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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
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Unwelcome Home: Ethnic Ethos, Gender and Class of North Korean Refugees and Migrants

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in East Asian Languages and Literatures

by

Eun Ah Cho

Dissertation Committee:  
Associate Professor Serk-Bae Suh, Chair  
Professor Kyung Hyun Kim  
Associate Professor Chungmoo Choi

2017



## **DEDICATION**

To

my parents and sister

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I now turn homeward, to my teachers in Sungkyunkwan University. My MA advisor, Ho-duk Hwang, began my journey in academia by teaching me the pleasure of reading and writing. His theoretical enrichment of my own understanding and the art he has shown in his writing have never failed to boost my enthusiasm for research. Professor Jung-hwan Cheon, for his part, has shown me how to live as a scholar in Korea; I deeply admire his way of communicating with people and the world. Professor Kee-hyung Han has taught me how to endeavor to research



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Irvine life was great with my colleagues and friends. I am particularly grateful to my trusted seniors, Yun-Jong Lee, Hyonhui Choe, and Hyun Seon Park, and I also thank my dear friends Jessica Kim Conte, Eun-Young Seung, Anat Schwartz, Kiki Ssu-Fang Liu, Jean Tsui, Tiffany Tsai, Tian Li, Ying Liu, Henry Lem, Seu-Heun Kim, Edith Huarita, and Seong-Min Kim. I had an unforgettable time with the members of the Korean Graduate Students Association of Irvine, and I thank Jinhee Park of USC and curator Jeehey Kim for aiding me in my intellectual pursuits by sharing valuable information about North Korean Migrant films. I look forward to deepening my friendships with these precious people.

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This study is deeply indebted to many sociologists, social scientists, and anthropologists working in North Korean refugee and migrant studies, and especially to North Korean migrant bodies. My research would have been inadequate without recourse to the abundance of studies conducted by a wide range of sociologists and anthropologists over many years of field research. I myself did not directly interview North Koreans, empirical research not being part of my research approach. However, I am fully responsible for any errors or inaccuracies in this work, and this study should not present any possibility of harming any North Korean individuals in any way.

As a researcher who studies cultures through various mediums, I seek to discuss how these mediums intervene in people's lives. Although the humanities, like sociology, social science, and anthropology do, delve into "humanness," they distinguish themselves by emphasizing the cultural and textual contexts over people. Conducting this deeply interdisciplinary study, I thus pondered the boundary of "Korean studies": how far I could, should, and must go. Even so, I could not stop asking myself where my own study belonged, unsure of how to categorize my own work. All I am certain of is that I have aimed to examine cultural Others in Korean society, and the two different kinds of Koreans in the Korean peninsula, through representations. More fundamentally, I have questioned the possibility of community at this time. Mediums—whichever forms they take—are windows through which to understand people in contemporary. Through them, we can raise fundamentally humanistic questions—which is exactly why I study literature, films, and media rather than conducting empirical studies. In doing so, I can come to understand people through these windows from a critical point of view. In this sense, my future research will always be both interdisciplinary and contemporary.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Unwelcome Home: Ethnic Ethos, Gender and Class of North Korean Refugees and Migrants

By

Eun Ah Cho

Doctor of Philosophy in East Asian Languages and Literatures

University of California, Irvine, 2017

Professor Serk-Bae Suh, Chair

*Unwelcome Home* analyzes South Korean, Chinese, and U.S. artistic and media representations that consider the relationship between East Asian countries and the United States. This research examines what having become refugees and migrants in the only divided nation in the world has meant to North Koreans, with particular emphasis on their sense of ethnic homogeneity and gender roles as reflected in artistic representations. I argue that the ethnic ethos used to justify reunification discourse has weakened through the generations as an understanding of South Korea and North Korea as different countries has become the status quo.

The first chapter examines the relationship between Korean Chinese and North Korean refugees on the frontier of China and North Korea, focusing on how neighbors become strangers and how the threshold of community emerges. In Zhang Lu's *Dooman River*, for example, the tension between Korean Chinese and North Koreans in the Chinese border village demonstrates the dissolution of communities and the subsequent weakening of members' sense of ethnic ethos.

The second chapter delves into how North Korean migrants' subjectivity is reconfigured in South Korean society, with a particular emphasis on South Korean television programs and independent films. Indeed, the gendered images of North Korean migrants in television fortify

the bifurcated gender frame of South Korean society, by deleting North Korean male migrants and South Korean females from scenes. Independent films, for their part, deal with the socially marginalized, including North Korean migrants, and bring class discourse to the forefront.

The third chapter analyzes autobiographies of North Korean migrants that have been published in the United States. Focusing on their production and readership, it attests to the connection between three political agents: evangelical churches, South Korean “conservatives,” and North Korean migrants’ groups.

This study demonstrates how representations and cultural discourse intervene in North Korean refugees’ and migrants’ subjectivity formation and explains how the divided Korean peninsula has been, and will continue to be, sustained in the postcolonial and neo–Cold War paradigms. By describing how collective ethics become the responsibility of sole individuals, this research questions the Korean communities’ potential for coexistence.

## Introduction

Since the great North Korean famine (*konanŭi haenggun*) in the mid-1990s, there has been an ongoing exodus of North Korean people to China. Indeed, the number of undocumented North Koreans in China is now hard to even approximate. Human rights issues related to North Korean migrants have thus become an urgent topic in recent years, especially amid rising public interest in the North Korean regime.

Taking a step beyond use of the term North Korean *defectors* (*t'albukcha*), some scholars of humanities and the social sciences have designated the group of North Korean border crossers as refugees as a way of problematizing their precarious status as stateless persons. The location of North Korean defectors within the realm of the Korean diaspora reflects the Korean writers' attempt to embrace defectors' narratives as part of the reunification discourse, whereas the refugee discourse perceives these defectors as victims of the North Korean regime—and thus considers them to be in need of saving. Recent scholars working in the social sciences<sup>1</sup> have begun to recognize North Koreans as migrants who cross the border in search of better economic and educational opportunities. The works of these scholars focus on migrants' motives as well as on their willingness to cross the border. They argue that North Korean migrants' movements should be understood in the context of relations between and the economic integration of East Asian countries.

It is true that the subjectivity of North Korean defectors and their free will, manifested in their crossing of the border, are emphasized when the term *migrants* is used. Yet, the difference

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Hyun Ok Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Sung Kyung Kim, "'Defector,' 'Refugee,' or 'Migrant'?" North Korean Settlers in South Korea's Changing Social Discourse," *North Korean Review* 8, no. 2 (2012): accessed February 8, 2017, doi:10.3172/nkr.8.2.94.

between refugees and migrants is subtle and somewhat ambiguous. Do refugees become migrants upon settling in their arriving countries and achieving their new legal status? Are border crossers called refugees when their border crossings were forced but migrants when they crossed the border of their own volition? Even separating border crossers who were coerced into crossing from those who crossed of their own free will is not always possible. I raise these questions to showcase the conundrum of choosing a suitable term. Terminology and recognition of North Koreans' status are not limited to linguistic or legal issues, because they could determine the future fate of North Koreans. Based on whether North Koreans are recognized as illegal migrants or refugees, they may be repatriated and may encounter the risk of death.

Despite a considerable accumulation of representations of North Korean refugees/migrants since the late 1990s, very few works have analyzed how these migrants configure their subjectivity and achieve civil rights in their countries of arrival. However, these representations may allow different audiences to understand how North Koreans achieve their political and cultural significance (or fail to do so) in their new society. Through these representations, we can learn how their gender and class are reconfigured in the framework of the South Korean society.

In this study, I will fill this gap by analyzing the cinematic and literary representations of this population as well as television programs and autobiographies produced in East Asian countries and in the United States. Through close examination of the visual and narrative politics of representations of North Korean refugees and migrants along with cultural and social dialogues, I focus on their (mostly unsuccessful) attempts to achieve human rights in the new country. Although South and North Korea both devote themselves to promoting their national hegemonies, they have both similarly included and excluded their ideal citizens from one

another. North Koreans have experienced both societies and have been educated on how to be model citizens in each society. However, even after North Koreans' resettlement in the countries of arrival and their active assimilation into new cultures, their North Korean identity becomes a topic of dispute whenever North Korea emerges as a global issue. In this regard, these refugees and migrants belong neither to the past nor to the present, becoming borders themselves. The lives of these North Koreans who are stateless in mind attest to the history of the two Koreas' division. Accordingly, concluding that representations and narratives of migrants affect the possibility of refugees' and migrants' establishing subjectivity as citizens, I argue that these North Koreans create their heterogeneous identity by experiencing the roles of ideal citizens projected by North and South Korean societies.

Although North Korean refugees and migrants are not only the product of the Cold War and the Korean War but also the living "aftermath" of these conflicts, their existence is rarely considered a continuation of the Cold War. On the contrary, North Korean refugees in the United States are understood as victims of the "evil" North Korean regime, and in North Korean refugees' autobiographies, America—which used to be their foremost enemy when they were living in North Korea—is the "savior" that rescues them from their inhumane situations. In this context, U.S. military and political interventions in the Korean peninsula throughout modern history are downplayed and ignored. However, in this study, I will demonstrate that North Korean refugees and migrants are not only the product of the current North Korean regime, but also the result of the continuing history of the two Koreas and surrounding countries. In the following section, I will elaborate on some key concepts of this research and outline the structure of *Unwelcome Home*.

### *Terminology Matters: Refugees vs. Migrants*

The question of terminology with respect to North Korean border crossers is central to this study, and it is not limited to the matter of appellation. It involves both a fundamental and a decisive description of North Korean border crossers because it is associated with their legal status and sometimes with the very possibility of their survival. In his 2012 article “‘Defector,’ ‘Refugee,’ or ‘Migrant’? North Korean Settlers in South Korea’s Changing Social Discourse,”<sup>2</sup> Sung Kyung Kim summarizes the development of terminology referring to North Koreans in South Korea from 1953 to the 2000s. According to Kim, North Koreans who arrived in South Korea between 1953 and 1989 were called “defectors,” which usually connoted returning “heroes;” perceived as such, their existence proved the triumph of the (US-led) capitalist society. During this period, North Korean “defectors” were understood as a significant human source that could provide important military and political information on North Korea, and as the term “hero” suggests, the majority of the border crossers were male. Based on the South Korean Ministry of Unification’s official statistics, the number of North Korean male “defectors” was much higher than that of female “defectors” from this period until 2001.<sup>3</sup> After the collapse of the Berlin Wall (1989) and then the Soviet Union (1991), the influence of the Cold War was diminished, and the North Korean people who came to South Korea during the 1990s were called “Ethnic Korean;” at that time, the term “refugee” emerged. This change should be understood as a product of three factors: post-Cold-War period, the emergence of South Korea’s first civilian administration (1993), and the proliferation of neoliberalism. Kim argues that the use of the term

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<sup>2</sup> Sung Kyung Kim, “‘Defector,’ ‘Refugee,’ or ‘Migrant’? North Korean Settlers in South Korea’s Changing Social Discourse,” *North Korean Review* 8, no. 2 (2012): accessed February 8, 2017, doi:10.3172/nkr.8.2.94.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in 1998, North Korean male migrants numbered 829 while the number of female migrants was 118. In 2002, North Korean female migrants surpassed male migrants in number. Since 2002, the ratio of female migrants has increased, and in 2016, it reached 79% of North Korean migrants. “The Ratio of North Korean Immigration,” accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.unikorea.go.kr/content.do?cmsid=1440>.



refugee for North Koreans has two side effects: first, presenting North Korean arrivals as refugees makes it possible for political groups to use them as a political bargaining chip due to their extremely vulnerable position, and second, the term refugee provides “an alternative view of the ethnic Korean discourse” that bridges an emergence of “economic migrant discourse.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the term refugee erases the sense of ethnicity from North Koreans and consequently may lead us to ignore the history of North Koreans from the divided Korean peninsula by equating North Koreans with general economic migrants worldwide.

However, different factions have used North Korean arrivals for political reasons as far back as the time the Korean peninsula was first divided; thus, understanding the difference created by the emerging humanitarian discourse should include its respective political and economic background before and after the 1990s. To argue that the North Korean migrants became more politically vulnerable after the emergence of the “refugee question” requires comparison to the earlier period. I do not agree that political utilization of North Korean migrants is a more recent “side effect” of them being referred to as refugees, but I agree that there is a high possibility of these refugees being appropriated by political groups for two reasons. First, the concept of being a refugee is ambiguous, and this stateless status should be discussed only in relation to the nation-state despite the paradox of such a juxtaposition; second, due to the vagueness of its definition, the term refugee can be only symbolic but powerful to the public (it can be powerful precisely *because* of the symbolism involved). That is, the debate about refugees is always in danger of being appropriated as rhetoric, since its humanitarian appeal can reach people in general without harm. The discussion of human rights in itself is at least somewhat useful: it has resulted in a greater awareness, if not necessarily new legal mechanisms, which has

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<sup>4</sup> Kim, 103.

occasionally helped to protect certain groups of people. However, it is critical to continue to question the logic of humanitarian discourse works and the appropriation of this concept for various ends. Kim's second argument about negative side effects of the "refugee" term is that perceiving North Koreans as refugees erases the sense of ethnicity from them, which is in parallel with the description of North Koreans as economic migrants. The term "economic migrants" for North Koreans emerged simultaneously with the use of the word refugee; however, drawing parallels between the terms "refugee" and "migrant" may suggest that the author equates these two terms despite the necessity of considering them separately. Similar to Kim who designates the North Korean arrivals after the 2000s as "economic migrants," the current social science studies on North Korean border crossers tend to present them as depoliticized subjects whose motivation for crossing the border is "very real socio-economic."<sup>5</sup> For instance, Hyun Ok Park, the author of *The Capitalist Unconscious*,<sup>6</sup> also presumes that the current North Korean border crossers are not "refugees" but "(economic) migrants."

Although the above-mentioned studies have managed to reorient the topic of North Korean refugees and migrants, the question of whether they should be perceived as "refugees" or "migrants" remains open. Although the current attempts of using "migrant" over "refugee" allow scholars to include North Koreans' border crossings in the field of migrant studies, they rely on the unspoken assumption that political refugees are prioritized over economic migrants. However, considering political refugees more important than economic migrants is potentially a relic of the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> Another question would be why the political exile should be treated as more

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>6</sup> Hyun Ok Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Here, I used the term "refugee" to refer to political refugees, but there is an attempt to use the term "economic refugee." For example, George Lakoff and Sam Ferguson used "economic refugee" in their 2006 article,

significant than flight from economic crisis. In addition, it is worthwhile to consider whether it is possible to separate political reasons for border crossing from economic ones. It is possible to separate political and economic motivation only if one assumes that economic conditions are solely dependent on an individual's professional skills and can be controlled by him or herself, whereas political reasons for exile are universal and beyond one's control.

Both terms may continue to be useful in this discussion and whether using either "refugee" or "migrant" is not an option of choice. Besides, these terms do not contradict one another. The fundamental difference between the terms refugee and migrant concerns their legal affiliation with a certain nation-state. To be specific, being a refugee means that one possesses a stateless status while being migrant refers to the process of moving into a different region or country. A similar term, "immigrant," generally implies the fact that an individual is in the process of belonging to a new place and becoming a member of a newly acquired country. Whether that individual is able to eventually achieve legal residence status in the adopted country, this person has previously belonged to one and now belongs to another country. Thus, immigration has to do with a particular state's criteria for permanent residents. The people who want to acquire a new nationality, should meet the new state's criteria for their temporary/permanent stay; and according to this explanation, they are in the process of "becoming" legal. Whereas migrants need approval to stay in a certain country, refugees need a legal status as refugees. Symbolically speaking, migrants are settling (or sinking), while refugees are floating.

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"The Framing of Immigration." They explain, "A refugee is a person who has fled their homeland, due to political or social strife, and seeks asylum in another country. An economic refugee would extend this category (metaphorically, not legally, though it might be shifted legally in the future) to include people fleeing their homeland as a result of economic insecurity." George Lakoff and Sam Ferguson, "The Framing of Immigration," PDF, The Rockridge Institute, May 25, 2006. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0j89f85g#page-1> Last Access May 21, 2017.

Migrants fight for staying in a country on a legal basis, which means that they are already within the nation-state as a systematic regime. Refugees, on the other hand, inhabit the moment of decision that has to do with whether they are willing to settle in a particular state or not. That is, they suspend their status by existing outside of the boundaries of the nation-state. They are stateless: in other words, they belong to the status of not belonging. Both notions of migrant and refugee are in some ways associated and juxtaposed with the concept of citizen, but from different directions. Migrants fight to acquire legal rights as citizens and make efforts to prove their documentary and cultural qualification to the given society as newly arrived citizens. On the other hand, refugees question the concept of citizenship by sometimes refusing to become citizens. Tomas Hammar's concept of "denizens" illustrates that the opposite of refugees is not migrants but "citizens." According to Hammar, denizens or "noncitizens often have nationalities of origin, but inasmuch as they prefer not to benefit from their own states' protection, they find themselves, as refugees, in a condition of de facto statelessness."<sup>8</sup> Agamben points out that Hammar's "neologism ... has the merit of showing how the concept of 'citizen' is no longer adequate for describing the social-political reality of modern states."<sup>9</sup> Further, in *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*,<sup>10</sup> Yen Le Espiritu defines a refugee as one who "constantly remind(s) others of the arbitrariness and contingency of identity borders and boundaries,"<sup>11</sup> not only "as a critical idea but also as a social actor whose life, when traced,

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<sup>8</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 15, quoted in Espiritu, 12.

illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change.”<sup>12</sup> While other scholars are concerned about using the term “refugee” because of its implication of passivity, Le Espiritu perceives them as agents who actively question the concept of citizen and the boundaries of nation-state.

Therefore, for the purposes of this work, I will differentiate refugees from migrants but continue using both terms for different purposes. Even though the current border crossers are different from the defectors during the Cold War era, for multiple reasons, the term “refugee” helps to emphasize North Korea’s geopolitical isolation. Hereafter, refugee will refer to border crossers who have not yet achieved any legal nationality or whose own will to achieve it is in a state of suspension. In this regard, the undocumented North Koreans who reside in China are refugees since they can never achieve legal status in China. Due to China’s repatriation policy, North Koreans are exposed to a danger of enforced return regardless of their will.

I use the word migrant to refer to North Koreans who reside in South Korea and other countries and have achieved legal status (as citizens or having been granted a visa for a temporary stay). As mentioned earlier, current scholars use “migrant” to underline the North Korean border crossers’ economic motivation, while removing political context. However, beyond their motives for border crossing, we should emphasize their status as immigrants, which refers to the fact that they moved from a different place. It is crucial to understand their historical and cultural backgrounds, even if they have arrived from what is considered an “enemy” state. This does not mean that we should recognize and respect the North Korean regime, but instead that migrant individuals have their own history and lives. Even though North Koreans tentatively show their desire to assimilate in a given society, forced assimilation into their new country

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<sup>12</sup> Espiritu, 11.

would be another violation of their will. Just as South Korean people recognize Korean Americans, Korean Japanese, and Korean Chinese with their varied backgrounds and differences, North Korean migrants' history and culture should be understood separately and without discrimination. With this understanding of differences, we should find a way to coexist.

North Korean migrants often show their displeasure when they are compared to international migrant workers, which results from their anxieties because they know that migrant workers are discriminated against in South Korean society. The fundamental problem is not whether they are migrant workers or belong to a returned co-ethnicity; instead, it is the social structure where migrants who occupy the position of an economic minority experience discrimination.

### *Gender, Citizenship, and Representations*

In this research, I will analyze the representations of North Korean migrants in South Korean conservative programs and independent films, with a particular emphasis on the migrants' gender. On the topic of North Koreans' settlement in South Korean society, exploring various media representations is important because through the media, not only the panelists on the shows but also the rest of the South Korean migrants come to realize their social positions and learn how to survive in South Korean society. Before discussing the reason the various representations—such as conservative television shows and independent films—should be examined together, it is necessary to point out how the migrants' subjectivity is already gendered upon their arrival.

Based on the South Korean constitution, South Korea recognizes the Korean peninsula, which includes North Korea, as its territory. Legally speaking, this implies that South Korea does

not recognize North Korea as a legitimate nation, making all North Koreans potential citizens of South Korea.<sup>13</sup> Helen Heran Jun articulates the notion of citizenship as follows: “All subjects who have secured their citizenship status, regardless of the specific particulars of their economic standing, gender, race, religion, national origin, etc. . . . have equal standing before the law and are formally equivalent to one another.”<sup>14</sup> However, she also criticizes the inequality the law invisibly perpetuates: “this imaginary universalism is designed to offer merely abstract equality—the law will treat you as if you were all equal to one another—to ensure the reproduction of vast existing inequality.”<sup>15</sup> Although Jun explains the notion of citizenship as it is understood in the United States, her criticism can be equally applied to the case of North Koreans. It would be hard to argue that the North Korean migrants who are potential citizens and who’ve become lawful citizens of South Korea are treated as equals regardless of their economic standing or gender. Of course, the inequality of citizenship is not limited to the North Korean migrants’ case; instead, it prevails throughout Korean society, especially in terms of people’s economic standing (class) and gender. I am focusing on the North Korean migrants’ case here not to elevate their case among Korean citizens, but to present them as a particular example of general concerns in Korean society. My examination of how North Korean migrants’ gender performativity is reconfigured will demonstrate that the South Korean society has been gender-biased, and its concept of citizenship has favored heteronormative men and people with able

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<sup>13</sup> Constitution Article 3: “The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands.” Also, article 2 declares “Nationality in the Republic of Korea shall be prescribed by Act,” and “It shall be the duty of the State to protect citizens residing abroad as prescribed by Act.” Since the State has a duty to protect the citizens abroad, the South Korean government has helped North Koreans, as potential citizens, who want to enter South Korea. “Constitution of the Republic of Korea,” accessed February 9, 2017, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_117333.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_117333.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Helen Heran Jun, “Citizenship,” in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ, and Kevin Scott Wong (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Jun, 21.

bodies. Existing studies about North Korean migrants tend to allocate a separate section to North Korean women's issues. However, this entire paper focuses on the migrants' gender aspects, with a focus on four gendered groups: North Korean women, North Korean men, South Korean women, and South Korean men.<sup>16</sup>

Saskia Sassen compares the concepts of citizenship and nationality in her 2006 article. Although both citizenship and nationality have a similar function, in the legal sense, "citizenship is largely confined to the national dimension, while nationality refers to the international legal dimension in the context of an interstate system."<sup>17</sup> In other words, citizenship is largely limited to the interstate system, which makes us go back to the aforementioned claim that migrants are bound by the arriving country's system and its criteria. In that case, how can we articulate citizenship in terms of citizens' rights? Balibar points to a clue in Arendt's 1951 analysis. Arendt compares "the contradictory relationship that existed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between the closed character of citizenship instituted within national frameworks and the universalism of access to the rights proclaimed by the nation-state (with the notable exception of its imperial and colonial extensions, where there were no citizens, but rather 'subject,' or 'subject races)."<sup>18</sup> This contradictory relationship between the concept of citizenship, which is largely instituted within the state, and the nation-state's claim on rights, which appeals universally, is also found in the twenty-first century. The difference between the conceptual perception of nineteenth/twentieth centuries and the twenty-first century lies in whether the "subject" belongs

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<sup>16</sup> Against my intention, this distinction repeats the bifurcated gender division between women and men and the heteronormative frames in both South Korea and North Korea. I oppose the violent presumptions that there are only male and female and that heterosexuality is the social norm. Nonetheless, we cannot help re-using these four gendered groups to criticize the gendered frame of the two Koreas.

<sup>17</sup> Saskia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship and Alienage: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics," *Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos*, 2006, 7, accessed February 7, 2017, doi:10.1057/9781403984678\_2.

<sup>18</sup> Étienne Balibar and Thomas Scott-Railton, *Citizenship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 80.



to the the imperial or colonial extensions. As Balibar writes in 2002, “the ‘imperial-national’ states did not merely have ‘citizens’; they also had ‘subjects.’” He continues, “Those subjects, as far as the national administration was concerned, were both *less foreign* than aliens, and yet more different (or *more alien*) than them”<sup>19</sup> (italics mine). Although we no longer use the term “subject” in a postcolonial context, the logic of the imperial-national state is still applicable in various contexts. For example, there are the citizens who are treated as “more alien” than foreigners, and North Korean migrants in South Korean society are some of them. The South Korean government decides whether North Korean migrants are qualified to become citizens, and upon their arrival, the South Korean administration finds these migrants to be of national concern.<sup>20</sup> North Korean migrants are certainly not “subjects” but are treated as “more alien” than foreigners not only by the government but also by the surrounding society.

### *Composition*

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<sup>19</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso, 2002), 79.

<sup>20</sup> After the North Korean migrants come out from Hanawon, every individual has their “detective in charge (*tamdanghyōngsa*).” These detectives help migrants to settle down, but they also monitor and report on the migrants’ lives. The time of observation depends on the situation and necessity of individual North Korean migrants, and it generally continues from 1-2 years to a longer period. As the number of North Korean migrants grows, there is also a need for an administrative department to deal with their issues. If we look at the amendments to this North Korean migrant’s related Act from 1993 onwards, we can see that the administration has changed. North Korean migrants’ protection and management in 1997 was done by the National Security Planning Department. In 1999, it was changed to the National Intelligence Service, and soon it was handed over to the Ministry of Unification. The protection and management of the unification ministry was subject to administrative change by request to the “Minister of Unification through the “Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs” in 2007. It was also one of the tasks to discuss the management and protection period of the migrants. In 2010, the Minister of Unification was able to delegate the duties to the head of the local government through consultation with the Minister of Public Administration and Security. It can be seen that it was gradually allocated to one of the administrative tasks of each district, and it means that managing the migrants by one organization like the Ministry of Unification has become overwhelmed due to the increasing number of the North Korean migrants. About the Acts for North Korean, see “Protection Act for North Korean Defectors (Ethnic Koreans).” National Law Information Center, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://www.law.go.kr/lsInfoP.do?lsiSeq=2963&ancYd=19930611&ancNo=04568&efYd=19931212&nwJoYnInfo=N&efGubun=Y&chrClsCd=010202#AJAX>. “The Protection and Resettlement Support Act for North Korean.” National Law Information Center, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://www.law.go.kr/LSW/lsInfoP.do?lsiSeq=4303&ancYd=19970113&ancNo=05259&efYd=19970714&nwJoYnInfo=N&efGubun=Y&chrClsCd=010202#AJAX>.

*Unwelcome Home* comprises three chapters that follow North Korean refugees' and migrants' popular escape routes—from China to South Korea, or from China to a third country. In chapter 1, *Ethnic Ethos in Crisis: North Korean Refugees and Ethnic Koreans on the China and North Korea Border*, I examine Zhang Lu's 2009 film *Dooman River* and Geum Hee's 2014 short story "Ok-hwa," focusing on the relationships between the intraethnic groups<sup>21</sup> of Korean Chinese, North Koreans, and South Koreans, and the decimated communities on the border that suffer from labor exploitation and human trafficking. Zhang's realistic film continuously questions whether North Koreans are neighbors or trespassers in the border villagers. Throughout the film, the ethnic ethos<sup>22</sup> that was once a core sense gathering the villagers together as ethnic Koreans has weakened, and the threshold of community emerges among these intraethnic groups. The villagers' emotional transformation resonates with the current tendencies that mark the reunification discourse of the two Koreas. Just as the villagers in *Dooman River* conclude that North Korean border crossers are not "brothers/sisters," but mere "starving humans" instead, so the sense of ethnic homogeneity that used to be a great impetus for reunification has lost the validation it once had among members of the younger generations. This

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<sup>21</sup> The term *intraethnic groups* is borrowed from anthropologist Jin-Heon Jung's study of North Korean refugees' relationship with evangelical churches. See Jin Heon Jung, *Migration and Religion in East Asia: North Korean Migrants' Evangelical Encounters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). I find this term useful for referring to these groups of North Koreans, Korean Chinese, and South Koreans. These three groups share a history as ethnic Koreans and use their ethnic ethos and language for their border businesses. I examined these intraethnic groups from the perspective of North Koreans' border crossings in the introduction and in Chapter 3: in short, migrant issues should be understood within a context of migrants' relationship with evangelical churches and conservative groups in China, South Korea, and United States. Most South Korean missionaries work as businessmen and women, educators, or tourists in Sino–North Korea border areas so as to conceal their identities. Korean Chinese people not only play the role of middlemen in the border business but also play a role as religious middlemen in Christian business. Of the approximately fifty to eighty organizations focusing on North Korean human rights in South Korea, only ten are active. As noted in Chapter 3, these organizations are private cooperatives whose finances are totally dependent on outside funds. Indeed, Sisa Press, the publisher of a weekly magazine, reported on November 15, 2012, that the biggest financial patron of North Korean defectors and North Korean human rights-related organizations is the U.S. Department of State. It is thus crucial to examine the relationship between these organizations, South Korean politicians, and the United States when attempting to understand North Koreans' migration.

<sup>22</sup> The concept of "ethnic ethos" is elaborated in chapter one.

shift explains how a perception of South and North Korea as two different countries has become the status quo.

In chapter 2, *Mirrored Images: Gender and Class of North Korean Migrants in South Korean Television and Independent Films*, I analyze the visuals and narratives of these migrants as presented in South Korean films and television programs. This chapter delves into how North Korean migrants reconfigure their subjectivity in South Korean society, particularly by focusing on their gender performance and class divisions. The cinematic representations of North Korean migrants produced after 2000, including Zhang Lu's *Dooman River* (*tumangang*; 2010), Park Jung-bum's *The Journals of Musan* (*musan ilgi*; 2010), Jeon Kyu-hwan's *Dance Town* (*taens t'aun*; 2010), and Kim Kyung-mook's *Stateless Things* (*chul-t'ak-tong-si*; 2011), problematize the socioeconomic strata of North Korean migrants in South Korean society and the discriminatory practices that they are experiencing.

North Korean minority films show how North Korean migrants mix with other underrepresented groups in South Korean society. For example, these independent films present the migrants' social status as analogous to that of other social minorities, such as the disabled, LGBTQ, unprotected teenagers, and elders in the blind zone of society. In so doing, these films assert that the social problem of North Korean migrants in South Korean society is less a matter of their origin than it is a class matter. By classing North Korean migrants with other underrepresented groups, these films succinctly raise the question of class division in South Korean society while demonstrating that North Korean migrants are currently scattered in every region and occupation in South Korea.

However, other media representations of North Korean migrants show different visuality from those conveyed in films despite a certain degree of homogeneity. Television programs,

such as *Now On My Way to Meet You* (*ije mannarŏ gamnida*; 2011–present), *Moranbong Club* (*moranbong k'ŭlŏp*; 2015–present), and *Southern Men, Northern Women* (*nam-nam-buk-nyŏ*; 2014–present), depict perfectly assimilated migrants who embody the ideal type of citizen that the South Korean government prefers and requires. These “example migrants” or “good migrants,” who have become quasi-celebrities through these television programs, not only differentiate themselves from other North Korean migrants but in doing so also actively fortify the bifurcated gender frame of South Korean society. For example, South Korean men call North Korean female panelists “Northern beauties” on television shows and perceive them as alternative potential brides—replacements for South Korean women. By contrast, North Korean male panelists become opponents who confirm South Korean men’s superiority through their rough and unsophisticated characteristics. The South Korean television programs focus on the polar framework of “Southern Men–Northern Women,” thereby marginalizing North Korean male migrants and South Korean females. This matchmaking frame is not only used for entertainment but also demonstrates the hierarchical relationship among four groups: Southern men, Southern women, Northern men, and Northern women. Such a classified gender structure supports South Korean males’ authority and strengthens the heteronormative structure of South Korean society.

In chapter 3, *Healing or Selling: Politics of North Korean Migrants’ Humanitarian Stories*, I examine those testimonies and autobiographies of North Korean migrants that have been published in the United States. In 2015 alone, more than five autobiographies by North Korean refugees and migrants were published in the United States, including Joseph Kim’s *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America*, Hyeonseo Lee’s *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector’s Story* and Yeonmi Park’s *In Order to*

*Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*. This chapter includes an examination of authorship and readership of North Korean migrants' autobiographies, focusing on their production in the U.S. Unlike most foreign authors' autobiographies, which are usually translated from their original language into the target language, North Korean migrants' stories are marketed in English from the outset. In this process, North Koreans become "orators" rather than "writers." I thus refer to these migrants' autobiographies as "half-biographies," arguing that they break the boundaries of autobiographical writing by partially divorcing the subject's experience from its written form.

