

# Gender Strategies from the Bottom: North Korean Women's Survival and Growth Strategies in the Period of Social Changes

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## I. Introduction

As North Korea has shifted to a market society and socio-cultural transition has been brought since the Arduous March, changes in the lifestyle and perception of North Korean women, who take care of daily lives of North Koreans, are detected through various channels. In the society, which is going through social changes due to internal and external challenges, women, who account for the majority of the entire population and are responsible for the survival of people living in the family-centered society based on “productive labor,” seek and implement various strategies to hide or escape from the power of the North Korean regime for their own benefit, though the regime keeps the unproductive social hierarchy using the military.

Those backing up the North Korean power class, mostly officials of the Party, the military and the government and people in Pyongyang, are not the majority of the North Korean population, and also co-exist with key leaders of the regime with various interests and needs. In addition, in the period of social changes caused by financial difficulties, many ordinary people in North Korea are looking for a better tomorrow while overcoming obstacles in their real life. Due to such rapid changes in the country, various studies have been conducted by North Korean academia since the mid-1990s on the structure and fluctuations of the country's politics, economy and society.

However, the changes in social members, which have come along with social changes, and by extension, the survival and growth strategies of North Korean women, have not been studied in depth as they have been eclipsed by the characteristics of North Korea's regime centered on an authoritarian ruler. In particular, in order to prepare for a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula where democracy and gender equality are guaranteed and an integrated society capable of minimizing conflicts among social members, understanding the perception and behavior of North Korean women from the gender perspective<sup>1</sup> is important,

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<sup>1</sup> As a precedent, German society and female community experienced a long-term conflict caused by discord between East and West German residents after the reunification. Although the old West German society and women's circle made considerable preparation and efforts, compared to South Korea, they evaluated after the reunification that “we didn't know anything about East German women.” With the recognition of the problem, combined with the continuation of a crisis and social changes in North Korea and the increasing number of North Korean refugee women, the women's community in South Korea says, “What we need right now is to properly understand North Korean woman.” For South Korean female community's perceptions of reality and specific and comprehensive recognition of problems, see the source book of the Symposium for Women's Peaceful Reunification held on May 10, 2005, under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender Equality to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the national

though analytical approaches to the issue have been not adequate.

Existing studies on North Korean women, which have been overwhelmed by the nature of the North Korean regime as an authoritarian absolute power system, have focused on analyzing North Korea's policies and discourses on women. Most of those studies are related to the patriarchal power as they regard women, who work both in society and at home but have a low political and social status, as "passive victims." This approach shows the sacrifice of and damage to women based on the biological difference, i.e., sex. However, studies have failed to expand to explore a hierarchical social system, which turns natural differences stemming from differences in sexual organs into discrimination, and the gender perspective on gender equality in its attempt to overcome the system.<sup>2</sup>

The research trend focused on patriarchal control exerted by North Korean powers over women has significance in revealing the gender-discriminative ruling system, in which the authoritarian state power limits women's rights through sexually unequal arrangement, and consequent suffering of women. However, the trend falls into the error of recognizing actors from the perspective of the power class and overlooks the "perceptual and behavioral growth of human beings" as the key players of history. Thus, the "world of women living today and dreaming of tomorrow" is regarded as missing by absolute power. In addition, such approach only shows the "effect on women exerted by the power of the state," so the world of women, who have served as a spearhead of social changes to overcome social crises, is at a great risk of being laid to rest. In the end, such studies could end up as "stories without woman" and "stories seen from the viewpoint of patriarchal powers."

Based on the recognition of such problems, this presentation attempts to investigate the concrete and actual conditions and aspects of how, in this continued economic crisis, North Korean women are implementing survival strategies for today and growth strategies for tomorrow in respond to the dedication and loyalty which North Korean powers require women to have in order to sustain a hierarchical social system. This presentation also aims to propose the overall challenges in order for the South Korean society and female community to establish a gender-equal peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. To put it concretely, this presentation addresses 1) the survival strategies of North Korean women; 2) their growth strategies; and 3) challenges to be tackled to establish a gender-equal peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. As research methods, both literature analysis and in-depth interviews and surveys of North Korean refugees were used.

## II. Survival Strategies: Hiding from Power

North Korea's policy for women, which had been maintained from the process of establishing the country, was the "dual role policy as a mother and a laborer," which added a social role to women's traditional role as a mother. Since the dual role policy suggested the image of women that was consistently imposed on North Korean women, they, especially mothers, who had taken care of household affairs and children and at the same time worked in society and at work even before the Arduous March, had to bear the dual burden of labor. However, North Korea's food shortage that had continued since in 1995 and the military-first politics imposed unprecedentedly heavy burden for survival on North Korean women, and that burden was incomparable to the burden of double labor of the past. In such a crisis threatening their survival, North Korean women's survival strategies were largely classified into austerity and excessive labor, maximization of networks, avoidance of childbirth, and

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liberation and the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the June 15 Joint Declaration (Women Making Peace, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Susan Hanson and Geraldine Prat, *Gender, Work, Space*, New York: Routledge, 1995.

prostitution.

