



MMG Working Paper 11-12 • ISSN 2192-2357

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post-division subjectivity: North Korean
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Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
Göttingen

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ISSN 2192-2357 (MMG Working Papers Print)

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Abstract

This paper provides a historical overview of the shifting identity politics of the South Korean state with respect to North Korean migrants, and an ethnographic study of intra-ethnic contact zones in which North Korean migrants and their southern counterparts interact and negotiate a new citizenship in envisioning a reunified nation. The presence of North Korean migrants and their daily struggles in adjusting to South Korean society gives rise to questions about the narrow-minded South Korean-centric nationalism which was once believed to be ingrained and that descended through „our“ blood. This essay posits that Korean ethnicity should not be taken for granted as a self-evident unit that shares a homogenous identity, but rather as a product of the complex social processes of boundary making. By examining gradual changes from national anticommunist celebrities to new settlers, I want to punctuate how state powers and interests influence the Northerners' processes of re-subjectification in South Korea, and further illuminate the ways in which the different terms of „North Korean migrants“ end up serving as quasi-ethnic markers. Micro-levels of empirical data are crucial in dismantling the assimilationist tendency in the policies towards the Northerners and a reunification rooted in a belief of Korean ethnic homogeneity.

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A revised version of this Working Paper will appear in John Lie (University of California, Berkeley) eds., *Multiethnic Korea*. University of California Press (n.d.).

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Introduction

This Working Paper provides (1) a historical overview of the shifting identity politics of the South Korean state on North Korean migrants,¹ and (2) an ethnographic study of intra-ethnic contact zones in which North Korean migrants and their southern counterparts interact and negotiate a new citizenship in envisioning a reunified nation. While technically at war, increasing multiculturalism in the South must be taken into account with respect to the geopolitical specificity of North-South Korean relations, and vice versa (e.g., Park 2009; Choe 2007). North Korean migrants' issues have always been considered part of a long-term reunification policy and are intimately associated with an assumption of what post-division citizenship should and would look like in South Korea. The transition of life from the socialist North by way of China to the capitalist South is a transition that recent newcomers make with a degree of personal risk, and it is inflected with the legacy of the Cold War and national desires for an era of post-division multicultural nation-state building.

In this paper, my aim is to interrogate how North Korean subjectivities have been shaped through performances of individual and national imaginations and negotiations that are quintessential to modern nation-building in Korean history. Borrowing Daphne Berdahl's idea of "an alternative ethnography of the nation-state" (2005: 235), this essay is devoted to illuminating two key issues. First, my historical approach indicates that while in the past North Korean defectors have been publicly celebrated as national heroes and heroines by anticommunist authoritarian regimes (1960s-1980s), today it is only within the space of non-governmental organizations—in particular, the Evangelical Protestant Church—and in the logic of human rights (which is equivalent to religious conversion) that they are empowered to criticize the "evil" North and celebrate the triumph of a "market democracy" in the South. Second, however, such seemingly upward mobility in politico-economic respects is not always satisfying to the migrants. They indirectly contest hypocritical "selfish" South Korean centric nationalisms and those who are not interested in understanding what their "poor" brethren from and in the North have been, and are passing through.

In growing discourses and practices of multiculturalism in South Korea, Korean ethnicity is perceived as a whole in comparison to "other" foreign migrants (see Lim T. 2010; Han G.-s. 2007; Han K.-k. 2007; Oh K.-s. eds. 2007). Indeed, some intel-

1 Instead of "defector", which is used in most mass media, I call the North Koreans "migrants" for a better comprehensive meaning than the former entails.

lectuals have pointed out potential problems of Korean ethnic nationalism, which is by no means singular in how it ignores, not only internal cultural differences (e.g., Grinker 1998, Kwon H.-b. 2000), but also multicultural values that encourage appreciating other ethnicities and customs (e.g., Park M. 2009). Following Bhikhu Parekh (2000), Myeong-Kyu Park (2009) asserts the necessity of a “spirit of multiculturalism” in the reunification process.² The presence of North Korean migrants with their daily struggles in adjusting to South Korean society, gives rise to questions about the narrow-minded South Korean-centric nationalism, which was once believed to be ingrained in and descended through “our” blood. This paper posits that Korean ethnicity should not be taken for granted as a self-evident unit that shares a homogenous identity, but rather as a product of the complex social processes of boundary making (Wimmer 2009).

As part of larger concerns about multiethnic Korea, this paper explores North Korean migrants as being neither nameless refugees nor mere social welfare beneficiaries,³ but rather as becoming and being made by themselves and South Korean society. Thus I organize this paper mainly into three parts: the first is a historical overview of state-led identity politics coupled with support programs that have changed according to the regime. The second provides ethnographic vignettes of the micro-level interactions between North Korean migrants and their southern counterparts within the church setting. I shed light on the Korean evangelical church, which is by no means alone in imagining itself as a social laboratory of a Christianized reunified nation-state. The third section concludes with suggestions for further studies.

2 Parekh stresses that “If we are to develop a coherent political structure for a multicultural society, we need to appreciate the importance of both unity and diversity and establish a satisfactory relationship between them” (2000: 114).

3 For more discussions about refugee identities, see Lisa Malkki (1995 and 1996) who points out the ways in which international humanitarian organizations de-historicize particular refugee individuals and groups (e.g., Hutu refugees in Rwanda). There is no refugee camp for North Korean border crossers in China and elsewhere, and so their case is different from refugees in a camp site. However, preceding refugee studies like Malkki’s are useful to understand “humanitarian interventions that focus on refugees as their object of knowledge, assistance, and management” (Malkki 1996: 377) in the context of South Korea.

Heroes to Burdens

On February 25, 1983, Lee Woong-pyung defected from North Korea by flying a MIG-19 fighter jet to the South, leaving his entire family behind. The South Korean Chun Doo-hwan Regime, that had taken office by coup d'état, took this opportunity to display its political and moral legitimacy over North Korea.⁴ A few months later, on a rainy day in April, he cried “*Taehanmin’guk manse!* (Long Live South Korea!)” at Yoido Square where there was a welcoming ceremony combined with an anticommunist convention, with a total of around 2 million people holding umbrellas and pickets proclaiming “Let’s smash communists!”

Over twenty years later, North Korean newcomers in the airport hesitate to show their faces, and wear a mask instead. While Lee Woong-pyung held public press interviews, few newcomers allow researchers or reporters to take their pictures or write down their real names or even their ages. They are afraid for their family left in China or North Korea, who might be arrested or even punished to death. In order to avoid this, they usually want to try to bring the rest of their family members to South Korea.

While Lee brought an MIG-19 fighter jet and classified secrets that the South Korean regime valued at the time, these newcomers bring nothing but their own bodies and stories of how they have undergone the famine, atrocities, sexual abuses, labor imprisonment, and family separation in North Korea and/or China, which are no longer valuable but unwelcomed by the state. While Lee was awarded about 1.3 billion KRW (1.4 million USD) in compensation, which is about 480 times the average annual income of South Koreans in 1983,⁵ and continued his profession with the South Korean Air Force, most newcomers today end up having temporary or part-time jobs. More significantly, these newcomers seldom or never tell their Southern counterparts that they are from North Korea, due to the fear of being seen strangely (*pyōlnage bonda*) and being discriminated against in the job market (for adults) or at school (for young people). Seemingly undetectable subtle differences in speaking and behaving—South and North Koreans look similar and speak the same lan-

4 Byung-ho Chung addresses “the military regimes in the South, which lacked political legitimacy and publicly displayed the border crossers as proof of their success, while the conservative political groups in the US and Japan used them as proof of their moral superiority to the communist regimes” (2009: 5).