North Korean refugees' autobiographies resonate with the narratives of refugees who escaped from communist countries during the Cold War. In these narratives, North Korean refugees become the privileged few who are lucky enough to have arrived in the country of liberty, and the U.S. and Americans become the saviors—the source of freedom. However, in this process, the history of the divided Korean peninsula is erased as the refugees become the victims of the "evil" North Korean regime. Instead of asking whether these refugees' testimonies are true, I focus on how the (co)authors select and interweave their episodes to create "humanitarian stories."

By examining the ways in which migrants' narrative production is financially supported and consumed, I argue that a trio of political agents—North Korean migrants, evangelical churches, and political groups in South Korea and the United States—are closely associated with the production of these narratives. Despite North Korean migrants' asymmetrical relationship with political and religious groups, these migrants have built a political sphere in which they can exercise their subjecthood as well as their victimhood. I conclude that North Korean migrants are

active creators of their narratives and images in collusion with the hegemonies of their countries of arrival.

## Chapter One

### Ethnic Ethos in Crisis:

#### North Korean Refugees and Korean Chinese on the China and North Korea Border

##### Ethnic Koreans on the Border and Ethnic Ethos

*Dooman River* (2010) occupies a unique position among the films that deal with North Korean refugees and migrants. The film was made by Zhang Lu, a Korean Chinese director, on the border between China and North Korea, which places its geographical setting outside the boundaries of the Korean peninsula. It was filmed in a China–North Korea border village located in the Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture.



Figure 1.1. The orange-colored area in the left map is the Jilin province, and within the Jilin province, the red-colored area is the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture. The map on the right side is a closed-up image of the prefecture. Images from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yanbian\\_Korean\\_Autonomous\\_Prefecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yanbian_Korean_Autonomous_Prefecture)

The camera in *Dooman River* is always positioned inside the Korean Chinese village and faces the North Korean side. According to director Zhang Lu, the camera's placement and angle result from his belief in cinematic realism; however, those choices are not meant to deliver any political message on North Korean defectors or *T'albukcha*. Speaking of the border village where he grew up, he said, "North Koreans' border crossings are their [the villagers] everyday life. Since I am from the border village, I cannot help but talk about it through either writing or filming . . . those experiences are a part of my life, too."<sup>23</sup> The director himself is Korean Chinese, and his middleness as an ethnic minority in China has motivated him to create his original art. This middleness is embodied in the characters of villagers in *Dooman River*. In order to understand their "middleness," it is important to understand first who Korean Chinese are.

The Korean descendants on the border between China and North Korea are called chosŏnjok, and the history of these people can be traced to the late nineteenth century. Between the 1860s and 1945, Koreans, or Chosŏn<sup>24</sup> people, moved outside the Korean peninsula. Most of them settled in the Soviet Union, Japan, and China, which at that time was Manchuria. At the time of modernization in the East Asian and Russian regions, when the concept of the nation-state had been established, these Chosŏn people acquired their nationalities and citizenships respectively.<sup>25</sup> Korean Chinese, or Chosŏnjok, have maintained their identity as Korean

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<sup>23</sup> Zhang Lu, in a preview of *Dooman River* (Wangsimni: CGV, 2011), March 3.

<sup>24</sup> Chosŏn is an old name for Korea from 1392 to 1897. Chosŏn changed its country name to the Korean Empire (*Daehan Jeguk*) in 1897. After Japanese colonization, the country was referred to as Chosŏn again. North Koreans still refer to themselves as the people from Northern Chosŏn and designate South Koreans as people from Southern Chosŏn.

<sup>25</sup> Hyon-jun Sin, "The Returning of Korean Chinese," in *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia*, ed. Biao Xiang et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). For example, after the division of South and North Korea, Chosŏn people in both regions were called South and North Koreans. In Japan, the descendants of these Chosŏn people were called *Zainichi*. In China, they were called Chosŏnjok. Referring to a study by Kim Pyŏnggho and Kang Kiju (2001), Hyun Ok Park explores the origin of this designation. In her view, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) "at first saw Koreans in Manchuria as 'Chosŏnin' or 'Koryŏin,' both of which meant Korean, but soon began to classify them as 'Chosŏnjok,' meaning the Korean national minority," which would be



descendants until recently. Since diplomatic relations were established between China and South Korea in 1992, “Korean dream” has overwhelmed Korean Chinese. Many Korean Chinese migrated to South Korea to earn better money, and the rest of the young generation are moving to big cities in China. As a result, the majority of Korean Chinese towns are struggling with their communities’ dismantlement due to the high rate of labor migrants. The village in *Dooman River* represents this tendency of community collapse. Although these communities were initially established by Korean descendants to maintain their ethnic characteristics, their sense of ethnicity has weakened throughout generations, and now the form of community itself is threatened by constant migration. Only the elders reside in these disappearing towns with their grandchildren, trying to recall what the community used to be like.

In order to describe these Korean Chinese’ sense of belonging to the same ethnicity, I use the term “ethnic ethos.” This term is a combination of “ethnicity” and “ethos.” “Ethnicity”, in this case, is a term which describes three relationships. First, it refers to the ethnic sense shared by Korean Chinese who made up the Korean Chinese communities. As mentioned above, this sense played an important role in forming communities among Chosŏn people who moved to China during the Japanese colonial period. It also relates to the sense of duty of Korean Chinese people, which led them to revive their language and spirit after the Chinese government oppressed ethnic minorities during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969). Second, “ethnicity”

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after 1921. However, if we look at the formation of Chosŏnjok community, it can be traced back to 1885: “It determined that the Korean Chinese minority first formed in 1885, when the Qing government accepted the legal immigration of Koreans, and that Koreans became a national minority in China after the Qing government not only enacted the 1909 nationality law granting nationality to foreigners with at least ten years of residency but also granted Koreans rights to cultivate and own land.” Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, 151-152. The Soviet Union’s case is a bit different: they used the term *Sovietskiye Koreitsy* to refer to Korean descendants. *Koreitsy* originates from *Goryeo-in*, which refers to the people from *Goreyo*, a Korean dynasty between 918 and 1392, before the Chosŏn dynasty. The case of *Koreitsy* is different from those of Chosŏnjok and Zainich, because the majority of them still remain “stateless.” About these Korean’s enforcement of moving, see <http://www.jnilbo.com/read.php3?aid=1483369200514137013> (Junnam Il-bo’s series article) Also, regarding Dir. Kim So Young’s film, see <http://www.womennews.co.kr/news/view.asp?num=96820>.

refers to the ethnic sense shared between the Korean Chinese and North Koreans. The first generation of ethnic Koreans in China, who were relatively free to cross the border between China and North Korea, recognize the entire Korean peninsula as their home before the country was divided. For example, in *Dooman River*, Chang-ho's grandfather looks at the North Korean side with longing and asks Chang-ho to bury him on the mountain where he could see Korea after he dies, and the mother of the village chief, who suffers from dementia, continues trying to cross the Tumen River located on the frontier, as she remembers the times of affluence in North Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. Also, when a North Korean border crosser knocks on Chang-ho's door, he appeals to him by using a term indicating close kinship: "Grandpa, help me." These scenes explain that North Koreans and Korean Chinese share the sense of belonging to the same ethnicity. Third, it also refers to a kinship shared between Korean Chinese, North Koreans, and South Koreans. Because they believe there is this sense based on ethnicity<sup>26</sup>, North Koreans and Korean Chinese expect to be treated differently from other foreign migrant workers in South Korea. The ethnic ethos described above differs from nationalism. It may have an intersection with ethnocentric nationalism, but this sense belongs to people rather than a nation-state.

The term "ethos"<sup>27</sup> here is based on Jacques Rancière's definition. In *Dissensus*, he explains,

Before signifying a norm or morality, the word ethos signifies two things: both the dwelling and the way of being, or lifestyle, that corresponds to this dwelling. Ethics, then, is the kind of thinking in which an identity is established between an environment, a way

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<sup>26</sup> This sense of ethnicity between North and South Koreans has also weakened. Kyung Hyun Kim points out that "the sixty-five years of division into North and South Korea – spanning more than three generations – combined with the influx of recent immigration make it impossible to continue to subscribe the "one people" theory." Kyung Hyun Kim, *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 120.

<sup>27</sup> The terminology of ethos is found from one of modes of persuasion in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Ethos, which has to do with the speaker's character, neither appeals to the audience's mind (*pathos*) nor acquires a logical proof (*logos*). Instead, it relates to a speaker's consciousness on ethics and responsibility.

of being and a principle of action. The contemporary ethical turn is the specific conjunction of these two phenomena. On the one hand, the instance of judgment, which evaluates and decides, finds itself humbled by the compelling power of the law. On the other, the radicalism of this law, which leaves no alternative, equates to the simple constraint of an order of things. The growing indistinction between fact and law gives way to an unprecedented dramaturgy of infinite evil, justice and reparation.<sup>28</sup>

Before associating with the norms of the community and its members' sense of morality, it is important that ethos is related to ethnic Koreans' way of life. Korean Chinese have constructed their lifestyle based on their sense of ethnicity. Although members of the Korean Chinese community have based their identity on ethnicity, their way of life, or ethos, now appears to be subordinate to the nation-state's system and their duty as citizens. I use the term ethos in explaining the relationships between the Korean Chinese and North Koreans not to judge their individual or collective morality but to assert that their confusion – for example, whether they should help others as they have done or report others' "illegality" as the Chinese authorities order – results from questioning the distinction between their lifestyle and law. As Rancière points out, the reign of ethics dissolves "the very core of 'old morality': the distinction between fact and law, between what is and what ought to be."<sup>29</sup> Thus, through an analysis of *Dooman River*, I will show how the villagers' "distinction between fact and law" became blurred and ethnic ethos is facing a crisis simultaneously with the integration of capital order, legal enforcement of the nation-state, and the hierarchical relationship between Korean Chinese villagers and North Korean border crossers.

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Steven Corcoran, Kindle ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 184.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Explaining that “a transnational Korean community in the post-Cold War present”<sup>30</sup> “are separated from one another,”<sup>31</sup> Hyun Ok Park clarifies “how global capitalist dynamics constitutes ethnicity – such as identity, nationality, citizenship, affect, experience, memory, and so on – through the mediation of the new democratic idioms like reparation, human rights and peace.”<sup>32</sup> In her 2016 talk,<sup>33</sup> Park states that “we can say that the Korean peninsula is already unified by capital,” which showcases a transition of the unification discourse from ethnic homogeneity to “global capitalism.” In *The Capitalist Unconscious*, Park writes,

The chiasmus in this book is, therefore, not so much between ethnic national sovereignty and territorial integration as between modern sovereignty and global capitalism. *This approach uncovers a momentous shift from the task of Korean territorial unification to the formation of a transnational Korean community in the post-Cold War present.* The formation of transnational Korea is inscribed in the experiences of economic crises by capitalist and socialist Koreas and the Korean diasporic communities. Figures of the Korean transnational community are separated from one another, as if islands, in today’s world of identity politics and civil society movements: South Korean unionized workers are contrasted with an irregular and migrants workers who are denied job security and organizational representation; Korean Chinese migrant workers are inscribed as “colonial returnees” for having migrated to China during the Japanese colonial era and returned as migrants laborers, and they are opposed to non-Korean migrant workers framed as “cosmopolitan subject”; and North Korean migrants are named “refugees” escaping the totalitarian regime. This book has shown *the intricate linkages of these figures, whose border-crossing relations construct a hierarchical Korean community on a global scale and embody the logics of the latest capitalist and democratic system.*<sup>34</sup>

After the Cold War, the South Korean society has moved away from the proposition of territorial unification of the Korean peninsula, a shift which was expedited with the respective economic

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<sup>30</sup> Hyun Ok Park, *The capitalist unconscious: from Korean unification to transnational Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 287.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> I would like to express my deep gratitude to professor Hyun Ok Park in the Department of Sociology at York University for kindly elaborating the meaning of her term via emails.

<sup>33</sup> Hyun Ok Park, “The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea” Organized by Todd A. Henry, Dolores Huerta – Philip Vera Cruz Room, Student Center, UC San Diego, February 11, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Hyun Ok Park, 287. Italics mine.

crisis of the two Koreas in the 1990s, such as the South Korean financial crisis (known as IMF crisis) and North Korea's great famine (known as March of Hardship) after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Neither ethnic ethos nor the cause of territorial unification is the principal reason of the people's border crossings between China, North Korea, and South Korea. According to Park, what matters to the border crossers is "the logics of the latest capitalist and democratic system"<sup>35</sup> in the Korean peninsula and China.

Indeed, ethnic ethos is on question. Although I do not imply that it should be saved or recovered, the crisis of ethnic ethos also signals a profound crisis of community. The main problem is that Korean Chinese and North Korean family members are drifting apart due to migration, and the sense of community is disappearing. Ethnic ethos may not need to be saved, but community should be, because diminishing community results in a society without collective responsibility. Fragmented individuals in the absence of collective ethics do not know how to live with others, and in a society where capital becomes the only dominant runner, social contradictions and predicaments become individuals' total responsibilities.

### Zhang Lu's *Dooman River* and the Threshold of Community

#### *Three Windows or Between Two Outsides: Middleness of Korean Chinese*

The main protagonists in *Dooman River* are Chang-ho, a Korean Chinese boy, and Jung-jin, a North Korean boy. They meet in an abandoned building near the border between North Korea and China. This building, located in a Korean Chinese village in China, appears several times, and the director strategically uses the window frame of the building. It is an empty old

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

building, but children play there, jumping out into the street from the windows. It is also a place where North Korean kids from across the Tumen River take a rest around a fire. Near the building, there is an empty field, where the kids play soccer. Throughout the film, this building appears six times. The Korean Chinese boys and North Korean kids who secretly cross the river see each other for the first time in this building. On the day following the meeting, Chang-ho and Mr. Park's son return to this building to find the North Korean kids who agreed to have a soccer match with them in return for food. However, except for a North Korean boy, Jung-jin, the rest of the North Korean kid has disappeared. In the scene where the three kids run to the field to play soccer, the camera divides the wall into three parts by using the window frames (see figure 1.2.).



Figure 1.2. The triple-divided window frame: Chang-ho, Jung-jin, and Mr. Park's son run to the field to play a soccer game.

This scene is a long take that lasts twenty-one seconds, and the camera stays inside the building, showing us the children running to the field. In this frame with the three windows, the children do not go beyond the middle window frame until the end of the take. If we consider that this scene takes places in the early part of the film, before a series of tragedies caused by North Koreans occurs in the town, the triptych view becomes a phantasmagoria that reflects the hope of

possibility—the hope of both the audience and the children of the film, and the possibility of community going beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Nevertheless, this phantasmagoric image does not last long, because the division within the image presumes the impossibility of going beyond those boundaries. The three windows symbolize three groups of the people in the film, namely, Chinese, Korean Chinese, and North Koreans. In this sense, the middle window represents the Korean Chinese town. Between the Chinese government and North Korea, the villagers also receive directions from the Chinese government as Chinese citizens. In the scene, the children do not go beyond the middle window frame, as if only children who are free from the rules and regulations of the state can be included in the frame. However, as it is phantasmagoria, in the end, the illusionary relationship between the three children is broken by the intervention of the nation and its regulations, as the triple-divided window frame never appears again. Even though this middle window and its phantasmagoric effect which mirrors the neutral position of Korean Chinese people do not succeed in strengthening the connection between the divided people, the attempt of the triple-divided window frame shows that neither the nation-state sovereignty nor ethnic ethos yet reach the new Korean Chinese and North Korean generation of Chang-ho and Jung-jin. Not knowing the history of ethnic Koreans, this generation builds their relationship on completely new ground, apart from their parents' generation.

Mr. Park is a character that demonstrates the middle-ness of Korean Chinese with a predicament between China and North Korea. He runs the only market in this small town, and he lives with his son and a niece. His wife and his brother with his spouse went to South Korea to earn money. Mr. Park's family represents the majority of Korean Chinese in the border village. Family members' migration to South Korean or Chinese cities has become a prevalent tendency

in this region, which results in families living apart, a high ratio of divorce, and aging communities. Korean Chinese people's South Korean dream began after the establishment of official diplomatic ties between Korea and China in 1992. In the late 1990s, the Korean Chinese migrated to Korea temporarily to make money, but after a shift in generations, the current Korean Chinese migrants prefer to settle in Korean society. According to the immigration office, the number of Korean Chinese in South Korea was 606,694 in late 2014, and if we add the number of Korean Chinese who acquired Korean nationality, it became 700,000 in that year.<sup>36</sup> Mr. Park's wife, his younger brother and sister-in-law joined this migration trend. The film clearly shows that the majority remaining in the village consists of either the elderly or children. Due to the parents' labor migration, these children are raised by their grandparents. Mr. Park's son and niece are usually home alone, without guardians.

It is not obvious what kind of business Mr. Park runs in the film except that it is a market. His truck returns to the town, but the audiences do not know where it comes from. What they do know is that Mr. Park carries people from North Korea.



Figure 1.3. Mr. Park helps North Koreans.

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<sup>36</sup> "Korean Chinese in South Korea, 700,000," *Yonhapnews*, January 30, 2015, accessed August 16, 2016, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2015/01/30/0200000000AKR20150130110700372.HTML>.





Figure 1.4. A North Korean couple disguises themselves as a married couple on their honeymoon.

In two major scenes, Mr. Park helps the North Koreans to cross the border. The first scene (see figure 1.3.) takes place in the beginning of the film when his truck appears at dawn. Soon the truck stops at the midpoint of the mountain. Mr. Park gets out of the truck and carefully observes his surroundings. When he opens the door to the storage area of the truck, two male and two female North Koreans jump off. Mr. Park explains to them their escape route, and they disappear in a hurry. From the information the audience receives, we cannot verify where he takes these people and how they contact each other. We do not even know whether he receives any compensation from the North Koreans for transporting them.

However, in the second scene, with other North Koreans, Mr. Park's role becomes more obvious (see figure 1.4.). In the scene, Park's truck stops on a bank surrounding a rice field. Mr. Park opens the storage area of the truck again, and this time, a woman and a man jump out. Mr. Park gives them a Korean traditional costume, or *Hanbok*, and makes them change clothes. The couple quickly changes their clothes and runs to a wedding car parked next to the truck. This scene suggests that there is a certain process that these people have to go through when they cross the border. In later scenes, we see that the security police inspect Mr. Park's truck in the

middle of the road. This series of scenes shows that Mr. Park is involved in a border trade with North Korea, and is also engaged in North Koreans' border crossings.

The movie does not explain details about how Mr. Park's involvement in North Koreans' border crossings is possible, but we can find a clue from his communicability with North Koreans. As Ju-won Kang points out, the ethnic Koreans in China and North Koreans share the same language.<sup>37</sup> The first premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai, set the official ethnic language of Korean Chinese in 1962, based on the language of Pyongyang in North Korea. Not only geographical proximity but also linguistic similarities bring North Koreans and Korean Chinese closer, compared to their distance to South Koreans. However, the Cultural Revolution caused a significant time lag between generations of Korean Chinese. According to one interview conducted by Hyun Ok Park, Korean Chinese people realize that there is a blank time in the history of Korean Chinese. The Korean Chinese interviewee, who works at a South Korean construction site, thinks, "at least one [Korean Chinese] generation is forgotten,"<sup>38</sup> referring to his own generation. While his father's generation, born in the 1920s, knows their ancestors and family history, the interviewee's generation, born in the 1950s, did not have a chance to learn them. China's Cultural Revolution also affected this rupture in their history, since ethnic minorities' culture and language were severely oppressed. Mr. Park and his son belong to generations born after those tragic days and fortunately know their ethnic language. Mr. Park's ability to communicate with North Koreans makes it possible for him to engage in such work at high risk as a middleman. This middlelessness becomes a problem for the Korean Chinese in the

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<sup>37</sup> Ju-won Kang, "An Ethnography of the Border City Dandong between China and North Korea: Through the Relations of North Koreans, Overseas Chinese in North Korea, Joseonjok, and South Koreans" (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Hyun Ok Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious. From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 148-149.

village, after the Chinese government orders the villagers to report North Koreans' border crossings. At the end of the movie, Mr. Park is arrested by his neighbors' report, and the villagers' dilemma – whether North Koreans are friends or foes and whether they should help North Koreans – is violently resolved.

*Becoming Stranger: an Aphasiac, a Madman, and Justitia*

As the middle window of the abandoned building becomes a metaphor for the position of this border village, Soon-hee—and especially her condition of aphasia—is another metaphor of middle-ness in this film. From the beginning of the film, the audience knows that Soon-hee cannot speak and communicates using sign language. The current medical profession would likely refer to her condition as aphasia because she has lost her ability to speak. Aphasia is a communication disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that govern language.<sup>39</sup> It is widely known that this disorder is often caused by brain damage or traumatic injury to the brain, but does not affect patients' intelligence. In the scene where Chang-ho invites Jung-jin to his house for the first time, the audience learns about what happened to Soon-hee. Chang-ho says to Jung-jin that when the Tumen River flooded<sup>40</sup>, their father rescued a drowning Soon-hee and was swept away himself. After the loss of her father, Soon-hee lost her verbal language. However, she does not believe that her father died and is waiting for him (see figure

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<sup>39</sup> “Aphasia,” American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, accessed August 16, 2016, <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/Aphasia/>.

<sup>40</sup> In 1995, North Korea suffered a flood, which caused 5.2 million victims and 15 billion dollars in damage. Kim Il Sung instructed during his regime to cut trees for making farms on mountains. According to the South Korean Office of Forestry's 2007 statistic, 163 hectares, which is 18% of North Korea's forest area, has already been devastated by the time. Soon-ho Choi, *North Korean Defectors, their Stories* (Seoul: Sigongsa, 2008). (This book is a collection of photos and does not include page numbers.)

1.5.). At the end of the conversation, Chang-ho whispers to Jung-jin, “Hey, you’d better be careful. My sister cannot speak, but she can hear all.”



Figure 1.5. Soon-hee explains to Chang-ho and Jung-jin that her father has not passed away, but is missing.

Soon-hee cannot speak; however, because most characters in this film are very taciturn, her attempts to communicate with sign language look exaggerated. Her body language speaks loudly, and her gestures are delivered in haste. She is the one who expresses her feelings the most among the people in the film, not only with her sign language, but also with her drawings. The villagers cannot verbalize what they see and do with respect to North Koreans. Her condition, or as Chang-ho puts it, “can hear all, but cannot speak,” is thus a metaphor for the situation of the Korean Chinese in this town. The villagers always encounter North Koreans who beg for their lives and for financial help, but the villagers cannot speak about who has visited them.



Figure 1.6. Mother tells Soon-hee over the phone, “Do you miss me? I miss you, too. But, only if I make more money, we can live like others.”

Soon-hee’s mother migrated to South Korea in search of a better income, and she calls home to check on her children. However, without Chang-ho around, Soon-hee cannot answer her mother. One day, when Soon-hee is home alone, she receives her mother’s call (see figure 5). Upon realizing that Chang-ho is not around, the mother speaks to Soon-hee. Soon-hee cannot answer, so she listens. This one-way conversation over the phone not only demonstrates the situation of the Korean Chinese children who are left behind by their parents, but also depicts the hierarchical relationship between the Korean Chinese village and South Korea. As if the message has arrived from the future, somewhere you cannot reach, the recipient cannot respond to it, but is only waiting for it. The majority of the villagers migrated to South Korea, but throughout the film, the audience has not seen anyone coming back home. The only news we hear is that Mr. Park’s brother and his sister-in-law died in a fire in a South Korean factory. If South Korea is perceived as the promise of a future for the Korean Chinese who are looking for better living conditions, it is certain that the future awaiting them is rather close to dystopia.

The mother’s call occurs after Soon-hee is raped by a North Korean border crosser, but Soon-hee cannot say anything to her mother. This problematic rape scene requires more discussion since it succinctly shows how the director uses Soon-hee’s character to explain the relationship between Korean Chinese and North Koreans. A North Korean male border-crosser’s

visit is the turning point in this film. The North Korean man knocks on Chang-ho's door at night, after being chased by the security police. Chang-ho's grandfather, whose hometown is in North Korea, lets him stay in a storage area. The next morning, when Chang-ho and his grandfather go downtown, Soon-hee wakes the man and provides him breakfast. While he is eating and drinking, Soon-hee turns on the television, but the channel is set to a North Korean broadcast praising the North Korean regime. The man, on hearing the television announcer's praise of "the Great Leader, Kim Jung Il," vomits the food he has just eaten and becomes temporarily insane. After yelling and staring at Soon-hee with anger, he rapes her and runs away. During the rape, the camera remains focused on the North Korean propaganda on the television.

This scene works in two ways: first, it functions as a turning point when the villagers turn away from the North Korean border-crossers. Illegal migrants' sexual violence against the local people cannot be remitted or justified. It may be excused by the perpetrator's temporary insanity from the legal perspective, but that cannot guarantee the villagers' understanding. Second, the director intentionally juxtaposes the North Korean propaganda on the television with the rape scene and exposes the North Korean man to this. Propaganda appears twice in this movie, but both times the content of the North Korean program is the same. Compared to this village's soundless and noiseless environment, the North Korean announcer's excited voice that praises the North Korean soldiers and the leader overwhelms the quiet space. Even the projected image of the North Korean leader appears to produce insanity in his people, though he is not physically present in the space. This clearly shows that the North Korean man had lived in the realm of terror, where the great leader's divinity was only believed and praised. The extreme fear that he faces as a result of his defection overtakes his sanity, and this border crosser, who had himself been a target of violence in his North Korean life, projects this violence to the weaker object,

Soon-hee. In this way, the film criticizes the vicious circle of violence, which is caused by the North Korean regime.

However, even if the film aims to criticize the North Korean regime indirectly, this rape scene is still problematic for two reasons. First, the portrait of dangerous male migrants is the image typically used by the people who oppose the acceptance of immigrants or refugees. The correlation between immigrants and crime has produced a discourse on dangerous strangers, creating segregated and exclusive environments for the migrants. *Dooman River* is no exception, and this rape scene is actually used to justify the villagers' guilty feelings toward North Korean migrants. Second, the film utilizes Soon-hee's body as a passage in both a physical and symbolic sense. The North Korean male rapes Soon-hee, and she gets pregnant. When the two drunken Korean Chinese villagers whose hometown is in North Korea visit Soon-hee's grandfather, they sing a song to cheer up the atmosphere. Superseding Chang-ho's grandfather's sad song about his nostalgic hometown, the two villagers sing "The Song of General Kim Il Sung." Listening to this familiar but foreign song, Soon-hee feels nauseous due to her pregnancy. She realizes that something foreign has infiltrated her body and is residing within. Her decision on an abortion is withheld until the end, when the film decides whether the strangers are friends or foes. In this sense, Soon-hee's body reflects the villagers' dilemma. Her abortion at the end of the movie means that the strangers are no longer welcome and will be evicted from this village.

Soon-hee's abortion and her crying are juxtaposed with Chang-ho's death. I am using the term "death" instead of "suicide" intentionally, because we should be careful in determining whether his death is a suicide or a "social homicide." Why does he fall from the roof, and how can we understand his choice? In order to understand why Chang-ho decides to fall off the roof, it is necessary to clarify how Chang-ho's friendship with Jung-jin is established. Even in light of

Chang-ho's good nature in helping people, his relationship with Jung-jin is not one-sided, despite the prejudice against the relationship between the Korean Chinese and North Koreans. First, Chang-ho asks Jung-jin to play a soccer game with him in return for food. Second, sitting on the windowsill of the abandoned building, Jung-jin talks about his family in North Korea to Chang-ho, and later Chang-ho tells Jung-jin about his family history, too. Third, Chang-ho gives Jung-jin one of the stamps that he is collecting and asks for a North Korean stamp in return. Because ordinary people can rarely get a stamp in North Korea, Jung-jin works to find an alternative and gets a toy model rocket for Chang-ho instead of a stamp. It is obvious that their relationship is not meticulously calculated, but it is worth emphasizing the equal footing of their exchanges. That is, the relationship between Chang-ho and Jung-jin is not one-sided, and their friendship is built not on pity, but on mutual understanding. After his younger sister dies, Jung-jin does not have to cross the border anymore, but he does so to keep his promise to Chang-ho about a soccer game. He crosses the border at the risk of death, so when Jung-jin is arrested for his illegal border crossing, Chang-ho realizes that it is his turn to risk his life. Thus, Chang-ho runs to the top of the roof, and yells at the police and at the chief as they haul Jung-jin to the police car.





Figure 1.7. Chang-ho is standing on the roof.

Chang-ho: (On the rooftop) “Let him free!”

Police: “Hey, come down quickly!”

Chief: “Chang-ho-ya, come down quickly!”

Chang-ho: (Walks back to the end of the roof and disappears from the frame. Soon he runs and falls.)

This short dialogue is not exactly a conversation. Even though they face each other, the two parties only state their claims. More precisely, Chang-ho requires (or threatens) the police to set Jung-jin free at the risk of his own life, whereas the police and chief demand Chang-ho to give himself up with no intention of negotiation. Considering the fact that Chang-ho’s claim is the first verbalized demand from any member of this village, the police’s way of dealing with it shows that this village does not accept different voices. These three words – let him free! – is the only token that this little boy, Chang-ho, has, for his “negotiation.”



Figure 1.8. Chang-ho’s body falls from the roof, while Mr. Park’s son is sitting inside the building between two windows.

Chang-ho falls from the roof, and his body falls upside down. In this scene, the window frame evenly divides the wall of the abandoned building. Outside the window on the left, the police and chief are included, whereas Chang-ho’s falling body fills the right window. This cruel but strange image of Chang-ho’s upside-down body resembles the image of Xenos in Greek mythology.<sup>41</sup> Discussing the concept of strangers, Jacques Derrida describes Xenos’ defense against an accusation of parricide. Xenos has to prove that he is not a foreigner—which means non-being or a madman who kills his own father in his culture—so with a fear of being judged by paternal authority, he states, “I am therefore fearful that what I have said may give you the opportunity of looking on me as someone deranged,” and according to Derrida’s translation, this deranged man refers to “literally, mad, manikos, a nutter, a maniac,” “who is upside down all over (*para poda metaballōn emautōn anō kai katō*), a crazy person who reverses everything from

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<sup>41</sup> In Greek, *Xenos* means both strangers and guests. In order to discuss “the question of the foreigner” or “a foreigner’s question,” Derrida begins his argument with the character of the Foreigner (*xenos*), who is mostly in charge of *questioning* in Plato’s dialogues. It is “the foreigner [who] shakes up the threatening dogmatism of the paternal *logos*.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans., Rachel Bowlby et al. (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

head to toe, from top to bottom, who puts all his feet on his head, inside out, who walks on his head.”<sup>42</sup> In order to prove himself not a stranger, Xenos defines the characteristics of a stranger who confuses the order as a madman. In his view, the madman is the person who “reverses everything from head to toe, from top to bottom.” As if to oppose the attempt of Xenos that proves himself not a stranger, Chang-ho willingly takes the jump making his body fall upside down. He does not ask Jung-jin to take any action, but instead, he becomes a stranger or a madman himself. Logically, Jung-jin is supposed to be a stranger in the country; however, by making him a stranger, Chang-ho’s falling body makes us question the inside and out of the boundary of a madman.

The concepts of *Xenos* (stranger/guest) and *Xenia* (good conduct toward the *Xenos*) tell us how complicated and ambiguous the relationship between two strangers or friends could be. In the Greek tradition, it was customary for a host to treat a stranger with generosity based on the belief (or suspicion) that the stranger might be a disguised god or goddess in the guise of a human. In this regard, the relationship between these two (host and guest) must be ritualized and symbolic. Gabriel Herman describes *Xenia* as “a ritualized friendship,” which is “manifested by the exchange of goods and services,” where both host and guest “carry out certain responsibilities towards the other.”<sup>43</sup> The exchanges between Chang-ho and Jung-jin—a stamp and a model rocket, for example—achieve a symbolic meaning in this way, because they confirm the relationship and responsibilities between guest and host. At the same time, however, this relationship is very fragile since it is firmly rooted in its rituality. That means if anything damages this rituality, the relationship loses its cause, thus shortly creating a crisis. It is true that

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<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans., Rachel Bowlby et al. (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Belfiore, “*Xenia* in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*,” *The Classic Journal* 89, no. 2 (1993-1994): 114.

it is not Jung-jin who breaks the rules that strangers should keep, such as politeness and respectfulness, and he is usually perfectly safe with Chang-ho. However, when this ritual meets with a crisis, his identity as Xenos is revealed. *Dooman River*'s virtue exists within Chang-ho's upside-down body in this sense. He is a host who carries out his responsibility to the end, by taking on the role of a stranger himself. Chang-ho's fall is, in some sense, symbolic of exchanging his life with Jung-jin, and he makes this unavoidable choice to accomplish the ritual of exchange.