## 1. Austerity and excessive labor

For many years, women, unlike men, have been considered key members of a family who are in charge of daily life management focused on food, clothing, and shelter. Therefore, in times of difficulties or crises that threaten daily lives, women who take care of family often endure austerity and excessive labor earlier than other family members. In addition, in a regime which allocates resources preferentially to the military and the munitions industry, women who struggle to maintain their everyday lives have no choice but to have a belt-tightening lifestyle for the survival of themselves and their families. Thus, in an absolute crisis of the Arduous March in which a considerable number of people died or disappeared due to starvation, and in a society where men were absent due to the military-first politics, women in North Korea demonstrated their extraordinary ability to making a living for the survival of themselves and their families, without limiting to their involvement in austerity and excessive labor.

Women understood this reality better than anyone, so well that women in business even talked to each other, saying, “the Democratic Women’s Union running, the Party sitting, and the Socialist Working Youth League (currently Youth League) standing still.”<sup>3</sup> This indicates that in North Korean society after the economic hardship, the Party simply sit comfortably and just gave orders and yelled to do this and do that, while men represented by the Socialist Working Youth League were able to do nothing and just stood still. On the other hand, women represented by the Democratic Women’s Union were virtually in charge of the society at large as they woke up early in the morning to be mobilized for road and village cleaning, flood damage restoration, and rural activities, and during the day, went to the market to do business to provide for their family.<sup>4</sup>

Even at the time of the Arduous March, doing business was not seen as favorably by the general public in North Korean society, and people were ashamed at and looked down on those engaged in business in *jangmadang*, or farmers’ markets. However, many North Korean women, who felt desperate to earn a living for their family in worries that if they did nothing, their family could starve, went to the markets and did nearly every business to obtain food (KMH, a North Korean female defector in her early 60s). Most of them usually wake up around 4-5 a.m. and go to work to make a living for the family. They arrive home after 10-12 p.m., and get some sleep before preparing meals and going back to work again. They usually walk around the 70-80 *li* (about 27.5-31.4 kilometers) in a day, which means they have to almost run the distance. Some of them with enhanced business skills use trains or buses. A few who have accumulated property act as capitalists, the key players of the shift into market society, or buy trucks (in fact, they rent trucks belonging to state-run enterprises and institutions) to do business at a larger scale. (KSH, a North Korean female defector in her early 30s)

The reasons why North Korean women have been more actively engaged in business

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<sup>3</sup> The North Korean Democratic Women’s Union is a mass organization which North Korean women who are aged between 31 and 55 and do not belong to any other organizations have to join. It has represented ordinary women who go to markets to sell and buy goods since the food shortage in 1995. Meanwhile, the Socialist Working Youth League (whose name has changed to Kim Il-Sung Socialist Youth League, or abbreviated as Youth League) consists of young men and male students, office workers, and soldiers, and mainly represents men in North Korean society. And the Party (Korean Workers’ Party) represents the power class.

<sup>4</sup> Good Friends Research Institute for North Korean Society, *North Korea Today* vol 38, September 2006.

than men after the food shortage are that a significant number of men were mobilized to the military and the munitions industry; many institutions for maintaining the regime mostly consist of men; and in North Korean social culture, women have to take the responsibility of child rearing and family livelihood. A father in a family is usually not involved in child-rearing and daily activities at home, and regards housekeeping and child as women's unique roles, so all women went out with their child on their back to do business. (KMS, a North Korean female refugee in her mid-30s) Regarding this, a North Korean female defector says, "Men are house dogs that do nothing. Honestly, women feed all. There, women work so hard, as if they work to death. We think that is what we have to do. All North Koreans think so." (KSL, a North Korean female defector in her late 40s) This deteriorated the nutritional conditions of North Korean women.<sup>5</sup>

In the background of such austerity and extreme labor of North Korean women lie the collectivism and militarism of the North Korean regime. In a collectivist system, individuals are nothing more than those comprising a family since the base unit of the system is family. Moreover, women are considered beings subordinated to the family.<sup>6</sup> The military-first politics have also expanded the hierarchical gender culture and social values derived from male- and combat-oriented militarism in North Korean society.