5 Lee Woong-pyung received the highest cash compensation according to the compensation system at the time, which as you shall see soon changed to a long-term support system.

guage—work to serve as remarkably significant markers that occasion real fear and discrimination.

For early “heroes” like Lee, however, there is an irony. For example, Lee was celebrated as a national hero and his life was guaranteed by the state, but the rest of his family members that were left behind in North Korea were allegedly persecuted.⁶ These consequences were perceived as being inhumane, selfish, and spiteful by South Korean civilians: “How cruel are they by leaving their wives and children, parents and siblings behind for only themselves?” and “Do not trust them because they once betrayed and would betray again,” and “They just keep demanding without working hard,” are a few examples of major discriminative prejudices levied against northerners by southerners (see Yang K.-m. & Chung J.-k. 2005). This distrustfulness as a cultural bias was also conjoined with a reproach that charged North Koreans with collaborating with the authoritarian regimes from the standpoint of the leftist and progressive forces (Chung B-h. 2009). These kinds of negative cultural biases persist to the extent that newcomers likely encounter them in South Korea. Add to this the stress that the migrants are feeling, such as being psychologically depressed, having feelings of alienation, and/or finding it difficult to have a sense of belonging in South Korea (Yang K.-m. & Chung J.-k. 2005). Meanwhile, the political meanings of “anti-communist national heroes” have gradually faded away, as have the cash compensation awarded by the state.

Andrei Lankov (2006) argues that the problems North Korean migrants undergo in the adjustment processes in South Korea are mainly caused by two reasons. First, he points out that the government (i.e., Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun presidential period in 1998~2007) “has moved to the policy of quietly discouraging” (Lankov 2006: 107) the people from the high-ranking backgrounds in the North by decreasing cash rewards, in favor of normalizing the relationship with the North Korean regime; and second, the recent “defectors” are mostly from working class backgrounds and can hardly pursue “normal” careers and can only rely on the low-income level of family welfare of the government support system in South Korea. While partly agreeing with his points about demographic change—increasing working class back-

6 Lee died from hepatic insufficiency in 2002 at the age of 48. He allegedly worked very hard, but collapsed one day due to an unexpected illness. It was reported that before his death he often said “I have lived in Seoul more than a third of my entire life, but I haven’t fully assimilated in South Korean society yet—just like oil is floating on the water.” In the meantime, one of his acquaintances later testified that he had been consumed with guilt because his family was left behind and punished cruelly for his defection in the North.

grounds—and of the “outdated” knowledge and skills that recent newcomers bring, I doubt his underlying principle that presumes that the North Korean regime collapse would be triggered by the mass exile of the middle and upper ruling classes. This scale of exile was partly effective in the case of German unification, but what has been missing in this structural approach to understanding the former “heroes” and newcomers alike are cultural and emotional dimensions; for instance, the bitterness of life, and feelings of alienation despite the economic prosperity of former “heroes.”

Compared to former defectors, it is true that those who have arrived since the 1990s receive a smaller cash award and no guarantee of employment. They are mostly expected to assimilate to a neo-liberal social welfare state. Yet, unlike post-socialist Eastern Europe and post-wall Germany, the transition of former socialist North Koreans into capitalist citizens is not merely about economic life (cf. Berdahl 2005). Rather, my ethnographic data suggests that it becomes more complex and ambiguous as the newcomers encounter South Korean society and another home country where the state does not provide economic stability and a political meaning for life (i.e., heroes or heroines). They find themselves situated in a new order of racial boundary-making together with the presence of foreign migrants and other Korean returnees (e.g., Korean-Chinese).

In other words, as the state begins depoliticizing, what the newcomers encounter on a daily basis are negative cultural biases that characterize them as being lazy, dependent, violent, and ignorant burdens, at the same time that South Koreans feel sympathetic towards them. Their being is still symbolically valued in envisioning a possible reunification of two Koreas. Korean scholars and critics nearly always stress the importance of understanding the migrants first as unifiers who would or should work for the reunification of two Koreas on the one hand, while acknowledging the cultural differences of two Koreas on the other (Chung B.-h. eds. 2006; Chung B.-h. 2009; Jeon W.-t. 2007; Yoon I.-j. 2009).

What follows is a brief analytical summary of the changing definitions of the Northerners given by the state.⁷ In his recent article, Byung-ho Chung (2009) divides the Northerners into six groups according to their social definitions.⁸ With reference

7 It is important for further discussions of citizenship, as Foucauldian theory reminds us of the need for understanding theories and practices of citizenship as developed by nation-states and as a set of political mechanisms controlling and regulating the “level, type, and range of societal membership” (Rocco 2004: 15).

8 Some Korean scholars tend to only consider the Northerners who came to the South after the Korean War, and often divide them into two groups; one being those who came to the South by the 1980s, and the other being those who came to the South after the 1990s.

to his categorization of the changing definitions, I divide them into three categories: anticommunist heroes, defecting compatriots, and new settlers. The first period of “heroes” is much longer than the latter ones; their numbers have explosively increased since the mid-1990s when the North suffered from a great famine, and had reached twenty thousand as of November 2010. South Korean civil societies organized campaigns for North Korean famine relief followed by peace campaigns for understanding North Korea beyond the Cold War, and at the same time encountered the 1997 Asian Crisis, commonly called the IMF Crisis by South Koreans. It is worthwhile to bear in mind that both South and North Korea sought to normalize their relationship while undergoing severe crisis as part of the consequences of changing global climates—the collapse of the Socialist Bloc and the world economic crisis.

Table 1 Statistics of North Korean migrants by 2010

	'50~'89	'90~'93	'94~'98	'99~'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	Total
Male	562	32	235	563	506	469	626	423	509	570	612	666	604	6,377
Female	45	2	71	480	632	812	1,268	960	1,509	1,974	2,197	2,261	1,819	14,030
Total	607	34	306	1,043	1,138	1,281	1,894	1,383	2,018	2,544	2,809	2,927	2,423	20,407
Female rate	7%	6%	23%	46%	55%	63%	67%	69%	75%	78%	78%	76%	75%	69%

Source: Ministry of Unification, South Korea

Division, the Cold War, and Anticommunist Heroes (1945-1993)

The North and South Korean states have governed their subjects and determined what type of access the individuals and families have to the rights, benefits, and resources that the state grants to full citizens. Countless dissidents in both states have been persecuted and their family members and relatives alike have had restricted access to the rights and opportunities as citizens through the guilt-by-association systems of the Cold War era.⁹

South Korean modern nation building consisted of constructing “proper” politico-cultural citizens who were ready to serve and protect “our nation” from communism and communists—“Reds”—and to devote themselves to national economic development. Such masculine, militant, and anticommunist norms of good citizenship have been perpetuated as the modality of modern South Korea through division politics,

⁹ The guilt-by-association system was allegedly officially abolished in the 1980s, but effectively existed in security screening until recently in South Korea.

which Soo-jung Lee refers to as “South Korea’s competition with and negation of the legitimacy of North Korea based on the ideology of anticommunism” (2006: 2).

The Northerners emerged at the birth of national division¹⁰ and have been shaped by this doctrine of anticommunist citizen-subject making. Their physical appearances and the series of anticommunist propaganda lecturing tours they carried out for the state constructed North Korean stereotypes among South Koreans. In addition, their socio-cultural statuses in South Korea have depended heavily on the government’s legal and administrative support system. The state played the role of “a strong cultural and political actor” (Kelleher 2003: 19) in the making of Northerner subjectivities in South Korea.