### *Neoliberalism, Morality, and Human Rights Discourse*

How will the authorities explain Chang-ho's fall to the villagers? How are the village kids who witness Chang-ho's fall going to remember the moment? It is highly possible that Chang-ho's death could be read as his individual responsibility toward Jung-jin, through which social responsibility and collective ethics find a way to manifest themselves. In this sense, the point of cruelty in *Dooman River* exists within Chang-ho's death. The director does not impose individual responsibility on any other adult members of the village, but actualizes it through this little boy's body as the scapegoat of a ritual. However, in light of the above discussion, we still need to decide whether Chang-ho's death is a "suicide" or a "social homicide," and whether we can assign responsibility for Chang-ho's death to a particular person.

Let us deal with "responsibility" for his death first. Despite the audience's sympathy for the innocent character dying, this is not a simple question as it touches upon the matter of collective responsibility of this community. How does this tragedy become Chang-ho's individual "choice," while eviscerating the villagers' collective responsibility? Shifting the responsibility for Chang-ho's death to himself resonates with the villagers' avoidance of

responsibility for the North Korean border-crossers. The villagers never designate the North Koreans by their nationality or ethnic backgrounds. Instead, they call them *the people across the river*. For example, when Mr. Park, who helped North Koreans to cross the border, is arrested, Yong-ran, who runs a tofu store, visits Mr. Park's son and explains why his father got arrested. Her words provoke Mr. Park's son to report Jung-jin's border crossing later.

Yong-ran (Giving boiled eggs to Mr. Park's son and his cousin to eat): "All [your father's arrest] is because of *the people across the river*. There was no fuss in our town before, but what is all this now? The entire town is stirred up. There is a saying that when people starve too much, they sell even their father and mother. Probably this refers to *those people* [North Koreans]."

Mr. Park's son (Breaking an egg with his hand): "...!"

Yong-ran's statement seems to show that the villagers blame strangers for the mishaps and problems; however, the monologue also reveals their dilemma concerning the recognition of these foreigners. Like Yong-ran, the Korean Chinese in the village do not use a specific designation for the North Korean border-crossers that could reveal their nationality or origin. There is one exception when the village chief delivers the order conveyed from the Chinese government. The term "North Korean defectors" is used in this announcement once. The villagers' ambiguous attitudes—to avoid naming the strangers—are based on their dilemma, which originates from two different layers, one being the villagers' collective guilt about North Koreans based on ethnic ethos, and the other—their avoidance of responsibility for these strangers. They do feel an obligation to help them. On the other hand, the villagers intend to avoid any moral and legal responsibility toward the North Koreans. If they appear not to know who they are, but only know the fact that they came from *across the river*, they can minimize their responsibility: "I know they are in need, but there is technically no tie between them and us." Even if the Chinese government catches them, Korean Chinese can remain innocent

bystanders. In the same manner, they can also minimize their moral responsibility for not helping the North Koreans.

The villagers' giving up their morality or responsibility is similarly portrayed when it comes to the case of Mr. Park's son. We should pay special attention to Mr. Park's son and his presence throughout the film, and how he ends up revealing Jung-jin's border crossing. He is a witness to all tragedies in the village; yet, the audiences do not know his name until the end. In light of his frequent appearances, his namelessness is not a mere coincidence. Rather, his character is a stand-in for those villagers whose attitude toward North Korean people changes along with the criminal incidents in the village. In the beginning of the film, Mr. Park's son is a good friend of Chang-ho who shares his kindness and generosity. However, he becomes the eyewitness of the village throughout the film. He witnesses that a North Korean defector rapes Chang-ho's sister and also witnesses that the village chief, a married man, has an affair with Young-ran, the owner of a tofu store. On top of that, he hears that his aunt and uncle died in a factory fire in South Korea.

This series of incidents results in a change in Mr. Park's son toward the end of the film. On the day of the soccer match with a neighborhood village, Mr. Park's son finally rides a bicycle to the police station and exchanges his information about Jung-jin's border crossing for his father's discharge. More precisely, he becomes himself a witness of the tragedy. However, with his eyes closed, he chooses to hide in the back. When his friends, including Chang-ho and Jung-jin, practice for the match, Mr. Park's son crosses the yard and arrives inside the abandoned building. In the Chang-ho's falling scene, Mr. Park's son hides in the middle of the frame where the two windows divide the wall evenly. He is sitting right in the middle between the windows, closing his eyes firmly (see figure 1.8.). His image with closed eyes is similar to that of *Justitia*

(Lady Justice) whose eyes are covered with a cloth while she holds a knife in one hand and a scale in the other. The image of *Justitia is* currently interpreted as the goddess of justice who prevents herself from the intervention of the profane, but when this image was first discovered in 1494, it was a satire of the goddess who was incapable of coming to a wise judgment due to outside interventions.<sup>44</sup> It may be true that Mr. Park's son has lost his ability to correctly evaluate the situation just as the goddess had. However, the fact that he betrays both Chang-ho and Jung-jin is not reversible. Mr. Park's son witnessed every incident in the village, but now he closes his eyes and turns his back to Chang-ho's falling body. As the villagers choose to minimize their guilt towards the North Koreans through referring to them as anonymous, Mr. Park's son also weighs his guilt for accusing his friend against the compensation that he will receive for his information. He knows the rules of exchange and learns how to eviscerate morality.

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<sup>44</sup> In Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, there is a woodprint illustration of Lady Justice in a strange position. In this picture, a religious fanatic wearing a fool's cap covers the goddess' eyes with a cloth. She brandishes her knife blindly, without seeing a pair of scales. This image was originally a satire of serial litigants who paralyze judicial authority with unnecessary debates. Several decades later, this image of the goddess of Justice with her eyes covered became popular throughout Europe. Nevertheless, for some reason, her covered eyes came to symbolize the justice or impartiality of judicial authority, like an ancient prophet who was remote from the world, thus seeing the truth. Francois Ost, *Raconter la loi, aux sources de l'imaginaire juridique* (2004). Qdt in Emmanuel Pierrat, *Antimanuel de droit* (Rosny-sous-Bois: Breal, 2007). Translated to English by author from its Korean translated version (2009.) The following figure: Albrecht Durer, *Goddess of Justice*, 1494, woodprint, accessed August 16, 2016, <http://blog.ohmynews.com/cjc4u/343007>.



It is not fair to assign the responsibility for the series of tragedies to the villagers' loss of morality, and besides, that is far from my intention. The central issue here is how the villagers transform a series of tragedies into individual responsibility and how this loss of collective guilt becomes a norm in this town. This village is on the verge of collapse as a community, and this collapse is closely linked to the massive migrant flow that overwhelms this community.

This Korean Chinese village demonstrates an example of a dissolving rural area due to industrialization and commercialization of China. After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the Deng Xiaoping government opened China as a market economy by incorporating neoliberal elements while maintaining authoritarian centralized control. Under the four modernizations of Deng Xiaoping—agriculture, industry, education, and science—China has achieved rapid economic development, and similar to many third-world countries, young generations have moved to cities and foreign countries in search of opportunity. In addition to China's economic liberalization, the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea in 1992 added economic momentum, especially for Korean Chinese, thus encouraging their labor migration to South Korea. As briefly mentioned earlier, the border town in *Dooman River* consists mainly of elders and teenagers, and the villagers in their twenties to forties who generate income are labor migrants to big cities in either China or South Korea.

The construction of such a state manipulative market economy in China made it possible to continue controlling the state and people within China, but this rapid economic growth, resulting from the market economy, also had side effects, such as social inequalities and the emergence of new class power. Apart from centralization and controllability of state authority, a neoliberal structure has arisen. In other words, political subjects remain under the control of the state, but as consumers, individuals have become subjects without limit. Borrowing Adam



Smith's term, individuals were newly found as "entrepreneurial actors" in their everyday life. In terms of consumption, individuals became "fully responsible for her- or himself" because "neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences."<sup>45</sup> Chinese have become "entrepreneurial actors" without a transition of political apparatus. It is important to note that with this economic transition, moral autonomy entered the realm of "self-care," by separating from something we called "commune." If we recall the scene in the beginning of *Dooman River*, where the villagers gather for an individual's death and accompany that person to the grave, we can clearly see that in this border town, only ritual remains as a residue of being lost whereas the value of community that the villagers have maintained is replaced by the value of individuals' "self-care" or "free-care." In this sense, helping others becomes a matter of self-choice, and so does dying for others. Hospitality toward strangers and acceptance of strangers are discussed in the realm of human rights; however, the urgency of its virtue now appeals on an individual level or not at all.

### Blind Zone: Labor and Human Trafficking on North Koreans in China

#### *Consensus: You Do Not Belong Here*

Lars von Trier's 2003 film *Dogville*<sup>46</sup> demonstrates how a guest (or gift) becomes a burden (or a slave) and how community's hospitality towards a stranger turns into hostility. When Tom (Paul Bettany), a villager, finds a stranger, Grace (Nicole Kidman), he understands

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<sup>45</sup> Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 42.

<sup>46</sup> *Dogville*, dir. Lars Von Trier (U.S.A.: Zentropa Entertainments8 ApS., 2003), DVD.

her as “a gift” not only for him but also for the rest of the villagers to “illustrate” their morality as a community. At first, the villagers are reluctant to give work to Grace, who is willing to provide her labor in return for their accepting her. After her sincere work, the town gradually becomes more vigorous, and as a result, every village member admits that Grace has given an opportunity to the villagers to consolidate their unity. However, when the police appears and tells them that Grace is a dangerous person with a reward for her capture, their attitude changes. While there is no accurate information about Grace’s identity, the villagers now claim Grace a corresponding price for hiding her. The villagers demand harder labor from her with less payment. Grace’s labor is exploited,<sup>47</sup> and soon the men in the village exploit her as if she were their common sexual tool. Regardless of how much Grace devotes herself to her work, the villagers complain about her work and wonder how they can get rid of her. What was once a gift now becomes a burden. At the same time, however, the villagers think that they “own” Grace’s labor and body and prevent her from escaping the village by hanging a chain around her neck with a bell to make sure she is not running away. Grace’s uncertain identity and her status as a fugitive “allow” the villagers to abuse her further, enslave her, and claim their ownership of her. Whenever it is necessary, the villagers gather in the village chapel and make a decision until they reach a consensus. The villagers raise various questions: Is Grace beneficial or harmful to the village? (In this case, every individual represents the village.) Can we trust her? Do we all agree on our decision? A writer, Tom, who was the first to find Grace and later falls in love with her, seems to hang on the boundary of this community because of his “special” intimacy with Grace.

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<sup>47</sup> At this point, Grace has to transfer her labor from one resident to another every thirty minutes when Martha rings a bell. She runs to the next villager’s home, using a shortcut through Mrs. Ma Ginger’s Gooseberry bushes. Mrs. Ma Ginger stops Grace and tells her that she cannot use this shortcut. When Grace said, “But everyone is using this way,” Mrs. Ma Ginger said, “They have lived here long enough to use this shortcut, but you don’t.” When Grace asks, “Do you mean I cannot use the shortcut because I am a stranger?”, Mrs. Ma Ginger answers, “No, it is not like that. I mean, you should be more careful.” The villagers no longer hide their antipathy against Grace, drawing a line between “us and you.”

In their last meeting, the villagers corner him by questioning, “Are you with us or with Grace?” Tom, whose sexual advances are turned down by Grace, eventually chooses to remain with the villagers and reports Grace’s existence to a dangerous gangster boss, who later turns out to be Grace’s father. By eliminating a discord, the villagers reach at consensus, thus believing that their community is saved. Indeed, this “consensus... defines a mode of symbolic structuration of the community that evacuates the political core constituting it, namely dissensus.”<sup>48</sup> In *Dogville*, the people do not accept dissent or difference and defend themselves, saying, “there was no choice.”

I explain the process of reaching consensus in *Dogville* at length, because this film provides an important clue to understanding what happens to the Korean Chinese villagers in China in terms of North Koreans. In the next part, I analyze a Korean Chinese writer’s short story, *Ok-hwa*, which is about North Korean women in a Korean Chinese village. The villagers do not understand why North Korean women are leaving the town secretly even after the villagers’ good deeds toward them. Like *Dooman River*, “Ok-hwa” also demonstrates the relationship between Korean Chinese and North Koreans, except that this time we finally meet North Korean women border crossers. Although *Dooman River* is a significant work in presenting the relationship between Korean Chinese and North Koreans on the border, as discussed earlier, Soon-hee’s rape scene remains questionable because it could lead the audience to consider these refugees or undocumented migrants as potential criminals who can harm anyone at anytime. Zhang Lu said that his film is based on what he and his neighbors had experienced in the border village in a “realistic manner.” However, because of his very position as a realist, this film is more dangerous for the audiences’ perception. We are watching those

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<sup>48</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Steven Corcoran, Kindle ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 188.

“realistic” scenes through the medium of film, but at the same time, we are missing the other part that is not shown. For example, the majority of North Korean border crossers in *Dooman River* are men. Three North Korean women appear in the film, but they do not have a particular role and are always with North Korean men, presented as a couple. However, considering the fact that over 70-80 percent of North Korean migrants in South Korea are women,<sup>49</sup> and the number of North Korean women in China is almost three times that of North Korean men,<sup>50</sup> this lack of representation of North Korean women in *Dooman River* makes us wonder about their absence. The rape scene of Soon-hee creates momentum for distrust of foreigners, which makes the villagers turn their faces away from North Korean border crossers, but the frequent violence and trafficking of North Korean women on the border are completely absent from the film. In this sense, *Ok-hwa* fills the gap of *Dooman River* and shows us the kinds of violence that most North Korean women encounter after their border crossings. North Korean women have to escape again from some Korean Chinese “human sellers” within China, and during their escape route, these women are continuously violated both physically and mentally by people who want to take advantage of their precarious situation as fugitives.

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<sup>49</sup> The number of North Korean women migrants surpassed that of North Korean men in 2002. Since then, the North Korean women migrants’ ratio has been between 70-80 percent. For example, in 2016, the ratio of the women migrants was 79%. The Ministry of Unification. Based on the information which appeared on March 25, 2017. <https://www.unikorea.go.kr/content.do?cmsid=1440>.

<sup>50</sup> Tae-hyun Kim and Chi-young Roh, *The life of North Korean Women Defectors in China (chaejung pukhan it'al yōsōngdūrūi sam)* - focusing on thirteen North Korean women's lived experiences (Seoul: Hawoo, 2003), 9.

“*Ok-hwa*”: the Name of the Undocumented North Korean

Geum Hee<sup>51</sup>'s “Ok-hwa” is an important work that illuminates the relationship between Korean Chinese and North Koreans. The North Korean female refugees’ case in *Ok-hwa* raises the question of human rights of North Koreans, as it is frequently presented by worldwide activists. However, more significantly, the stateless status of the North Korean women in *Ok-hwa* demonstrates that people who do not belong to a certain nation-state have no place to claim their human rights. This story touches upon the refugee problems that have overwhelmed many parts of the world. The refugees need a new place to live, but with the exception of a few, they eventually remain on the border, unwelcomed by any states. As Balibar expatiates on Arendt’s reflection on “Human rights in general,” “Human Rights can no longer be considered a mere prerequisite and an abstract foundation for political rights that are set up and preserved within the limits of a given national and sovereign state.”<sup>52</sup> When people do not belong to a certain nation-state, their human rights do not appear sufficiently important and can be easily ignored. Furthermore, the nation-state does not commit to guaranteeing human rights. The principle of the nation-state is not based on human rights, but human rights are just one of the many discourses that the nation-state is interested in. In this case, how should we approach the case of human

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<sup>51</sup> Geum Hee (or Kim Geum Hee) is a female Korean Chinese writer, who began writing in 2007 in the Korean Chinese literary field in China. Most of her works have dealt with the identity issue of Korean Chinese as an ethnic minority or other ethnicities in China and South Korea respectively, but she became known to South Korean readers with her 2014 short story “Ok-hwa.” This story tells us how North Korean refugees are accepted and excluded from a Korean Chinese community. The writer herself reveals unpleasant feelings of receiving special attention only because she deals with this “special” topic of North Korean refugees; she cannot divorce from the North Koreans’ stories because their presence has been and still is a part of the life of Korean Chinese, including the author. About the author’s interview, see Jae-bong Choi, “It is not welcoming to get an attention only because it is about North Korean defectors,” *The Hankyoreh*, 2015, accessed January 9, 2016, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/culture\\_general/718198.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/culture_general/718198.html). She used to use her full name Kim Geum Hee in the Korean Chinese literary field, but after writing in the Korean literary field, she changed her pen name to Geum Hee to distinguish herself from a different Korean writer with the same name.

<sup>52</sup> Etienne Balibar, “Outlines of a Topography of Cruelty: Citizenship and Civility in the Era of Global Violence,” *Constellations* 8. no. 1 (2001): 17-18.

beings whose human rights are not guaranteed? “Ok-hwa” demonstrates that not only human rights but also humanistic understanding is not guaranteed to North Korean women on the border.

In “Ok-hwa,” Hong, a Korean Chinese woman, runs a small shop in a Korean Chinese town. Her business runs adequately but mostly depends on credits instead of cash. Hong is a sincere churchgoer similar to typical Christians in Korean Chinese towns, whose belief becomes the principal motive of their work. One day, a North Korean woman refugee who has been appearing in the church for two years approaches her and asks for some money. After “the woman” asks for her help, Hong faces a dilemma. She oscillates between two thoughts: “Now that I promised her, let’s just help her” and “Why do I have to give her money? Do I owe a debt on her or what?” Hong starts to skip the church meetings to avoid the woman. In the meantime, other church members speak negatively to Hong about the woman. Hong suffers from the ambivalence: She feels guilty for not helping a North Korean woman, but also feels unfair in that she does not know why she has to give her money to the woman. These feelings remind Hong of Ok-hwa, another North Korean refugee woman that she used to know. Ok-hwa was a woman who married Hong’s younger brother four or five years ago, but then suddenly disappeared despite having been well treated by Hong’s family. Hong has felt betrayed by Ok-hwa’s departure ever since. Hong realizes that her suppressed feelings regarding Ok-hwa have become intertwined with her feelings for the woman in the church. Hong eventually gives the money to the woman, but blames her for not being grateful enough. Hong also explains to the woman how much this money means to her.

The North Korean female migrant, who is called simply “the woman” rather than by her name, demonstrates the insecurity of the North Koreans in China due to their status as

undocumented workers and refugees. These women appear in the town suddenly, like Grace in Dogville, and then disappear without notice. Their existence shakes the Korean Chinese village and becomes a collective problem to the villagers. The main protagonist, Hong, suffers from her ambivalent feelings toward a North Korean female migrant in her town. Hong's suffering is tied to three questions: One, "why do I have to emotionally suffer when I help others? Two, why did Ok-hwa betray our family after we did so good to her? The woman in the church will be like Ok-hwa. Then, why should I help her? Three, how can I trust her? How can I understand them?"

She is suffering not because she is greedy, but she feels as if she has been betrayed by one of these North Koreans. Although Hong's friend at one point reveals the name of the woman in the church as "Sister Yi," Hong always refers to her as just "woman" (*yŏcha*). This demonstrates that in Hong's mind, every North Korean woman is the same, all of them like Ok-hwa. Hong's ambivalence about Ok-hwa emerges on an unconscious level through a dream:

That night, Hong struggled with her lingering feelings about that woman. They wandered through her dreams like they had in other dreams she'd for a few days in a row.

In this last dream, when Hong asked the woman, "Why should I give you the money?" the woman had answered, "Because you have it."

Hong asked her another question. As she did so, though, the woman shifted back and forth from her regular identity into Ok-hwa: "So, I gave you the money. So why are you still not satisfied?" Then the woman looked down at her unsatisfactorily with her slanted eyes, as she had always done in Hong's dreams, and said, "Oh, all *that* money! Money even a dog couldn't use! So you throw a little bit of money at me. No, I'm not grateful!"<sup>53</sup>

A little bit of money? How could she say that? Even in her dreams Hong felt so stifled that she rubbed her hand against her chest. "Once I make a lot of money in South Korea, then I won't behave like you guys." After saying that, the woman had grinned at Hong and then in the end doubled over giggling. She then turned into Ok-hwa.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> After this, the translator adds "Who do you think you are?," which does not appear in its original Korean text. It seems that this line was added to make the flow smoother, but I think this strong line may change the woman's intention in the story. It truly is an exaggeration of the woman's feeling. Thus, I omit the line here.

<sup>54</sup> Geum Hee, *Ok-hwa*, trans., Seung-hee Jeon (Seoul: ASIA Publishers, 2015), 39, 41. Originally published in *Creation and Criticism (Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng)* Vol. 163 (Changbi Publishers, 2014).

Hong's stifled feelings—a mix of guilt and aggravation at the lack of gratitude—are vividly expressed in this dream. She suffers from an emotional debt<sup>55</sup> to the woman and Ok-hwa. That is for some reason, she feels obligated towards these women, like the villagers in *Dooman River*. Just as Yong-ran in *Dooman River* blames North Korean border crossers for the village's tragedies and the villagers in *Dogville* point out Grace as their common problem that ruins the community, Hong's church people heavily criticize the woman for her working attitude.

Annoyed by the woman, Hong's church friend says,

“But the nanny job was too hard, the cook position she had to travel too far, the factory job was too dangerous, the company janitor job meant working too long... My goodness! These days when it's hard enough even finding a job she can't be so choosy. I just don't know. She's complained about her back pains, but she obviously carried a bag of rice that a Deaconess bought her with no problem. How much more can you believe her?”<sup>56</sup>

The woman's reputation and credibility plummet due to her poor performance at different jobs. However, as we saw from Grace's case, no matter how hard the woman works, her performance is always underestimated by those who feel she is still in their debt. In the last conversation with the woman, Hong realizes that the church people blamed the woman for leaving for South Korea, suggesting that she settle instead with an adequate person in China. Their hospitality is about to end and Hong's suffering begins when the church people ask the guest to become one of them—to settle with a local person and find a job, just like them. However, they also know that the woman cannot be one of them after all, because she does not belong in the village. The town people have not tried to understand why the woman makes the

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<sup>55</sup> Kyung Hyun Kim explains this emotional debt as “an artificial mea culpa,” appearing in South Korean films about North Koreans. He sees that after three generational gaps since the Korean division, Koreans' “one people theory” is no longer working, but some South Korean melodramas bring South Korean audiences to tears. Kyung Hyun Kim, *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 120–121.

<sup>56</sup> Geum Hee, 27.



tough decision to leave for South Korea. The same thing happened to Grace in Dogville. For the villagers, Grace's attempt to run away was *very disrespectful*, so they "had no choice but bring her back to Dogville" for their *dignity*. Hong's ambivalence toward the woman in *Ok-hwa* also arises from this perception of the woman being disrespectful toward her hosts. Hong understands that her noble humanity towards others was degraded.

Hong continuously finds an answer why North Korean women are leaving the town despite their good deeds onto them. "It so happened that the last time Hong saw her [the woman] was the day when her brother-in-law, whom she hadn't seen for several years, returned from South Korea,"<sup>57</sup> Hong states. The presence of Hong's brother-in-law and his view of South Korea as "other" provide a possible clue to the riddle—why North Korean women are leaving. After having drunk strong liquor, Hong's brother-in-law talks about South Korean people's stereotyping and exclusion of Korean Chinese. Besides, as an undocumented laborer, he is not able to claim his human rights in South Korea, where—according to Hong—people cannot enjoy their lives but only work as moneymaking machines. The clue to understanding the woman is given in Hong's brother-in-law's jeremiad against his insecurity—he cannot trust anyone, cannot speak anything true. Hong realizes that the situation of the Korean Chinese who work in South Korea as migrants is not so different from that of North Koreans in China. Thus, when the woman visits Hong for the last time and confesses her "true story," she says, "But I can do nothing I want here. Since I heard that I could do anything legally there, I have to go."<sup>58</sup> Hong cannot respond but just drinks her juice.

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<sup>57</sup> Geum Hee, 57.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

The church people portrayed the woman as a lazy and shameless person who does not thank the church people enough for their help. However, in the end, Hong realizes that the woman has suffered from too much work ever since she crossed the border.

“After I had swum across the Duman River, I was captured by human traffickers. They were veterans. They didn't sell North Koreans to Yanbian or ethnic Korean villages. They sold them to remote mountain villages. The shack I lived in was just a rough roof over four walls, and the man was unable to work and just lay around all day... I worked the farm, raised the pigs, and did the housework all by myself. I worked like hell, and had a baby, too.” She said that she had run away, leaving behind her two-year old son, who had just begun speaking, his grandmother, and the disabled father. She walked day and night for two days until she got to the nearest train station. She happened to get off in this city and walked on until she was so exhausted that she collapsed near the church. “Do you now understand who I am? I ran away. I deserted my own baby. What more I can say about myself?”<sup>59</sup>

The woman feels terror because of her insecure situation and guilt because she abandoned her unwanted baby. Similarly, most North Koreans residing in China work as undocumented laborers and experience emotional difficulties.<sup>60</sup> Due to their status as fugitives, they get paid much less than Chinese people,<sup>61</sup> while doing dangerous and difficult jobs in unseen areas. Due to the circumstances, many North Korean women who later safely escape to South Korea have ambivalent feelings about Korean Chinese because the latter help North Koreans to hide and survive, but they also exploit North Koreans' labor for very little money. The majority of North Korean women are trafficked and sold right after they cross the border. While the church people

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>60</sup> “Because of the Chinese government's enforcement on illegal immigrants in China, North Korean women with their babies and even pregnant women are hiding away from the crackdown. The anxiety they feel causes their psychological and physical health problems.” Tae-hyun Kim and Chi-young Roh, *The life of North Korean Women Defectors in China* - focusing on thirteen North Korean women's lived experiences (*chaejung pukhan it'al yösöngdürüi sam*) (Seoul: Hawoo, 2003), 9. My translation. However, detailed studies about North Korean women's condition in China have not been conducted yet.

<sup>61</sup> North Korean women said that they rarely received wages for their work, and even if they have, they received 1/10 of the Chinese wages, when they started their work. Kim and Roh, 108.

perceive the woman as ungrateful and lazy, the church was the last place the woman arrived to avoid human trafficking, labor exploitation, and sexual violence.

Hong's brother-in-law confesses that he could not tell his true (or real) story to anyone because of his anxiety and insecurity as an undocumented worker in South Korea. Unlike him, the woman tells Hong her story before she leaves China, and finally says, "I've never told anyone my stories. I feel better because I told you."<sup>62</sup> Without exaggeration, the woman tells Hong how she crossed the Tumen River and was trafficked by "human sellers (*saram jangsakkun*)." The church people have complained about how much rice and Kim-chi they afforded the woman, but what she needed the most at this point was not food. She was mainly hoping to be treated like a human being.

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<sup>62</sup> Geum Hee, *Ok-hwa*, 75.

## Chapter Two

### Mirrored Images:

#### Gender and Class of North Korean Migrants in South Korean Television and Films

In this chapter, I examine how North Korean migrants establish their subjectivity in South Korean society by analyzing three conservative television programs and four independent films. Not only have these representations have become a crucial medium for North Korean refugees and migrants, but they also allow the South Korean people to understand North Korea and its people for two main reasons. First, North Korea is a closed society, and information related to North Korea and its people is generally limited. Second, for the South Korean people, there is one additional barrier in terms of information on North Korea, because the information is, first, filtered by the government (according to the National Security Law) and, second, censored by South Koreans themselves because the National Security Law and the history of massacres (Jeju Uprising [4.3] and the massacre during the Korean War, for instance) have limited people's curiosity about North Korea and its people both consciously and unconsciously. In this anti-North Korea climate, the rare appearance of various representations of North Korean migrants has been somewhat extraordinary, and they have helped North Korean refugees outside the Korean peninsula to get a sense of what it is like to live in South Korea and also helped South Korean people to understand North Korean refugees and migrants' past and present.

At first glance, the conservative television programs seem to take a position opposite to that of the independent films: the latter focus on the North Korean migrants' human rights and the discriminatory practices against them and can hardly be called "conservative." The different representations of North Korean migrants fill the gap of the audience's knowledge and

understanding of them. These different media also presumes their different audience-ship (or spectatorship). To fully comprehend the differing representations of Korean migrants, it is in any case necessary to understand these medias' different frameworks and biases from the start.

As mentioned, the conservative channels such as TV Chosun and Channel A have been most active intercessors in producing images of North Korean migrants.<sup>63</sup> For example, the audience rating of *Now on My Way to Meet You* was notable, 4.554% in December 2015; in other words, it was rated the third-highest of all television programs at the same time.<sup>64</sup> The program *Now on My Way to Meet You*, which promotes itself as an entertainment show, was launched on December 4, 2011 on Channel A, whereas *Southern Men, Northern Women* is a reality television show on TV Chosun. *Southern Men, Northern Women* launched its first season on July 4, 2014, and ran until June 19, 2015, while its season 2 ran from July 17, 2015 to the present. *Moranbong Club* is an entertainment show presented by TV Chosun; it was launched on September 12, 2015. As discussed earlier, these programs were shown on well-known conservative channels; therefore, it is unsurprising that politically the content of these shows was rather similar. These three programs agreed in their assessment that South Korea is greater than North Korea and showed how South Korean people were helping North Korean arrivals to settle down in "our (*uri*)" society. Despite this commonality, the characteristics of the three programs varied based on the producers and show hosts. By analyzing the shows' characteristics with a

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<sup>63</sup> This relates not only to these channels' audienceship, but also to their supporters. For example, on November 14, 2012, the Ministry of Unification awarded a prize to the television program on unification and South and North Korean relations. *Now on My Way to Meet You* received the program award, and three North Korean migrants who participated in this program from the beginning as "Northern Beauties" won special awards. The Ministry of Unification used the expression "Northern Beauties" on their official website to explain this award. "Awards to the People in Charge of TV Program Related to Unification and South-North Korean Relations," *SaengSaeng News*, November 14, 2012, accessed February 23, 2017, <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/content.do?cmsid=1554&mode=view&page=&cid=11292>.

<sup>64</sup> Seulbi Lee, "The Average Audience Rating of *Now on My Way to Meet You* in December is 4.553%, which wins SBS and KBS1," *Sports Donga*, January 11, 2016, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://sports.donga.com/3/02/20160111/75839049/1>.

particular emphasis on the migrants' gender repositioning, in the next section, I will demonstrate how these conservative television representations attempt to establish the migrants' "ethnocentric-conservative" (or "patriotic") particulars.

In order to examine these conservative television programs as media, it is necessary to understand these programs' formats. In "Architectural Parallax," Slavoj Žižek demonstrates how the outside world seen through a window is different from the outside itself.<sup>65</sup> Thinking of his experience in a Peppermint Bay community center designed by Terroir Pty Ltd, Žižek explains that what he calls the inside-outside, or the outside landscape seen from inside the building, is different from the landscape itself. Seen through the window frame, "the outside is no longer simply the encompassing unity containing the inside, but is itself simultaneously enclosed by the inside (or, one might say, nature is enclosed by culture)."<sup>66</sup> In the following passage, Žižek describes the relationship between South Korea and North Korea by using this metaphor of the inside-outside. He states, "North Korea may appear sublime—when viewed from the safe spot in South Korea," and "conversely, democracy may appear sublime, when viewed from an authoritarian or 'totalitarian' regime,"<sup>67</sup> that is, North Korea. In other words, South Koreans' understanding of North Korea is the result of filtering through a South Korean political and cultural frame, whereas democracy looks beautiful when it is filtered by North Korea. The meaning of "inside-outside" of Žižek encompasses more than the subject's viewing frame. If the landscape of Peppermint Bay has become well-known after establishing the community center's extraordinary window frame, the nature of the view before and after we learn of the existence of the window frame is no longer the same. We do not discuss the nature of Peppermint Bay as a

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<sup>65</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Architectural Parallax," in *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), 259.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

place without referring to the community center anymore, because the latter has become a part of its nature. A similar conversion occurs within the framework of South Korean television. South Korea and North Korea observe and think of each other through their window frames, and the South and North Koreans do not exist without one another on the world stage. To be more precise, in the case of the South Korean television shows, the audience looks at North Korea through a double pane window. The producer and the program represent the first pane while the North Koreans, as panelists, create the second pane. The audience sees the contents through the North Korean panelists' testimonies, which are already mediated through the shows' framework. The television shows disseminating information through these double-pane windows are presented to the audience, including South Koreans, North Korean migrants, North Korean refugees worldwide, and North Koreans residing in North Korea.<sup>68</sup> It is not possible to identify all the audiences more precisely, nor is it my interest. In any event, it is hard to "prove" how the audienceship affects the programs' formatting.<sup>69</sup> By discussing the three television programs, we will encounter the different kinds of window frames that these shows aim to provide their audiences.