In the reality of society in which men are absent as they are directly or indirectly mobilized to national defense projects, women in North Korean have to assume responsible for the survival of their families while they are also mobilized to conduct various projects for war preparation and rural support by taking part in social labor at a high participation rate. However, the military regime strengthens a male-centered social culture and justifies women's excessive work. Against these backdrops, the value of women's labor to survive and maintain daily lives is not fully recognized, and is perceived as a very personal act of little significance.

Therefore, in North Korea's economic situation, which cannot be normalized through persistent military-first policy neither return to normal by its own ability, women's labor devoted to work for livelihood is evaluated as an activity subordinate to the military-first politics and is not recognized for its "productive value." In other words, the social value corresponding to their labor is not recognized, and the "right to work" is not properly given. Such reality creates psychological resistance in North Korean women that creates distrust of the North Korean regime from the bottom.

## 2. Maximization of networks

Women in general form close relationships with real persons through reproduction of the community, i.e., childbirth and child-rearing, and are closely involved in the daily lives of family members, experiencing and getting used to complex and diverse aspects of human relationships from childhood relatively frequently compared to men. As a result, as many gender equality researchers point out, women are more involved in human relationships in the community than men and show remarkable management skills.

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<sup>5</sup> Let's take a look at the testimony of a North Korean defector woman about the change in her body due to malnutrition. She says, "Because of insufficient nutrition, menstruation stopped altogether, and I hadn't menstruate for several years. I told you that once I went to Chongjin as a group for work. When I went there, there were some six men and 15 women. And all of them did not menstruate at all. We were there for three years. Their menstruation disappeared." (KSL, a North Korean refugee woman in her late 40s)

<sup>6</sup> Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (Gwak Dong-hun, Trans.). Seoul: Hyunsil Book, 1995, p. 61.

Such sexual characteristics served as the basis for North Korean women to develop a three-tier network for survival amid social changes that began with the food shortage. In the network for survival, the primary network is the family relationship, and the secondary network is relations with acquaintances and with government officials forged through bribery. The tertiary network is established while they are doing business. Other than that, there are relations created at workplaces or *inminban*, North Korea's basic neighborhood unit, but according to the testimonies of North Korean defectors, it is considered that such relations now do not contribute much to survival and livelihood, compared to the time before the Arduous March.

Regarding the power of the blood ties, the primary network that plays the most important role in the survival of North Koreans, a North Korean refugee woman said, "We have an uncle and an aunt in China, so we got help from time to time. And my sister who lived in China sent us some money and goods. So we managed to live. We can survive with help, and without that, we can't. Without that, how can we survive on our own? We have nothing, so how can we live on?" (KMS 1, a North Korean female defector in her mid-30s)

The secondary network contributing to survival refers to the intimacy with lower-ranking officials who exert daily and direct power over North Koreans in daily life and markets. This relationship is also one of the characteristics of the generalized guardian-ward relationship in an authoritarian society where bureaucrats have a great influence over the society at large. However, there is a difference in the aspect that the "normalization of direct but inhumane relationship based on material gain. In other words, the relationship is mainly characterized by bribery as common practice and unreliability in human relations. For example, "Even after being cracked down, those with a lot of money anyhow offer bribes and get free, and they sell goods again and all these are repeated on and on." (KSH 2, a North Korean refugee woman in her mid 40s).

In particular, members of the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Social Security, the censorship and control units, are included in the broadest secondary network. In addition, the larger the profit, the higher the position of related government officials, so high rank officials of the army and the prosecution mainly comprise the network. Branches of the Socialist Working Youth League has separately organized Youth Education Group since 1999 to crack down *jangmadang*, but members of the group are also engaged in bribery often even though the amount is small. This is because small amount of money is collected for various purposes and therefore the total amount is quite significant.

The tertiary network for survival includes relations women have forged while doing business. Prior to the Arduous March, human relations formed through occupations and regions, such relations at workplaces and within *inminban*, played an important role in the daily lives of North Koreans. However, in a situation where factories and businesses are not in operation, the market has become an important space for survival, and various ways to move have been expanded for survival and business, the network built through jobs or residences does not have as much effect on the survival of North Koreans as in the past. Rather, the relationship with people whom they came to know in the process of making a living or doing business has become important. The testimony about this is as follows:

"What kind of job you had, it didn't matter. I mean, because I didn't have money, and after I started business in that town, I realized that help influenced business a lot in that village. Above all, who recognized the fact first and what kind of business he or she started first? If someone makes a great profit and becomes rich, everyone does that business. In our XX-dong district, some people started shoe business first, got to be better off, and then, it became the specialty of our village. Among 26 households,

all excluding about four households sold shoes. In our XX-dong, the people who brought shoes from China, they brought the products by car from their relatives in China, right? If you do this, you cannot make money by selling the shoes only to rich people. At that time, you may sell them on credit, traveling to villages after villages. In this way, you can do business regardless of your previous job. If I want to do business, then, I also can bring products on credit.” (KMH, a North Korean female defector in her mid-60s)

In North Korean society, women had to forge a more diverse network than men because of the gender role norms derived from the militaristic gender policy in which women have to take care of family’s daily lives and make a living. Such norms have emerged from a combination of the “politics of difference” in sex implemented by state power, the characteristics that women have acquired in the process of socialization, and the practice they themselves have learned to gain their own advantage while responding to the oppression from the top.