“System selective migrants” (1945–1950) are people who fled from the socialist North to the South at the dawn of national division. They were called “Crossers to the South (*walnamin*),” and the village they settled in, in Seoul, was called “Liberation village (*Haebangchon*).” During the Korean War (1950-1953), approximately 650,000 of “War refugees (*pinanmin*)” (1950–1953) moved down from the North to the South. They became “synonymous with 'Christians' and 'Anti-communists'” (Chung B-h. 2009: 9). These two groups above are the first generation of Northerners and are known as *Silhyangmin*, or separate families. Soo-jung Lee articulates that “*Silhyangmin* have been publicly produced as ‘enunciating subjects’ who speak for the anticommunist state,” while *Wōlbukcha* families, in which one or another member went to the North, have been marginalized and silenced (2006: 4).¹¹

“Heroes who returned to the state (*Guisun (Kwisun) yongsa*)” (1962–1993) is the title of a small number of defectors from the North who since the early 1960s began receiving special treatment and financial rewards, as the then-militant Park Jung-hee regime set up the Special Relief Act for Patriots and Heroes Who Returned to the State. They were treated similarly to the patriots of independence movements, and taken care of by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs. The amount of the

10 At the same time that Northerners existed, so did their Southern counterparts’ social discrimination, which was based on cultural biases that had been present even in the Chosōn Dynasty period prior to the modern Korea. Historical records show that few bureaucrats from Northern provinces were able to achieve the higher positions that were all occupied by Southerners. See Sun Joo Kim (2009) for a more detailed history about that period. The cultural biases of South Koreans against the Northerners in my project, however, are not merely bound to the region but are rather a modern product constructed by and inflected with the Cold War legacy and class distinction.

11 See also Kim Ki-ok (2004), and Kim Sung-nae (1989, 2001) for more ethnographic discussions on similar issues.

award, *borogeum*, increased if one brought weapons and valuable information (Lee Woong-pyung introduced earlier was rewarded according to this compensation system). Before 1993, however, the number of “heroic defectors” was no larger than ten per year, and the financial burden on the government for compensating them was not that heavy.

The images of “heroic defectors” published in the mass media during this period had a great influence on South Koreans visualizing stereotypes of North Koreans as being “poor, starved, and oppressed”. They thought that North Korean defectors should wear shabby military uniforms or outdated clothes (Kang J-w. 2006). When they reappeared in public for press conferences or special anticommunist lectures some time after arriving, their physical appearances demonstrated a clear “before and after” transformation, since they dressed in suits. Their bodies were markers of the “evil” communist North Korea where they had been oppressed and starved, and converted emblems of the “modern and superior” South Korea.

Also, the anticommunist propaganda lecturing tours that most defectors had to carry out for South Korean audiences, in part contributed to reproducing anticommunist sentiments. Lee Sang-soo (1992) discovered that the “heroes” coming to the South in the 1960s–70s had lectured, on average, 4,000–8,000 times per person for years by the early 1990s. The content of the lectures was the portrayal of the members of the North Korean socialist regime by the South Korean anticommunist regimes as being war-mongers, brutal and “evil” Reds, and citizens that were “living on thin gruel” (*Kangnaengijuk*), deprived of all agency and basic freedoms, and thus “North Korea is not an appropriate place for human to live”¹² and so on (Lee S-s. 1992).

The format and content of their lectures were largely managed by national security agents. However, there were times that they happened to tell or show a “truth” that gave a positive impression about the North while answering questions from audiences. For example, Lee Sang-soo introduced an episode that Mr. M experienced. Mr. M had some of his family members’ color photos. A national security agent took them from him asking “How are there color photos in the North?” But Mr. M was able to keep secret one of his sister’s photos. One day he went to a lecture for college students and there was a female student who asked many questions about everyday

12 In such an authoritarian period, the term of human rights (*inkwŏn*) was likely equivalent to that of anti-government pro-democracy movements and thus coerced to mean pro-North Korea in South Korea. Even today, domestic human rights activists working for laborers, homeless people, sexual minorities, immigrant workers and so on often encounter these anticommunist reactions in the field.

North Korean life in detail. To aid in answering the questions, he showed his sister's color photo to the audience. As a result, the agent once again investigated his house after the lecture and confiscated his last photo.

Many of these speakers developed a certain fluency in delivering these scripted speeches thousands of times. The false and opposite information that they relayed slowly transformed into a kind of truth and in this way they became agents of creating a false reality, which was eventually discovered to be wrong or distorted. For example, Mr. Kim¹³ who came to the South in 1999 once told me;

I realized that there were some imposters among famous North Korean lecturers. For instance, one man has been saying for years that 'there is no ancestral worship allowed in North Korea. No other than Kim Il-sung can be worshiped, so if one did such things, his all family would be persecuted', things like that. I was perplexed to hear that as an audience with other South Koreans. It was because my family continued to do such traditions every year, and I lived in Pyong-yang. He was lying before me, but I was not able to offend him, because it might hurt our [North Korean] image before South Koreans.

Nonetheless, the "heroes" became a part of conventional life trajectories that the newcomers tended to follow. First, the so-called anticommunism lectures were, for some "heroes," their main income source and almost a mandatory national duty to compensate for the support of the South Korean state. Either scheduled by the government or other conservative civil organizations, some 'famous' lecturers continued to be invited and paid for their lectures. Second, the format of the testimonies became a specific genre that South Korean audiences became familiar with and that North Korean border crossers are expected to perform before their audiences.

Settler Kin or Defecting Compatriot (1993-1997)

I now turn to the changing definitions and support systems of the government since the 1990s. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the post-Cold War era in world history. This historical transformation awakened the South Korean people to the fact that the Korean peninsula became one of the last divided nations. Although some Marxist activists, having led social movements for democracy and unification, were perplexed by losing a socialist model nation-state, the popular desire for peace in the peninsula transcended the previous concerns about ideological competition with socialism.

13 All personal names here are pseudonyms.

As a civilian president after consecutive militant regimes in South Korean history, Kim Young-sam promoted a unification policy of “peaceful cooperation and reconciliation” with the North Korean regime, human rights and quality of life improvements, humanitarian food aid, and economic cooperation. The North Korean migrant issue was situated within this unification policy, and this administration did not want the migrant issue to disturb the inter-Korean relationship. In a sense, the Kim YS administration’s policy toward the migrants was unstable. In the case of North Korean wood-cutters in Russia who wanted to be exiled to South Korea, Kim YS denied their request, reflecting his “selective” acceptance policy.

However, as the North Korean economic situation worsened and the country faced a devastating famine, the number of North Korean border crossers in search of food in China increased at a rapid pace. The number of those who came to South Korea by way of China began increasing. While most defectors in the previous decades were from relatively elite groups like government officials, party members, or military officials, the new migrants were from less privileged social statuses including factory workers, farmers, women, and even young adults, which demonstrated how the North Korean food distribution system had collapsed (Chung B-h. 2003).

The Kim Young-sam Administration changed several policies pertaining to migrants. The “North Korean brethren who returned to the state (*Guisun dongpo*)” (1993–1997) Act was enacted to Protect the North Korean Brethren that had returned to the State in 1993. The newcomers became treated as economic refugees, and the government division taking care of them changed from the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs to the Ministry of Health and Society (now the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs). During this time, the government subsidy for their housing and settlement was reduced so that each individual received about 7,000 USD for resettlement and about 8,400 USD for housing.

The change in supplements implied that the previous Act was established to lure potential defectors as a form of competing with the North. Kim Sang-gyun underscores this aspect of the previous Act prior to 1993 that “has promoted regime and other political propaganda, and its main targets are spies, soldiers from the North and etc. And the services including excessive reward and so on given to them are too much” (1994: 47-48, cited at Yoon Y-s 2001: 291, 11n).