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<sup>68</sup> It has been widely known that South Korean Wave (*hanlyu*) is prevailing in North Korea. Of course, both accessing and watching foreign programs are illegal in North Korea, but North Korean people watch South Korean dramas and entertainment shows after obtaining recorded tapes through underground sellers. Among the North Korean panelists, it was rare to find one who had not watched South Korean television before they crossed the border. "The Dong-A Ilbo has recently reported that a young elite North Korean woman studying in Beijing defected as a result of watching Imangap [Shorter name of *Now on My Way to Meet You*]." Epstein and Green added that this story was told by the defection broker Kim Yong-hwa on September 15, 2013, but "it has not been independently confirmed." Stephen Epstein and Christopher Green, "Now on My Way to Meet Who? South Korean Television, North Korean Refugees, and the Dilemmas of Representation," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, no. 2 (2013). Accessed July 4, 2016. <http://apjif.org/2013/11/41/Stephen-Epstein/4007/article.html> However, many of the panelists said on the show that they decided to come to South Korea after they watched South Korean television, including *Now on My Way to Meet You*.

<sup>69</sup> It is not impossible to presume the reciprocity between television and audienceship by examining the programs' online bulletin board. However, it does not "prove" their relationship because the viewers who write their opinions on the board are few. There is some possibility that audiences influence a certain host's or panelist's quitting, but such a claim would also be hard to prove.

## North Korean Migrants in South Korean Television

### *Beauty of “Good Migrants”*: *Now on My Way to Meet You* (*Ije mannarõ kamnida*)

Since *Now on My Way to Meet You* was launched in 2011, this weekly show has grown to 269 episodes (by February 12, 2017). The show’s format has not changed much since its inception, but there have been slight revisions. Its initial slogan was “A Touching Project for Divided Families (*isan kajok kamdong p’ũrojekt’ũ*);” however, on December 16, 2013, starting from the 105th episode, the show adopted a modified format of “South-North Korean Communicative Variety (*nambuk’an sot’ong põraiõ’t’i*).” While the former phrase focuses the audience’s attention on the story of the North Korean “refugees” and their vivid experiences during the border crossings, the latter devotes more time to entertaining aspects, such as the panelists’ specialties, including dancing and singing. It is true that the show keeps promoting ethnic homogeneity between North and South Koreans and aims to facilitate the North Korean migrants’ adjustment to South Korean society. However, the atmosphere of the show has clearly changed from the time of the slogan’s revision. The amount of time devoted to the panelists’ tear-jerking narratives has decreased, and the show has become lighter entertainment on the whole.

The show *Now on My Way to Meet You* can be characterized as “ethnocentric conservative,”<sup>70</sup> and its main topic is reunification. Even though many current scholars find the

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<sup>70</sup> After the 1945 liberation, the separate governments of South and North Korea were established, and the Korean War occurred. The conservative regime of Syngman Rhee solidified itself based on the promise of anti-communism rather than ethnocentrism because of the division between South and North Korea. Now that communism has collapsed and North Korean socialism has become a failure, the anti-communist conservative movement has lost its cause, and its slogan lost its power. Although some conservatives still go for anti-communism, other conservatives, including these conservative television programs, secretly replace anti-communism with ethnocentric conservatism (*minjok posujuõi*). *Now on My Way to Meet You* aims for South Korea leading reunification, and it should take place peacefully by, for example, the collapse of the Kim family.



logic of ethnic nationhood is no longer working in South Korea,<sup>71</sup> this show positions itself as exceptional in that it reinforces the necessity of reunification based on ethnic homogeneity. For the hosts of this show, the necessity of reunification seems beyond doubt. With the official support of the Ministry of Unification, this show promises to continue until the day of reunification comes. The program's representative format reveals clearly when a new panelist joins the show. One or two new North Korean migrants join every episode, based on the episode's topic. The temporal panelists sometimes have just come out from Hanawon,<sup>72</sup> the national institution for the North Koreans' temporal education, and their nascent experience in South Korea for one or two months becomes the biggest element of fun in the show. The show host typically asks about the migrants' most confusing experience upon their arrival, and their answers usually end with enthusiastic applause for South Korea. For example, in episode 269, one female migrant said that she had been amazed by the sight of an escalator when she visited a department store in Seoul, South Korea. When she said that she was not at all interested in buying goods in the store but overwhelmed by riding on the escalator, everyone laughed. The following subtitle appeared after the laughter, "Don't worry, escalators are not only in Seoul, but everywhere in South Korea." After her "amazing" experience, most of the North Korean panelists added how they have been fascinated by South Korea's development, security,

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<sup>71</sup> For example, Hae Yoon Choo's current work on migrant rights in South Korea presumes "the absence of ethnic nationhood" in South Korea, and her work begins with the question "how the migrants' presence transforms South Korea as a polity" on this presumption. Hae Yeon Choo, *Decentering Citizenship: Gender, Labor, and Migrant Rights in South Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

<sup>72</sup> Hanawon's original name is "North Korean Defector Settlement Assistance Office," and this is a center belonging to the Ministry of Unification. Hanawon operates to help North Koreans who have fled to South Korea to adapt to society. The chief of this institution is a senior-level official, and in 2012, the first woman chief was assigned to this position. Hanawon opened in 1999 for the education of an increasing number of North Korean migrants in South Korea. Currently, two Hanawon are located in Gyeonggi Province and Gangwon Province. Upon their arrival in South Korea, North Koreans receive an intense investigation by the South Korean government for seven days to one month to confirm their motivation for escaping, identity verification, and whether they are camouflaged spies. After this period, they are sent to Hanawon to receive social adjustment training for three months.

education, and liberty. The contrast with North Korea's desperate situation was the next topic. This conversation ended when the migrants as well as South Korean hosts and panelists concluded that they were all blessed by being here, in South Korea.

*Now on My Way to Meet You* demonstrates what Hannah Arendt describes as the notion of a "Voluntary Prisoner." Explaining how Jews became loyal Frenchmen after their exile to France, Arendt writes, "We were the first "*prisonniers volontaires*" history has ever seen."<sup>73</sup> These Jews not only adjusted themselves to become new members of a new country, but were also eager to prove themselves "super-patriotic." In the same vein, the North Korean panelists in the show demonstrate their gratitude, appreciation, and loyalty to South Korea ever since their arrival. In this sense, they cannot criticize the South Korean government for anything in the show. As Arendt points out, such loyal citizens cannot criticize their newly adopted country's order, and this inevitably results in confusion regarding issues of their identity:

Very few individuals have the strength to conserve their own integrity of their social, political and legal status is completely confused. Lacking the courage to fight for a change of our social and legal status, we have decided instead, so many of us, to try a change of identity. And this curious behavior makes matters much worse. The confusion in which we live is partly our own work.<sup>74</sup>

North Korean migrants are confused about whether they can conserve their integrity regarding their original identity because technically they have come to their "enemy." Co-ethnicity – we used to be family with the same genealogy - is the only cause that they can rely on, but South Korean society keeps asking them to prove that they are still not an enemy.

We should note that the North Korean panelists in these television shows represent a small percent of North Korean migrants in South Korea. These North Koreans among the

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<sup>73</sup> Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 115.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

arrivals were “chosen”; thus, loyalty as a good migrant is implicitly promised. One North Korean panelist who had been in South Korea for nine years (as of 2016) intentionally referred to South Korea as “our country (*uri-nara*)” while criticizing North Korea’s underdeveloped condition. In the panelists’ confessions of their loyalty to South Korea, they tend to ignore their difficulties in adaptation or any confusion in their process of becoming South Korean. This frame of the show, “look only on the bright side,” successfully promotes South Korea’s superiority over North Korea; however, in the meantime, it marginalizes those North Korean migrants who suffer from their living difficulties as well as from psychological anxiety. For example, in the 2012 JTBC documentary, *North Korean Defectors 1.5*, the migrants frankly confess that it is not easy to adapt to a different society after their defections. Young-ho Kim, who turned 20 years old in 2012, said, “I can neither call South Korea ‘our country (*uri nara*),’ nor can I call North Korea ‘our country’ since I escaped from there. I don’t know . . . I am neither the nation of here nor there . . . That is why I symbolize myself as stateless or a refugee.”<sup>75</sup> His confusion cannot be resolved easily, and it is not limited only to his case.

In the show, the North Korean panelists confess the challenges they had to overcome before arriving in South Korea, and their successful stories generally include a happy ending: “however, they are happy after all, since they are here.” While describing their hard experience, they confine themselves within their status of exiles. In reality, some North Korean migrants choose to live separately from their families because even their family members remind them of

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<sup>75</sup> “North Korean Defectors 1.5,” in *Special Documentary*, JTBC, April 16, 2012. This documentary was broadcasted for two consecutive days. “1.5” in its title indicates that this documentary focuses on the younger generation of North Koreans, those who were born in North Korea but grew up in South Korea. The content is accessible on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFmAHR18Vcl>) (Accessed February 16, 2017), but, due to some cast members’ requests, it is blocked on the official JTBC webpage.

their most difficult moments.<sup>76</sup> It is worse if some of their family members died during their border crossings or they had to go through life in a concentration camp together. There are very many North Korean migrants who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and serious depression, but systematic support for them is very limited.

North Korean migrants' adaptability to the given society becomes their own responsibility, and the South Korean government's care system is overall insufficient. Instead, the North Korean migrants appearing on the show continuously prove how South Korea has embraced them with moral responsibility toward its "own people." Why is this old frame of the Cold War still working in 2017 Korea? Furthermore, why do we, including the producer and the audience, need this frame, and what do we need to (re)confirm from this?

This old frame presumes that the two Koreas still compete against one other in terms of their economic strength and political legitimacy. Even though North Korea's socialist system has failed, it seems that South Korea still needs to juxtapose itself to its counterpart. However, this Cold War frame paradoxically attests that these two counterparts and their regimes cannot exist without each other. The South Korea-North Korea ceasefire and confrontation will help maintain the power of vested interests, but it is a serious obstacle to political maturity for democracy. Conservative politicians often argue that the two Koreas are in a state of quasi-war. North Korean women are recognized as heterogeneous objects by South Koreans because, on the one

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<sup>76</sup> For example, in "North Korean Defectors 1.5," we see a middle-aged woman (since the episode was blocked by the cast members' request, I am not using their real names here) who crossed the border with her family. During their border crossing, she lost her brother and sister, and only her mother and daughter survived with her. Her mother and herself suffer severely from guilt feelings that they survived after their siblings' deaths. Because of serious depression, the woman beats her own daughter very hard and wants to abandon her in a center. In the interview with the producer, she confesses that she cannot control her anger and guilty feelings, so she expresses her feelings towards her daughter with beatings. Even though many arrived migrants are suffering, mass media rarely focus on these cases.

hand, they are voluntary prisoners who escaped from the enemy's arms, and on the other hand, they are the sisters, mothers, and women who were rescued from enemies.

### *Gender Repositioning in the South Korean Heteronormative-patriarchal System*

Criticism of *Now on My Way to Meet You* has been centered on the show's representation of the female North Korean panelists. As is well known, this show borrowed its format from *Global Talk Show—The Chatter of Beauties* (*Minyŏdŭrŭi suda*: KBS), whose main panelists were beautiful young female foreigners.<sup>77</sup> The female North Korean panelists are also called “Northern Beauties (*t'albuk minyŏ*),” and Eun-ha Shin, who sits at the center of the fourteen female panelists, is called the show's “official beauty (or number one beauty).” In all of its 243 episodes, the show's focus on the female panelists' beauty has not changed. Existing studies of the show have criticized the show's request that female panelists wear “too revealing” clothing and perform a “sexy dance,” which obviously underlines their sexuality.<sup>78</sup> The female panelists are presenting their memories, but from the start, they become subjugated under the male audiences' gaze.<sup>79</sup>

As Sun-Min Lee points out, young women have relatively less authority in a male-dominated society, and women's statements are underestimated as private, light, and trivial.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Stephen Epstein and Christopher Green, 2013: 5; Sun-Min Lee, “How Can North Korean Women Defectors Speak: A Critical Analysis of Television Talk Show <Now, Going to Meet> (Channel A),” *Media, Gender & Culture*, no. 29 (2014): 77.

<sup>78</sup> Hae Youn Choo, “Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship: North Korean Settlers in Contemporary South Korea. *Gender & Society*, no. 20 (2006): 576-604.

<sup>79</sup> Jee-ho Tae and In-sung Hwang, “How Does Television Talk Show, <Now, I'm Coming to Meet You> (Channel A) Reconstruct North Korean Women Defectors' Personal Memories?” *Korean Journal of Communication & Information*, (2012): 103-124.

<sup>80</sup> Sun-Min Lee, “How Can North Korean Women Defectors Speak: A Critical Analysis of Television Talk Show <Now, Going to Meet> (Channel A),” *Media, Gender & Culture*, no. 29 (2014): 75-115.

This analysis is also applicable when it comes to the female migrants' statements and status in the show.<sup>81</sup> While the female panelists are selected from among young and beautiful female migrants who have enough "entertaining" talent (in other words, external qualities server as the main criteria for participation), the North Korean male panelists are selected from a group of higher class, specialists, or elites in North Korea. Ever since the male panelists began to appear in the show, the female migrants' statements have undergone the clarification process of the male migrants. Without the North Korean male migrants' approval, the female migrants' statements are considered rumors without positive proof. The host of the show asks a male panelist, perhaps a doctor or professor, to confirm whether the female migrant's statement has credibility. Through this process, we see four degrees of authorities among the cast in the show. The host, a South Korean male, lends his authority to the North Korean male, while situating North Korean female panelists under the male panelists. In this process, the South Korean hostess, whose role is basically one of assistance, echoes the host's statements, situating herself somewhere between the South Korean male and the North Korean male.

Since the North Korean male migrants have appeared on the show, the relationship between the South Korean male and North Korean male has become relatively obvious. The North Korean male migrants began to appear on the entertainment show very recently, compared to their peers, the "Northern beauties." However, the image of North Korean male migrants has been described as ignorant and rough, compared to the South Korean male guests. Min-woo Jung, who used to be a company commander in the People's Army of North Korea, is a character representative of North Korean men. His tanned skin and strong Northern accent have become targets of mockery. Whenever he speaks, the host and other South Korean male guests ask

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<sup>81</sup> Lee, 95.

someone to “translate” his Northern accent. The stereotype of North Korean men has been established by Jung’s character in the show. However, when another North Korean Hyung-seok Lee visited the show as a special guest, this hierarchical relationship with the South Korean men above the rest of the participants fell apart. Lee, who was a street beggar (*kkotchebi*) in North Korea for four years, defected to China with the help of his father, who had defected before him. He now lives in Canada and works as a North Korean human rights activist. In episode 190, Lee’s appearance surprised the South Korean male guests, because his look was very different from that of Jung.



Figure 2.1. The subtitle says, "Northern Men as Black and White." Jung on the left is referred to Black and Lee on the right becomes White. This expression can be used to refer to a succinct contradiction, but when it is used to refer to people, it surely implies racism. Episode 190, Aug. 9, 2015.

One of the South Korean male guests said, “I was very confused when I entered the studio. I was wondering why that person was sitting there among the North Korean panelists even though he is not a North Korean.” Lee wore a white jacket and glasses, and had lighter skin than Jung.

Moreover, Lee did not use the Northern accent at all, and his English fluency enhanced his image as an “unusual North Korean man.” This comparison intentionally denigrated Jung by promoting Lee as the new chapter for North Korean male migrants. It is interesting that Lee’s presence not only threatened Jung, but also made the South Korean male guests insecure. The South Korean male guests had initially positioned themselves above the North Korean migrants with their civilized and sophisticated image. However, Lee’s character “looks exactly like South Koreans.” The South Korean male guests’ confusion attested to the fact that previously the North Korean panelists have been understood and perceived to fit within a certain stereotype. On the other hand, the North Korean female panelists did not represent a problem for the South Korean male guests, since they did not perceive these female migrants as competitors from the beginning in this male-dominated society. The North Korean male migrant, such as the unsophisticated Jung, was relatively safe, because “former enemies” like him had to be submissive when they arrived in their enemy country, South Korea. In this sense, the South Korean males identified their status with that of the nation itself; therefore, North Korean males’ migration proved their surrender. These male migrants’ ignorant and maladjusted characters satisfied the South Korean males. Due to this presumed gender frame in the show as well as in the society, Lee’s character could not be selected as a long-term panelist, but only as a one-time guest. Overall, each of the four gendered groups became either visible or invisible when viewed through the politically conservative and gender-biased lens of the television show *Now On My Way to Meet You*, repositioning each to conform to South Korean society’s conventional gender roles.



*North Korean “Caste System” Inherited: Moranbong Club (Moranbong k’üllöp)*<sup>82</sup>

*Moranbong Club* was launched on September 12, 2015 by TV Chosun. This new program selects popular North Korean female migrants who have previously appeared on several television shows for the program’s popularity. This program also promotes their “northern beauties;” however, this talk show puts more emphasis on the North Korean migrants’ background, such as their original regions and their class in North Korea. Compared to *Now on My Way to Meet You*, *Moranbong Club* often shows recent pictures taken in North Korea. It does not reveal its official source(s) and says the production team worked hard to get these pictures. As the show focuses on the North Korean panelists’ regionalism and classism, it goes well with the materialism and snobbism in South Korea. The show often uses expressions such as “the top one percent,” “special class,” and “gold spoon (*kŭmsujō*)” as topics and headlines.<sup>83</sup> Even though the North Korean and South Korean panelists criticize the Kim family’s hereditary fortune and power, they nonetheless envy the experience of North Korean migrants from the top 1% of North Koreans. This show’s frame transforms North Korea’s classism into South Korean economic classism without any contradiction, since the privileges that the top 1% of North Koreans have enjoyed are not different from those of the upper echelons of the South Korean society.

For example, the early episodes divided the women panelists according to their original regions in North Korea and made them compete against each other by arguing that their own

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<sup>82</sup> Moranbong is a small hill located in Northern Pyongyang in North Korea. It is believed that this hill resembles the shape of a peony blossom. Peony is Moran in Korean and Bong means hill. North Korea’s most famous female band’s name is also Moranbong Band (*Moranbong aktan*), and it seems that this television program was so named due to the band’s popularity.

<sup>83</sup> For example, the theme of the 13th episode (December 5, 2015) is “the best region of North Korea,” the 17th episode (January 02, 2016): “Top 1% elites from three major universities in North Korea,” and the 21st episode (February 06, 2016): “Alumni Association for the North Korean major universities.” Even if other episodes do not have such titles, the show consists mainly of people who belonged to elite classes in North Korea and those who had jobs close to the Kim family.

region was better than others. Episode 17 invited North Korean migrants who used to be in the upper 1% of North Korean society in terms of education. It is well known that in order to enter the three popular universities in North Korea, Kim Il-Sung University, Kim Chaek University of Technology, and Pyongyang University of Music and Dance, high grades as well as good family background are required. Without a noticeable family background, students with high grades do not get the chance to take an entrance exam for those universities. Furthermore, people with poor family backgrounds<sup>84</sup> were evicted from the capital Pyongyang, which made it an exceptional region. The guests who used to be the students of those universities proudly explained the privilege that they experienced, and the South Korean hosts and the rest of the North Korean migrants envied their past. Without any criticism or self-examination of North Korean class division, the show continuously focuses on the migrants' privilege without a critical analysis in the same way as programs that showcase celebrities' luxurious lifestyles. There is an obvious division between these North Korean migrants who used to be the upper 1% and the rest of migrants from North Korean rural areas even after they have migrated to South Korea.

Episodes 46 and 47 intensified the expressions of show's snobbism and obsession with the migrants' socioeconomic strata in North Korea. One North Korean male guest who identified himself as a "Pyongyang native" proudly said that he had lived in Pyongyang for 28 years (1968–1996) before his defection. The host asked other migrants whether this guest was included in the privileged group, and then one of the panelists described him as "the person with an excellent family background and is very *clean*." This idea of "clean" or "pure" bloodline was

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<sup>84</sup> Based on the episode 47, there are roughly five classes in North Korean society. The privileged special group includes the bereaved family of revolutionary patriots; the core people include the families of the war dead and honored soldiers; the average people include the proletariat, farmers, soldiers, and intellectuals; the complicated people include North Korean defectors and draft dodgers; and, finally, the hostile people include landowners, pro-Japanese or collaborators, spies, religious men, and defectors. South Korean guests were very surprised by the North Korean class system, but at the same time, they showed envy toward the North Korean people who had come from the group of special people.

understood by all participants with no internal examination in this show. However, when another North Korean male migrant who also came from the upper 1% in North Korean society said that he had not had a chance to gather with the lower class like the other migrants in the show, one female migrant at last ran out of patience and almost yelled at him. Their minor quarrel was mediated by another male migrant, Kim, who warned the migrant who provoked the others. This ambivalent and contradictory idea perseveres the show without a chance of reflecting on it, and, in this environment, the migrants cannot overcome the class system that used to tie up their life in North Korea even after they have migrated to South Korea.

Episode 48 transferred the discourse from class differences to gender hierarchy by presenting a North Korean married couple who had migrated to South Korea together. This couple was introduced as the North Korean version of Romeo and Juliet because their class difference was obvious in North Korea. The woman belonged to the hostile group, and the man was from the core group. The cast and the hosts praised the man as a romantic person who had given up everything for love. Describing the woman as fortunate and blessed, the show connected class hierarchy to a hierarchy between the husband and wife. This hierarchical relationship does not interrupt the existing South Korean structure where the divided gender roles between married couples are taken for granted.

*Moranbong Club's* interest in the North Korean migrants' regionalism and classism does not help the migrants to make a new start. In an atmosphere where members of the top class of North Koreans are warmly welcomed, the rest of the migrants who do not belong to this class feel isolated. This is the limitation of the conservative television programs—it is impossible to properly reflect on the North Korean system. This limitation is based on the fact that these conservative programs also lack a reflective (or critical) view of the system of South Korean

society. Reflection is impossible unless the programs obtain a more introspective or self-critical view of their own society, where privileged people are praised, and wealth is considered exceptional. Without such a reflection on the system, only blind criticism of communism is possible, which no one now questions. Within their limitations, these programs unintentionally emphasize the commonalities of South and North Korea in terms of people's longing to belong to the upper classes. For the migrants who thought that they would be able to live a decent life based on their efforts and abilities instead of belonging to the innate "class (*sŏngbun*)," this program's frame only proves that South Korea is also a society in which economic class cannot be overcome or disregarded.

*Match Makers: Southern Men, Northern Women (Namnam pungnyŏ)*

*Southern Men, Northern Women* adapts its title from the old saying, "among the men, Southern men are good, and among the women, the Northern women are good."<sup>85</sup> This program is a reality show where South Korean male entertainers and North Korean female migrants enter into virtual marriages. Season 1 of the show began on July 4, 2014, and ended on Jun 19, 2015, completing 51 episodes. Season 2 began on July 17, 2015, and still continues. This reality show has shown a typical patriarchal marriage life between South Korean men and North Korean women while educating the new women from North Korea on the characteristics of the South Korean marriage. This program clearly aims to "reunify South Korean men and North Korean women before the reunification of country." This goal, however, serves to consolidate the heteronormative patriarchal system of Korean society. There have been many couples over the

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<sup>85</sup> This has been used to refer to South Korean men and North Korean women, but according to *Spring Anecdote (Ch'unmyŏng ilsa)* in *Imha's Notes (Imha p'ilgi)*, North and South here refer to the northern and southern region of Hamgyeong Province (now located in north-east North Korea) during the Chosun dynasty of the 19th century.

two seasons, but the gendered framework has not changed. The South Korean males perform their role as saviors of these newcomers, and they teach the women how to be good wives in the society. In this frame, the North Korean migrants are considered only as potential wives who do not threaten the patriarchal system but fortify it instead. This is clearly shown by their chorus concert held in January 26, 2016.



Figure 2.2. The North Korean popular band, *Moranbong Band*, sings "The greatest my country, to others envy, for show, with pride."



Figure 2.3. South Korean version of Moranbong band, *Moranbong sidae*, sings, "The greatest my husbands, to others envy, for show, with pride."

In this concert, the four North Korean migrants sang as a temporal singing group named “*Moranbong sidae* (Moranbong Generation or Era of Moranbong).” It is widely known that the Moranbong Band is a very popular female music group in North Korea, and its members are selected directly by the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. This band, also known as a North

Korean idol-group, is very popular for their performances, and they sing for their great leader and the nation. In the concert, the South Korean version of Moranbong Shidae wore the same uniform as the North Korean band and sang the Moranbong Band's most popular song "With Pride." While the Moranbong Band sings for and about their nation, the Moranbong Shidae sings for and about their "husbands" with revised lyrics. A slight revision was made from "nation" to "husbands." However, is it that different, really? The ways in which the North Korean regime and the South Korean reality shows portray the North Korean women as "proud" of their men, nation, and leader surprisingly resemble each other. The North Korean females and their images that used to maintain the male-dominated society of North Korea now serve the same role in the South Korean society. In this way, South Korean society and North Korean society mirror each other.

This "ideal relationship" frame between South Korean men and North Korean women has also been actualized through matchmaking companies in South Korea. In 2013, there were about five matchmaking companies promoting marriages between North Korean female migrants and South Korean men. According to the Foundation for Supporting North Korean Refugees, three out of four North Korean migrants are married to either North Korean male migrants or Korean Chinese.<sup>86</sup> However, Southern men-Northern women couples are on the rise. In fact, Young-hee Choi, who runs a matchmaking company called "Southern Men, Northern Women," migrated to South Korea in 2002 and established her company in 2005.<sup>87</sup> In the five years since the company's foundation, Choi has matched approximately 400 couples. According to Choi, 90%

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<sup>86</sup> Juyeon Pyo, "The era of 30 thousand North Korean Migrants... But "Southern Men Northern Women" Still Meet a High Wall," *Newsis*, November 4, 2013, [http://www.newsis.com/ar\\_detail/view.html?ar\\_id=NISX20131103\\_0012483780&cID=10201&pID=10200](http://www.newsis.com/ar_detail/view.html?ar_id=NISX20131103_0012483780&cID=10201&pID=10200) (accessed February 26, 2017).

<sup>87</sup> Jiyoun Im, "North Korean Women Are Not Picky about Men's Academic Clique or Salary," *SisaIn*, November 8, 2010, <http://www.sisain.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=8788> (accessed February 26, 2017).

of Southern men seeking her matchmaking company are mainly urban and in their early 30s to early 40s.<sup>88</sup> Choi thinks that whereas South Korean women are picky about men's annual salaries and jobs, North Korean women do not consider those elements significant. Furthermore, she adds that South Korean men are kind and sophisticated, whereas North Korean men are blunt and patriarchal. Choi cited these reasons to explain why South Korean men and North Korean women look for each other. She also added that couples involving North Korean men and South Korean women are rare because there are few North Korean male migrants in the list of the match-making companies and South Korean women do not know about them.

North Korean women are becoming a new option for South Korean men seeking a wife. The migrant women from Vietnam and the Philippines continue to marry South Korean men, and most of them achieve citizenship after their marriage. Since North Korean women are South Korean citizens without marriage, their motives are different from those of marriage migrants. What motivates these South Korean men and North Korean women to look for each other? Are their motivations based on a fantasy or stereotype, such as that of the kind South Korean man and innocent North Korean woman?

In this "ideal" marriage frame, South Korean women and North Korean male migrants are notably absent. What does their absence signify? For whose sake does this frame of "Southern men, Northern women" exist? The North Korean migrants in South Korea are already gendered before they establish their subjectivity. Misogynistic discourse has recently been prevalent in South Korean society, and the acute tension between men and women has been a part of serious social discourse. In this environment, where talking about misogyny itself has

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<sup>88</sup> The registration fee for the match making companies is about 1,700,000 won (approximately 1,500 dollars) in 2011, and, when a couple decides to marry, they pay additional costs ranging from 5,000,000 won (4,413.45 dollars) to 10,000,000 won (8,826.90 dollars). On the other hand, there were five reports on matchmaking scams in 2009. In 2010, the scam cases increased to 24. Jung-yeon Huh, "I Wish I had a Stable Southern Man like an Official," *Joins*, March 24, 2011, <http://nk.joins.com/news/view.asp?aid=4903024> (accessed February 26, 2017).

become antagonistic, the image of obedient North Korean women works as a substitute for South Korean women. These divisions between the South Korean male, South Korean female, North Korean male, and North Korean female delay the arrival of reflective discourse where we can discuss the equal rights—or, at least, basic rights—between people. The gendered image of North Korean migrants not only shows the gender-divided mentality of South Korean society, but also demonstrates how the divided Korean peninsula has been sustained. The stalled inter-Korean relations and the Cold War are sustained by the gendered frame of the society. Without the reformation of this frame, the division will be sustained, since the two nations have both strengthened their structures by exploiting and sacrificing “their” women.

In this section, I analyzed North Korean migrants appearing on conservative programs on South Korean television. The conservative programs as a medium highlight the positive aspects of South Korean migrants who willingly become “voluntary prisoners,” thus repeating the frame of the Cold War era. In this frame, South Korean society is represented as superior to North Korean society, which can be perceived in how South Korean society embraces and assimilates migrants. Although these entertainment programs make it easier for South Korean audiences to approach North Korean migrants, they are also responsible for reinforcing specific images and stereotypes of North Korean migrants.

What is the purpose of the illusion that the Korean conservative programs are creating for North Korean migrants and South Korean audiences? These programs select North Korean migrants who are “safely” settled economically and professionally or sometimes those who have outstanding looks. Unlike the South Korean independent films that will be featured in the next section, these programs are not interested in exposing the discriminatory practices against North Korean migrants. The illusion produced by the television programs deceives both North Korean



migrants and South Korean audiences. Watching the shows, the North Korean audiences believe that they will soon be recognized as “complete” citizens of South Korea. The illusion seems to be effective on a superficial level, but it soon disappears because South Koreans realize that they themselves still have prejudices against and stereotypes of North Koreans. In the case of North Koreans, their belief in the possibility of being “complete” citizens is also soon discouraged after experiencing social prejudice and discrimination against them. The next section analyzes independent films about North Korean migrants, who are discriminated against as a social minority.

### North Korean Migrants in South Korean Independent Films

The independent films that deal with North Korean migrants have mainly focused on the migrants’ human rights. Because these films generally criticize social discrimination against economic and social minorities, the audiences perceive them as progressive. However, conservative groups also find these independent films resonate with them; thus, sometimes the films win awards at human rights film festivals led by so-called conservative communities and political parties. In this way, independent films and conservative television programs are gathered under the common denominator of “human rights.” David Harvey accurately pointed out in 2011, “it has been all too easy to co-opt human rights issues as ‘swords of empire.’”<sup>89</sup> Discussing neoliberalism and its use of human rights issues, Harvey criticized current empires, such as the United States, as justifying their cause of using the military “in the name of

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<sup>89</sup> “Swords of empire” was the expression of Bartholomew and Breakspear. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 178.

protecting freedom, human rights, and democracy.”<sup>90</sup> It is obvious that human rights discourse provides first aid to those who are unprotected and at least gives them a voice and a forum. However, human rights discourse sometimes rhetorically used and the dignity of human rights do not always meet with goodwill. Harvey’s criticism of NGOs resonates with this idea. He talks about the massive increase in NGO activity since the 1980s and points out that the NGOs function as “Trojans for global neoliberalism.” In other words, no matter how well NGOs initially started in human rights-related activities, they are not democratic institutions. Instead, they maintain an elitist attitude toward those who are in need. Such attitudes are similar to those who have vested interests and some conservative forces whose priority is to maintain their own strengths. Thus, their discourse on human rights contributes to their image improvement and policy maintenance. I have no intention of defending the human rights situation in North Korea, and the situation should be repeatedly criticized. What I want to point out, however, is that the human rights discourse is always in jeopardy, regardless of the intentions of those who truly need it. In the following section, I examine how the North Korean people are repositioned as social minorities in their new society, focusing on class and gender aspects. We will see that these independent films demonstrate how the people who should be protected under human rights discourse are abandoned in society and experience multi-layered discrimination. In this process, we will also see how the frame of independent films that deal with the socially marginalized erases gender and brings class discourse to the forefront.

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<sup>90</sup> Harvey, 178.