The other reason is that in conflicts with a father and brothers, the patriarchal power in a family, women unconsciously acquire techniques to protect their body and seek their own gains earlier than men through adaptation, compromise, or silence and resistance, all of which are important strategies for the establishment of human relations. Such abilities for survival are often seen in a woman's management ability or tenderness needed to address conflicts in relations, in connection with social norms, but on the other hand, they can also be expressed as a much stronger endurance and ability to cope with a crisis than men.

### 3. Family dissolution, avoidance of childbirth, and prostitution

The prominent social phenomenon that appeared in North Korea until the early 2000s after the Arduous March was the dissolution of families, which occurs in the process of survival. Above all, the increase in *kkotjebi*, or homeless children, plainly demonstrated the dissolution of families and drew keen attention of the North Korean regime since it could cause social turmoil.<sup>7</sup> Since 1997, the North Korean authorities have even organized and operated the 917 Permanent Committees, the shelters for *kkotjebi*, at the regional level across the nation. According to a testimony, the 917 Permanent Committee takes care of *kkotjebi* even though it merely provides rice porridge to young homeless children who are not fed properly and wander on streets, in front of stations, or around markets after their family broke down due to the food crisis and their parents disappeared, or separated from or abandoned them; and to some older homeless people wandering about on streets due to starvation or mental or physical disabilities. However, as food rations were not provided on a regular basis and the number of *kkotjebi* increased rapidly, disposing of corpses became the shelters’ major task at one time. It is said that at that time, the 917 Permanent Committee just rolled up dead bodies with straw mats before burying in a single pit (KSH 1, a North Korean refugee women in her early 30s). Hamgyong Province was affected hardest by the food shortage during the Arduous March, and the damage was expanded to Pyongan Province. Accordingly, families whose members became *kkotjebi* increased in the early 2000s in the Pyongan Province.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, among the various aspects of family dissolution, a typical phenomenon related to survival strategies is avoidance of childbirth. Although the North

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<sup>7</sup> The North Korean authorities estimate the number of *kkotjebi* nationwide at about 30,000 to 40,000.

Good Friends Research Institute for North Korean Society, *North Korea Today* vol 82, July 27, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Good Friends Research Institute for North Korean Society, *North Korea Today* vol 83, August 2, 2007.

Korean authorities, which lost a significant portion of the population during the Arduous March, began implementing policy to promote childbirth in the 2000s, women who felt it difficult to be the breadwinner for their existing family members avoided pregnancy and even chose an abortion when they got pregnant (KSL, a North Korean female refugee in her 40s). In particular, more families separated for livelihoods increased, and in families with a couple having to go out for work, pregnancy and childbirth were often avoided due to business or the burden of child care (KMH, a North Korean defector woman in her mid-60s).

The next is prostitution, one of the typical ways of survival of women to use sex in North Korea. In order to understand prostitution in that society, it is necessary to examine the level of sex education and sexual awareness of North Korean women, the causes of prostitution and the proliferation process, and consequent problems. In general, sexual education is rarely conducted in North Korean society and in school curriculum. Even in adolescents who undergo radical changes in their body are not given basic education on sex or prostitution. With the absence of sex education and unestablished social norms on sexual issues, combined with a feudal social climate that makes people regard sexual issues as something personal, shameful or secret that cannot be openly talked, North Korean women have insufficient information and understanding of those issues themselves. As a result, they tend to overlook the influence of sexual issues on their body and mind, or even have no sexual awareness at all. Furthermore, they may have arbitrary or distorted sexual awareness. In other words, they may have an attitude of using sex to achieve their goal. The typical examples are sexual favors provided by some women to the Party's male officials to join the Party or obtain preferential treatment, which were controversial even before the food crisis.

In the absence of sexual education and sexual awareness, the food crisis threatening survival accelerated the use of sex as means and made prostitution itself as a tool for survival. Such phenomenon began in areas of Rason Special City where Chinese were able to visit freely, spread to the port, the front of stations, and then the entire city. Clients of prostitutes were also mostly Chinese at first, but changed to ordinary residents and soldiers.

Let's look at sex education first. Even during the middle school period when the body changes rapidly and sexual awareness begins to be built, information and materials needed to contemplate sex issues are not provided at all at school and at home due to the collectivist curriculum that regards sex as a personal issue and the patriarchal atmosphere that treats sex issues as taboo. Then, the "women's education" in the curriculum of North Korea can be seen in the following testimonies.