Combined with the change in political climate, the principle of equity in this issue arose. That is, the newcomers came to be supported in their settlement based on the welfare system in which they were equivalent to South Korean low-income citizens (*Yöngsemin*). However, the term “returned to the state (*Guisun*)” implied the

political defection, while the term “*dongpo* (brethren)” had reflected a symbolic victory appealing to South Koreans—as if “we” South Koreans should welcome with affection our “brethren” who went through difficulties under the “outdated” socialist North. However the reality of this change was harsh to the new “brethren”.

Ambivalence arose as a result of the new definitions (*Guisun*) and the little support that Northerners were given by the government. The new arrivals during this period underwent serious maladjustment problems—unemployment, poverty, and social discrimination. Contrary to their expectations, the “brethren” were no longer “protected” by the state and half of them were unemployed (Song 1996). In addition to material poverty, culture shock, and psychological loneliness, feelings of guilt impeded their social adjustment process. Moreover, the North Korean famine caused an increase in border crossers in the Sino-North Korean border area and the South Korean government needed to consider a better support system for the newcomers (Chung B-h. 2009, Yoon Y-s. 2001).

New Residents vs. Defectors: Struggling for Definition (1997-Present)

Over the past ten years, the North Korean population in the South has tremendously changed. Above all, the state came to see the issue of North Koreans as part of long-term plans for national reunification. The Ministry of Unification took over the matter from the Ministry of Health and Society. The Kim Dae-jung Administration (1998–2002) tried to maintain a balance between the normalization of inter-Korean relations and support systems/programs for newcomers. While mobilizing South Korean society to overcome the Asian Financial Crisis (aka the IMF Crisis in Korea since 1997), the Kim DJ regime carried out the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea, aiming to promote economic assistance and interactions with the North. As part of the efforts, he visited Pyongyang for the first time in divided nation history, and the two heads of the two Koreas announced the so-called 6.15 Joint Declaration. For North Korea, South Korea became vital in dispensing famine relief aid and South Korea was likely to attract foreign investors for its economic revival. Culturally, such a historical moment gave rise to a sense that anticommunism seemed to have become a bygone ideology of former authoritarian regimes in South Korea (Kim S. 2006; Cumings 2007). This transforming geopolitical condition simultaneously affected the direction of a policy for North Korean migrants whose numbers began multiplying annually. Interestingly, the question of how to define new North Korean migrants

in the Korean language was central to debates among South Korean policy makers, civil organizations, and the migrants.

The first definition is "Residents who escaped from North Korea (*Bukhan ital joomin*)" (1997-2004). In 1997 the Act for the Protection and Resettlement Support for the Residents Who Escaped from North Korea (hereafter, the Act) was passed. Based on the Act, the Hanawon (House of Unity) was established in January of 1999, as a government settlement center operated by the Ministry of Unification. As such, the South Korean government support system for the newcomers became part of long-term plans for national reconciliation rather than for anticommunist propaganda. The Kim Dae-jung administration provided about 36,000 USD per adult for settlement. While the government officially and legally defined them as *Puk'an ital joomin*, *Talbukja* began to be used more often in civil society and in the mass media. *Talbukja* tends to indicate both those who were in third countries like China and Russia, and those who arrived directly in the South from their places of origin.

The term "New Settlers (*Saeteomin*)" (2005–present) is promoted by the Roh Moo-hyun Administration and tries to neutralize the terminology for the newcomers from the North. A new name "Saeteomin", which was chosen through a popular contest, means "new settlers." The government decided on the name change because the term *Talbukja*, that has been most widely used, implied two negative nuances: "Talbuk" implies political escape from the North. The other, "ja", is a suffix that is from a classic Chinese noun translated as "nom" in Korean. "Nom" once meant ordinary people in the pre-modern period, but it became an abusive term. Similarly, for this reason "changaeja," the disabled, was changed to "changaein" since "in" is from "saram," meaning "people".

South Korean conservatives and some North Korean activists in exile working to change the North Korean regime rejected using the new term. Instead they preferred "talbukja (escapees)," "jayu ijumin (free migrants)", or "jayu Puk'anin (free North Korean)" as their collective identity for mainly three reasons. First, they think that "Saeteomin" does not fully represent that they were forced to migrate by North Korean political oppression and human-rights violations (representing the victim image). Secondly, they want to articulate that they chose to come to the South in search of "freedom" (individual agency). Lastly, but most importantly, "Saeteomin" tends to perpetuate the position of the migrants as a group of people who are not yet "us". In addition, the much more politically right wing voice accused the term of what they saw as "pro-North Korean" leftist regimes' (Kim DJ and Roh MH presidents) collaboration with the "evil" Kim Jong Il regime. This debate grew more

complex in that some of my North Korean informants who were cooperating with South Korean right wing supporters criticized the way their southern counterparts seemed to “utilize” them to revive their political power. It is clear that state-led depoliticization of North Korean migrants simultaneously came to open more diverse and competing discourses and practices in which North Korean migrants began to engage much more actively than ever before.

Along with such new definitions of the Northerners, the South Korean government modified its support system from a one-time payment to a long-term distribution of settlement money and to an incentive system for encouraging individuals to become independent, self-sufficient, and thus productive capitalist citizens. By situating them in a state welfare system and a special support program, a main force at the state level may be the principle that they are expected to assimilate as “regular citizens” into the South Korean value system as soon as possible.

Nonetheless, as described above, the series of definitions such as *Walnamin*, *Pinanmin*, *Silhyangmin*, *Guisun yongsa*, *Guisun dongpo*, *Bukan ital joomin*, *Talbukja*, and *Saeteomin* reflect the politics of Korean state nationalisms. This genealogy of conceptualizations about the Northerners shows us the ways in which the political meanings have been potently bound in the making of the Northerners’ subjectivity by the state. For decades, they were “enunciating subjects” (Lee S-j’s *Silhyangmin* case) serving the anticommunist state. They were “performing” as anticommunist lecturers, performing what the state wanted to tell and show about North Korea.

Accordingly the different name tags changed over time and reflected the differences in the state material compensations that were essential to the social adjustment of North Koreans. This historical overview suggests that the South Korean state has gradually retreated from giving a political meaning to the Northerners as it began normalizing relations with the North Korean regime.

I will now move on to discuss the social process of North Korean migrants’ search for life meaning while interacting with their southern counterparts. Among daily interaction fields such as workplaces, village offices, job training classes, schools, streets, etc., I pay particular attention to the church, which I see as serving as the primary contact zone where the migrants and their southern counterparts encounter unexpected cultural differences and negotiate a new sense of belonging by envisioning a Christianized reunified nation.

Born Again: Interactions and Negotiations of Belonging

Preceding literatures address the concerns of both governmental and civil support systems for the migrants and the ways in which the migrants struggle to adjust to their new society (e.g., Choo H-y. 2006; Chung B-h. eds., 2006; Chung B-h. 2004, 2009; Jeon W-t. 2000, 2007; Kang J-w. 2006; Kim Y-s. 2004; Kim Y-y. 2009; Lankov 2006; Suh J-j. 2002; Yoon I-j. 2007; Yoon Y-s. 2002). Previous anthropological work has found that the difficulties the migrants face in the adjustment process in the South stem intimately from a larger problem—South Korean ethnocentric nationalism. For instance, North Korean migrants are generally “ethnicized” (Choo H-y. 2006) as second class citizens, as has been similarly observed between West and East Germans in Germany; are socially and biologically “stigmatized” (Chung B-h. 2000); and viewed as “cultural inferiors” (Kim Y-y. 2009) and often discriminated against in schools and the job market in the South. In the meantime, it is critical to realize that the interactions between South and North Koreans are more dynamic than is portrayed in the literature that posits them principally as victims. Kim Yoon-young’s dissertation (2009) examines the ways in which the migrants either strategically conceal or expose their North Korean identities for gaining benefits or justifying the receipt of such benefits. The South Korean donor and North Korean receiver relationship is reversed in accounts that report, for example, “You got paid thanks to us” (Kim Y-y. 2009: 247-258). Such ethnographic studies assert that for North Korean migrants it is not merely the legal and social welfare benefits given to them, but rather the actual interactions with their southern counterparts in everyday lives that are central in reconfiguring and negotiating a new sense of belonging, as well as mental and psychological stability (see also Yang K.-m. & Chung J.-k. 2005).