*Laboring Male Bodies at the Margins: The Journals of Musan* (2010), *Stateless Things* (2011)

In *The Journals of Musan* (2010), director Park depicts the daily life of Seung-Chul,<sup>91</sup> who is in his twenties, and frames how he survives his work environment and human relationships. Kim Kyung-mook's *Stateless Things* (2011) shows the people Jun encounters in his daily life and draws the social boundaries separating them. The protagonist of *Stateless Things*, Jun, is portrayed as an immature boy, but Jun and Seungchul in *The Journals of Musan* are possibly in the same age group, given the fact that they do not go to school but work for a living. In the current section, I examine how these two laboring male bodies of Seung-Chul and Jun are portrayed and recognized by society, focusing on their masculinity.

Seung-Chul speaks little and looks emotionless in *The Journals of Musan*. His attitude toward society is explained in one sentence throughout the film, just as the film poster<sup>92</sup> tells us: "I can do anything." He works for people who illegally post the advertising cards and posters

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<sup>91</sup> Before *The Journals of Musan*, director Park Jung-Bum actually made a short film called *125 Jeonseungchul* named after his friend. 125 was the specific number that was given to the North Korean migrants in order to distinguish them from South Korean citizens by their resident registration cards. The North Korean male migrants receive the number 125 and the female migrants receive 225 as the final digits of their registration card numbers. The North Korean migrant groups had fought to change the number, and on January 2009, the Korean government passed a law amendment that enabled the North Korean migrants to change their registration number once during their lifetime.

<sup>92</sup> One of the posters of *The Journals of Musan*. The slogan in yellow, taken from the movie says, "I can do (anything) well."



that promote adult nightclubs and private loan sharks. Even though he works diligently in a precarious condition, his boss always looks at him with disapproval. In the boss's eyes, Seung-Chul is “not desperate enough.”



Figure 2.4. A street bully tears Seung-Chul's padded jacket with a cutter.



Figure 2.5. The down feathers burst from his jacket like blood.

Seung-Chul, portrayed by director Park himself, appears ironic and unbalanced on the screen. His rough movements and the film's shaky camerawork create an unstable atmosphere. Seung-Chul's shiny blue padded jumper is an austere counterpoint to his long and untamed hair, and the padded jumper, full of down feathers, represents Seung-Chul's hidden desire to be recognized by society. Seung-Chul's close friend, Kyung-Chul. Kyung-Chul, who works a middle-man job between the North Koreans residing in China and the North Korean migrants in South Korea, guarantees the delivery of his migrant North Korean friends' money to their families back in North Korea. However, it turns out that he actually deceives his friends and

steals the money entrusted to him. Kyung-Chul buys the expensive jumper for Seung-Chul and makes him an accomplice to his crime before Seung-Chul realizes it. However, this blue jumper becomes a target in an ordeal with street bullies. The bullies, who “simply asked Seung-Chul to lay low” without reason tear up Seung-Chul’s padded jacket.

In the beginning of the film, Seung-Chul does not seem to know how to express his himself in his new environment. It seems that he only expresses his emotion to a street dog that he often visits. However, as the movie continues, the audiences see that his obsession with dress and attire has grown. This desire is hardly mentioned, and is thus hiding, just as Seung-Chul himself passively reacts to the bullies at the beginning of the film. It is at the moment when the down feathers burst from his jacket that Seung-Chul finds his desire and anger toward society.

Even though Seung-Chul visits church every weekend and works on a very dangerous side road where cars frequently pass at high speeds, he is always invisible to other people. He only becomes noticeable when a police officer catches his illegal road-crossing and a detective introduces him to the church community. Without these official bridges, he is invisible to society. Instead, he only counts as a working body. Seung-Chul later works for a singing room (*noraebang*) that is run by his secret aspiration, Sook-young. Witnessing Sook-young’s illegal alcohol sales in the singing room as well as Kyung-Chul’s fraud, Seung-Chul slowly changes and adjusts himself to this deceitful society. He threatens the bullies with a rock, steals Kyung-Chul’s money, and finally passes his beloved dog’s corpse on the street. Unfortunately, *The Journals of Musan* tells us that Seung-Chul finally settles down and becomes a part of society when he comes to understand social injustice. With the money that he steals from Kyung-Chul, he buys a suit and cuts his hair. He learns to hide his identity under an artificial covering in order to be accepted by the society.



Figure 2.6. Jun rides his scooter with Soon-hee after they escape from the owner of the gas station.



Figure 2.7. Jun walks on the street at dawn as if he is angry at something.

In *Stateless Things* (2011), the audiences meet another North Korean boy, Jun, who has a different characteristic. Jun works at a gas station during the day and illegally posts name cards, as Seung-Chul does, at night. However, unlike Seung-Chul, who keeps silent most of the time, Jun reacts to the difficulties that he runs into. For example, Jun fights the gas station's owner when the owner tries to sexually assault Soon-hee, a Korean Chinese girl, and asks for his rightful wages when the owner fires him. Unlike Seung-Chul, who has an emotionless face, Jun shows different and changing emotions on his face all the time, and sometimes his frowns look

as if they will become tears. Of all his characteristics, Jun is often shown walking on screen with very impatient and restless steps.

The camera does not give us any clues about whether he has his own place; instead, it shows Jun either walking on the street or riding a scooter. The spatiality of *Stateless Things* not only characterizes the protagonists' appearance in the public space, but it is also closely associated with society's recognition of these marginalized figures. Even though Jun visibly appears in the public, he does not really settle in one place. There are two explanations for his relentless movement. First, after migrating, Jun does not yet have his "own space." This point could also metaphorically represent that he does not yet belong to the given society. Second, Jun may also be afraid of being settled because even he does not know who he is in this new society. In other words, he does not know how to become a member of South Korean society. His anxiety explains North Korean migrants' expectations of and disappointment with the South Korean society. Before their arrival, the migrants had their own expectations and fantasies about South Korea, but in reality, the South Korean people whom the North Korean migrants meet in their daily lives are not really interested in the migrants' lives. The society's ignorance makes the migrants nervous and depressed in their new lives. Jun's spatiality demonstrates the paradox of visibility of this marginalized figure: even if he wants to reveal his existence, it is rarely revealed.

Jun loses his job at the gas station in *Stateless Things*, yet finds a way to survive. However, the more he struggles, the worse things get. It is notable that he is described as an orphan in the film, but in his conversation with Soon-hee, we realize that he defected from North Korea along with his family. In a flat voice, Jun quickly reveals how his mother died when they crossed the border, and his father now lives in Busan with "another woman." The family that

dreamed of a better life in a new place has dissolved, leaving a little boy who does not know how to fight the world and is losing his hope. At the end of the movie, Jun becomes victimized in a gay pornography videotape that circulates on the black market. A fully-grown man, wearing a mask, rapes Jun in a public restroom, and the film shows the scene through the shaky camerawork of a camera in the rapist's hands. This North Korean boy's body, portrayed as small and immature, is violated by a masculine South Korean body that covers its identity with a criminal mask. It is notable that elsewhere the hierarchical relationship between South Korean people and North Korean migrants has been described mostly as that between two different sexes, and it is typically the relationship between South Korean men and North Korean women. The relationship between South Korean men and North Korean male migrants has rarely appeared on the screen, and Jun in *Stateless Things* becomes a rare case. Jun's rape scene by an anonymous masked man is perceived as an extreme violence, because it illustrates the hierarchy between South Korean men and North Korean in South Korean society, which has not openly discussed in public.

After this scene, Jun walks on Jong-no Street with his eyes on the ground. The camera follows his fast walk from across the street, but this long take eventually ends with him disappearing from sight. In the next scene, we see Jun arriving in front of a door of an apartment.

The viewers then hear monologues:

Heon: There were twins. When one child opens a door with his right arm, the other child closes the door by leaning with his left. When the child who peeps around the closed door is about to knock, the other child opens the door.

Jun: The voice outside the door sounds familiar as if from one who I knew before. His face is staring at me, and it resembles my face.

There is another boy, Heon, in *Stateless Things*. The movie connects people, such as a North Korean migrant and a Korean Chinese girl, and sexual minorities in order to name them social



minorities. As the monologue in the quotation shows, the film presents Jun and Heon as a pair of twins. Heon is also portrayed as having an immature body in his late teens or early twenties. He is gay and works for people who request “special” sexual orders online. He also “works” for his “lover” (*aein*) in the lover’s luxurious apartment. The lover, Sung-woo—whose real name is later known as Sung-hoon—is a socially successful man in his forties, who not only has fame and money, but has also married a heterosexual wife. This man with two names settles within the boundary of social normativity, but does not want to give up either what he has or what he wants to have. He is the person who possesses, who orders, who begins and ends the relationship with Heon.

Unlike Jun, who appears in the public, Heon never appears in open spaces in this film. He is confined to his lover’s luxurious apartment and waits for him to visit without notice. Often, Heon meets people in a motel room or a singing room to serve strangers’ special orders, including a sadistic performance or being a sexual object for a middle-aged gay man. Most of the time, though, he writes stories in the apartment about the alienated people whom he meets. Sung-woo seems to have everything; however, he is always insecure in his relationship with Heon because Heon has a free soul and nothing to lose.

The camera does not show how Heon moves from the apartment to a singing room. He moves from one room to another and communicates with his customers via chat “rooms.” Sung-woo’s apartment is surrounded by curtain walls (entire walls are windows), but whose windows are not meant to be open. Heon observes the world through the windows, but these gigantic windows do not connect him to the outside. As Sung-woo wants Heon hidden in his secret place, Heon seldom connects to the world. Hiding Heon in Sung-woo’s apartment, Heon’s sexual orientation is represented as something that he should not reveal to the world. His diary is the

only window through which he is able to open his mind, but it is torn apart by his lover and burned by Heon before his suicide.

Even though Jun and Heon have never met before, they find each other's look and sound familiar at the end of the scene. The film clearly delivers its message that these two lost souls on the margins are (and have already been) connected. However, they meet at the door to death and become companions to each other's end. In their suicide attempt, they block all the gaps between windows and doors and burn Heon's writing. Soon, smoke rises in the room; they lie on the bed, waiting for the death that is coming to them. After a while, one of them wakes up and tries to escape from the smoke-filled room. Through the highly blurred screen, we do not know who it is. It is Heon who comes out through the doorway, and he barely makes it down the steps to ask for help. There is no one on the street at dawn, and the camera follows him shakily. However, the next cut shows us that it is actually Jun who has survived the suicide attempt. This deliberate change between Jun and Heon suggests that it does not matter who survives. What matters in this scene is that this marginalized person has just escaped from his death and wants to survive. This directly communicates the message that the film aims to deliver. The original Korean title of *Stateless Things* is *Chult'aktongsi* (啐啄同時). *Chul* (啐) refers to the sound of a chick's pecking from inside an egg, whereas *t'ak* (啄) refers to the sound of a hen's pecking from outside the egg. A chick dies if it cannot break its eggshell within three hours of hatching, and so it does its best to break it; however, in breaking the shell, the chick is only successful when its mother helps by pecking the shell from the outside at the same time (同時). As its poster demonstrates, these young boys are within their shells, remaining unborn. Nevertheless, throughout the film,

we see how they struggle inside their shells in order to become members of the outside world, and how they desperately ask for pecking from outside the shell.



Figure 2.8. A poster of *Stateless Things*. The crouched body resembles an egg shape.

The change of survivors between Jun and Heon at the end of the film tells us that it could be any one of us who walks totteringly on the street. *Stateless Things* pairs Jun with Heon<sup>93</sup> and portrays these young souls who are marginalized in society because of either a regional provenance or sexual orientation. However, at the same time, it labels them as belonging to an “abnormal” condition that the heteronormative society of South Korea fails to recognize.

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<sup>93</sup> SungKyung Kim and YoungSook Oh have studied the reaction of North Korean migrants who have seen the movies that represent North Korean migrants. As for the appearance of North Korean migrant, Korean Chinese and gay in *Stateless Things*, the North Korean migrant audiences “expressed their unpleasantness that they were accepted the same as Korean Chinese and gay. They emphasized that North Koreans are in a better position than the rest of minorities.” SungKyung Kim and YoungSook Oh, *Experience of Defection and Cinematic Representation (T'albugü kyönghömgwa yönghwa p'yosang)* (Seoul: Moonkwa (*Munhwagwahaksa*), 2013), 256. My translation. The North Korean migrants with South Korean citizenship intend to differentiate themselves from the Korean Chinese and foreign migrant workers. However, their discrimination against Korean Chinese or gay does not help to resolve the minorities issues in South Korea.

*Sexuality and Motherhood: Dance Town (2010) and Yoon Hee (2014)*

Compared to North Korean male migrants' invisibility, North Korean female migrants are overwhelmingly visible in South Korean society. In various representations, the female migrants appear as socially marginalized people, and they easily become targets of sexual objectification. In order to understand the socio-strata in which these female migrants find themselves, we should examine how their gender performativity is established in their relationship with South Korean males, South Korean females, and North Korean males. Their gendered performativity can be examined by questioning how their sexuality is perceived by other characters in the film, what kind of gendered role they play in their working environment, and how their sex is understood in creating a human relationship. It is necessary to note that this division of four different gender groups does not mean that I define heterosexual as the norm. Even though Kim Kyung-mook shows us an attempt to align North Korean male migrants with a gay character, the North Korean migrants who are LGBT have not been openly discussed. This is mainly due to the fact that North Korea is a highly patriarchal and military society which has no room for discourse about non-heterosexual orientation. Jeon Kyu-hwan's *Dance Town* (2010) and Yoon Yeo-chang's *Yoon-hee* (2014) show a succinct bifurcation between males and females. In this part of the paper, I analyze how the women protagonists of these films recognize their gender role in their new country, and how the female migrants relate to South Korean males and females.

The first people whom North Korean migrants encounter when they arrive in South Korea are detectives. In the films that deal with North Korean migrants, audiences always see those detective figures. However, these detectives do not have many distinct characteristics in most of the films. For example, the male detective in *The Journals of Musan* shows an

ambivalent attitude toward Seung-Chul. He considers migrants to be pathetic and tries to help them find a workplace, but also blames them for not becoming adjusted and flexible in this hostile world. There are two male detectives in *Dance Town* (2010) as well. These detectives look as anonymous and businesslike with their faces half-shaded and their voices surprisingly emotionless. However, *Dance Town* is different from other films, since it shows us a female detective, her name, and her face. The film not only introduces the detective, Soo-jin, to the audiences but also spends a substantial portion of time describing the female detective as a South Korean female. Compared to the frequent absence of South Korean females in the previously discussed frames, the South Korean female detective figure opens a new window allowing us to observe the gendered groups in South Korean society. However, although Soo-jin's and Jung-rim's worlds frequently intersect, they do not really communicate with each other. Soo-jin monitors Jung-rim's daily life, but she does not intervene in Jung-rim's actual life. Soo-jin limits herself to the role of observer. Soo-jin's life itself seems full of oppression. For example, she is cornered by the conventional societal roles of women, such as, she has to get married in time, and her mother's daily prayer (for Soo-jin's future) suffocates Soo-jin.

The camera follows Soo-jin's daily life. Soo-jin is in the marriage market and meets an anonymous South Korean man. The camera captures them in the distance, so the audiences cannot hear their conversation. The distance gives us a sense that it is another routine date with no significance. The camera stops following when Soo-jin falls onto her bed with extreme fatigue. Soo-jin's dating scene is later juxtaposed with Jung-rim's dating scene involving a South Korean male policeman. Using this comparison, *Dance Town* places a South Korean male, a South Korean female, and a North Korean female migrant within the frame of their given society.



Figure 2.9. Jung-rim, a North Korean migrant, with a South Korean male policeman.



Figure 2.10. Soo-jin goes on a date with an anonymous South Korean Man.

It is noteworthy that Soo-jin works as a detective, and Seong-tae, the South Korean, works as a police officer. Detectives and policemen are supposedly and safely included within the boundaries of law – fully integrated in a society as it were. Compared to these government officials, the social minorities in the film, including Jung-rim, appear beyond rightful protection. However, in showing Soo-jin and Seong-tae’s life, the film tells us that they both suffer from an unsatisfactory environment where there is no recognition from the public. A drunken person yells at Seong-tae, “You are police, so what? Who do you think you are?” and Seong-tae rather envies Jung-rim’s position because, as a North Korean migrant, she is offered housing and money.

Jung-rim's character is unique among all the representations of North Korean female migrants. She divorces her first husband in North Korea after she witnesses him having a sexual relationship with her colleague. Considering the facts that divorce itself is very rare and that it is very hard to get an "approval" from the North Korean party to divorce, Jung-rim's divorce record already makes her unusual. During her second marriage, she defects to South Korea after her neighbor reports her to the authorities for watching South Korean pornography with her husband. As the director, Jeon Kyu-Hwan reveals, North Koreans' consumption of South Korean pornography becomes the motif of *Dance Town*, which is based on the real story of a female North Korean migrant.<sup>94</sup> In addition to her reason for defecting, Jung-rim goes beyond the stereotyped character of female North Korean migrants. Her uniqueness is clearly revealed when we compare Jung-rim's character with the female protagonist in *Yoon Hee* (2014).<sup>95</sup>

Yoon Hee is a relatively one-dimensional character and a product of South Korean expectations of what female North Korean migrants should be. Despite a series of desperate situations, she does not lose hope of bringing her daughter from China. She is not only portrayed as a robust and strong mother figure, but is also described as a young and pretty North Korean woman. She is involved in a fraud but believes that South Korean people will eventually find her innocent. She experiences human trafficking, fraud, and later has to act as a surrogate mother, but the film ends happily and with a positive mood when her daughter finally arrives at the court

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<sup>94</sup> "Director Jeon, who stares at Town, and his straight talk," *Cine21*, accessed Aug. 15, 2016, [http://www.cine21.com/news/view/?mag\\_id=65180](http://www.cine21.com/news/view/?mag_id=65180).

<sup>95</sup> *Yoon Hee* (2014), directed by Yoon Yeo-chang, is a commercial but fairly low-budget film. According to one interview with the director, its shooting time was eight days and the total budget was only about \$114,000. Due to production limits, the quality of its visual images is somewhat low-grade; however, it is worth addressing the narrative of *Yoon Hee* in order to understand the way in which films for "the second citizens" are created. In the interview, director Yoon Yeo-chang says that he wants to make films that represent social minorities (*ül*). I do not look down on his motivation, but his motivation in actuality explains to us how the character of Yoon Hee was created. Doohee Kim, "Interview: The Director Yoon Yeo-chang of *Yoon Hee*," *News Today*, January 21, 2014.

where she eventually wins her lawsuit. Yoon Hee is a projection of South Korean people's expectations of the women from North Korea. The film does not represent her beyond the boundaries of her motherhood, which limits Yoon Hee's role in society. Yoon Hee's character results from two strong desires of South Korean patriarchy: not only does the film show her strong motherhood,<sup>96</sup> but she also becomes pregnant by an anonymous South Korean man. Her pregnancy transforms her used-to-be "red" body, coming from a communist country, to a fertile body.<sup>97</sup> This transformation becomes a motive to "forgive" her being and to accept her as a mother of a potential South Korean citizen.

In contrast to Yoon Hee, fulfilled by the affirmation of her motherhood, Jung-rim in *Dance Town* does not have a child, and to her mother-in-law in North Korea, Jung-rim's infertility becomes a reason for forgiving her son's unfaithful behavior. As mentioned, before the defection, Jung-rim divorces and marries her second husband who adores her body very much and wants to die surrounded by her body. We see Jung-rim's satisfied smile only once during this scene when she lies on the bed with her husband. *Dance Town* is the first film that questions

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<sup>96</sup> *Winter Butterfly*, directed by Kim Kyu Min, a North Korean migrant, shows how maternal love is represented differently in North Korea and South Korea. Kim stated that he made the film based on actual events during the North Korean "March of Hardship." His film portrays a mother and a son suffering from food shortages in times of privation. Young Jinho goes up to the mountains every day to collect dried trees, and his mother goes to the market to sell them, the income from which is barely enough to sustain the mother and son. One day, Jinho is beaten to near death by soldiers for cutting a raw tree rather than a dry tree, and his mother, who is nursing Jinho, sees her health start to fail. The mother mistakes soil for rice and eats it, mistakes photographs of chicken for chicken, and eventually mistakes Jinho for a guard dog. When the soldiers come in for a report, the mother begs the soldiers to leave the meat for Jinho. The film simply says that such strong maternal instincts cannot work given North Korea's food shortages and living conditions. Conversely, Yun Hee arrives in South Korea after bringing her daughter and her daughter's possessions from China. These two films have the same frame in that they depict maternity as the strongest characteristic of women, but they eventually conclude that South Korea and North Korea strengthen and undermine womanity, which is considered the same as motherhood.

<sup>97</sup> As Eunjung Kim points out, "reproduction has become a major site of intervention for "curing" inherited disability." Eunjung Kim, *Curative Violence: Rehabilitating Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 38. In *Yoon Hee's* case, her regional orientation, as a North Korean, is considered as one of "disabilities" that need to be "cured" in South Korean culture. Yoon Hee's reproduction becomes her passage to be "cured."



what it means to be a woman for North Korean women and how they cope with their sexuality in their new countries. Thus, it should be examined that how Jung-rim builds her subjectivity in terms of her sexuality, and how her character is reinterpreted within South Korean society.

Considering the previous stereotypical representations of North Korean women who are obedient and passive in terms of their sexual desire, the fact that Jung-rim watches pornography seems striking enough to motivate one director to decide to create a film. In contrast to the images of North Korean women who have been portrayed as sexual “objects,” Jung-rim is characterized as a “subject” here, which appears to be a certain achievement. However, although she is portrayed as a figure with her sexuality, it should be pointed out that Jung-rim watched pornography with her husband to please him. Her sexual desire works only with her husband, which becomes something that belongs to “her man.” After she defected to South Korea, the storyline shows that a woman who reveals her sexual desire is not acceptable but punishable beyond the boundary of marriage, a secured relationship. With the absence of her husband, who was later executed in North Korea, Jung-rim becomes an “insecure” woman. Seong-tae, the South Korean policeman, who is full of discontent at his given society for not recognizing him, sees in Jung-rim a way to exercise his power, since she is obviously weaker than he is. Referring to “the way South Koreans become friends,” Seong-tae gets Jung-rim drunk, and keeps repeating, “Let’s go to the end.”

Not knowing “the rule” of South Koreans, Jung-rim becomes drunk and falls on the dirty pavement. Seong-tae rapes Jung-rim, who cannot control her body, and walks away.<sup>98</sup> At this

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<sup>98</sup> I found two studies analyzing *Dance Town*, and it was surprising that the two studies consider this rape scene to be a sex scene. Yi-seok Kim’s “The phenomenon of alienation in the Jeon Kyu-hwan’s “Town Trilogy”: Regarding Mozart Town, Animal Town, and Dance Town” avoids using the term rape for some reason and deflects its topic as one of “a failed love.” *Journalism & Communication* 16 no. 1 (2012, 2): 22. So-hee Kang’s “Ethical Attitude of Movies Reproducing the Others: Focus on Films about North Korean Refugees” also interprets the rape scene as a sex scene, which “reveals that she (Jung-rim) cannot have a relationship with the others even through a sexual intercourse,” which becomes HER failure of building her relationship with society. *Human Beings*,

moment, the relationship between these two, mingled with ambiguity and suspicion, becomes a hierarchical relationship between two bodies of different genders. In other words, when the rape scene (crime) reminds us (and also its participants) of laws (boundary), it demands an identification of these people. Jung-rim becomes a female body from North Korea, and Seong-tae becomes a South Korean male body. It is ironic that this policeman who is supposed to protect citizens is the first to violate this newly arrived citizen. As if he exercising patriarchal law and taming this insecure woman through sexual empowerment, he violates her and brings in another anonymous male as a co-conspirator to his crime. We see that one homeless person is watching the rape scene from the corner, and later when Jung-rim comes back to the spot, that homeless man takes money from Jung-rim's wallet in front of her. He not only colludes with Seong-tae by not taking any action, but also commits a second crime against her. The homeless person's indifferent face tells us that this is the beginning of hardship and distrust in this country.

Even though *Dance Town* spends its first half to depict Jung-rim as not only a North Korean migrant but also a woman who has her period and sexual desire, its latter half betrays the former by showing how her ego crumbles in this male-dominated society. Thus, Seong-tae's return to the cleaner's where Jung-rim works becomes a new act of violence against her. During his visit, he checks to see whether Jung-rim is going to take any action against him. He cowardly confirms that he is safe, but his policeman uniform attests that this is just another declaration of hierarchy. A series of violent events occurs to her during her short time in South Korean society and becomes a part of the reason she commits suicide. It is certain that her husband's execution in North Korea triggers her decision to commit suicide, but we know that acts of violence against have destroyed her hope.

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*Environment and Future* 11 (2013, 10): 145. These studies, published in Korean journals, are exemplary studies of the reluctance to define rape and generosity to perpetrators of sexual assaults.

Since the 2010s, independent films about North Korean migrants have depicted them as people that one might encounter, like neighbors, in everyday life in South Korean society. In the films, we meet ordinary North Korean migrants, instead of people of high class or television celebrities. Often focusing on the discriminatory socio-cultural practices that the North Korean migrants experience during assimilation in South Korea, the films convey the message that the South Korean people's acknowledgment and systemic support are vital to the migrants. Nevertheless, at the same time, these films reveal some of South Korea's structural flaws: its starkly delineated economic strata, and its attitudes to women and sexual minorities, both of whom endure multiple layers of oppression. *Dance Town*, which examines North Korean women's sexuality, places the female protagonist within the gender-biased framework of South Korean society. *Stateless Things*, which explores how social minorities interact, ultimately abandons its protagonist, naked, at a construction site. The independent films' framework of grouping social minorities shows that people of similar rank can communicate with each other regardless of their regional background. In other words, this framework emphasizes that the South Korean society is already classed.

In this chapter, I employ both the terms "refugees" and "migrants" to refer to the North Korean people who have managed to cross its southern border into South Korea. Considering the plight of North Koreans who are at great risk of repatriation, the word "refugee" seems apt. Also, the use of the term "refugee" implicitly questions the definition of "citizen" and the concept of boundaries with regard to the nation state. However, this chapter uses the term "North Korean migrants" because the television programs and films referred to herein tell the stories of North Korean characters who have settled in South Korea and acquired South Korean citizenship, so

the term “migrants” seems most appropriate, since it reflects that North Korean individuals are in the process of becoming South Korean citizens culturally and legally.

As Hannah Arendt’s notion of “voluntary prisoner” succinctly shows, North Korean migrants often prove themselves to be overtly patriotic. Because of this, they are susceptible to being co-opted by conservative political parties and special-interest groups. South Korean society has been losing its campaign for ethnic solidarity. It has sacrificed these values for the benefit of the privileged class. I don’t claim that ethnic solidarity is essential for a nation or that a battle be waged for its restoration. The decline of ethnic solidarity, however, should not mean that that it is taken up as an issue to benefit a certain group’s interests. As mentioned above, conservative programs tend to mislead many North Korean migrants through politically biased education, and this can often result in them remaining oppressed. This process of education is useful only to privileged North Korean migrants. Enlisting privileged migrants strengthens South Korean conservative groups with a vested interest in actively mobilizing the migrant groups. Therefore, it is necessary to educate fairly the subsequent generations of the North Korean migrants. This section does not look at young North Korean migrants specifically, but a thorough examination of this group should certainly be conducted.

Some North Korean migrants form independent political groups or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In those groups, some who hope to receive financial support and recognition from the South Korean government and the United States censor the voices of their fellows who oppose the government’s policies, isolating them to dilute their views. Of course, there are many others in those groups who devote themselves to helping their fellow migrants and defending their human rights. The problem is that all these people are at risk of being co-opted by conservative groups who want to taking advantage of their vulnerable situation.

Exiled high-ranking North Korean officials and television celebrities who do not admit that they themselves are “select individuals,” treated specially, should not expect to escape criticism. Nor should criticism be withheld from the class division among North Korean migrants itself. South Korean conservative programs, which do not provide an open forum to reflect on the class division based on “clean bloodlines” in North Korea, are committing secondary violence on North Korean migrants. The few famous North Korean migrants have the power and resources to change the circumstances of their fellow migrants in South Korean society.

## Chapter Three

### Healing or Selling: Politics of North Korean Migrants' Humanitarian Stories

#### Authorship and Readership of North Korean Migrants' Autobiography

In this chapter, I examine the authorship and readership of the autobiographies of North Korean migrants that have been published in the United States. North Korean migrants' stories have been published in South Korea since the late 1990s, and some of their autobiographies have been published in English, French, and Germany since the 2000s. Compared to the representations of the North Korean migrants in South Korean independent films, television programs, and fiction works that have been discussed in previous chapters, the genre of the North Korean migrants' autobiographies stands apart and should be considered on its own. Whether North Korean migrants' experiences become stories in themselves or just motives for such stories, the cinema, television, and fiction are heavily influenced by the characteristics of those media and by those who create the stories, including directors, producers, and writers. However, in their autobiographies, North Korean migrant bodies come out to the forefront as the subject of their stories.

For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, conservative television programs present North Korean migrants and about the relationship between South and North Korea in a strongly stereotyped manner. The North Korean panelists' stories in these television programs are edited and rearranged within the format regardless of their will. In fact, one of the North Korean migrants, Yeonmi Park, who used to appear on the South Korean television show *Now on My Way to Meet You* as a panelist, confesses in her autobiography that her "interviews were heavily

edited” by the writers of the show, and that she sometimes thought her “‘sister’ cast members were exaggerating their hardships.”<sup>99</sup> She appears to convey ambivalent feelings toward her image or mask of “a North Korean Cinderella” in the show, because she and her mother “were trying to give answers” they “thought the audience wanted to hear.”<sup>100</sup> In other words, according to Park, she and her mother only created the image that the show and audiences wanted to see. By criticizing the television show’s distortion and arbitrary editing of participants’ statements, Park positions her autobiography in juxtaposition to the show. She presents the autobiography as an authentic representation of herself, unlike the controversial show.

The North Korean migrants’ autobiographies are different in this respect, because the genre, as such, presents migrants as “authors” and “subjects” of their own stories, rather than as willing or unwilling participants. However, in the case of North Korean migrants’ autobiographies published in the United States, this “represent-ability” also becomes a significant issue, because they have two “authors.” Unlike foreign literary works which require a translator to translate the work for the targeted culture, these North Korean authors have “co-authors,” a position which is different from a ghostwriter. It is curious to consider why North Korean migrant writers need co-authors for their autobiographies in English. Due to the presence of such co-authors, one can also question whether presenting their autobiographies in translation these authors to some extent pander to what they believe the audience wishes to hear or read, as Park did for her television show.

Since English is not North Korean authors’ first language, most of their autobiographies have been written with the aid of a coauthor or contributor. While most foreign authors’

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<sup>99</sup> Yeonmi Park and Maryanne Vollers, *In Order to Live: a North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 244.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

autobiographies are usually translated from the work's original language into the target language, autobiographies of North Korean migrants published in the United States were intended for publication in English from the outset. Most of the North Korean authors are "interviewed" by their co-authors, which makes the North Koreans "orators" rather than "writers." Indeed, these migrants' written narratives amply support Jacques Rancière's notion of biography's "falseness"—a term that here does not mean that a writer's testimony is untrue, but that refers instead to the general characteristic of the genre which necessitates the selection, rearrangement, and displacement of life experience in a written story. Due to the process of selecting experience and the nature of memory, writing (auto)biography itself is thereby "false." However, in the North Korean migrants' case, there is dual process of falseness. After the first author orates, the second author rearranges, reselects, and writes those memories. The concept of "auto" biography is thus questioned due to this dual process of falseness. In addition, it is interesting to note that even though these North Korean migrant authors have settled in South Korea, their stories are neither mediated by the Korean language nor aimed at the South Korean market. Accordingly, I question what the target audience of such half-biographies may be, and what kinds of vicarious experience readers hope to gain from the North Korean migrants' stories.