"Girls take practice class for female students in the second year of junior high school, from the age of twelve or thirteen. We mainly learned how to sew clothes with a sewing machine, how to embroider, and how to cook, and so on. When I was an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, I learned about female hygiene, and there was only one page on sex. When I was learned, we thought it was so embarrassing, the menstruation thing, the man-woman relationship or something like that. Both men and women felt so embarrassed. People think that this is just something embarrassing, rather than think this is a common sense to learn scientifically. People just think so. There was a section called "Women and Hygiene," and in the last part, menstruation was addressed. Women physiologically spill blood once a month, which was written in Korean. It said which age foreign women begin it, what about the case of we North Koreans, this is not a disease. But there was nothing about menstrual cycle. There was only a single page just like that. We graduate from the middle school at the age of 18, and in terms of hygiene, that's all." (KYJ, a North Korean defector woman in her late 30s)

“They don’t teach contraception or anything like that, and as for hygiene, they say totally different thing. So, well, we have no common sense about that. We thought we would get pregnant if we just sit where a man once had sit.” (KSY, a North Korean refugee woman in her early 30s)

Next, let’s explore the causes and spread of prostitution. As mentioned above, there were sex favors for admission to the Party officials even before the food shortage, but after that, women began selling sex only for making a living for themselves and their family in a special economic zone, mainly in Rason Speical City, where Chinese freely came and went, and this later spread to ports, the front of stations and the entire city. In addition, the prostitutes were not limited to unmarried women to include women with kids, and sex buyers were expanded mostly from Chinese to soldiers and general residents. However, prostitution has declined considerably in the Kim Jong-un era due to strict and massive crackdowns.

The major problems of prostitution in North Korean society are that the use of sex as a tool for survival, which takes place in a state of weak awareness of sex and body protection, not only imposes mental pain and physical damage to women but also spreads various diseases. There is even a testimony, saying, “Previously, many women did that in front of stations, and there, they caught syphilis, went to hospital.” (KSL, a North Korean female defector in her late 40s). On top of the rapid rise in sexually transmitted diseases, the lack of contraceptive information and sexual awareness makes women mentally and physically sick.

Regarding this problem, the following testimony says, “There is no contraception in North Korea. We don't even know about birth control pills or condoms. So women go to hospital to terminate pregnancy. Some women do it even ten times. I heard that one of the women who are here after escaping from North Korea did it twelve times. Later, so many women get the surgery, so hospitals don’t do the surgery anymore, because the fertility rate is too low. There is nothing to eat and it is hard to live, so who on earth gives birth? I heard, in several years from now, the population of North Korea will decrease significantly, so women should have a baby, but who would do that? Even the children who were already born are starving to death. Anyway, people share bed so wives get pregnant, go to hospital to get an abortion. Before marriage, women have to undergo the D&C procedure to scrape off their baby, damaging their body.” (KSL, a North Korean defector woman in her late 40s).

### III. Growth Strategies: Escape from Power

As the penetration of market economy, *jangmadang* activities, information dissemination, and cross-border travels increase, North Korean women learned the “taste of money.” Along with this, the perception of women who were obsessed to survive also changed. “For a better tomorrow than today,” they not only accumulated private property, but also tried to escape from the control and system of power. That is, their growth strategies began emerging.

#### 1. Shift to market society and accumulation of private property

As is well known, the key operators of the North Korean market are women, so that it is often said that “If you scatter pebbles in the market, all to be hit are woman.” (KSY, a North Korean refugee woman in her early 30s) The foundation was laid down based on private income and the distribution of goods from home-based production and various sideline works, which were conducted widely and mostly by married women after the “August 3 People’s Movement for Consumer Goods Production” was initiated by the order of Kim



Jong-il in 1984. In the process, women were able to earn income based on their abilities as they produced and sold August 8 products they made of the byproducts from plants and farms. Most official sales channels were stores selling consumer goods to the people, while their informal sales channels were *jangmadang* and black markets, or illegal trading (KGC, a North Korean female refugee in her early 50s).

From the 1980s, the North Korean economic crisis reared its ugly head, as factories were operated abnormally and had difficulty in producing goods due to disruption of resources and raw materials supply. As of 2007, the August 3 People's Movement for Consumer Goods Production, implemented by the North Korean regime during the time with the aim of alleviating the shortage of consumer goods by using waste resources and idle manpower, contributed to the establishment of the market economy (secondary economy) that separately works from the planned economy and North Korea's shift to the market society. Another reason behind the changes was North Korea's military-first politics. As a militaristic stance was maintained under the military-first politics with the men-centered military and the war industry taking the lead in strengthening defense capability and overcoming the economic difficulties and food shortage, thereby building a strong and prosperous nation, daily economic activities were carried out entirely by women.