Previous works also acknowledge that the migrants’ Christian experiences and reliance on church services are all significant throughout their life trajectories. However, they tend to consider Christianity or religious matters at large as merely incidental or side issues for migrants. When the church is mentioned, most often it is in instrumental terms with reference to the services the church does or should provide. Instead, I regard the church as the primary intra-ethnic “contact zone”, which Mary Louise Pratt defines as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (1992:4). This paper asserts that religion serves as a window through which we can better understand how the complex ideological, political, and cultural tensions (i.e., nationalism, imperialism, freedom, human rights, and etc.) all meet

in the reconfiguration of migrant identities. More precisely, for the North Korean conversion as a project, this study asserts that the evangelical church, in concert with international anticommunist and North Korean human rights advocates, renders North Korean migrants as “freed” from the communist regime, and “revives” their religiosity by replacing *Kimilsung-ism* (the ideology of Kim Il-sung, or *Juche* North Korean national ruling philosophy) with South Korean Christianity.¹⁴

North Korean migrants who came to South Korea in recent years are no longer expected to contribute to the state’s anticommunist propaganda, but to adopt South Korean ways of thinking and behaving for “themselves” and thus a national future—a reunified nation. However, Myung-hee, a woman in her early 30s whom I met in 2006, was very pessimistic about a “vision” of national reunification. While appreciating that she was accepted as a South Korean citizen, she hesitantly though assuredly said that the current physical division between the two Koreas would be nothing compared to the cultural conflicts between North and South Koreans. According to her, North Koreans have a much stronger sense of pride (*chajongam*), which makes them intolerant to their southern counterparts who may look down upon them. Meanwhile, she praised God whom she got to know in South Korea, and was attending missionary training programs step by step in which she interacted with South Korean Christians. This section is devoted to examining secular and religious interactions between North Korean new arrivals and their southern counterparts in a church setting, which I consider to be a primary contact zone.

I maintain that Korean ethnicity is a result of complex negotiation processes and is not a taken-for-granted unit in which individuals share the same language, ancestor, and history.¹⁵ Following Andreas Wimmer’s suggestion, this section explores North and South Korean intra-ethnic boundary-making by examining “the processes of social closure and opening that determine where the boundaries of belong-

14 In light of multicultural and foreign migrant workers’ labor/human rights, Korean churches also serve as inter-ethnic contact zones. Leading civil organizations working for foreign migrants, such as Borderless Villages and Korea Migrants’ Center, are founded and run by progressive pastors and Christians, and with little doubt stemmed from the 1980s social activism.

15 At one time in South Korea “Our wish” was unification, or “*Uri-ŭi sowŏn-ŭn T’ongil*”. One ethnically homogenous and independent nation-state is an ideal form aspired to by most ethnic nationalists across the world in the modern era. And this wish has hardly been dismissed, but instead tends to be stronger over time across regions in the era of globalization, though people traverse national boundaries (Anderson 1983, 1992; Wimmer & Cederman 2009; Appadurai 1996; Ong 1996, 2003).

ing are drawn in the social landscape” (Wimmer 2009: 256). Since the mid-1990s when a famine took at least one million North Korean lives, people have crossed the Tumen River, a natural border between China and North Korea, in desperate search of food. It is via this area that escalating numbers of migrants risk their lives to make their way to South Korea in search of a “better life” (Yoon Y-s. 2003; Suh J-j. 2002; Chung B-h. 2009). Interestingly, statistics show that a startling 80-90 percent of North Korean migrants identify themselves as Christian when they arrive in South Korea and around 70 percent of them continue to rely on church services for support after they arrive (Jeon W-t. 2007). One’s meaning of life or meaningful life, so to speak, is often conceived as being no less important than material prosperity. Thus, their “better life” is likely not only associated with conditions of physical and economic security, but also tied to a journey of searching for meaning.

Sincere Citizens and the Healing of Spirit: North Korean migrants in Freedom School

When the migrants arrive in the South, Protestant churches play an important role in their settlement. After the government, churches provide the second-largest set of resources, including financial aid, household goods, and Sunday lunch and prayer/bible study gatherings. Some of the churches run special training programs for improving the migrants’ spirituality and job opportunities.

The church imagines itself to be fostering a social laboratory that simulates the conditions of a reunified nation (e.g. Freedom School brochure 2007; NS Church Task Force proposal 2006). Depicted as returned “prodigal sons and daughters,” the Korean church gives a symbolic meaning to their identity, the “first generation unifiers” who would contribute heavily to the evangelization of a unified nation.¹⁶ As predestined evangelical subjects, called “reserved missionaries” (Yoon I-j. 2005:8), they follow the logic and nature of the repentance story of “the prodigal son” and are expected to deconstruct and deny their past as being outdated and evil, and to integrate into the modern and good South Korean Christian “family”.

16 Kim Byung-ro, a Christian scholar in unification and theology states that “In the unification processes, South and North Koreans shall experience conflicts due to a gap between rich and poor or different value systems. If the Korean church would work hard in serving North Korean migrants, it could contribute to not only the gradual peaceful unification but also ultimately the revival of Korean church” (2008.4.28. Koomin ilbo, my translation).

Further, North Korean converts are urged to acknowledge that their disconnection from God was a “sin” due to the North Korean communist regime, and Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il who they once worshiped. In North Korean national law and mindset, the migrants are national traitors, but in Protestant language it is North Korea that deceives its people with “*Kimilsung* cultism.” In this way, most North Korean converts’ religious confessions demonize North Korea and celebrate a “God-blessed” South Korean society. Thus evangelical language directs the migrants to discount present encounters as suffering and to instead see experiences in South Korea as part of God’s plan to strengthen their belief.

On the diagram of North Korean mission, they are weighed with the holy God’s callings so that they shall “return” to their homeland as God’s warriors to enlighten their families and neighbors with Christianity and the free market economy. Although they are apparently located at the bottom of the church hierarchy as well as South Korea’s class pyramid, they are served by established South Korean deacons/deaconesses and pastors who in turn try to let them to feel God’s “love” and believe that Jesus came for us, died for our sins, and will come again. The South Korean church believes that there is none other better than the North Korean migrant in realizing God’s great plan for a Korean nation and the Kingdom of God.

I will now recount the experiences of a weekend-training program run by a mega-church in Seoul, South Korea. Around 50 North Korean adults in their 20s to 50s who have passed an entrance exam attend the program every Saturday and Sunday for about 10 months. By attending the weekend classes, weekly group bible study, and various outdoor activities, each individual receives a monthly stipend of about 200 USD. Reflecting the current tendency of new arrivals, about 80% of the people are female and 20% are male.