### *Who Owns the Story? Two Authors of North Korean's Half-Biography*

In Lee Cheong-jun's 1976 short story "*Let's Write Autobiography*,"<sup>101</sup> the protagonist, Ji-wook, who is a writer, takes a job writing an autobiography for Pi Mun-o, a comedian. Pi wants to publish his autobiography in order to rebrand his image and finds Ji-wook who is known

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<sup>101</sup> Lee Cheong-jun, *Let's Write Autobiography (Chasōjōndūl ssūsipsida)*; Seoul: Yōllimwōn, 2000). The novel series in this book were originally written between 1971-1979. One of the stories, "Let's Write Autobiography," which has the same title with the book, was written in 1976 summer.



precisely for ghostwriting. Ji-wook, who is suffering from his identity crisis as a writer, realizes that he cannot write Pi's autobiography. Writing and rewriting the first sentence hundreds of times, Ji-wook eventually turns down Pi's request. Ji-wook writes a long letter to Pi to explain why he cannot write Pi's autobiography:

As you know, I've been writing books like autobiography and memoirs of millions of people over the years. But, of course, as in your case, it was not the work done on the experience of the impression or the specific trajectory of the protagonist's life. It was a story that I heard a little bit about and made a creative work for myself. . . . But then, when I focused on creating the person's life arbitrarily in my head, I started feeling empty about my work. Who am I to endeavor myself to fabricate others' stories? . . . As I looked at the history of life I have never seen before in my head, I began to feel an empty feeling in my work. I began being skeptical about ghostwriting other's autobiography. Even if someone who has given me a job has really impressed me and made me feel worthwhile in my work, how can people accept ghostwriting autobiography? In fact, when the person writes about his life, it is easy to lose the fairness of writing due to the habit of beautifying and exaggerating his own past. This has been criticized as the general recuperation of autobiographical writing. Indeed, it is a fraudulent deception to rely on others' hands for writing the person's own past.<sup>102</sup>

As Ji-wook's letter indicates, Ji-wook criticizes not only himself as a ghostwriter, but also the actual notion of ghostwriting autobiography. Based on Lee Cheong-jun's note<sup>103</sup> on this novel, in 1978, the year when this story was written, many autobiographical books, such as memoirs and confessions, were published. He created the protagonists, Pi and Ji-wook, due to his general concerns about this genre. Lee wanted to criticize those who, like Pi Mun-o, consider autobiography simply an image-making tool. After Ji-wook sends his letter, Pi Mun-o visits Ji-wook at his home and violently threatens the latter to make him resume the work.

It is not for the benefit of others that I want to publish my story through autobiography. (...) I am doing this to live. As you said, I want to cover the old and miserable memories of my past with thick bandages and live in the world by spreading my will and giving strength to the neck like everyone else through the autobiography. What if it's my statue,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 55-56. Translated by author.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 99-101.

what if it's a memorial? Why do you get jealous when I want to make money as easily as others through that statue?<sup>104</sup>

Here we find two subjects in crisis. Pi Mun-o, as the subject of his own life, chooses to distort his life himself in order to reinvent his public image. Ji-wook, as the subject of ghostwriting, is also in crisis as he worries about becoming a “ghost” in his life. Ji-wook takes his anxiety seriously because his identity as a writer, who finds his meaning not only from the art of writing as such, but also from the authorship of writing, is at the risk of being erased. On the other hand, the character of Pi is a great illustration of Lee Cheong-jun’s criticism of autobiographies in the late 1970s when autobiographies became fashionable.<sup>105</sup> Many people have others ghostwrite their autobiographies as statues or memorials to their achievements, real or fictional.

Is it possible to speak of the relationship between a subject and a ghostwriter in the case of North Korean migrants’ autobiographies? Unlike the case of Ji-wook and Pi in Lee Cheong-jun’s novel, North Korean migrants’ autobiographies published in the United States are written neither by the migrants themselves nor by a ghostwriter. Although newly rising North Korean human rights activists can now speak English on the world stage after a lot of practice,<sup>106</sup> their autobiographies were published in English only several years after their defections. Therefore, all the North Korean migrants have written autobiographies with either “co-authors” or

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 89. Translated by author.

<sup>105</sup> Lee Cheong-jun did not criticize the publication of autobiographical books, such as memoirs and confessions. Instead, he believed that testifying and reflecting on the author’s life actually contributes to his or her own life as well as to that of the readers. What Lee criticized was some books that commemorated the author’s life and that were written by hired ghostwriters. Lee Cheong-jun, “Author’s Note,” in *Let’s Write Autobiography* (*Chasöjödül ssüsipsida*; Seoul: Yöllimwön, 2000), 99-101.

<sup>106</sup> For example, Hyeonsoo Lee made a presentation on her border crossing experience at a TED conference in February 2013. Her autobiography, *The Girl with Seven Names: a North Korean Defector’s Story*, was published in Britain in July, 2015. Also, Yeonmi Park spoke at the One Young World 2014 Summit in Dublin, Ireland, which resulted in sensational attention worldwide. Park’s autobiography, *In Order To live: A North Korean Girl’s Journey to Freedom*, was published in the United States in September 2015. Both autobiographies are examined in this chapter.

“contributors” who helped the migrants to publish the books in English. These co-authors and contributors differ from ghostwriters, such as Ji-wook, since their names are included on the books’ covers. Usually, in the case of a regular autobiography, the book is written by one author and then translated from the subject’s language by a translator. Even if the authors have ghostwriters, it is not revealed to the reader because their existence is supposed to remain hidden. However, on the copyright pages of the North Korean migrants’ autobiographies and their introducing pages of Internet book market,<sup>107</sup> as Table 1 demonstrates, the North Korean authors are named along with their co-authors or contributors.

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<sup>107</sup> For example, in the case of *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor*, Barnes & Noble indicates its author “Yong Kim, Suk-Young Kim (With),” whereas Amazon.com indicates the book is “by Yong Kim (author), Suk-Young Kim (Contributor).” <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/long-road-home-yong-kim/1123830175?ean=9780231147477>; [https://www.amazon.com/Long-Road-Home-Testimony-Survivor/dp/0231147473/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1495326548&sr=8-1&keywords=Long+Road+Home%3A+Testimony+of+a+North+Korean+Camp+Survivor](https://www.amazon.com/Long-Road-Home-Testimony-Survivor/dp/0231147473/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1495326548&sr=8-1&keywords=Long+Road+Home%3A+Testimony+of+a+North+Korean+Camp+Survivor) (Last access May 20, 2017).

Table 3.1. A list of North Korean defectors' stories that are considered (auto)biographies<sup>108</sup> in the U.S. Market

Title	Author(s)	Publisher/Copyrights (©)	Published Date	Print/Best Sellers Rank <sup>109</sup>
<i>The Aquarium's of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag</i>	Kang, Chol-hwan (Author) Rigoulot, Pierre (Author) Reiner, Yair (Translator)	©2000 by Éditions Robert Laffont ©2001 by Basic Books Translation © 2001 by Kang Cho-hwan and Pierre Rigoulot	Originally published in French in 2000 as <i>Les Aquariums de Pyongyang</i> . Translated into English in 2001.	#26,986 in Books
<i>Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor</i>	Kim Yong (Author) Kim, Suk-Young (Contributor)	©2009 by Columbia University Press	June 19, 2009	#344,322 in Books
<i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i>	Harden, Blaine (Author)	Viking, a member of Penguin Group (2012) Penguin Books (2013, 2015) ©2012, 2015 Blaine Harden	March 29, 2012 A new edition with new forewords was published 2015.	#3,253 in Books
<i>Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee – A Look Inside North Korea</i>	Jang, Jin-sung (Author)	First 37 INK/Atria ©2014 by Jang Jin-sung	May 13, 2014	#39,893 in Books

<sup>108</sup> I put parenthesis here because of *Escape from Camp 14*. This book is technically a biography written by one author, Blaine Harden. However, when the book became controversial over the authenticity of the testimony of Shin, the North Korean subject of this book, the author, Blaine Harden, was not the target of criticism; Shin alone was. This shows that this book is also between the boundary of autobiography and biography despite its clarification about a single author. Unless we know the transparent process of book making, we do not clearly know to whom to assign blame, the author of biography or the subject of the story.

<sup>109</sup> I made multiple attempts to find out these books' sales point, but most publications replied that the information is confidential. Therefore, I used a different measurement to approximate how popular these books have become. The bestsellers ranks in the categories of Books and Biographies & Memoirs are based on the results which appeared on Amazon Best Sellers' list, last accessed on April 15, 2017.

<i>Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea</i>	Kim, Eunsun (Author) Falletti, Sébastien (Author) Tian, David (Translator)	©2012 by Éditions Michel Lafon Epilogue St. Martin's Press © 2015 by Eunsun Kim and Sébastien Falletti Translation © 2015 by David Tian	Originally published in French under the title <i>Corée du Nord – 9 ans pour fuir l'enfer</i> in 2012. Translated into English on July 21, 2015	#27,958 in Books #183 in Biographies & Memoirs
<i>Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America</i>	Kim, Joseph (Author) Talty, Stephan (Contributor)	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2015) Mariner Books (2016) © 2015 by Joseph Kim	June 2, 2015	#244,464 in Books
<i>The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story</i>	Lee, Hyeonseo (Author) John, David (Contributor)	William Collins (2015, 2016) © 2015 by Hyeonseo Lee	July 2, 2015	#7,380 in Books Nominated for a Goodreads Choice Award for Best Memoir & Autobiography in 2015
<i>In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom</i>	Park, Yeonmi (Author) Vollers, Maryanne (Author)	Penguin Books ©2015 by Yeonmi Park	September 29, 2015 Also published in German and Italian in 2015, and in Chinese and Polish in 2016.	#3,029 in Books
<i>Stars Between the Sun and Moon: One Woman's Life in North Korea and Escape to Freedom</i>	Jang, Lucia (Author) McClelland, Susan (Author)	Douglas & McIntyre (2014) W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (2015) ©2014 by Lucia Jang and Susan McClelland	Originally published in Canada on October 5, 2014 American Edition was published on October 5, 2015 Also published in German in 2015.	#440,502 in Books
<i>Every Falling Star: The True Story of How I Survived and Escaped North Korea</i>	Lee, Sungju (Author) McClelland, Susan (Author)	Amulet Books, an imprint of ABRAMS Text ©2016 by Sungju Lee	September 13, 2016	#222,104 in Books

If autobiography was not written by a sole author, then it has to be considered that whether a work can still be published as an *autobiography*.. Perhaps, such a text deserves a separate

category, a genre of its own. But how do we define autobiography in the first place? Youn Jeon discusses the definition of autobiography based on Starobinski and Lejeune's notions: "Starobinski defines autobiography as 'biography written by oneself,' suggesting three conditions, such as identification between speaker and protagonist, narrative-dominant rather than description, and story of life journey."<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, Lejeune defines autobiography as "a story of a past recalled form written as narrative, in which a real person speaks about his/her existence, particularly focusing on their own life history."<sup>111</sup> These definitions do not go much beyond the literal meaning of autobiography, which is the result of "three separate components: *autos* or self, *bios* of life, and *graphie* or writing."<sup>112</sup> "Bios" can sometimes become interchangeable with "existence," but there is not so much difference in their meanings. With respect to different terms used to describe autobiographical writings, Timothy Dow Adams points out, "autobiographers seldom make a distinction between autobiography, autobiographical novel, memoir, memories, or reminiscence, genres with different ideas of truthfulness."<sup>113</sup> Although Adams is right in that the ambiguity of this genre of autobiography gives one a space to reconcile with oneself in metaphoric authenticity,<sup>114</sup> it seems that Adams does not account for a case where there are two authors in one autobiography. In the case of the North Korean migrants' autobiographies, among the three required components of "*autos* or self, *bios* or life,

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<sup>110</sup> Starobinski, "Le style de l'autobiographie," *Poétique*, no 3, 1970, p. 257 qtd. by Youn Jeon, "Fiction of truth or truth of fiction – Problems of autobiographical writing (Fiction de la vérité ou vérité de la fiction – Problèmes de l'écriture autobiographique," *Société Coreenne d'Enseignement de Langue et Littérature Francaises* 7, 1995. 5, 263.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Timothy Dow Adams, *Telling lies in modern American autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1. Italicized by Adams.

<sup>113</sup> Adams, ix.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

and *graphie* or writing,”<sup>115</sup> only bios—a life description—definitely remains while “autos (self)” and “graphie (writing)” are less accurate.

Although it is unusual for more than one writer to be credited as the author of the autobiography, the copyright of the text is still held by the North Korean authors in most cases.<sup>116</sup> However, there are also some exceptional cases, such as that of Lucia Jang and Susan McClelland’s *Stars Between the Sun and Moon: One Woman’s Life in North Korea and Escape to Freedom*. Both authors have the copyright for the book. The issue of copyright is important, because it is about who takes the initiative of this book and has to do with the moral responsibility about its contents. Thus, the main authors often declare their sole rights to the book, as Hyeonsoo Lee did. The copyright page of *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector’s Story* indicates, “Hyeonsoo Lee asserts *the moral rights* to be identified as *the author* of this work” (my emphasis).<sup>117</sup> In this assertion, it is noteworthy that Lee claims that not only does she have the copyright of the book, but also that she bears the sole responsibility for the work. This moral responsibility is important because frequently, the veracity or authenticity of autobiographies become subject to controversy. For example, Blaine Harden’s *Escape from Camp 14: One Man’s Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* has become a controversial topic, after a Youtube clip “Lie and Truth”<sup>118</sup> was released by the North

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<sup>115</sup> Adams, I. Italics are the author’s.

<sup>116</sup> However, English-speaking authors are registered as “authors” in the market, based on Amazon book’s indication on its website, and copyright is different from their right to have profit allocation. In terms of book’s profit, the two authors’ portion remains confidential unless author reveals in the public.

<sup>117</sup> Hyeonsoo Lee and David John, *The girl with seven names: a escape from North Korea* (London: William Collins, 2016), copyrights page.

<sup>118</sup> *Lie and Truth*, prod. Uriminzokkiri, Youtube, October 26, 2014, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1pTAGxgDwk>. Shin Dong-hyuk testified about his experience in North Korea, along with the U.S. Government in November, 2011, and he actively performed as a North Korean human rights activist. It seemed that North Korean regime considered Shin’s performance in international stage as a threat.

Korean regime in 2014. Published in 2012, the book presented the story of one North Korean defector, Shin Dong-hyuk, and the North Korean authorities claimed Shin's story was a fake in the book by producing a video about Shin Dong-hyuk's past.<sup>119</sup> However, Shin autobiographical memoir was already published in South Korea in 2007.<sup>120</sup> The North Korean authorities had not expressed any reactions to Shin's story until 2016 when Blaine Harden's book about Shin's story became widely known to the world. After the North Korean authorities' criticism, Shin withdrew some of the statements he made in the book.<sup>121</sup> In one interview he gave to a South Korean television program,<sup>122</sup> Shin said that even though he admitted that some of his statements were

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<sup>119</sup> North Korean authorities made three main claims in "Lie and Truth." First, Shin Dong-hyuk was not born in the North Korean concentration camp 14. They provided Shin's photo taken when he was five. Second, Shin Dong-hyuk insists that his finger was cut off when he made a mistake while working in a concentration camp. North Korean authorities say that this is not true. Instead, they argue that he fell on a stone field while working in a mine, broke his finger, and cut it while he was undergoing surgery. Third, North Korean authorities argue that Shin Dong-hyuk is not only a liar, but also a criminal, who raped a 13-year-old girl and escaped. This video tried to add credibility to their claims by including statements from Shin's father and other ordinary workers. *Lie and Truth*, October 26, 2014.

<sup>120</sup> One year after his defection, Shin began writing his diary. His continuous writing became a starting point of his 2007 memoir, "(*North Korean Political Prison Camp, a Total Control Zone*) *Escape to the Outside World*," published in South Korea. However, his book failed to draw public attention in South Korea. "His memoir had flopped, about five hundred copies sold from a printing of three thousand. Shin said he made no money from the book." Because of this failure, Shin was very reluctant to publish his story in English, and it took nine months for Blaine Harden to persuade Shin to sign the contract. Blaine Harden, *Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* (New York: Viking, 2012), 9; 169.

<sup>121</sup> The most important statement that Shin Dong-hyuk withdrew from his argument is whether he was born in a concentration camp 14. In Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14*, Shin argued that he was born in the No. 14 camp, and due to an extraordinary environment of the concentration camp, where people are not considered to be treated as human beings, he never saw the portrait of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. However, when the North Korean authorities opposed that Shin's claim was false, Shin changed his words that he was born at camp 14, but was later transferred to camp 18. For those who are not familiar with the situation of North Korea, it may seem that there are no differences between camp 14 and camp 18, but the characteristic of those two camps are different. Camp 14 is a political prison camp, which is notorious for not being released alive once it is entered. Compared to camp 14, camp 18 is for minor criminals, which is the prisoners have a high chance to be released once their attitude is believed in being improved. Shin Dong-hyuk had received more attention than other North Koreans because he argued that he escaped the camp 14.

<sup>122</sup> In an interview, Shin Dong-hyuk said that he saw his father's face after several decades through the video taken by the North Korean authorities. After watching his father telling him not to lie, Shin said, "he wanted to die." To the North Korean authorities, Shin said, "if I have lied, let me meet my father in person. I will ask him directly." He added, "Tell me, why my family had to go concentration camp." *Shin Dong-hyuk, North Korean Kim Jong Eun's most fearful character?*, Youtube, December 2, 2014, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFOaE1y47J4>.



not true, some of the North Korean authorities' claims were not true either. Some experts on North Korean refugee issues defend Shin, arguing that misrepresentation of truth could have happened either in the process of writing, due to dramatic exaggeration of events, or in the process of Shin remembering the past, which sometimes results in a certain distortion after a traumatic experience.<sup>123</sup> However, Shin argues that in either case, the fact that the North Korean regime suppresses their people in the camps did not change. At the same time, his retraction of certain statements suggests we have to question the validity of North Korean defectors' statements after all.

However, since the author of this book, *Escape from Camp 14*, is not Shin Dong-hyuk, but Bladen Harvey, the issue of moral responsibility of contents becomes a more complicated. Of course, we cannot disregard the facts that the text narrates Shin's experience, and he has become more famous since the book was published, enabling him to address the UN on the topic of human rights in North Korea in 2012. In the legal sense, however, all copyrights to this book belong to the author, Blaine Harden. This fact leads us to a more fundamental question: should we consider *Escape from Camp 14* Shin's autobiographical story or a biography written by Blaine Harden?

Harden wrote the book's subtitle as "One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West." This title implies his position as an observer who is located in "the West," while making Shin, the subject of the story, anonymous as "one man." We do not exactly know the process of how the author was told Shin's story,<sup>124</sup> though we can assume that it is the

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<sup>123</sup> Shin Dong-hyuk, *a North Korean defector's shocking confession. Admitting false accusation of political prison camp?*, Youtube, January 19, 2015, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvxxE4oTKvM>.

<sup>124</sup> However, we can imagine that an English-speaking writer sits with a North Korean migrant and listens to the migrant's story of life and escape. The writer records the tale, takes some notes on the migrant's story, and asks questions to clarify the chronology and other details. The writer sometimes needs the help of a translator to

writer's role to organize and finalize the narrative and to choose the correct words, expressions, and descriptions for the experience. Moreover, Harden was able to take the initiative of the contents after he promised Shin "a fifty-fifty split of whatever it [the book] might earn."<sup>125</sup> Given that having the copyright of book is the same as taking moral responsibility for the contents, Harden is not free from his moral responsibility over this controversy. At the end of the book, Harden was listening to one lecture of Shin in Seattle, who became a popular lecturer after the success of *Escape from Camp 14*. Bladen states, "If not yet in his life, Shin had seized control of his past."<sup>126</sup> However, after the controversy, Shin, who has been surrounded by his own words, is seized by his past, rather than controlling it.

Even if we admit that the genre of autobiography is ambiguous as aforementioned, North Korean migrants' "autobiographies" should be considered as a genre separate from other autobiographies because they divorce a person's experience from the process of writing while still being presented within the genre of autobiography. If we consider the North Korean migrants as the subjects of their experience, can we also claim that they are the subjects of the written story? Once again, this question brings us back to the definition of autobiography as a genre. What the English-speaking author does is exactly what the biographer does, and "whatever role the biographer consciously chooses, his or her presence in the text is inescapable

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write a North Korean migrant's autobiography that has never written before. We can think of two cases. If a writer cannot speak Korean, he needs an actual translator between him and the migrant. Even if the writer is bilingual (Korean-English), he still needs a translator (either person or machine) to clarify some expressions, because now North Korean vocabulary is very different from the South Korean. In either case, we can presume that a third party is required in this process of writing. Bladen Harvey must have been the first case. Bladen's *Escape from Camp 14* is rather loose compared to the rest of North Koreans' autobiographies in its overall composition. It is more like journalistic writing rather than a well-organized biography of Shin. For example, the author organizes book's narrative and supports his words using North Korea specialists' statements.

<sup>125</sup> Harden, 9.

<sup>126</sup> Harden, 191.

through the tropes, narrative style, and language of the work.”<sup>127</sup> Here, I am not arguing that the North Korean “authors” are not sufficient enough to be the subjects of their books, or that their works are diminished by such collaboration. What I am focusing on is the genre of autobiography itself in relation to North Korean migrants’ stories published in the United States. I argue that these works should be categorized differently from other existing autobiographies. I name this new genre “half-biography,” because it occupies a space between autobiography and biography, and the co-authors or contributors play a very significant role as the biographer. They not only write the books in English, but also participate in the book projects from their beginnings and target English-speaking readers in the United States market. “Half-biography” is not a pejorative term, nor a critique on North Korean migrants’ efforts on their books or to doubt their authenticity. Instead, “half-biography” can help us question the concept of autobiography and emphasize the production of North Koreans’ books and the use of their “humanitarian” narratives.

Kim Yong and Kim Suk-Young who co-authored *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor* went through a different process of writing compared to the rest of North Koreans who have published half-biographies. The book narrates the story of Kim Yong, who survived and defected from North Korean camp, but it is composed differently from others. Suk-Young Kim, a co-author of this book and a prominent scholar in North Korean studies, wrote the preface and introduction. Her introduction covers a brief history of Korea to enable readers to better understand Kim Yong’s story while her preface reveals the process behind the project. In outlining her dilemma, she constantly asks herself how far she should play the role of a coauthor in this project, since it fundamentally relies on Kim Yong’s experience and story.

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<sup>127</sup> Ira B. Nadel, “The Biographer’s Secret,” in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 25.

*As translator and transcriber*, I constantly had to make decisions to capture accurately the unique array of Kim's experiences and bring them to life in English. (...) Although Kim Yong and I share the same language and certain common grounds of Korean culture, and although we lived not too far away from each other – the distance between Pyongyang and Seoul being only 120 miles – we seem to have existed in parallel universes. (...) How was I to overcome the profound gap between us, marked by differences in age, gender, and finally the ideology that divided the two Koreans into hostile regimes? *How were our perspectives supposed to merge and create a singular narrative?* (...) When I started transcribing the recorded interviews, I had to make a conscious decision: *how to negotiate between the commitment to faithfully capture Kim's cadence and voice and the impulse to embellish his story with literary flair*. I discussed this very issue with Kim Yong many times, and we concluded that it would be best to **transcribe** Kim's story from the original interviews with minimal dramatization or stylistic alteration, which might diminish the credibility of his story. At the same time, we also felt the necessity to polish the raw narrative to make it more readable, so long as this process would not interfere with the veracity of the events presented (Italics and emphasis are mine).<sup>128</sup>

It is crucial that Suk-young Kim identifies herself as a “translator and transcriber.” She succinctly reveals that she was not sure how far she could transform Kim Yong stories, “which might diminish the credibility.” Indeed, this also seems to be a hard decision for the publisher, since a university press usually presumes different readers from private publishers. As the authors chose to add the second author's preface with its morally centered consciousness, this book locates itself between biography and anthropological studies. As a result, it may attract readers in academia, but it is questionable whether it will attract more or fewer general public readers.<sup>129</sup> The authors' consciousness of their moral rights, that is, of how far they can claim their roles and take responsibility, is sufficient to make this book extraordinary. Their decision

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<sup>128</sup> Yong Kim and Suk-Young Kim, *Long road home: testimony of a North Korean camp survivor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), ix-x.

<sup>129</sup> As is frequently the case with books published by University press, the copyright of *Long Road Home* belongs to Columbia University Press. The details on how Kim Yong and Suk-young Kim reserve their rights, especially in terms of their portions of book sales, are confidential. However, both authors have assigned their copyright to the Press, and the Press does not differentiate between their contributions. Even though Suk-Young Kim morally identifies herself as a “translator and transcriber,” in the legal sense, she is a coauthor of this book. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Jonathan Fiedler, a Sales and Marketing Associate of Columbia University Press, and Yi Deng, a Subsidiary Rights Assistant of Columbia University Press, for helping me to figure out the book's copyright issue.

about the book's identity brings out a vital element of North Korean migrants' half-biography, that is, how to select the subject's experience, arrange those stories, and adopt a specific writing style.

In "The Historian, Literature and the Genre of Biography," Rancière demonstrates that the genre of biography is a mode of expression that reveals certain conditions in history, and these conditions enable one individual's life to be extended to a public discourse. According to Rancière, historians use the "revolutionary characteristic of literature" through the genre of autobiography.<sup>130</sup> His assertion opposes Paul de Man's criticism on the discourse surrounding autobiography's definition. De Man said that the problem of autobiographical discourse is "the attempt to define and to treat autobiography as if it were a literary genre among others,"<sup>131</sup> and Adams points out that De Man suggests to "think of autobiography, not as a genre, but as"<sup>132</sup> "a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts."<sup>133</sup> However, the "indistinguishability" between reality and fiction inherent in the genre of biography does not change even if we do not consider it as a genre. Furthermore, the very figure of autobiography that De Man points out as something that occurs in all texts attests to its homogeneity with literature, such as narrativity and fictionality. Therefore, "the genre of biography is the privileged place for this double indistinguishability: between action and states, but also between the real

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<sup>130</sup> "The important point is that biography is the emblem of the literary revolution that makes history possible as a science....Biography as a genre brings to light the paradox hidden in the literary conditions of specialist history as a discourse." Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 177.

<sup>131</sup> Paul De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 919. qtd by Adams, 2.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>133</sup> Paul De Man, 921, qtd. by *Ibid.*, 2.

and fictional.”<sup>134</sup> Rancière later refers to this indistinguishability as the “falseness” of biography, but this characteristic is far from the controversy whether the fact written in biography is accurate, such as in Shin Dong-hyuk’s case:

The stories workers tell of embarking on writing are themselves exemplary tales that refer to each other and repeat certain pre-existing models. They tell of the meeting between life and writing, not in the accuracy of the facts they relate, but in their very “falseness”: not in their inaccuracy, but in the way they are borrowed and displaced, attesting to the shifting of one mode of experience of language and life to another mode. Biography does not happen without some indistinguishability between reality and fiction. The problem then involves working out where to put this lack of distinction, where to circumscribe it, rather than denying it.<sup>135</sup>

Authors of biography presume this “falseness,” an innate characteristic of biography. Whether the facts in the biography are true is not the biggest concern here, because biography is born from this indistinguishability between fiction and reality. “Falseness” can occur when memories are “borrowed and displaced” in the process of writing. As the workers’ stories refer to each other, North Korean migrants’ stories also intervene in each other.<sup>136</sup> What matters then is how the mode of experience becomes the mode of writing. Thus, in North Korean migrants’ half-biography, writers are the subjects of mode changing, even though they may not be the subjects of experience. These writers reveal themselves, reminding the readers of their existence. Indeed, Ira B. Nadel is correct in that “although the biographer may declare their position ‘off state,’ through their language and narrative voice as well as structure and organization, they always present.”<sup>137</sup> His statement is applicable to the case of North Korean migrants’ autobiographies.

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<sup>134</sup> Rancière, 177.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>136</sup> North Korean migrants do not only describe their own experience in their half-biography, they also support their credibility from the stories of their friends, relatives, and coworkers. This is the same as the case of the North Korean panelists in South Korean television programs. Even though they do not reveal their exact source(s) due to security issues, their stories are sometimes intermingled with others’ stories.

<sup>137</sup> Nadel, 29.

If we admit “falseness” is the nature of biography, the question becomes where to locate the boundary of acceptable “indistinguishability” or “falseness.” Shin Dong-hyuk’s autobiography, for example, crossed the line of acceptable indistinguishability to the public discourse. Even if we understand that Shin Dong-hyuk’s story was an attempt to gather international opinions on North Korean human rights, questions remain as to how we should perceive his performance as a human rights activist after the controversy. This perjury-related suspicion of North Korean refugees, which seems to be only a closed labyrinthine game with no exit, resembles the discourse of autobiography based on the genre’s ambiguity. As we cannot designate all authors of autobiographies as liars, the matter of authenticity does not create a productive discourse about the North Koreans’ half-biographies.

*“The Mute” is Talkative: U.S. Readers and the Experience of Others*

Echoing Gayatri Spivak’s title “Can the subaltern speak?” Rancière asserts, “History gets the mute to talk.”<sup>138</sup> This is true in the sense that the written microscopic history of individuals has provided subalterns a language. However, the veracity of this claim is undermined by Rancière himself in the next sentence:

For the “mute” themselves, it’s not so simple. Precisely because they are not mute. Their history is actually a conflict between two lives that is also a conflict between two ways of talking: the way that suits productive and reproductive life, and the way that the children of the people experiment with when they encounter words, phrases and stories that come from elsewhere, from the holy book, from the platform of oratory or from poetry. (...) Historians have often thought I was thereby trying to provide evidence for some kind of lived experience or private life, on the part of workers, hidden beneath the public life of the ‘workers’ movement’. But what I was trying to do was challenge that very division, to challenge the biographical tradition that refers public acts or speech acts to some popular lived experience, both individual and collective, of which they are supposedly and expression.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Rancière, 181.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

If “history gets the mute to talk,” a coauthor of North Korean migrants’ half-biography thereby becomes an historian or biographer who has the written language to make the North Korean migrants talk, while their speech is inapprehensible on its own. However, it is also true that the North Korean migrants are not mute. Instead, North Korean migrants describe themselves as active, progressive, and subjective individuals who have crossed multiple national borders to obtain legitimate identities.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, they have a strong desire to be accepted and recognized in the society they’ve entered. Although there are various external factors and motivations for the publication of North Korean migrants’ stories, the writers publishing half-biographies certainly manifest a strong desire to show who they were and who they are going to be.

The North Korean migrants’ half-biographies are written in past tense<sup>141</sup> and describe who they were in North Korea, how they crossed the border, and how they live at the moment. Most of the stories end with their settling down in the South Korean society. However, these stories are not only written for remembering their past, but also for creating their future. Jiok in Lee Cheong-jun’s *Let’s Write Autobiography* explains what autobiography is for:

However, once the autobiography is written, it begins to take on the living protagonist of the autobiography and exert the strange power of dominating the protagonist. Today’s

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<sup>140</sup> Many North Koreans, in their half-biographies and television programs discussed in chapter two, explain that they have experienced more than any individual can do in a lifetime, so there is nothing they cannot do. Sometimes, North Koreans are reluctant to speak about their experience, but it is not because they do not have their subjective language but because they are not ready to reencounter their traumatic experience and share it with others. For example, when Shin dong-hyuk began to talk to the public, it took a long time for him to break out a barrier before him. When audiences asked him to explain his escape story, he was very uncomfortable and said, “This is really private and sensitive. I try to avoid talking about it as much as I can.” Shin used to finish his talk very short by saying “My story can be very heartbreaking. I don’t want you to be depressed.” Blaine Harden, *Escape from Camp 14: One Man’s Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* (New York: Viking, 2012), 177.

<sup>141</sup> Taking William Marchal’s biography written by Georges Duby as an example, Rancière points out that some biographies are written in the present tense, not following the chronological order of the subject’s lifetime. Based on this fact, Rancière argues some literary elements from the genre of biography. Hyunseo Lee’s half-biography, *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector’s Story*, starts from her talk at a TED conference held in Long Beach, California in 2013. This ordering beyond the chronology boosts the dramatic effect of the story.



autobiography is nothing more than autosuggestion for his future that is written borrowing the past tense. Autobiographies let the living protagonist see his new future. And let him dream of actualizing it. Because it is a plausible story. . . .However, the future is not for the future of the protagonist who writes autobiography, but for the people of the next negation to mirror it.<sup>142</sup>

The written biography constructs the North Korean migrants' future, but it is also potentially powerful in shaping the future of its readers. In fact, many North Korean migrants' autobiographies were selected as recommended books for primary school students in the United States.<sup>143</sup> This tendency again leads us to question why many of North Korean migrants' autobiographies are published directly in English in the form of half-biography. In other words, this is a question about the production, consumption, and readership of North Korean migrants' half-biographies.

Let me start with the most fundamental question: why do North Korean migrants wish to publish their autobiographies? Not every North Korean has an opportunity to publish his or her story, and those who do definitely need an external source of funding, such as a publisher or an agency that advocates for North Korean human rights. However, aside from these external elements, the migrant makes a decision about publishing her story because she decides to communicate with others by revealing her own life in North Korea. Then, the next question arises: with whom does she want to communicate? It is possible that the writer chooses English as the language of communication, since it has many more potential readers than Korean. On the other hand, non-English-speakers, including North Korean migrants and potential North Korean

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<sup>142</sup> Lee, 58-60.