In this process, North Korean women formed and strengthened markets in North Korea and accumulated private property. The business activities for survival revitalized the market and accelerated North Korea's transition to market society. "Everything begins from the market. Prices start in the market, food prices rise and fall, all start in the market, which naturally leads to the market economy. I mean, socialism has now gone. That's what this means." (KSH 1, a North Korean defector woman in her early 30s). Accordingly, this enabled women, the key players of business, to accumulate their own private property. As women experienced the utility of the market and learned the "taste of money," they began pursuing a better future for their individual lives. In other words, they were not limited to survival strategies and adopted strategies for growth.

In the first place, North Korean women were neither active in nor favorable to doing business. Rather, they looked down on business in the planned economy and the feudal social culture. However, as they went out to start business for survival, and sought for a better future, their perception of business and market changed significantly. The decisive reason was that they learned the "taste of money." They came to recognize that the material of money was a great means that enabled them to develop their lives for a tomorrow better than today. Let's look at the testimonies on this aspect.

"At first, I was ashamed of doing business, and I was embarrassed because I did it for the first time, and I was also embarrassed because others could see me. So I hid my face when acquaintances passed away, because I thought doing business was something shameful, because I was educated so. But then, I learned the taste of money, so I went to the market grabbing products to sell." (KMH, a North Korean female defector in her early 60s)

"Before the Arduous March, people engaged in business were regarded as humble, and others pointed finger at them. Almost all did so. It was the year of 1996, the hardest time, and I managed to make a living with the help of my family. Until then, I felt embarrassed about doing business. So I said, 'How can I go out and do business?' However, at that time, everyone was in hard time, so people went out, involved in business, and as time went by, not running any business became more embarrassing. I found business interesting in *jangmadang*. I understood the notion of

money when goods were not supplied, I became to understand it after starting business. While doing business, people came to understand, ‘Ah, this is what money is.’ People said money could even make a father and a son do such bad thing to each other. As people got to know the taste of money, society changed altogether, everyone became ungenerous, tight with money, and from the moment, people turned to capitalism. By the way, as many people got to understand the notion of money, they became selfish, more people ignored their neighbors, and some even did weird things to make that money. Before that, when we didn’t value money, we just said, ‘Use this and eat that,’ as if things jointly belong to all of us, but as goods weren’t supplied sufficiently, everyone changed.” (KJJ, a North Korean female refugee in her mid-30s)

As such, women who had learned the taste of money through home-based work and production as sideline and marketplaces came to realize that money was a means not only for a simple survival but also for the growth and prosperity of themselves and their family. Meanwhile, the radical change of perception also expanded the mammonism rapidly. In addition, the larger scale of private property newly stratified North Korean society and intensified the desire for a better life. The external drives for this were the increase of travels and the acquisition and exchange of information for survival, and such change boosted the need for reform and openness.

On top of this, in the process of the shift to market society and information inflow, changes in the labor patterns and perception of North Korean women manifested themselves in an emphasis on material interests. In particular, in order to develop with the perception that they had to take responsibility for their lives, as well as in the man-dominated militaristic culture, women came to realize that pursuing material interests was far more beneficial than remaining loyal to power. Let's check the testimonies regarding this.

“Of course, all the social environments may have taken hold like this, but first of all, I thought, for me, there would be no way but to make money. For me, the only way I chose to overcome the situation was making money. Even if the Arduous March hadn’t occurred, I must have chosen that path. I had nothing. I had no power, I had no special abilities. I had no special skills, but it is said generosity comes from the storage. If you give others something, saying, ‘Take this,’ then everyone would love it. Like this, you can do and give anything to others only when you have something. So I thought I had to have something, and to do so, I needed money. That way, I could give something to others and get something corresponding to it from them. I have thought like this from long time ago.” (PYO, a North Korean defector woman in her late 20s)

“It is true that people came to my house and looked around and said, ‘Even the secretary of the municipal party branch cannot live like this.’ I looked richly in the eye of others. I decorated the entire house, furnished it with everything. So everyone came in and just watched. Anyway, I was pleased to see that, pleased to see even security officers begging me for money. It was pleasing and satisfying to see people lowering their head in front of me. When it comes to the marriage proposals to my children, in fact, it was difficult for my daughters to get married before the Arduous March, because at that time, people only regarded lineage as important. But after the Arduous March, as I started doing business, and my daughters have demonstrated their abilities in business, people think about how they will make a living and want to

get married with women who make a fortune. Now more people choose that. Parents still have an old-fashioned mindset. So, children persuade their parents, saying, 'Do you think the party membership certificate or lineage gives you money or rice?' If they say like this, parents will be persuaded." (KMH, a North Korean refugee woman in her early 60s)

## 2. Deviation from organizations and norms

The desire for a better life develops into an act to escape the control of power that maintains the existing social system. A typical pattern of such deviation was the weakening of loyalty to the absolute power, which was followed by the weakening of control over mobilization of residents and everyday lives in organizations. In particular, the deviation of residents who were hurt or dissatisfied due to their *seongbun*, or ascribed social status, became prominent. In addition, the deviation from organizations and norms enforced by the power, such as changes in sociocultural norms and the increase in various crimes, have been revealed to date in various aspects.

