities for the elderly) you have to eat what you are given, and when they tell you to sit still, you have to sit still. (informant 5)

Representing my life

According to the informants, their living places—home and community—were not just a concept of residential space but also symbolic of their lives. Three cover domains were included in this second category: (1) defining my identity, (2) reward of lifetime effort with the house spirit's (*Jib-Tur's*) help, and (3) feeling attached throughout life.

All of the informants had lived in this community for about 40 to 80 years, which was almost their whole lives. Most informants said they had lived in one place with their in-laws because they married at the young age of 18 or 19 years. (Culturally, older Korean adults describe marriage as “move to in-law's house.”) For this reason, all of their life memories existed in their houses and communities. During interviews and home visits, the informants spent a lot of time talking about their home- and community-related memories.

When researchers remodeled this house 30 years ago, my husband invited his high school buddies, and they played traditional Korean band music. That has remained my biggest memory. That was the happiest time in my life. (informant 8)

I moved to my in-law's house at the age of 19. I've been living here with my husband for 57 years. (informant 7)

Because they have lived in one place for so long, the home has become a symbol of their lives and their existence. One informant thought of her house as a place where others could remember her life, and she wished for her children to visit the house after she dies to remember her. Another informant wanted to give her house to her oldest son who would take over the ancestral rites for her.

Even after I die, I hope my children will not sell this house and just come and go like their hometown... This house has let me live my life. That's the meaning of this house. (informant 6)

I will give this house to my son because he is the one who will practice the memorial rituals... to my son, my eldest son ... This house must be given to the son who will do the rituals. (informant 9)

Interestingly, many informants mentioned the house spirit (in Korean, *Jib-Tur*—literally, the site of the house). They believed that they could not live in the house if they were not compatible with their *Jib-Tur*. In addition, they talked about how well they fit with their *Jib-Tur* and how it gave them good luck. With the help from the *Jib-Tur*, they could raise children, save money, and stay healthy while living in their house. They said they had worked hard and made a great effort to own a house. They believed that their houses were the reward for their lifetime's hard work and that this would be difficult to achieve without the house spirit's help.

My husband built this house, so I have to live here. Researchers were starving because researchers did not have much to eat when building this house (because researchers were economically bad off). That's how researchers lived. (informant 7)

I think this Jib-Tur has brought me luck. I've made my living and worked here without getting ill so far. (informant 8)

Finally, many elderly people in the community, including all the informants, showed a great attachment to the familiar places of home and community, including the neighbors.

I love it (my house). I am happy here... because this is the place I feel attached to. What else can it be? I lived here with my husband, and so I feel so attached to it. I've never thought of selling this house and going to some other place. (informant 1)

Particularly, the informants referred to their neighbors as people with whom they had interacted like family for a long time. Still now, neighbors in the community are helping each other and experiencing life's great events together. Researchers also observed that people in the community spend most of their time together at the village hall playing traditional Korean games. They seemed to know everything about each other, shared food, and took meals together. Specifically, giving someone something to eat is seen as a sign of affection. The elderly people in the community gave us a lot of food during these visits.

Researchers (people in my neighborhood) are like a family. They call 119[911] if I become sick. When I am sick, they come and see if I am OK, and if I'm not home, they look for me and ask around. (informant 4)

When I first came back to my home alone after my husband's death, the hometown grandmas took me to the village hall, fed me, and took me home. People in this village are warm-hearted. I feel comfortable here. (informant 5)

Maintaining my control and influence

The last category focused on power and productivity in the elderly. Many informants believed that they could be powerful and influential in their own places, and indeed, researchers observed many of them working in their houses and fields. This category included three cover domains: (1) a place where I can meet my people, (2) still being productive, and (3) being able to be a good parent to my children.

The elderly people in the community were actually spending much time with people they were close to, and they put importance on such meetings. The informants showed a strong disagreement with our statement that they could still meet people at the facilities. They stressed that they valued intimacy with people they met. Actually, they formed close groups in their neighborhoods. Homes and neighborhoods were especially important places to meet with people. They invited close people to their homes or were invited to others' homes, and they always served tea or fruits when people came to visit.

I like it when my friends come to my house. When they come to my house, researchers drink tea and eat something, and researchers visit with one another. (When they come) I give them tea and fruit or something like that. I also go their homes, and they do the same for me. (informant 3)

In addition, researchers saw that the homes of elderly Koreans were a means for them to live a productive life. Most of the elderly people in the community worked productively in their homes, paddies, and fields. They farmed, harvested, and shared their crops with their neighbors. Many informants said they felt rewarded for their productive activities. In contrast, they thought that aging in a facility was a passive and unproductive life.