<sup>143</sup> For example, Lee Sungju's *Every Falling Star* won 2016 Parents' Choice Awards by the Parents' Association in the United States. Heejung Yang, "A North Korean Defector, Sungju Lee's Autobiography became U.S. Parent Association Recommended Book," *Radio Free Asia*, November 4, 2016, accessed April 25, 2017, [http://www.rfa.org/korean/in\\_focus/human\\_rights\\_defector/award-11042016162930.html](http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/human_rights_defector/award-11042016162930.html).

border crossers as well as the readers in South Korea (with over 30,000 North Korean migrants) may have limited access to her work.

In fact, many North Korean migrants' stories have been published in South Korea since the 1990s. Since the 1990s and until the present moment, twenty North Korean memoirs<sup>144</sup> were published in South Korea, and among them, sixteen were originally published in Korean. The other four were initially published in either French or English, and later translated into Korean. Based on data provided by Kyobo Bookstore (*kyobomun'go*),<sup>145</sup> among the sixteen books, which were originally published in Korean, four books are not on sale because they are either sold out or out of print, while one book<sup>146</sup> is not registered. Why do U.S. publishers prefer not to translate these published stories into English, but to create their own version? In other words, why are North Koreans' books translated from English into the Korean language, but not the other way round?

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<sup>144</sup> Some books are published as “memoirs.” The memoir is “*sugi* (수기: 手記)” in Korean, which means a handwritten record. Autobiography is “*chasöjön* (자서전: 自叙傳)” in Korean, which refers to a biography written by oneself. Even though the boundary between autobiography and memoir is blurred, generally speaking, an autobiography emphasizes chronological writing of the writer's life, whereas a memoir can focus on a specific episode or a time in a person's life. Nonetheless, they both share the characteristic of self-writing.

<sup>145</sup> <http://www.kyobobook.co.kr/search/SearchKorbookMain.jsp> (Last accessed May 13, 2017). Kyobo Book Store is the biggest bookstore in South Korea.

<sup>146</sup> Kim ho's *The Road to the South: Kim Ho's Memoirs on Defection from North* (*namnyökk'üro kanün kil: kimho t'albuk sugi*) is not registered in the market, but found in the National Library of Korea (*kungnip chungang tosögwän*). [https://www.nl.go.kr/nl/search/SearchDetail.nl?category\\_code=ct&service=KOLIS&vdkvgwkey=388884&colltype=DAN\\_HOLD&place\\_code\\_info=100&place\\_name\\_info=서고자료신청대%281층%29&manage\\_code=MA&shape\\_code=B&refLoc=null&category=&srchFlag=Y&h\\_kwd=남녘으로+가는+길&lic\\_yn=N&mat\\_code=GM&topF1=title\\_author&kwd=남녘으로+가는+길&dan=&yon=&disabled=&media=&web=&map=&music=&etc=&archive=&cip=&kolisNet=&korcis=](https://www.nl.go.kr/nl/search/SearchDetail.nl?category_code=ct&service=KOLIS&vdkvgwkey=388884&colltype=DAN_HOLD&place_code_info=100&place_name_info=서고자료신청대%281층%29&manage_code=MA&shape_code=B&refLoc=null&category=&srchFlag=Y&h_kwd=남녘으로+가는+길&lic_yn=N&mat_code=GM&topF1=title_author&kwd=남녘으로+가는+길&dan=&yon=&disabled=&media=&web=&map=&music=&etc=&archive=&cip=&kolisNet=&korcis=) (Last accessed May 13, 2017).

Table 3.2. Autobiographies and Memoirs of North Korean Migrants Published in Korean

Title	Author	Publication	Published Date	Translation
<i>The Road to the South: Kim Ho's Memoirs on Defection from North</i> (namnyōkk'ūro kanūn kil: kimho t'albuk sugi)	Kim Ho	Life and Human Rights (sōul: saengmyōnggwa in'gwōn)	1998 (Not found in Bookstore)	
<i>A Tear-drowned Rainbow</i> (nunmullo kūrīn mujigae)	Jang Gilsu	Moonhak Soochup (sōul: munhaksuch'ōp)	2000 (Sold out)	
<i>(Ji Haenam's Song of Wailing) Don't Cry, Hongdo: Ji Haenam's autobiographical Confession on Defection</i> (chihaenami purūn t'onggogūi norae hongdoya uji mara: chihaenamūi chajōnjōk t'albuk kobaek sugi)	Ji Haenam	Taeil Publication (sōul: t'aeilch'ulp'ansa)	2004 (Out of print)	
<i>(North Korean Political Prison Camp, a Total Control Zone) Escape to the Outside World</i> (pukhan chōngch'ibōm suyongso wanjōn t'ongje kuyōk sesang pakkūro naoda)	Shin Dong-hyuk	The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (sōul: pukhan in'gwōn chōngbo sent'ō)	2007 (Out of stock)	
<i>I Want To Be Human</i> (in'ganigo shipta)	Kim Hye-suk	Essay (sōul: eseip'ōbūllishing)	2009	
<i>Two Escapes, One Dream</i> (tubōnūi t'alch'ul, hanaūi kkum)	Lee Jeonghak	Text (sōul: t'eksūt'ū)	2010	
<i>Cross the River with Poetry: Jang Jin-sung's Memoir, a North Korean defector poet of "I Sell My Daughter for 100 Won"</i> (shirūl p'umgo kangūl nōmda: "nae ttarūl paegwōne p'amnida"ūi t'albuk shiin changjinsōng sugi)	Jang Jin-sung	Chogapje.com (sōul: chogapchedatk'ōm)	2011 (Out of print)	
<i>On the Border (Cross the Border of Heaven)</i> (ch'ōn'gugūi kukkyōngūl nōmda)	Lee Hakjun	Young Soul (p'aju: ch'ōngnyōnjōngshin)	2011 (Sold out)	
<i>A Thousand Miles to Freedom</i> (chayu ch'aja ch'ōnmalli)	Ji Hyeona	J&C Community (koyang: cheiaenssik'ōmyunit'i)	2011	
<i>I Wanted to Live as a Person: Beyond the Border, 12427 Miles, A Tearful Real Story that Moves the Whole World</i> (saramūro salgo ship'ōtta: kukkyōngūl nōmō)	Lee Hakjun	Samnparkers (p'aju: ssaemaenp'ak'ōsū)	2012	

<i>2mank'illomit'ö, chön segyerül ullin nunmurüi kamdong shirhwa</i> <i>An Old Promise (oraedoen yakso)</i> <i>Dream of a Salmon (yöndöü kkum)</i>	Yun Jeongeun Kang Dimode	Tindrum (söul: yangch'ölbuk) Yeyong B&P (söul: yeyöng B & P)	2012 2013 (Out of print)	
<i>Escape from Camp 14 (14ho suyongso t'alch'ul)</i>	Blaine Harden	The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (söul: asanjöngch'aekyön'guwön)	2013	Translated from American edition by Shin Dongsuk.
<i>A Will from Eleven-year-old: From North Hamgyong Province to Seoul, 9 Years of Defection Story to Hope and Freedom of 9 years (yörhansarüi yusö: hamgyöngbukto ündögesö söulkkaji himanggwa chayurül ch'aja saengsarül nömnadünün 9nyön'ganüi t'albuk süt'ori)</i> <i>Dear Leader (kyöngaehanün chidojae)</i>	Sébastien Falletti and Kim Eunju Jang Jin-sung	C&I Books (söul: ssiaenaibuksü) Chogabje.com (söul: chogapchedatk'öm)	2013 September 19, 2014 (Sold out)	Translated from French edition by Moon Eunsil. American edition was published first on May 13, 2014. <sup>1</sup>
<i>My Hometown: Defection, Repatriation, Re-defection...Decades of Adversity (naüi saltön kohyangün: t'albuk, puksong, chaet'albuk...kü sushimnyöni yökkyöng)</i> <i>If You Knew What I Saw (naega pon kösül tangshini alge twaessümyön) (American title: In Order to Live)</i>	Kang Sungyo Park Yeonmi	Happy Book (söul: haengbogenöji) Book21 (p'aju: 21segibuksü)	2015 2015	American edition was published in September 29, 2015, and translated into Korean by Jeong Jihyun
<i>Everyday We Live Is a Miracle (uriga saraganün haruharuga kijögida)</i>	Lee Seunghui	Happy Book (söul: haengbogenöji)	2015	
<i>Labor Newspaper: North Korean Man's Diary on Clumsy Settlement in South Korea (rodongshinmun: t'albungnamüi chwach'ungudol namhan chöngch'akki)</i> <i>Hwang Jangyeop's Memoir (hwangjangyöp hoegorok)</i>	Choe Seongguk Hwang Jangyeop	Koreahurrah (söul: kkoreaaura) Zeitgeist (söul: shidaejöngshin)	2016 2016	

(A Journalist from Kim Il Sung  
University) Ju Seongha 's  
Between Seoul and Pyongyang  
(kimilsŏng taehak ch'ulshin  
t'albukcha chusŏngha kijaŭi  
sŏulgwa p'yŏngyang sai)

Ju Seongha

Guiparang (sŏul:  
kip'arang)

2017

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Most North Korean half-biographies in English have been published since 2012, presumably after *Escape from Camp 14* and *Dear Leader* had achieved great success in the U.S. book market. Around that time North Korean migrants' stories began to be translated from English into Korean. However, the opposite did not occur – none of the migrants' autobiographies has been translated from Korean into English. This means that North Korean migrants' autobiography achieved an independent market value in the U.S. with no mediation through the subject's first language or the Korean publication system. Therefore, American publishers, hoping to increase the number of readers, need to work closely with English-speaking co-authors to develop strategies aimed specifically at U.S. readers, because North Korean authors are not familiar with the U.S. market situation. Those marketing and publishing strategies may in turn also influence the contents of these half-biographies.

Yeonmi Park, a North Korean migrant, reveals her intriguing reading list in her half-biography, *In Order To Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*. From chapter 21 to 24, she shows us how she absorbed knowledge after she had settled in South Korea. For her, "books were more important than food"<sup>147</sup> even at this time:

I started with Korean translations of children's books, then moved on to picture books about the countries of the world. I bought books about Roman mythology and world history. I read biographies of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Hillary

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<sup>147</sup> Yeonmi Park and Maryanne Vollers, *In order to live: a North Korean girl's journey to freedom* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 229.

Clinton. I was interested in America, and I particularly loved biographies because they were about people who had to overcome obstacles or prejudices to get ahead.<sup>148</sup>

I read literary classics like *Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies*, and Tolstoy's short stories. I fell in love with Shakespeare. But it was discovering George Orwell's *Animal Farm* that marked a real turning point for me. It was like finding a diamond in a mountain of sand. I felt as if Orwell knew where I was from and what I had been through.<sup>149</sup>

I had been reading the biographies of American civil rights heroes like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, and others who had sacrificed their safety and even their lives so that others could be free. I was drawn to their stories, and by the notion that living a meaningful life requires embracing something bigger than yourself.<sup>150</sup>

My tutors had me reading everything from Shakespeare to the American abolitionist and escaped slave Frederick Douglass. His defiant letter to his former master made me wonder what kind of letter I might write to Kim Jong Un if I had the nerve. Maybe, like Douglass, I would tell him that I was a human being and he didn't own me anymore. Now I owned myself.<sup>151</sup>

Yeonmi Park's reading list makes her half-biography unique because it allows us to imagine the very first booklist of these North Koreans upon gaining their "freedom." It is also interesting that she barely seems to be exposed to Korean books. Her reading list is full of American biographies and classics, which enables her to connect to the U.S. readers. Although Park later mentions Hye-ja Kim's book *Don't Beat Someone, Even with Flowers*,<sup>152</sup> which is about Kim's international voluntary work, most of her readings are based on American culture. Considering that Park was living in South Korea and the Korean language was her tool for absorbing knowledge, her reading list based on American culture defies our expectations. Even if she was able to access these American centered books with translation, why did she build her literary

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<sup>148</sup> Park and Vollers, 229.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>152</sup> Hye-ja Kim, *Don't Beat Someone, Even with Flowers (kkoch'ūrodo ttaeriji mara)* (Seoul: Ancient Futures, 2004).

experience from American literature in South Korea? And how is her booklist constructed specifically to gain the attention of U.S. readers?

North Korean migrants' half-biographies and their publication in the U.S. demonstrate that North Korean migrants' stories with their extraordinary experience have already expanded beyond the boundaries of the Korean peninsula. North Korean migrants and their defections are no longer conceived as only a matter of two Koreas, and the role of North Korean migrants is not limited to drawing up the reunification discourse. Instead, they have become refugees whose human rights issues are highly problematized upon the world stage. In the framework where North Korea is considered "a troublesome matter," North Korean migrants' testimonies become evidence of North Korea's monstrosity. This notion illustrates why North Korean migrants' testimonies become bestseller products in the U.S. market and generate American people's increasing curiosity about North Korea. However, the lessons or touching points that move the U.S. readers should be thoroughly examined.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag argues that photography is a powerful medium for showing the "naked face" of others, and the photographs filled with fragmented bodies in "the absence of a landscape"<sup>153</sup> are particularly violent. The world's most isolated country, North Korea, has also been known through the pictures taken by foreign reporters, and the photographs of North Korean children, especially those with bodies shrinking from starvation, prompted people's attention to North Korean human rights. For those who have seen North Korea in these fragmented images, the North Koreans' half-biographies are important as they provide a sense of North Korean people's lives through a narrative. Through this narrative, the "landscape" from which North Koreans' pain originates can be discussed beyond the violence of

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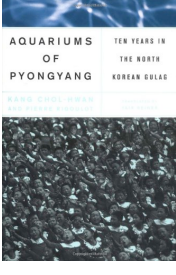
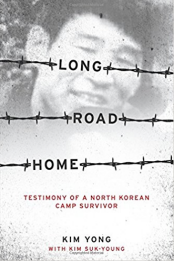
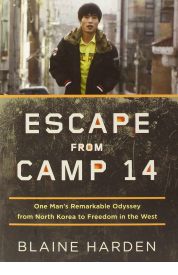
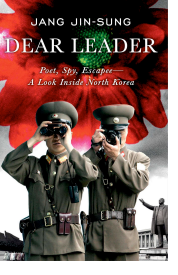
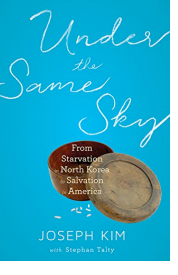
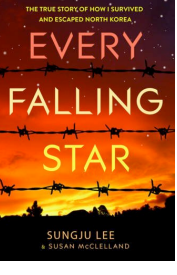
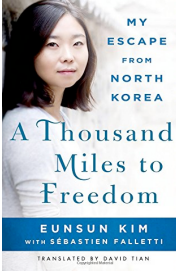


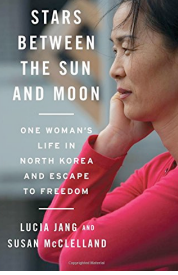
<sup>153</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 64.

close-up images. Nevertheless, due to the geopolitical position of North Korean migrants, they tend to produce a similar kind of shock as is delivered by photographs. Their shocking testimonies, however, are different from the strategies of photography that sells the pain of others. The North Korean authors of their half-biographies show not only the “naked faces” of their past, but also the aftermath of their defections in free countries. Through the glamorously packaged image of the half-biographies, these authors lead the readers to wonder about the dark past beyond their beautiful faces.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> These images are on their hardcover; I used the covers saved on Amazon.com.



					
<p>The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag</p>	<p>Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor</p>	<p>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</p>	<p>Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee – A Look Inside North Korea</p>	<p>Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America</p>	<p>Every Falling Star: The True Story of How I Survived and Escaped North Korea</p>
					
<p>Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea</p>	<p>The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story</p>	<p>In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom</p>	<p>Stars Between the Sun and Moon: One Woman's Life in North Korea and Escape to Freedom</p>		

**Note.** Compared to the covers of the North Korean male migrants' books in the first row, the front covers of the four female migrants' books in the third row place the migrants' faces at the forefront.

Figure 3.1. Book covers of North Korean's (half) biographies

In this process, readers identify themselves with rescuers who offer to former “prisoners” the freedom of the “western world,” thus becoming a part of the North Koreans’ book project. The suffering of North Koreans that the U.S. readers encounter can be understood as someone else’s,

because their pain comes from the only extant Stalinist state in the Far East. The readers cannot really understand North Korea, whose leader is officially described as a “lunatic” by Western newspapers, nor do they feel that they need to. As Susan Sontag asserts, “So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering.”<sup>155</sup> In the frame of “North Koreans’ escape to American freedom,” the historical context of the relations between North Korea, South Korea, and America is absent. In this absence, the history of the Korean War and its division is not discussed and Cold War history is ruptured. In this framework—Americans save North Korean victims from the monstrous North Korea—America once again becomes the hero who rescues refugees and offers freedom.

In 1933, Walter Benjamin explained the era of “poverty of experience,” where people “have devoured everything, both culture and people.”<sup>156</sup> Starting with the fable of an old man who “had passed a valuable piece of experience”<sup>157</sup> to his sons, Benjamin questions:

Where has it all gone? Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story? Where do you still hear words from the dying that last, and that pass from one generation to the next like a precious ring? Who can still call on a proverb when he needs one? And who will even attempt to deal with young people by giving them the benefit of their experience?<sup>158</sup>

Benjamin’s notion of experience is something we can pass on to a younger generation, like the old man’s lesson about hard work and achievement. After World War I, the value of experience

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<sup>155</sup> Sontag, 102.

<sup>156</sup> Walter Benjamin et al., *Walter Benjamin: selected writings* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 734.

<sup>157</sup> This is an old fable. One man, on his deathbed, “fooled his sons into believing that there was treasure buried in the vineyard. They would only have to dig. They dug, but found no treasure. When autumn came, however, the vineyard bore fruit like no other in the whole land.” Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

fell after people experienced “some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world.”<sup>159</sup>

The survivors returned home in silence because they had nothing to share with the younger generation about their experience on the frontlines. In this era of poverty, North Koreans’ experience has become a bestselling story. While the majority of North Koreans are reluctant to talk about their experiences and choose to remain silent similar to the survivors of World War I, these few escapees were brave enough to break this silence. However, what these North Korean authors pass on to their readers is not valuable experience, but a cry that their experience should not be repeated. What they deliver is not recommended as a valuable experience, but a description of an inhuman case resulting from the violence of the state and its boundary. The pseudo-lessons that readers learn from these individual stories may exist before the reading process. The readers expect to confirm their monstrous notion of Communism that has already been known to collapse and once again to hear the praises to the freedom of capitalist society. The readers also want to see how these “others” from the world’s most isolated Communist country, ruled by “a lunatic” dictator, adapt themselves to the system through self-developed narratives – how the subject is reborn as a new person.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

## The Human Right to Sell

“*Knock and the door will be opened to you.*”<sup>160</sup>

Jero Yun’s 2016 documentary, *Mrs. B., A North Korean Woman (Madame B or madam pi)*, focuses on a North Korean woman who was sold to a Chinese farmer after her defection. After spending five years with her farmer husband, she decides to live with him,<sup>161</sup> even though her original husband and two sons are still in North Korea. She believes she can legally marry her Chinese husband once she achieves a legal citizenship from South Korea. Thus, she travels to Southeast Asian countries in order to enter South Korea. After an arduous trip, the camera suddenly shows us the metropolis’ prospect of Seoul, filled with skyscrapers. This abrupt transition from a Southeast Asian detention center to the cityscape in Seoul evokes an unexpected awe and an uncanny feeling in the audience. Followed by images of Mrs. B’s tough life in Seoul as a cleaning lady for water purifier machines, this cityscape overwhelms the audience, suggesting that her life in Seoul is not going to be easy. This frame showing the cityscape of Seoul lasts for 1 minute and 48 seconds accompanied by the monologue of an anonymous girl:

My grandfather is a disabled veteran. During the Korean War, he was shot in the leg. They took the bullet out, but his shin bone stuck out. He always told me sadly that it represented the scar and pain of the Korean peninsula divided between the North and the South. Hey, everybody! Who dared to shoot at an 18-year-old boy? Sixty-four years have passed since the end of the Korean War, but we should never forget the brutality of the

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<sup>160</sup> “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7)

<sup>161</sup> Mrs. B explains that even though she was sold to this Chinese man and did not like him at first, the man and his old parents were good to her and understood that she did not want to give birth. She said that she felt comfortable in this area governed by the Chinese because she did not need to worry about food or anything else. All she wanted was to get her legal status, so that she could legally marry this Chinese man. Her North Korean husband and two sons came to South Korea first, and she arrived later. Although her family achieved citizenship, Mrs. B’s request is pending due to her record as a pimp and drug dealer in China. She confessed what she did in China for living during her interrogation. By the time the movie was made (2016), the criminal charge has not been withdrawn, which delayed her return to her Chinese partner.

Communists. They are responsible for the tragedy of this fratricidal war. “Forgive but never forget!” We should never forget that North Korean Communists are still pointing their guns at us and that the Korean War is not over yet. North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons to threaten us. Little matter the power of these weapons and at the cutting edge of technology, *this war is in God’s hands. I ask God to send plagues and hornets to protect our nation, the Land of the Morning Calm.*<sup>162</sup>

Until the early 1990s, Korean elementary schools used to hold an annual event, where children would draw anti-communist posters and engage in oratory contests. The eloquence of the girl’s monologue in 2016 seems to tell us that nothing has changed after sixteen years had passed since the anti-communist education disappeared. Instead, her statement amplifies the cruelty of the history of the Korean peninsula. Her speech becomes more grotesque towards the end when she claims the fate of the Korean peninsula and the unfinished Korean War depend on God’s intervention. As Moses asks God to send plagues and locusts to Egypt in order to save the captured Israelites,<sup>163</sup> the girl similarly appeals to God to send plagues and hornets, presumably to North Korea, to save poor North Korean people. To the Protestants in South Korea, the Korean War and Korea’s division can be solved only through divine intervention. Based on their logic, North Korea should be punished and North Korean people should be rescued, and the existence of North Korean defectors proves that their logic is correct. In the next section, I examine the evangelical churches’ intervention in North Koreans’ defections and complicated connections between North Korean bodies, evangelical churches, and the so-called South Korean “conservatives.”

Geoffrey Galt Harpham asserts that the nature of autobiography, which is “the conversion of experience into narrative, should originate with Augustine’s Confessions within a theology of

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<sup>162</sup> *Mrs. B. A North Korean Woman*, dir. Jero Yun (The United States: Icarus Films, 2016), DVD. 41:30-43:18. My italic.

<sup>163</sup> Exod.

conversion.”<sup>164</sup> The form of confession and the process of conversion are the innate characteristic of autobiography, and, indeed, North Korean migrants’ half-biography particularly adapts the form of religious confession—how authors are born again after achieving freedom. Thus, it is not surprising that many North Koreans authors participate in Christianity. In fact, the majority of North Koreans meet Christian missionaries in China when they receive aid. Every North Korean needs a middleman to cross the Chinese and North Korean border without the North Korean regime’s permission. Because the armed North Korean soldiers are guarding the borderline, and Chinese government forces Chinese people to report North Koreans’ border crossing, it is too risky for North Koreans to cross the border without these middlemen’s help. There are various types of middlemen, including brokers and human traffickers, however Christian missionaries too serve as middlemen. The majority of North Koreans who successfully arrived to countries that provide legal protection for them confessed in their autobiographies that their migration would have been impossible without missionaries’ help. Hong, the protagonist of *Ok-hwa*, a short story discussed in Chapter one, also meets “the (North Korean) woman” in her church. It is not coincidental that “the woman” is found in Hong’s church, because churches are a popular place where North Korean border crossers hide and get some help. However, as is well known, China, which is run by its socialist government, restricts people’s religious freedom. As a result, the Chinese government has carefully watched the activities of South Korean and Korean Chinese missionaries in China.<sup>165</sup> Due to this complex situation, anthropologist Jin-Heon Jung<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Conversion and the Language of Autobiography,” in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>165</sup> For example, in July of 2012, a famous Pastor, Chun, from South Korean Hanaro Church was arrested for helping North Korean refugees in China. He was arrested at the Harbin airport by Chinese police and was imprisoned for 159 days. For Chun’s discharge, the Christian churches in both the Korean Chinese and South Korean areas gathered signatures. Chun was later released on bail, and was remembered as the father among the missionaries who work for North Korean refugees. However, the assessments of pastor Chun were divided into two parts. Many scholars and activists heavily criticized Chun for his reckless defection projects. For example, Chun was

finds that the majority of South Korean missionaries work as businessmen/women, educators, or tourists in the Sino-North Korea border areas to conceal their identities. South Korean missionaries also need help from local Korean Chinese, since South Koreans are foreigners in the border area, and North Koreans are reluctant to have contacts with South Koreans.<sup>167</sup>

Based on Jung's research, there are two approaches North Koreans take in terms of their religious conversion. While the South Korean theologians who understand the North Korean Juche ideology (or *Kimilsung-ism*) as the North Korean state religion suggest that Christian missionaries take the form of "inter-religious dialogue," most evangelical missionaries choose to "total transformation" of North Koreans as "born-again Christians."<sup>168</sup> In this respect, Joseph Kim's case turned out to be a very successful example of proselytization. Kim is a North Korean refugee who later settled in the United States in his late teens. According to his 2015 half-biography, *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America*, Joseph Kim, whose first name used to be Kwang Jin in North Korea, was later born again as

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involved in one of North Korean group's defections in 2001. Chun escorted seventeen refugees near the Mongolian border. However, after Chun's troop left the refugees to walk to the border, they were arrested by the Chinese police. Among them, all but two were forcefully returned to the North Korean regime. Regardless of the repatriated refugees' security, Chun used his recorded footage of the seventeen refugees as promotion on his own website, not even covering up the refugees' identities. Chun was also involved in 2013 Yantai Port incident, which was about approximately fifty North Korean refugees' escape from China. All refugees were arrested by the Chinese police, and nineteen were repatriated to North Korea while others went missing. According to the statements from others involved in the project, there were only three leaders of this Noah's ark and Chun was one of them; furthermore, the conditions on the boat were terrible. One North Korean migrant who was an assistant at that time confessed that the refugees' escape was not well planned from the beginning, and he had to bail water out of the boat. Chun was criticized for using the North Korean refugees to gain worldwide attention with this reckless plan. Aforementioned testimonies are from "Desperate Defection Route: We were the victims of North Korean Human Rights Organizations," *The Its Know*, Seoul Broadcasting System (Seoul: SBS, January 21, 2006). Accessed September 26, 2016. [http://allvod.sbs.co.kr/allvod/vodEndPage.do?srs\\_id=10000060745&pc\\_searchclick=sub\\_vod\\_cont\\_11\\_28](http://allvod.sbs.co.kr/allvod/vodEndPage.do?srs_id=10000060745&pc_searchclick=sub_vod_cont_11_28).

<sup>166</sup> Jin-Heon Jung, "North Korean Refugees and the Politics of Evangelical Mission," *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2013): 157.

<sup>167</sup> When North Koreans are caught and repatriated, they are first interrogated as to whether they have met missionaries or South Koreans in China. That is considered the greatest crime in North Korea.

<sup>168</sup> Jung, 152-153.

Joseph in a church in Tumen City. Kim describes how he began to seek Christian churches in the Korean Chinese villages after he crossed the border. After he reached a Korean Chinese village, a woman told Kwang Jin to go to a Christian church for help. Until that point, Kwang Jin had only heard the term “Christian” once in North Korea coincidentally. With no appreciation for what Christian means at this time, Kwang Jin follows the sign of a cross, as the woman suggested. Full of suspicion, he knocks on the door of a church, and his bluntness offends the church people; however, they provide him with twenty yuan (about three U.S. dollars). Holding money in his hand, Kwang Jin thinks, “Christians are real.”<sup>169</sup> However, without an understanding of Christianity and why the church people did this good deed, he thinks, “If one church gave me twenty yuan, I’ll hit every church I can find and clean them up. Ten churches meant two hundred yuan. A fortune!” As if ridiculing Kwang-jin’s naïve thoughts, many Korean Chinese churches let him down. When he returns to the church in Tumen city that first gave him money, he finds a Biblical passage carved on the wall: “Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Kwang-jin’s story is a typical narrative of Christian conversion, where a person becomes a son of God. Jung, who emphasizes the uncomfortable relationship between North Korean refugees and evangelical missionaries, concludes that the conversion of these North Korean refugees is a “dialectical encounter.”<sup>170</sup> Jung argues that these North Korean refugees in Korean Chinese churches are “exemplary victims” because they have no alternative but to convert. However, at the same time, Jung equally emphasizes that the North Korean refugees quickly

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<sup>169</sup> Joseph Kim, *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 223.

<sup>170</sup> Jung develops the term “Christian passage” to describe North Korean refugees’ conversion narratives. He concludes that North Korean refugees develop their new selves in this process by polishing their stories of suffering and perilous migration. See Jin-Heon Jung, *Migration and Religion in East Asia: North Korean Migrants’ Evangelical Encounters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 118.



learn how to reframe themselves. In other words, the conversion of North Korean refugees becomes one of their strategies for survival.

After revisiting the Tumen City church, Kwang-jin is provided shelter and food. A local pastor finds a sponsor for Kwang-jin, but the Korean Chinese people in the village refuse to accept him because boys are dangerous in many respects – compared to girls, they are “not easy to exploit.”<sup>171</sup> The pastor tenaciously persuades one old lady to be his sponsor, and she finally proposes one condition: “when I meet him, I will ask him if his name is Joseph. If he says yes, then I will know [that this is God’s will]”.<sup>172</sup> When the pastor delivers the lady’s words, Kwang-jin gets offended and hurt. He thinks, “My name was all I had left of my father, all I had left of my childhood. Everything else had been sold off or taken from me. To give away my name for some hot food and a roof over my head was too much.”<sup>173</sup> However, he realizes that he has no alternative. Thus, when the old lady asks him if he is Joseph, Kwang-jin painfully tells her what she wants to hear.

*Old woman, I thought, let me tell you what is going to happen. I am going to let you call me Joseph, and I am going to your home and I will steal all your money and all your valuables. I will take them and go back to North Korea and live under my real name. I will buy my mother’s freedom and live happily with her and never see you or China again.*<sup>174</sup>

Kim’s half-biography shows how Kwang-jin later becomes a true Joseph, a newborn Christian, after the old lady shows her devotion to and faith in him. However, this episode shows us how South Korean and Korean Chinese churches push North Koreans’ to the edge. Furthermore, they

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<sup>171</sup> In Joseph Kim’s autobiography, he testifies, “Everyone in that area of China [the Tumen City] was hoping to find a female North Korean defector to help around the house, because they were vulnerable and easy to exploit.” Kim, 227.

<sup>172</sup> Kim, 227.

<sup>173</sup> Kim, 228.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

aim at the North Korean refugees' "total" conversion by erasing their past and giving them a new identity. The old lady's symbolic test, "Are you Joseph?" is not just about giving one a biblical name, but resembles a ritual of baptism. It is also noteworthy that the lady chooses the name Joseph for Kim. In the Old Testament, Joseph is the 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob, who is hated by his own brothers and becomes a slave in a neighboring country, Egypt. In his circumstances, Joseph (in the bible) becomes "an exemplary slave" due to his sincerity and morality. What the old lady expects from Kwang-jin is also Joseph's virtues of sincerity and morality. He works in the lady's house for a number of years with no payment, until he is "chosen" by a missionary and goes to the United States.<sup>175</sup>

*Tri-political Agents: Evangelical Churches, the Conservatives, and North Korean Refugees*

The missionaries and North Korean refugees are in an "asymmetrical relationship in which the refugees are positioned at the bottom," which "in turn, engenders religious and ethical dilemmas"<sup>176</sup> to both. The missionaries always have doubt whether the North Koreans' conversions can be defined as full conversion, while North Koreans question themselves whether they truly believe in God or just pretend to do so. Despite their confusing experience in

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<sup>175</sup> Joseph Kim had to study the bible in a Christian school in Shenyang and pass an exam to prove that he is sincere enough to go to America. As his case demonstrates, the depth of North Korean refugees' belief in God sometimes becomes the way to achieve their freedom. For example, Karo Hiroshi criticizes some South Korean missionaries for setting their criteria of whether North Korea refugees meet their qualifications. "Does he/she have enough money (3000RMB in Chinese currency) to travel to their destination third country? If he/she does not have money, does he/she go to a Christian church in China and eagerly engage in morning and evening prayer services? Does he/she attend the Bible study meetings to deepen their understanding of the Bible? Can he/she actually demonstrate a pattern of giving to the church in China? If he/she wishes to settle in South Korea, will they promise to donate 10 percent of their income once settled in South Korea?" Karo Hiroshi, "Japanese Policies on North Korean Refugees and Problems They Encounter when Settling in Japan," Speech delivered at an international conference held at Korea Christian University, Seoul, Korea, April 2, 2008. Quoted by Jin-Heon Jung, "North Korean Refugees and the Politics of Evangelical Mission," *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol 4, No. 2 (2013): 165.