First, the trust of and loyalty to the absolute powers in the North Korean regime weakened significantly, compared to the Kim Il-sung regime. In this regard, KMH, a testimony says, "To be honest, I lived only for Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il in North Korea. We all lived for them and we died for them. But we knew nothing at all when Kim Il-sung was alive. From that time when Kim Jong-il took control, many people died, so all must have come to China. It was totally a 'bowl politics,' which means that Kim Jong-il governed the country only in the bowl, within his boundary. 'When will the bowl politics end?' Even security officers sit around and said, 'This bowl politics should be over.' When I heard that, I thought, 'Every security officer thinks that way.'" (North Korean refugee woman in her late 40s) "Kim Jong-il has done nothing. He has done whatever he wants to do since he was born. Kim Jong-il himself is a person like that, so that's why I think his personality is still expressed that way. He tries to move everything as he wants, and his subordinates are trying to please him. But people don't obey his commands. It's different from the old days when people bent at their waist and only said *yes, yes*. Now they just do their business on their own, their words do not correspond to their actions." (KSL, a North Korean female defector in her early 60s)

Despite the distrust of the regime, it is hard to identify direct resistance or popular uprisings in North Korean society. It is because the regime, which maintains the system mainly with the military and security agencies, directly exerts control over society. In other words, on top of the operation of the daily surveillance system, the damage inflicted back to resistance will be "strong and direct." In particular, the guilt-by-association system plays a critical role in preventing people with complaints from gathering together.

The next thing to explore is the weakening of the control over daily activities in organizations, which is the most representative control method. Since various social mobilizations and fundraising continued while no food rationing was provided to the general population, workers at factories or workplaces that were operated properly were involved in work for the August 3 Movement, or "just showing off and idling away before disappearing again." (KMH, a North Korean defector woman in her mid-60s) One of the reasons behind this was that they had to put priority on making a living, but more fundamentally, it was because self-reflection and social criticism improved as people looked back on their life of the past when they were loyal to organizations, and realized that such efforts did not help their development. Such self-reflection and criticism spread not only to individuals but also to families. Let's look at the testimonies regarding this.

“Why am I doing this like an idiot?’ Let me tell you how naïve I was. In 1996, people all became busy in their social life. Others left factories and took flight to make a living, but I was so stupid that during the day, I went to *jangmadang*, and at night, went to the factory and stood guard. I kept doing such things like a douche bag. I couldn't get my mind off of the factory, and thought, ‘How can I do such a thing,’ so I kept guard in the factory at night, and again, went to *jangmadang* to sell products during the day. Then I thought I was such an idiot, so I decided to focus on doing business. When I started business, all of my kids were ashamed of it and did nothing. They just ran errands in the market. So I said, ‘Don’t you have any ambition? If I were you, I would do my best to use this good opportunity to make a fortune. I’ll not touch your money at all, so keep all the money you earn.’ I also said, ‘The money for your marriage was all stolen, so from now on, prepare for your marriage with what you will earn.’ This way, their money was not spent at all, which allowed them to enjoy earning money. The pleasure of raising more money.” (KMH, a North Korean female defector at her early 60s)

Along with the shift to market society, the “desire for freedom” spreads. In addition, discrimination by *seongbun*, as well as resistance to and deviations from control grow. In particular, the changes in the lowest social status of “hostile class,” which were excluded from political power, becomes prominent. As the market develops, hostile class residents have sometimes demonstrated that “making money is a way to success” and that money can buy both power and honor. (PYO, a North Korean defector woman in her late 20s) Above all, the perceptual changes and deviations are widely identified from those who suffered due to their *seongbun* in admission to school, job placement, and marriage. In addition, those with relatives in other countries such as Japan, China, and South Korea, who were disdained in the past, are now aspired as people witness them receiving support from those relatives.