“I am the future of the nation!” This is the motto of the Freedom School (FS), which sounds decisive, heroic, and definitely nationalistic. The school’s name suggests that “freedom” is what the migrants did not have in North Korea. The dean of the school, Mr. Song, a forty-six year old gentle Christian and former college instructor of North Korean politics, stresses with great conviction that the motto is God’s calling to empower these “brethren” to be born-again national leaders. The motto is a sacred message hung on the wall, interestingly printed in a “cute” font on a square cloth on which there is also a map of the Korean peninsula. The motto is attached to a pink heart with wings, and smaller pink hearts are embroidered here and there. It was made to promote the message that the future of a unified Korea must be carried out not by masculine warriors of God, but by love. On the other side, “Love

and bless you (*Sarang-hago ch'ukbok-hapnida*)” is written in various colors, and is attached to the wall right above a school board panel. If one sees the wall and ceiling decorations, FS does look like a Sunday school classroom for children in church. In a sense, it is: “What we are doing for them is simple. That is, just like *fixing a necktie* if it is not put on in a right way, we assist them to make up for some minor shortcomings”, stated a deacon of the FS advisory board (*italics mine*).

Fixing a necktie is a metaphor for the North Korean mission used by the South Korean evangelical churches, and a task that the FS is actually carrying out for North Korean migrants in the South. In the account above, “we” and “they” are all Koreans, sons and daughters of the Father. But “they” have been living far away for a while, and have recently “returned” to the bosom of Our Father. They need to be refashioned to become “normal” in the South. South Koreans at FS assume that they need to fix only the very “minor errors” of their northern counterparts. “We” and “they” believe themselves to be ethnically homogeneous, and the presumption is that Korean culture is inherently embodied in all Koreans. Such ethnic nationalism in which race, ethnicity, and nation are conflated throughout Korean modern history (Shin 2006; Palais 1998) is at the heart of the Christian mission for North Korean migrants and North Korea.

As the metaphor of fixing indicates, Freedom School is designed to help the migrants to be born again as modern citizens. Norms like sincerity, hard work, self-reliance, and independence are emphasized as the “truth” for a successful life in South Korea. Interestingly, these values were also equally stressed in the principles of North Korean Juche ideology. However, South Koreans stereotypically perceive that North Korea migrants are somewhat lazy, lack will, and are dependant, as commonly observed in post-communist transitions. Such stereotypes are often simply interpreted as a byproduct of Juche ideology, and thus they need to be refashioned as “sincere” returning brethren. What makes North Korean assimilation cases unique from other post-communist cases is that, as Sheila Jager (2003) analyzes the Korean War Memorial, a carving of a South Korean big brother soldier (literally) embracing a smaller North Korean soldier, North Korean migrants are situated as younger siblings in the Korean family system and automatically subordinated in the Korean ethnic hierarchy.

It is in this context that the concept of sincerity (*seongsil*) emerges as the most important attitude the migrants should have in South Korea, and at the same time the most contested value in negotiating “true” Christianity. First, *Seongsil* in the FS lecture series means a complex set of mindful and bodily manners that include being

modest, obedient, gentle, enduring, hardworking, and unselfish. Second, in light of the family metaphor, the *seongsil* represents the familial, social, and religious obligation that the newcomers are expected to put in place of the outdated Juche bodily habit. As the deacon's metaphorical phrase "fixing a necktie" crystallizes, Korean Christians who work for the migrants tend to measure their degree of social adjustment, personality, and more importantly their religiosity, by their bodily appearance and behaviors. Speaking the Seoulite language, whitening one's skin, and performing obedient bodily manners are a few among many examples that are taught for the sake of making "sincere" North Korean subjects in the job/religious "market." It is ironic, however, that the FS staff always stresses the "interior" mind over the "exterior" body.

Thus, in addition to "fixing a necktie", healing (both as a metaphor and a ritual) is a key purpose in the Freedom School program. I will use a particular story to illustrate this matter in which I visited a key Freedom School program. In mid-September of 2006, the FS designed a two-day outdoor activity called *Ch'i yu*, or healing camp, for North Korean trainees. The purposes of the camp were (1) to heal wounded souls through an experience of God's advent, (2) to make them find true dignity in their existence within God, and (3) to cut the past life off and rebuild a new life chain with Jesus Christ. It was apparent that the ultimate goal of the camp was to convert the North Korean migrants. Historically, this goal is not particularly new, as throughout the history of Christianity the ultimate healing is completed when people convert to Christianity (Porterfield 2000; Wightman 2007). The list of purposes, which is short and concise, also represents a more or less negative image that most South Korean adults have of North Korean migrants—their souls and hearts are wounded, their self-esteem is low, and their past lives are all ruined and contaminated.

On the night of the first day, after a series of lectures and worship services, an intensive healing ritual took place for about four hours. It was intense: young South Korean volunteers, who led all the gospel worship services, kept weeping together with North Koreans; we were all praying loudly, and at some point I found myself speaking in tongues. So-yong, a female North Korean in her early 40s, suddenly fell down on the floor, as if she was possessed by a spirit. Her face was wet with tears, her arms and legs were shaking, and the symptoms were not medical in nature. FS director Mr. Kang and invited Pastor Choi immediately approached her and started shouting "Go away! I command you in the name of Jesus, go away!" That was a spectacular scene that I felt heated up peoples' emotions. I was looking forward to witnessing more dramatic moments, such as So-yong springing up from the floor

and praising God. However, no such drama occurred for about half an hour. Both Mr. Kang and Pastor Choi looked exhausted and thus Mr. Kang asked another woman to take So-yong back to the second floor to lay her down on a bed.

The next morning, I happened to be engaged in a short talk with Mr. Kang and Pastor Choi. Kang whispered in a small voice, “Well, it was almost done, but eventually they didn’t fully open their minds”. And then he seriously stated;

You know we are all same nation (*han minjok*). I talked to myself one step more one step more... Last night, I felt that I was almost there. But they didn’t fully open... I don’t know, but there is something like a *glass* between us and them. I can’t break it. As I want to break it, they seem to make the glass thicker. I don’t know what the *glass* is and why I felt that way always...I think it may be due to the fact that they were drowned in Kim Il-Sung Ideology for too long...

His last account manifests that what both Kang and Choi were attempting to do to So-yong: to “cure” her soul, which was presumably possessed by the demon of Kim Il-sung, not by the Holy Spirit. A little while after this conversation, I also happened to have a short conversation with So-yong and another woman, Chae-eun, in person. At the time, both were attending a theological college. Having woken up late, So-yong was looking pale. I said to her, “I guess you were possessed by a spirit last night, how do you feel now?” “Well, I don’t know what it was, but I just couldn’t move. Maybe because I was too tired, since I haven’t taken a rest in recent days,” and she then added “I had taken exams. You know it’s hard to read books and there are lots of things to memorize... So I haven’t slept for three days...”.

Comparing Kang’s account and So-yong’s, I was struck by the differences. Kang perceived So-yong’s state to be precisely a spirit possession but by the inner demon, the deeply embodied ‘evil’ Juche. Meanwhile, So-yong claimed it was caused by a burnt-out condition, fatigue that in turn was caused by carrying out heavy duties as a mother and student in her 40s. This episode is significant because it represents on-going miscommunications, conflicts, and negotiations between North Korean migrants and South Korean Christians, thus opening up a question about the ambivalent nature of Korean evangelical nationalism in practice.

The terms of *Seongsil* and healing entail key virtues of South Korean Christians who serve their northern counterparts, and for the North Korean missionization. Without a doubt, I had witnessed how hard and “truly” South Koreans work for the migrants in the name of God. Simultaneously, however, it should be noted that their individual-oriented belief practices and South Korean centered support programs both tend to overlook the cross-cultural dimension in interacting with their counter-

parts. Thus, I also witnessed that while appreciating their religious life in the church setting, some migrants criticized South Korean evangelicals as being materialistic and hypocritical. Such accounts, however, are hardly presented in public, partially due to the nature of biblical language and the church hierarchy. Instead, their confession narratives draw our attention to the ways in which migrants reformulate and reinterpret their memories, present, and future life. Their narratives are all implicative of understanding their aspirations of reconfiguring alternative subjectivities in religious terms.