<sup>176</sup> Jin-Heon Jung, "North Korean Refugees and the Politics of Evangelical Mission," *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol 4, No. 2 (2013): 149.

Christianity, most of them keep their converted religion after they resettle in a new country. Based on Wootack Jeon’s 2003 data, 88 percent of the North Korean migrants who moved to South Korea are Christians.<sup>177</sup> According to Jung (2015), “more than 65 percent of them [North Korean migrants] continued to attend churches regularly in the following three years.”<sup>178</sup> South Korean churches also provide a sense of community to North Korean migrants who newly arrive in South Korean society.

The evangelical churches and NGOs in China that help North Korean refugees’ border crossings and movements have an intimate connection with the North Korean human rights organizations in South Korea. According to Juntae Lee, there are approximately 50-80 organizations related to North Korean human rights, but among them only ten are active.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Wootack Jeon, “Survey of the North Korean People’s Social Consciousness-Study on North Korean Defectors in South Korea,” *Journal of the Korean Neuropsychiatric Association* Vo. 42, No. 5 (2003) quoted in Juntae Lee, “Formation, Ideology and Activities of North Korean Human Rights NGOs in South Korea: Conservative-Oriented Organizations” (MA diss., Seoul National University, 2015), 86.

<sup>178</sup> Jin-Heon Jung, “Refugee and Religious Narratives: The Conversion of North Koreans from Refugees to God’s Warriors,” in *Building Noah’s Ark for Migrants, Refugees, and Religious Communities*, ed. Alexander Horstmann and Jin-Heon Jung (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 81.

<sup>179</sup> Juntae Lee, “Formation, Ideology and Activities of North Korean Human Rights NGOs in South Korea: Conservative-Oriented Organizations” (MA diss., Seoul National University, 2015), 18-19. Lee categorizes these major groups into four according to their characteristics. The categorization of the first three rows is based on Lee’s research, and I added the protestant groups.

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Category of North Korean human rights Organizations	Name of Organization
Conservative-oriented groups	Citizen’s Alliance for North Korean Human Rights ( <i>pukhan in'gwŏn simin yŏnhap</i> ), Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights ( <i>pukhan minjuhwa net'ŭwŏk'ŭ</i> ), NK Watch (used to be “ <i>pukhan minjuhwa undong ponbu</i> ”)
Liberal-oriented or a-political groups	Peace Network ( <i>p'yŏnghwa net'ŭwŏk'ŭ</i> ), <i>Sarangbang</i> Group for Human Rights ( <i>in'gwŏn undong sarangbang</i> ), People Peace 21 ( <i>ch'amyŏ yŏndae</i> ), The Peace Foundation ( <i>p'yŏnghwa chaedan</i> ), Good Friends ( <i>chohŭn pŏttŭl</i> ), <i>KyoReh Hana</i> ( <i>uri kyŏre hana toegi undong ponbu</i> ), Good Neighbors

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These organizations are private cooperatives, which are financially wholly dependent on external funding. *Sisa Press*, a weekly magazine, reported on November 15, 2012, “The biggest financial patron of North Korean defectors (or human rights) organizations is the U.S. Department of State.”<sup>180</sup> This magazine further claimed that the *nonprofit* organization of National Endowment for Democracy (NED) – which is publicly known as an affiliated organization of the U.S. Department of State – and the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF),<sup>181</sup> as well as the

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Groups in the United States	Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), U.S. Committee for North Korean Human Rights, North Korea Freedom Coalition, Defense Forum Foundation
Protestant Groups	Committee of Reconstructing the North Korean Churches ( <i>Pukhan Kyohoe Chaegŏn Wiwŏnhoe</i> )*, The Union to Plant Churches in North Korea ( <i>pukhan kyohoe seugi yŏnhap</i> )**, Save North Korea***, ( <i>han'guk kyohoe yŏnhap nambuk kyohoe hyŏmnyŏk wiwŏnhoe</i> ), Christian Mission for North Korea (CMNK) ( <i>kidokkyo pukhan sŏn'gyohoe</i> ), Justice for North Korea (JFNK)****, Cornerstone*****

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\**Committee of Reconstructing the North Korean Churches*: This organization belongs to the Christian Council of Korea, and it began to operate in 1995. It aims to rebuild the churches built in North Korea before the division of the Korean peninsula. The representative members of *the Union to Plant Churches in North Korea* (UPCK)\*\* used to be a part of this organization, but the latter separated themselves from the Committee and established UPCK in 2006. Its establishment resulted in conflicts with CCK.

\*\*\**Save North Korea* (Save NK): This organization started as the Commission to Help North Korean Refugees (CNKR) in 1999 as an affiliated organization of The Christian Council of Korea (KCC), but was abolished in 2006 after the organization’s embezzlement, corruption, and fraud were reported in the documentary *Desperate Defection Route: We were the victims of North Korean Human Rights Organizations*, mentioned above in footnote 36. CNKR changed its name to Save North Korea in 2004 and now became an aggregate corporation of the Unification Department.

\*\*\*\* *Justice for North Korea*: This organization was first founded and led by a South Korean pastor, but according to its introduction, it now promotes to everyone regardless of one’s religious faith or nationality. Its website was accessed on February 1, 2016. <http://www.justice4nk.org/about/>.

\*\*\*\*\**Cornerstone*: This organization is a religious group founded in 1985. They aim to publish the Bible written in North Korean language, to deliver the bible to North Korea, and to develop under railroad churches in North Korea. They have offices in South Korea (Seoul), U.S.A. (Tustin, CA), and Canada (Vaughan, ON).

<sup>180</sup> Rakin Jeong, “the State Department’ is the biggest patron of North Korean defectors’ organizations,” *Sisa Press*, November 15, 2012, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.sisapress.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=59247>.

<sup>181</sup> Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) was established in 1998 and is run by the U. S. State Department. Its financial support to the North Korean Human Rights organizations began in 2009, which means that

Defense Forum Foundation (DFF) in America are the main funding sources, and these sources are “indispensable” to the survival of the North Korean human rights organizations. Nanhee Shin also points out that it is NED and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (BDHRL) that support the projects related to North Korea’s democratization.<sup>182</sup> Since the United States government cannot directly support the groups in North Korea, the funds are used by the organizations in South Korea.

Ever since President George W. Bush referred to North Korea as an “axis of evil” in 2002, the U.S. government made the North Korean human rights issue one of international urgency. The North Korean Human Rights Act was passed in 2004, which made it easier for the U.S. government to approach the North Korean refugee issue. NED defines itself as a nonprofit organization, but its origins can be traced back to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Because the funds to support foreign organizations should be approved by Congress, it is more accurate to describe it as a “pseudo-nongovernmental organization”<sup>183</sup> (pseudo-NGO). The North Korean Human Rights Act enabled the NGOs in the United States, NED among them, to use two million dollars per year despite funding cuts in 2010.<sup>184</sup> After the Obama government assumed power in 2009, the U.S. government’s direct financial support has decreased,<sup>185</sup> but its pressure

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the U.S. government has directly involved in. However, its budget and the patrons are highly confidential. Lee, “North Korean Human Rights NGOs,” 71.

<sup>182</sup> Nanhee Shin, “The Activities of North Korean Defectors’ Organizations in South Korea and the Politics of Recognition in the Context of Politics at Home and Abroad,” *Comparative Literature Studies (Pigyo Munhak Yŏn’gu)* 21 (2015): 338-339.

<sup>183</sup> Juntae Lee, “Formation, Ideology and Activities of North Korean Human Rights NGOs in South Korea: Conservative-Oriented Organizations” (MA diss., Seoul National University, 2015), 57.

<sup>184</sup> For the details of NED’s financial support, see Juntae Lee, 56-73.

<sup>185</sup> Based on a news article published on April 17, 2013, the U.S. government’s funding of North Korean human rights groups in South Korea has almost stopped in 2013. Heung-kwang Kim, a representative of the NK Intelligence Alliance, said, “The U.S. supported almost 5 million dollars a year, but the resources are now almost

on the North Korean regime in international politics became stronger, leading to the creation of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea in 2013.<sup>186</sup>

In sum, North Korean human rights organizations, protestant churches, the State Department, NED, and the South Korean conservative-oriented groups are all associated with each other with respect to the North Korean refugee issue. The evangelical churches' involvement in the North Korean refugees' migration should be understood in this complicated context, and South Korean conservative-oriented groups' particular interest in the so-called North Korean refugee "business" has a similar foundation. Sora Kim's research shows that the South Korean people whom North Korean defectors first encounter are mostly from the conservative camp.<sup>187</sup> The "conservatives" in South Korean society have been criticized for their lack of philosophy, and their frequent use of "pro-North out" discourse has been particularly criticized as their cliché. Before Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, South Korean presidents mostly came from the Democratic Republic Party (or military), which directly supported the so-called conservative activities. It was President Kim Dae-jung who changed the country's attitude towards North Korea with his Sunshine Policy, and his North Korea policies continued under the Roh Moo-hyun administration. The late 1990s and the 2000s were a watershed period when the conservative groups were established as civic groups. During this period, many North Korean migrants who had already settled in South Korean society created

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halted. In the circumstance where the North Korean regime is not doing anything about their democratization, American citizens became reluctant to support, and the U.S. financial crisis was another reason for budget cut." However, according to Shin, the U.S. government expands its financial support after 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea report, although its supporting method is not specified. Nanhee Shin, 339.

<sup>186</sup> In addition, there were about forty organizations affiliated in International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) that played a significant role in creating the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR) are also among them.

<sup>187</sup> Sora Kim, "A Study on North Korean Human Right Discourses in South Korea" (Ma diss., University of North Korean Studies, 2008), quoted in Lee, "North Korean Human Rights NGOs," 86.

their own NGOs because they felt their safety was threatened under the Kim and Roh administrations with positive attitudes towards North Korea.<sup>188</sup> Besides, the Roh administration changed the “protection” policy of North Korean migrants to the “self-support” policy in 2005,<sup>189</sup> which resulted in the North Korean migrants experiencing an economic crisis. In these circumstances, the North Korean migrants actively gathered and joined with the conservative political parties.

As a result, when Lee Myung-bak was elected as President in 2008, his administration actively supported the North Korean human rights organizations,<sup>190</sup> and so did the Park Geun-hye’s administration. In her 2014 New Year’s press conference, President Park emphasized the hope for the unification of South Korea and North Korea. By using a current slang term *taebak* (big success), she emphasized that “reunification is bonanza (*T’ongil Taebak*).” In March 2014, Park visited the Dresden University of Technology in Germany and announced the “Peaceful Unification Initiative on the Korean Peninsula.” Based on the historical similarity between Germany and Korea—both countries were divided for a long time, but Germany became reunified in 1990—she expressed her hope for national unification despite the lack of a clear policy or specific plan to achieve such a possibility.<sup>191</sup> The Park Geun-hye administration also largely mobilized conservative groups, including the North Korean human rights groups. While

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<sup>188</sup> In particular, President Roh did not attend the 2003 North Korean Human Rights Resolution due to the “particularity” of the relationship between South and North Korea, and this resulted in massive criticisms from the North Korean migrants as well as the conservatives. Some North Korean migrants understood President Roh’s decision as a “treacherous behavior.” They thought that President Roh sold the country to the North Korean regime. For more interviews of North Korean migrants, see Lee, “North Korean Human Rights NGOs,” 52-54.

<sup>189</sup> Shin, 337-338.

<sup>190</sup> Lee, 77-78.

<sup>191</sup> However, during “2016 South Korean political scandal” (or Park Geun Hye Gate or Choi Soon-sil Gate), it turned out that this reunification address was mostly revised by Choi. According to JTBC’s report in November 2016, it is suspicious that Choi was involved in North Korea-related diplomacy, such as closing Kaesong Industrial Complex.

stigmatizing those who protest against any government's decisions as “pro-North Korea (*Jongbuk*)” – including the rail strike, the Sewol Ferry families and related protests, and a women's issues protest that advocated nullifying the unofficial contract with the Abe cabinet – the Park administration fortifies its military alliance with Japan and the United States. While the Lee administration focused on free-market and materialism, the Park administration are explicitly using the anti-communism discourse, thus fortifying the neo-Cold War system in Asia.

In 2016, evidence was produced that the Federation of Korean Industries (*chǒnguk kyǒngjein yǒnhaphoe*), henceforth FKI (*chǒngyǒngnyǒn*),<sup>192</sup> “hired” the Parent Federation (*ǒbǒiy ǒnhap*)<sup>193</sup> to organize demonstrations against anti-government protests.<sup>194</sup> More surprisingly, the Parent Federation also mobilized North Korean migrants' groups (*t'albukcha danch'e*) and paid for their participation.<sup>195</sup> These two united groups—the Parent Federation and the North Korean

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<sup>192</sup> The Federation of the Korean Industries (FKI) was established in 1961. South Korea's representative conglomerates, including Samsung, SK, LG, and GS, are its members. FKI declared that it defends the rights of the business sector, but has been generally accused of collaboration against anti-conglomerates movements. FKI is designated as a representative of close alliance between business and politics. Currently, much evidence has been discovered that President Park has been involved in the mergers and amnesty of large corporations such as Samsung and SK in exchange for collecting illegal funds, and the funds were collected through FKI. Lee Jae-yong, the head of the Samsung group, promised to withdraw from the FKI, and LG and KT officially withdrew (January 2017). It turns out that FKI has deposited more than 500 million won (approximately 5 million dollars) in the borrowed-name account of the Secretary General of the Parent Federation. Although much evidence proves that the FKI, the Parents Federation, and the North Korean Migrants Groups are associated, many media and newspapers were reluctant to speak out due to the power of FKI. FKI businesses were not only the advertisers but also the sponsors of these media.

<sup>193</sup> The Parent Federation was established on May 8, 2006 (note that May 8 is Parents' Day in South Korea). It is known as an ultra-conservative group that is strongly anti-communist. They have held rallies such as the Rallies Urging Democratic Party's Demolition (August 10, 2013), the Rallies Against the National Teachers' Labor Union (September 23, 2013), the Rallies Against the Korean Railway Workers' Union Strike (December 27, 2013), the Rallies Against Seoul City's Free Lunch policy (December 20, 2010), the Rallies Against Hanjin Heavy Industry Strikes (July 30, 2011), and the Rallies Against the Reconstruction of Truth about the Sewol Ferry Disaster (February 5, 2016), etc. The Parent Federation has always been criticized for their mobilization for government service.

<sup>194</sup> “Summary of Suspicion of “Black Connection” Between Parent Federation, FKI, and Blue House,” *The Hankyoreh*, April 22, 2016, accessed February 4, 2017, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society\\_general/740902.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/740902.html).

<sup>195</sup> “Suspicion of FKI's Money Line with ‘North Korean Migrants’ Mobilized Demonstrations,” *The Hankyoreh*, April 19, 2016, accessed February 4, 2017, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society\\_general/740495.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/740495.html). Also see “Suspicion of FKI's Money Deposit into



migrants—served the Park Geun Hye government with FKI’s financial support. North Korean migrants who participated in the demonstrations were willing to shout the Parent Federation’s frequently used slogan, “Pro-North Out, or Pro-Red Out” at the so-called “anti-government” protesters. This slogan has a long history that can be traced back to a symbolic figure, Lee Seung-Bok, during the Cold War era. Ten-year-old Lee has become a popular figure, memorialized as a victim of communist guerillas in 1968, as the communists reportedly tore the boy’s mouth after he cried out, “I hate Communists!” Lee’s cry ironically has passed down to the people of North Korea in 2016, and using this slogan, the North Korean migrants in the anti-anti-government protest were able to prove their submission to the South Korean government.

It is an established fact that the Parent Federation (*ōbōiy ōnhap*) and North Korean migrants’ groups (*t’albukcha danch’e*) served in the recent conservative government of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye; however, it is not fair to generalize them as government-controlled groups or as scapegoats mobilized by the conservative government. What we should question instead is the reason that has led the members of these groups to participate in these government-led demonstrations. It is noteworthy that the majority of these elderly and North Korean migrants are economically and culturally marginalized in Korean society. For them, it is important to achieve recognition from society, and especially from the authorities that can pay back their social “performance.” In the case of North Korean migrants, it is indispensable to conduct pro-government activities because they need to avoid the government’s constant monitoring and allay suspicions of being North Korean spies. Thus, they feel the need to criticize not only North Korea but also the groups designated as pro-North. They are also victims of this

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the Parents Federation,” *JTBC*, April 19, 2016, accessed February 4, 2017, [http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news\\_id=NB11217099](http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news_id=NB11217099). It turns out that the North Korean migrants’ groups were mobilized at the request of the Parents Coalition, and every individual receives 20,000 won (approximately 20 dollars) per demonstration.

bipolar frame of “pro-North” and “anti-North” in South Korean society. Due to the stigma and economic difficulty of being North Korean migrants, North Koreans become an easily mobilized social power in South Korea. However, the connection between the Parent Federation (*ōbōiy ōnhap*), North Korean migrants’ groups (*t’albukcha danch’e*), and conservative governments, needs to be understood in light of South Korean society’s lack of social welfare, ideological divisions, and structural contradictions.

## Epilogue

On August 3, 2010, a *Sisa* article reported that more than 200 North Korean defectors had re-defected to North Korea by 2010.<sup>196</sup> Some North Korean migrants' half-biographies<sup>197</sup> also contain such stories of re-defection, which readers may not expect to hear. North Korean migrants' desire to return to North Korea may confuse readers, because it undermines the simple dichotomy of evil North Korea and savior South Korea (or America). Indeed, North Koreans' reentry into North Korea has not only become a motive in fiction,<sup>198</sup> but also happens in reality. For example, on August 15, 2015, *The New York Times* published an article about a North Korean Ryen-hi Kim, who arrived in South Korea in September 2011. In an interview, Kim claimed that "her defection to South Korea was a terrible mistake." According to her, she came

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<sup>196</sup> Rakin Jeong, "More than two hundred North Korean defectors have returned to North Korea," *Sisapress*, August 3, 2010, accessed August 21, 2016, <http://www.sisapress.com/journal/article/129832>. There are two reasons for North Korean migrants to consider re-entry to North Korea. One is that, despite their idealization of South Korea before they leave North Korea, the living conditions in South Korea are not easy, and the South Korean government's settlement allowance is not enough to survive. For others, the motive is the nostalgia for their hometown. Most North Korean migrants are separated from their family members and relatives. As a result of hard labor and anxiety and depression, they long to go back "home."

<sup>197</sup> For example, Lee Hyeonseo, the author of her half-biography, *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story*, is also stunned when her mother says that she wants to go back to North. After defecting to South Korea, Lee persuades her mother and younger brother to escape from North Korea. Overcoming numerous crises, her mother and brother arrive in Korea, but they cannot adapt to Korean society easily. After several arguments, Lee looks for a way to go back to the North for her mother. Although the return would be as arduous as their first defection route, it is possible. Fortunately, her mother changes her mind because she does not wish to separate from her daughter and son. However, soon, it is Lee's brother's turn to have a similar episode. Her brother, Min-ho, had a fiancée in North Korea. After re-establishing contact with his fiancée, he decides to go back and gets a Chinese visa without letting Lee know. Lee has to persuade Min-ho that, without freedom, his life would be restricted again. After an hour's conversation, Min-ho "slowly [comes] back to reality," and finally gives up on returning. Hyeonseo Lee and David John, *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story* (London: William Collins, 2015), 281-285.

<sup>198</sup> In *Sister Mokran* (*moknan ðnni*), the play's protagonist is a North Korean migrant from a Pyongyang elite family. She was accidentally involved in a smuggling incident during her military service in North Korea and escaped to avoid harming her parents. However, Mokran could not adapt to the South Korean society. She was cheated out of the government's subsidies and her apartment's rental. The play begins when she decides to re-enter North Korea after all the problems she encountered in South Korea. She needs 50 million won (appx. 50,000 dollars) to come back, and the play begins when she decides to work at the house of one club's madam to make the money. *Sister Mokran*, by Eunsung Kim, directed by Incheol Chun, Doosan Art Center, Seoul, 2011.

to China “to visit relatives and obtain treatment for a liver ailment.”<sup>199</sup> Kim explained her previous decision to leave at a press conference held in South Korea in March 2015: “I was traveling to China in June 2011 when a broker persuaded me that I could make lots of money in a few months if I went to South Korea.” However, Kim asked the South Korean government to return her to North Korea, arguing that her choice was a mistake. Watching her press conference, the North Korean authorities, via their propaganda channel, also demanded her return: “Send Kim back to us immediately, in accordance with her own request.” However, the South Korean Unification Ministry announced, “Now there is no South Korean legal system that repatriates South Koreans to North Korea. Also, in her process of defection, we confirmed Kim’s will several times. There is no basis for overturning her investigation process.”<sup>200</sup> Although the 2015 *The New York Times* article described Ryen-hi Kim as the “only one, as far as anyone know, has ever asked to go back”<sup>201</sup> to North Korea, according to Jeong’s 2010 article,<sup>202</sup> some other North Koreans who settled in South Korea are also looking for their way to go back “home.” Given that North Korean migrants in the South Korean society have emotionally relied on the sense of

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<sup>199</sup> Sang-hun Choe, "A North Korean Defector's Regret," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2015, accessed May 18, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/world/asia/kim-ryen-hi-north-korean-defector-regret.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/world/asia/kim-ryen-hi-north-korean-defector-regret.html?_r=2).

<sup>200</sup> Yoonseok An, ""South Korean government, we cannot allow Ryun-hee Kim's re-entry to North Korea," *Nocutnews*, September 22, 2015, , accessed January 9, 2017, <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=079&aid=0002752237>. However, as previously mentioned, more than 200 North Korean defectors re-defected to North Korea by 2010.<sup>200</sup> The change of North Korean regime’s attitude towards North Korean defectors also affected their decision to return. As the number of North Korean border crossers rapidly increased since the late 1990s, the North Korean authorities strengthened border surveillance. However, even though the punishment became more severe, the number of North Koreans’ attempts to escape from the country did not decrease. Thus, the North Korean regime became more lenient in its promises at least, stating, “If you come back and repent, you will be forgiven, and if you come back with foreign currency, you will be welcomed.” Rakin Jeong, "More than two hundred North Korean defectors have returned to North Korea," *Sisapress*, August 3, 2010, accessed August 21, 2016, <http://www.sisapress.com/journal/article/129832>.

<sup>201</sup> Choe, *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Jeong, *Ibid.*

ethnic homogeneity between two Koreas, the reason of their re-defection from their “new home” requires some thought.<sup>203</sup>

The documentary *Spy Nation (chabaek, 2016)* may help explain the reason why North Koreans feel unwelcomed in South Korean society. The director of the documentary, Choi Seung-ho, also the current producer of *Newstapa*<sup>204</sup> in South Korea, covers agent manipulation by the National Intelligence Service (NIS). This documentary discusses how spies are being “made” in South Korea by dealing with spy cases such as “1977’s spy group case of Korean

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<sup>203</sup> North Koreans do not stop looking for better living conditions, but the number of places where they can be safe is getting smaller. Whereas some North Koreans choose to go back to North Korea, others choose a different route. They re-migrate to “the West,” including the United States. After experiencing South Koreans’ discrimination against them, some North Koreans chose to go to the United States, but very few were legally accepted. Thus, some North Koreans “decided to make their way to the US illegally through a broker.” Soo Youn, “North Korean defectors see American dream deferred as reality sets in the U.S.,” *The Guardian*, June 13, 2016, accessed August 08, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/13/north-korean-defectors-america-reality>. However, their living situation in the United States is also hard, and they “experience a feeling of isolation, experts say, that’s exacerbated by a lack of community.” Since South Korean immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s were educated during the anticommunist era and still harbor antipathy against North Korea, it is not easy for North Koreans to integrate with the existing Korean communities in the United States. In addition to the United States, some North Koreans have chosen to migrate to European countries, such as Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Britain, and France. Recently, however, these countries have become reluctant to receive North Koreans. Since some North Koreans who had already achieved South Korean citizenship hid this fact and applied to European countries as camouflage refugees, European countries made the process for being recognized as a refugee more complicated. North Koreans are under stress because European countries do not recognize them as refugees but ask them to go to South Korea instead.<sup>203</sup> As the borders of Europe are more strongly guarded after a massive wave of Syrian refugees, North Koreans’ recognition as refugees has become increasingly difficult. Soo Youn, “North Korean defectors see American dream deferred as reality sets in the U.S.,” *The Guardian*, June 13, 2016, accessed August 08, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/13/north-korean-defectors-america-reality>; Wonhee Lee, “A safe country for North Korean defectors,” *Radio Free Asia*, July 11, 2013, accessed April 24, 2017, [http://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly\\_program/woman\\_era/womenera-07112013150914.html](http://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly_program/woman_era/womenera-07112013150914.html). In the UK, in 2014, 23 North Koreans applied for asylum; 17 of them were refused. In addition, 128 out of 140 refugee applications were rejected in the Netherlands in 2013, 99 out of 126 were rejected in Belgium, and 30 out of 40 in the UK in the same year. In France, all 19 applications were canceled. Arum Jung, “Europe, Increase denial for North Korean's Refugee status,” *Radio Free Asia*, June 15, 2015, accessed April 24, 2017, [http://www.rfa.org/korean/in\\_focus/human\\_rights\\_defector/eurefugee-06152015163527.html](http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/human_rights_defector/eurefugee-06152015163527.html). The notion of the nation-state is questionable for North Koreans who constantly dream of moving. They try to gain the status of refugees, giving up the citizenship provided by a certain country. In the United States and European countries, North Koreans belong to Tommas Hammer’s concept of “Denizen,” which was discussed earlier in Chapter One. In other words, while accepting the deprivation of their rights as a citizen, North Koreans choose to become refugees, or stateless in their mind, those who do not belong anywhere.

<sup>204</sup> *Newstapa* is an Internet broadcast opened on January 27 2012. After the Lee Myung-bak government was launched, reporters and producers who were dismissed from various media company for their critical attitude towards the Lee government made this broadcast. *Newstapa* is operated solely by citizens’ contribution which to make it available for not having any advertisement.

Japanese students” and “2012’s Yu Woo-sung case.” During the Park Chung Hee era, many Korean Japanese students who visited South Korea were arrested on suspicion of spying. These ethnic Koreans born in Japan were not familiar with South Korean society during the time, and their lack of complete fluency in the Korean language made them an easy target for Park’s regime. Without being given a reason, the Japanese Korean students were tortured in prison and used as tools to justify the extension of Park’s dictatorship, by emphasizing the North Korean threat. In 2011, after thirty-four years, the Korean Japanese students were found not guilty, but some of them were left disabled after the NIS’s ruthless torture. In 2016, Yoo Woo-sung, a North Korean migrant,<sup>205</sup> was also arrested on suspicion of spying. He was found innocent after three years, but his sister underwent a severe investigation by NIS. In addition to these cases, Director Choi visited the tomb of a North Korean migrant who committed suicide after the NIS illegally detained him and forced a (false) confession. In the film, another North Korean migrant, who was also arrested on spying suspicion, was interviewed after his fortunate release. He trembled and cried, “If you [(South Korea)] were to treat us [(North Koreans)] like this [(illegal detention, beating, and coercing)], why did you bring us [to South Korea] from the beginning? I was so lucky to meet these lawyers that I was released; otherwise, I would rot in that prison.” It is not widely known that some victims of South Korean government’s spy witch-hunts are still continuing even after more than forty years of dictatorship. As a consequence, it is likely that the rest of North Korean migrants in South Korea censor themselves in every respect in their lives, afraid of the possibility of being manipulated. These examples illustrate the dark side of North

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<sup>205</sup> Yoo Woo-sung and his family were Korean Chinese living in North Korea (*pukhan hwagyo*). Since South Korea accepts people who had a family and job in North Korea and did not acquire the nationality *after* their defection, Yoo was able to enter South Korea as a North Korean defector. After the South Korean government found that Yoo was *pukhan hwagyo*, they illegally detained him for 170 days without a warrant and charged him with spying. On October 29, 2015, the Supreme Court sentenced him to one year of imprisonment, two years probation, and a penalty for violating Yoo’s fraud, but he was found innocent of spying.

Koreans' defections to South Korea, but the public is much less aware of these cases compared to "Northern beauties" who appear on the television. Without some brave people, including director Choi, breaking the silence, this danger of defection would still remain unknown.

Some people consider North Korean migrants as subjects who will lead reunification of the Korean Peninsula, and some North Koreans actually engage in political activities with this belief.<sup>206</sup> On the other hand, they are people displaced by the Korean War, and their defections to the South have created another displacement on the Korean peninsula. Even though the North Korean migrants' nostalgia for their families and homes is increasing, they cannot freely express their longing for home due to the South Korean society's possible criticism of the migrants' presumed ingratitude.

This study began with concerns about South Korean society, which perceives North Korean migrants as potential spies or as second-class citizens, despite the laws and policies that prescribe a general acceptance of North Koreans as potential Korean citizens. In so-called "globalized" societies, where people and capital are increasingly crossing national boundaries for political and economic reasons, the borders are still very difficult to cross and institutions that would protect the refugees' human rights are absent. When North Korean defectors are caught in China, they face the risk of being forcibly repatriated to North Korea due to the difficult diplomatic and economic relations between China and North Korea. The complex political, economic, and military relations between South Korea, North Korea, China, Japan, and the United States lead South Korea to quietly sweep the issue of North Korean refugees under the rug because the existence of these defectors and their human rights are often considered risky

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<sup>206</sup> For example, Hwang Jang-yop, who used to be a North Korean politician, and Thae Yong-ho, who is a former North Korean diplomat, defected to South Korea in 1997 and 2016 respectively. They regard North Koreans in South Korea as the subjects of reunification, including themselves.

factors that may provoke North Korea. In this situation, North Korean migrants think that North Korea may assassinate them so that they are constantly troubled by the anxiety. Thus, North Korean migrants support Korea's strong security policy to isolate North Korea politically and economically. In order to achieve a sense of security in their new country, North Koreans in South Korea often establish alliances with the ultra-right parties. Therefore, the ultraconservatives' mobilization of North Korean migrants that was revealed during Park Geun-hye's impeachment in 2016 is not surprising. Anxiety and need make people look for any power they can rely on, which is no exception for North Koreans. They may, in fact, perceive the political mobilization of the ultraconservatives as way to become active members of South Korean society and overcome South Koreans' widespread indifference toward them.

This study is limited because it cannot cover the representations and experiences of North Korean migrant teens. North Korean migrant youths are different in every respect from the adults who had spent more than twenty years of their life in North Korea before they escaped. Many of these young people were not well educated in North Korea and moved to China at an early age. Therefore, by the time when they arrive in Korea or other countries, their linguistic and cultural knowledge is more rooted in Chinese culture than Korean. Unlike North Korean adults, after settling in South Korea, North Korean migrant youths have to receive an education in Korea and establish their identity by mingling with other South Korean youth. Although there are alternative schools for North Korean defectors only, these North Koreans still have to enter South Korean society and establish social relationships at some point. Compared to North Korean adults who have a strong sense of identity as North Koreans and a longing for their home, North Korean teenagers, also called North Korean 1.5 generation, don't yet have a place to call "home." This



research should be extended to the issues of North Korean teenagers and North Koreans in Europe living as refugees.

Korean culture is familiar with the repressions such as “brotherly love” and “the spirit of our Korean people.” Zhang Lu’s films, such as *Dooman River (tuman'gang)* (2010) and *Desert Dream* (or *Hyazgar (kyōnggye)*) (2007), question Korean audiences that whether North Koreans are others or brothers/sisters to them. Zhang Lu made audiences think about the invisible Northern “people” who are hiding on the border. At the same time, these representations make us think about the functions, limitations, and violence of the reproductions. As this is a study of existing representations, not possible ones, it is difficult to suggest alternative forms that would more accurately describe North Korean refugees and migrants. However, at the very least, I can argue that the representations should not use North Koreans’ experience as a well-selling commodity or distort their narratives to gain higher ratings. In the same vein, human rights groups and religious organizations should not use refugees as a means of promoting and obtaining funds for their own benefit.

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