I still like to work in the field because, after I finish my work in the field, I will have a good harvest. That's what I like... and I feel that's rewarding and worthwhile. (informant 1)

When I get up, I wash my rags and clean the floor... From time to time, I straighten my back, and I feel good. (informant 6)

(Facilities for the elderly) Dear, how can it be good? I am not going there because it is a living hell. Don't do that to me. I can't even work there. Well, I get locked up and can't do anything. (informant 7)

Finally, the home had a meaning of preserving a parent's role for elderly Koreans. Home was a place where the children came to see them and where they could make some food for their children so that they could still play a parent's role for their children. Many elderly people in the community were very happy with their children's visits and looked forward to their arrival. Many of them talked to us about their children and boasted about their children's jobs or work although researchers had just met.

My youngest kid likes the side dishes that I've made for him. So, when he (my youngest son) comes to my house, I prepare some greens and side dishes for him to take home. (informant 9)

When I can give them [children] Kimchi or other things, (I feel good). When I make Kimchi in my house and my sons and

daughters take it, I feel good, even though it may take some doing for me. (informant 6)

On the other hand, for elderly Koreans, living in one's own home by themselves seemed also to be related to thoughts that they did not want to burden their children. Although it has long been considered a virtue for children to serve and support their old parents, most informants stated that living with their adult children and receiving their support would be such a burden to adult children. They believed that aging in a facility for the elderly would put financial burdens on their children as well. For these reasons, they insisted on living alone.

My son says that he will not send me to a nursing home (and will take care of me by himself), but I know the current era is not such a time, so I need to take control of my own life. I am not going to my son's house. Whether it is inevitable or not, once I go to my son's house, it will be heavy in my mind... I am satisfied (living alone in my house). I've got to live by myself, errrrr. (informant 2)

Even if I get sick, I will not go to my son's house. This is not such a time, is it? Researchers can't go (to the children's house) in this era. (informant 9)

Discussion

For elderly Koreans, their own homes and communities were the places that made them feel present and alive. It meant keeping them safe and comfortable, representing their lives, and maintaining their control and influence.

Wiles et al [4], who explored the meaning of AIP for older people in New Zealand, reported that the meaning of AIP was related to their sense of attachment, security, familiarity, independence, autonomy, and social connection. This result was similar to that of our study in that the older Korean adults researchers met also stressed that their places were safe, secure, familiar, and comfortable, and they could keep their autonomy and independence. However, obviously, there were cultural specific findings in our results that have not been revealed in other studies; therefore, researchers discussed the meaning of "my place" by focusing on sociocultural aspects in Korea and provided policy implications based on this.

First of all, in Korean culture, the house is an important symbol to people. They believe that the house spirit exists at the site of the house (*Jib-Tur*), positively or negatively influencing the people who reside there. There are several cultural myths in some countries related to house spirits which protect the family residing the house [18]. For instance, in Finnish mythology, a spirit named "haltija" lives in the attics or barns of the house and protects the family who lives there. In Japanese folklore, the invisible household spirit "zashiki-warashi" becomes visible to the owners of a house when they decide to leave the house. Their leaving house is considered as a sign of bad luck in family, so the people consider this spirit as good luck. *Jib-Tur* in Korea, on the other hand, has a power, and it was believed that too much power of *Jib-Tur* would hurt or kill the family. However, family members were blessed if they were well matched with *Jib-Tur*. Nonetheless, this spiritual perspective has not been considered in terms of AIP as far as researchers know. Therefore, further investigation is needed.

Second, whether the house belonged to them or not was important to elderly Koreans. It was more than just a fear of being homeless and unstable, that is, for them, the house was more like their own identity. For example, the people who did not own a house described themselves as wanderers who could not achieve

anything. In contrast, those owning a house felt very proud of themselves and thought of the house as a result of their lifelong efforts. This finding can be interpreted with other research studies that explored correlating factors in achieving successful aging for elderly Koreans [19], reporting that unlike other Western countries, economic status and stability is an important factor to elderly Koreans in their aging experiences. They asserted that the economic condition and its stability were highly related to psychological well-being in elderly Koreans, and this is understandable when looking back at the historical period in which they lived. The current elderly Korean population underwent rapid and critical social changes, from Japanese colonialism and the Korean War in the 1940s and 1950s to the economic boom in the 1960s and 1970s. Especially during the economic boom, the government and public motivated people to work hard and earn foreign currency by emphasizing the traditional Korean virtue “loyalty to country.” Older people, the Korean workers at that time, believed that they should revive the nation by hard work, and that was the way to be loyal to the nation [20]. Thus, elderly Korean people's thoughts about economic conditions and home ownership may represent those years.