Narrating “Christian Passage”: Born Again Christian Heroes and Heroines

In the following section, the processes by which South Korean Protestant nationalism affects the way in which North Korean migrants imagine and organize their sufferings and remake their selves will be analyzed through an examination of conversion narratives. Following Diane Austin-Broos, I consider conversion as a cultural passage, which “involves interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course ... [and] an encultured being arriving at a particular place” (Austin-Broos 2003: 1-2). For North Korean converts, the passage and the “particular place” are not merely imaginary but are actually rather real. The passages in their accounts consist of the actual crossing of national borderlines, numerous physical obstacles, and cultural encounters (such as language), and internal rationalization of conversion (e.g. creationism vs. evolutionism) in Weberian terms. Conversion for the migrants is “a matter of the individual conscience” that intersects with political conditions (van der Veer 1996: 10-14). The Juche (*Kimilsungism*)-Protestant dichotomy is central to the shift of North Korean converts’ loyalty from Kim Il-sung to God, and from “cursed” communist North Korea to “God blessed” “free” and “prosperous” South Korea. It is important to personally demonstrate such a changed conscience.

One day in late 2007, Mrs. Yang, a North Korean migrant in her late 40s, gave me a call and asked me to translate her testimonial into English. I remembered her saying a week earlier that she was struggling to fit it into two pages because a U.S. church had asked her to send a shorter version before inviting her. Already a seasoned presenter of her religious testimony before South Korean believers, she was having a hard time finalizing the shorter version. She sounded upset and let me know that she did not appreciate that the American church was judging her in this way. In the end, though, she did complete her testimony and thus obeyed an institutional

global hierarchy in which American churches are usually considered to be higher up than their South Korean counterparts.

While reading her one-and-a-half-page long narrative, which was indeed to be her life history written in a Biblical idiom, I was impressed by and surprised at two things: first, the piece communicated a clear sense of how God had helped her to overcome a series of sufferings in both North Korea and China since the North Korean great famine and how she had in turn carried out God's work. Her testimonial observed the typical storyline that most North Korean converts recount when churches invite them to share their conversion with South Korean believers. The second thing that impressed me about her testimony was that the testimonial told of how she came to "Canaan" and depicted South Korea in Biblical terms as the place where there is no suffering, but only hope and a new future. This optimism also brought to mind an informal conversation that I had had with her at our last meeting in 2005. At the time, she expressed her disappointment with crime-ridden South Korean society, where she experienced social discrimination, where politicians were corrupt, where North Korean children lagged hopelessly behind in public schools, where her friends had lost all their money through fraud, where families were broken, and where Christianity was materialistic and hypocritical. In this paper I am interested in the disjuncture and contradictions between this sort of accounting and her Christian testimonial—a mode of narration that I argue she acquired in concert with formal religious institutions in the south.

I consider North Korean migrants' conversion narratives as a performance hosted largely by conservative churches from which they receive financial and social benefits, and in return provide new spiritual inspiration for South Korean and sometimes foreign believers. In this institutional context, the migrants are forced to imagine suffering as being spatially and temporally Other (i.e., in the past and in North Korea). I argue that these "formulaic" testimonials preclude description of the sufferings that they as migrants come to encounter in South Korea. Indeed, the conservative Protestant language that they learn and speak in the church setting tends to translate their current South Korean life into the "blessed life." Additionally, Biblical language forces them to erase the hand of institutional or human mediation, instead allowing only for supernatural power as the mediator that leads their religious conversion and passage to South Korea. In this way, their conversion to Protestantism entails both their physical relocation from North Korea/China to South Korea and their internal transformation from *Juche*, the North Korean national ideology, to Christianity.

I thus suggest that their conversion narratives must be understood in the context of what I call their “Christian passage”, as these migrants’ secret passage out of China is nearly always sponsored by the missionary, monetary, and other efforts of Korean Protestant churches in China.

I will now review the main storyline of the testimonials of Mrs. Yang and some other famous converts. North Korean converts’ testimonies begin by worshipping and speaking of their submission to God. From the beginning, they clarify their changing ideas as being Protestant. In her short letter, Mrs. Yang states: “Now I will live only for Jesus. Because I know now that He has listened to my prayers and that He is the way and the life for me”. Referring to John 14:6 (NKJV), she says “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,” she declares Jesus as her savior and Lord. It is noteworthy that her second line “Because ... He has listened to my prayers”. This underlines her theological inclination, which is in fact a dominant characteristic of Korean evangelical Protestantism.¹⁷

The testimonies of famous converts usually begin with their former careers in the north, and the main reasons for their escape from it. In Mrs. Yang’s case, the famine was a main cause and effect by which she had to cross the border at all costs and is described as follows:

I had to leave North Korea because of my family’s extreme poverty, which began with the waning economy in North Korea ever since Kim Il Sung died in 1994. So in September 1998, I told my family I would go to China to make money and left. But it wasn’t easy to make money.

So she attempted to return home, but was arrested and imprisoned in a labor camp. Soon after being released from the jail, she continued to witness the disastrous effects of the famine.

Dead bodies were scattered about on the streets. If an animal died, it was taken to be eaten, but when a man died, no one bothered with it. So I tried China once again. In October 1998, ten days before the election for Kim Jung Il, I escaped North Korea (leaving my three children behind).

¹⁷ That is, “answer-theology”, focusing on “religious experience” rather than “doctrine.” The “this-worldly” oriented theology of prosperity emphasizing health, wealth, and spirituality as God’s blessing, is equivalent to the answer-theology. This seeing/experiencing-is-believing sort has been more prevalent in Korean mainline churches than in relationship-theology, which emphasizes doctrine itself like believing without seeing/experiencing (see Kim S.-g. 2007). The phrase inspires audiences to be ready to experience another “conversion” by listening to what God has done for her (Harding 2000).

Her accounts of the labor camp and the dead bodies are key elements in describing both individual and collective experiences of the famine for non-North Korean audiences. More painful moments are often emotionally described with tears and motions in actual testimonials. One day Mrs. Yang heard that her children she left behind in North Korea came to China too. She began to search for them and looked everywhere. It was at this time that she first heard about God from a friend who told her that if she prayed hard, she would find her children:

So I began to pray in words that I didn't even understand at the time. Within two months of prayer I was reunited with all of my three children, and I began to work in a restaurant at a retreat facility that belonged to a church.

Coincidentally, when I went to China in 2000, I made several visits to the church where she had once worked. The church was well-known because many North Korean refugees came there for aid. When I went there the retreat center in which she had worked was under construction with financial sponsorship from a South Korean church. The construction was an alternative way to employ and help refugees. However, I witnessed struggles and conflicts among South Korean missionaries, Korean-Chinese Christians, and the migrants. Moreover, the church minister, a South Korean, had been frequently imprisoned for caring for the refugees. Considering the local geopolitical situation, the fact that Mrs. Yang worked there could be seen as really good luck. But she had not been able to stay any longer.

One day the church told me they couldn't pay me anymore and I must find a way to support my family. Then I began to pray again and received His answer. His answer was for me to go to South Korea—the Canaan—after traveling through China, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

Her escape journey was like a pilgrimage. She continues: “God helped me reflect on non-believing, poor nations and God-loving South Korea, and He let me realize why North Korea is in such poor state and also what I must do.” In her testimony, a series of her sufferings is ended by God who eventually brought her and her daughters to South Korea. Her transformation is not only spiritual but also territorial. Even though she first came to pray for God and rely on church in China, her religiosity remained incomplete until she arrived in South Korea.

Mrs. Yang's testimonial gives me a chance to reflect on North Korean migrants' conversion to Christianity. It is a physical and spiritual transition, which requires submission to South Korean Christian nationalism. It also determines what their Christian subjectivity should look like. Yet in another sense, behind the grammar of

the evangelical language, what they want to do with the audiences may be to raise awareness about a human tragedy taking place “right over there” instead of celebrating a God-blessed South Korea. However, their voices are filtered by a particular demand of church hierarchy and translated into a South Korean evangelical ritual that is by and large infused with the Cold War legacy. The mission is thus ambivalent and controversial.

Conclusion: Intra-ethnic Transcending and Boundary-making

I have approached North Korean migrants’ subjectivities that have been shaped and transformed mainly in accordance with South Korean state powers, which have corresponded and maneuvered by local and global geopolitical climates. The first section has reviewed official treatments and definitions applied to the Northerners who came to South Korea after national division. By examining gradual changes from national anticommunist celebrities to new settlers, I wanted to punctuate how state powers and interests influence the Northerners’ re-subjectification processes in South Korea, and further illuminate the ways in which the different terms for “North Korean migrants” end up serving as quasi-ethnic markers.

Micro-levels of empirical data are crucial in dismantling the assimilationist tendency in the policies toward the Northerners and a reunification rooted in a belief of Korean ethnic homogeneity. I agree with Han Kyung-Koo’s argument that the real enemy of multiculturalism in Korea is not a strong sense of Korean ethnic homogeneity, but the “very sense of being civilized and culturally superior” (Han K.-k. 2007: 12). But at the same time, I assert that such “superior” mindsets and attitudes are relational, and need to be scrutinized in light of actors’ efforts to overcome, challenge, negotiate, or reproduce consciousness through interactions with “others” or “not-like-us” individuals. North and South Korean intra-ethnic relations offer us a chance to retrospect the complexity of the basic assumptions embedded in the modern identity politics that are inevitably intertwined with the Cold War and national and global aspirations in South Korean society. The second part has thus explored North Korean migrants’ encounters and interactions with South Korean Protestantism with a focus on conversion processes, which are intermingled with both adopting South Korean ways of thinking and behaving, biblical language, reinterpreting time and space, as well as projecting a new identity by envisioning a Christianized

reunified nation. In terms of one's life meaning or meaningful life search, Christian membership seems to comfort them by providing meanings for existence—a radical transformation from a worthless being to God's beloved son or daughter.

Meanwhile, my analysis of their formulaic conversion narratives that are recited before non-North Korean believers in churches brought out further complicated questions about transcendence and boundary-making processes in both religious and mundane contexts. My ethnographic data, which I have not been able to incorporate in this paper in its entirety, brings me to a story that has a sad and ambiguous ending. It is partly because North Korean migrants are voluntarily or involuntarily not conducting their "own" home state cultures which are simply degraded as having been a product of an out-dated Juche ideology; and partly because, as I was told frequently by my northern informants, South Koreans do not have any knowledge or desire to know about North Korea. Likewise, it is not a matter of tolerance, a new virtue emphasized by government and critics for a multicultural Korea, but rather a wide-range of ignorance that these "new settlers" from the North encounter in South Korea, where a pan-Korean ethnic nationalism does not "really" exist on the ground, as I was told. Similarly, I found that North Korean migrants have had little knowledge about the South. Through the series of interactions with their southern counterparts, both North and South Koreans came to realize that in order to transcend cultural boundaries, recognized and made, more than Christian love and a sense of ethnic homogeneity is needed (cf. Shin 2006, Kim Y.-s. 2004).

I maintain that North Korean migrants are not a homogeneous group of individuals but a product of social processes. Likewise, both South- and North Koreans are made through a series of macro and micro interactions. In this spirit, I would like to end this paper by suggesting further research. First, it is critical that one not attempt to homogenize the migrants by regarding them as people who internalized North Korean cultures or ideologies, which are often represented as timeless, static, and permanent. It may be necessary to investigate the life trajectories of the migrant individuals who move in and out of political and religious entitlements, and further the ways in which they come to construct, destruct, and negotiate a sense of solidarity within themselves and among others in the context of host societies.

Second, their networks are significant and can be used to better contextualize a Northeast Asian form of transnationalism and globalization, which in turn would contribute to multiple academic fields such as refugee migrants studies, post-socialism studies, religion and politics, Cold War studies, and more. Indeed, although a statistical study shows that more than 85% of North Koreans in China want to come

to South Korea as their final destination, a significant number of South Korean ID holding North Korean migrants continue to migrate to other countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, some European countries, and even China. My ethnographic data shows that their broker lines are intimately linked to the Korean diaspora's church networks. Additionally, just like many other immigrants elsewhere in the world, the majority of them save and try to send money, contact by phone, or bring the rest of their family members from North Korea. The implications of their transnational migration draw our attention to a comparative approach.

At the same time, and thirdly, these transnational networks are also in need of analysis in the theme of gender and generation. As statistics show, female North Korean migrants outnumber males. Rather than viewing them as victims of human trafficking, or national and global masculine violence, they are actively involved in negotiating a new self, discourses, and networks in and through the perilous interactions with local and transnational communities. In the same vein, the generational differences between migrants should be stressed. Those who were born between the 1980s and 1990s and survived a devastating famine in the mid-1990s have passed through a somewhat radically different childhood from their former generations. Individual variables with focus on gender and generation, and in the context of larger transnational migration networks, need to be further examined and analyzed.

Last but not least, it is crucial to retrospect the limits of narrative-based empirical research. This is a methodological question. Many South Koreans from various backgrounds and even North Korean migrants themselves often pinpoint that most North Korean migrants speak what they assume that their southern counterparts want to hear about, and not what they want to say, and so North Koreans are not trustworthy in terms of language performance. This bias, I argue, is a product of the social interactions in their home and host societies. At the same time, researchers should contextualize and analyze what they are told in a longer and larger historical and geopolitical context, instead of citing as evidence that which proves or fits their theoretical frames. Indeed, I have witnessed that not all, but some formal and informal interviews along with written survey forms are often conceived of as a paid part-time job for North Korean migrants who are actually paid along with some of whom are introduced in the guise of random sampling. So it may be crucial neither to conduct an interview without building a rapport, nor fully rely on so-called snowball methods for collecting individual life histories unless one has built an extensive long-term personal relationship with his/her informants. Precisely, however, one should be aware of the asymmetrical relationships that exist interlocutors in terms of repre-

sentation. It does not mean that the researcher position is always perceived as higher than the interviewees, but the relationship is reversible. As numerous anthropologists have stressed, it is important to engage in reflexive ethnography.

Epilogue

The South Korean Lee Myung-bak regime and conservative civil organizations alike have recently proclaimed the year of 2011 as the first year of substantial preparation for national reunification. While the percentage of people who support the reunification declines significantly, the New Right forces declared in their joint meeting that the South Korean “liberal democracy” system is much superior and the only legitimate entity to absorb the North for a new Korean nation. They call this model *Chayu Tongil* or liberal unification. The declaration they announced in public entails ten principles for the reunification. Four out of the ten caught my attention. First, to put any pro-North Korean forces within South Korea under an absolute blockade, to strengthen mutual alliance with the United States and Japan, to recover a partnership with China toward an era of East Asian civilization revival, and to welcome all sorts and conditions of North Koreans without discrimination into the South Korean democratic social system in the process of reunification. This does not sound unusual, but what makes this proposal rather contradictory is its connotation of ideological and political homogenization, combined with ignorance at large of cultural differences between the two Koreas. Culture in South Korea (and possibly in the North too) has nearly always been perceived in the context of national division to the extent that division minorities have been created and excluded.

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