Third, maternal affection in Korean women was fully manifested in the meaning of their home. Perhaps because of the influence of Confucianism, the informants expressed a stronger maternal affection toward their sons. All of the informants prepared foods for their sons (and occasionally for their daughters) at home and felt happy as mothers when their adult children took the foods. Indeed, there have been many studies about Korean women's strong maternal affection toward their children, influenced by Confucianism [21,22]. Korean women had traditionally considered it a virtue to raise the children well and support their children's success. Their children's success was regarded as their own success and their family's honor [21]. In fact, during our visits to Bu-Hang, researchers were surprised that many older people in the community talked about how socially successful and well grown up their children were although researchers had just met.

Finally and most importantly, the older Korean adults researchers met through this study wished to stay in their own places until death, and this was consistent with findings in the previous literature [3,4,23]. Indeed, according to the national data [8], 57.2% of Korean adults say that they wish to die at home. Nonetheless, during this study, researchers became curious whether the elders really desire to stay at home or just have no particular place to go. After asking further in-depth questions, researchers came to understand that most of them did prefer to stay at home and did not want to go to a facility; on the other hand, aging in their own house was also a way for them to not become a burden to their children. They were lonely and showed anxiety and a fear of being alone, especially when they were sick. Korea, which has long been a Confucian country, had considered it a virtue for children to support their old parents. Nonetheless, the elderly confessed that they cannot burden their children because society has changed, and that was one of the reasons why they insisted to live in their own house by themselves. Lum et al. [1], who focused on socioeconomic status in elderly Chinese city dwellers in terms of their AIP preference, reported that very low income and community resources, including medical facilities, were related to their preferences of AIP. Bu-Hang was not a low-income town, but it did not have many accessible resources. There might be cultural issues in terms of the preference of AIP in elderly Korean people. Therefore, elderly Koreans' preference for AIP should be deeply investigated with various conditions through further research.

There are several implications for further research and policies on AIP based on the findings. First, the Korean government should consider the country's traditional values when planning and

implementing new policies. Under the influence of familism, elderly Koreans belong to a generation that values family and considers the role of parents as a virtue [21]. The elderly researchers met in this study waited every day for their adult children to visit them. In addition, although researchers could not interview their adult children in person, the informants gave the impression that their children seemed to feel guilty about the parents living alone. In light of this, evidence-based nursing care services and systems are needed that will help preserve the traditional values of the family and community as part of CC. As the latest trend, using technology can be one option. Wang et al. [24] introduced the usage of mobile and wearable devices in older adults AIP in the US in their article and reported that most older adults were interested in sharing the data through the device with families, friends, and health providers.

Second, various and accessible community resources should be constructed, especially in rural areas. Those resources should include not only medical facilities but also adequate spaces for community gatherings. Those spaces could reduce the elderly's loneliness and help them to maintain their social engagement.

Finally, various elderly abuse and neglect cases at some geriatric care centers have scared some elderly people and have forced them to stay at home. Therefore, a strong and rigid legal system to prevent elderly abuse should be established.

Some limitations of this study should be considered: this study only targeted one town in South Korea. Perhaps, the findings would be different with elderly people living in urban areas. In addition, researchers were unable to recruit older male adults as informants. For the aforementioned reasons, caution should be taken when generalizing the results of this study.

Conclusion

The national plans for AIP have already begun in Korea and are picking up the pace. Still many older adults hope to age at home; however, researchers should understand that it was not only because of the familiar building itself but also because there are many meanings that are implicit in it. Through this study, researchers tried to explore a sociocultural meaning of “my place” in Korean older adults living in rural areas. Their place was a symbol of representing their presence. Therefore, the stakeholders in South Korea now have to think about how to make them meaningfully present and exist in the society, rather than just how to make them live. Importantly, enhancing the QOL and maintaining dignity to the end for elderly people can be achieved in consideration of the social culture of a nation rather than unquestioningly following the global trend.

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Conflict of interest

The authors of this study declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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