In the sociocultural aspect, the patterns of the dissolution of patriarchal norms is detected. For example, if one is a single mother or divorced, she found herself difficult to live there because of a lot of gossip. But as time has passed by since the mid-1990s, women have become “more brazen.” (KMS, a North Korean female refugee in her mid-30s) The social pathological deviation is a rise in fraud and diverse crimes. In particular, as women take the lead in the market economy, it is said that about 80% of economic offenses are women, while robbers and murderers are mostly men. (KMH, a North Korean female defector in her mid-60s) The deviation from various norms and controls has not been reduced, but has been prominent nationwide, so now the tendency of making a living even though violating law for it” is prevalent in North Korean society, which indicates the “violation of law that has become common in daily lives.”

### 3. Marriage and Divorce

#### 1) Calculation in love and marriage

More North Korean women are avoiding marriage registration and selecting late marriage and cohabiting. When married, women have to assume responsibility for everything in their family. Unlike the past, when the *seongbun* and the family circle were considered in marriage, the primary criterion for marriage for North Korean women is the economic capability and potential growth of men. However, there are not so many men who fulfill the criterion. Therefore, more unmarried women avoid marriage.

In addition, the number of couples with an older wife and a younger husband has increased. As for the couples, women can be relatively independent from their spouse or in family relations. Smart men prefer to live with a woman good at business, even though she already has two children. When men are discharged from the military, they would be usually in their late 20s to around 30 years old, but smart women with experience and abilities in business are usually older than those men. Therefore, men want to live with women who are older than themselves and have experience and ability of life. Due to this tendency, North Korean society calls now the "Era of Lee Chan," naming after an elite man who married an older woman whom he loved in times of the regime establishment. According to this social change, men often live with women who are five, six, or more years older than them. It is also said that there are more cases in which men get married to women who have even two kids. And as North Korean women bear the heavier burden of supporting for their family, more single women have chosen to live with their partner without registering marriage to the authorities. As women, especially wives or mothers, are responsible for making a living, it has become more notable that single women avoid marriage for their own life and development.

On the other hand, since a large number of men are assigned to collective services for maintaining the system, such as the military, the munitions industry, and the Construction Storm Troops, the number of men in civilian society is far less than that of women. For this reason, men usually get married when discharged from the army, while there are more women who are not married even at the age order than the marriageable age because there are few eligible men who meet their desired criteria.

## 2) Divorce and avoidance of marriage registration

divorces led by women have continued increasing in North Korean society to emerge as a social issue. A rise in divorces is a phenomenon that appears in the process of survival as one of the aspects of family dissolution, but its characteristic also signifies the declaration of independence of North Korean women that "I will no more endure unfair treatment in my marriage life." Above all, this shows signs that a patriarchal marital relationship, which have been overlooked so far, has burst out, rather than that livelihood itself is a decisive reason for divorce. As financial difficulties have intensified marital conflicts, women no longer endure husband's violence or affairs, which they had stood in the past, and this will be expressed in a form of divorced. For example, when husbands wield violence against their wife in marital conflicts caused by financial problems, more wives, unlike in the past, choose divorce without tolerating such violence

What is worth noting here is the perception formed among North Korean women that "I will no longer remain as a victim as I did in the past." Even under the contested divorce system, where one cannot easily divorce, the feudal view of couples that once married, women must endure the faults of their husband is now changing from the bottom. In the past, it was impossible for a divorced couple to live separately in the same village. However, it is said that now, people do not give greatly different glance at a divorced couple, even though they live separately in the same village. As women's economic power and voice have grown, and incompetent men have still been claiming patriarchal superiority, villagers became more lenient toward divorced women. Most of all, the awareness of not tolerating physical violence has been raised. Unlike in the past, there have been an increasing number of cases that women put themselves against their husbands when they quarrel. Socially, divorce on the ground of a husband's violence has become more common. Women now think that since they go out and do business to make a living while standing poverty, they cannot maintain a

marriage if they are beaten by their husband during a fight.

Meanwhile, as the social atmosphere has changed, it becomes easier to get a divorce than in the past. In particular, the court approves divorce on the ground that in the cases of a husband's continuous violence or affairs, it is difficult to maintain family life. Nevertheless, it is said that since North Korean society is male-centeredness, as for the contested divorce, the opinions of men, head of the household, are more reflected in the ruling. In particular, North Korean refugee women testify that the North Korean court puts more emphasis on the divorce suit filed by a husband than that by a wife. Such male-centered divorce rulings are also the reason why women avoid marriage and seek a new perspective of -the relationship between a man and a woman. With increased demands for divorce across North Korea, the authorities once took measures to forcefully deport those who would get divorced.

However, North Koreans do not take the government's threat seriously, because they don't think they have to report marriage or divorce to the authorities. More people now think that they can live together without marriage registration and may separate from each other if they are not compatible. For this reason, more married couples do not register marriage, and after several months or years of marriage, just separate when living together is hard or they hate each other.

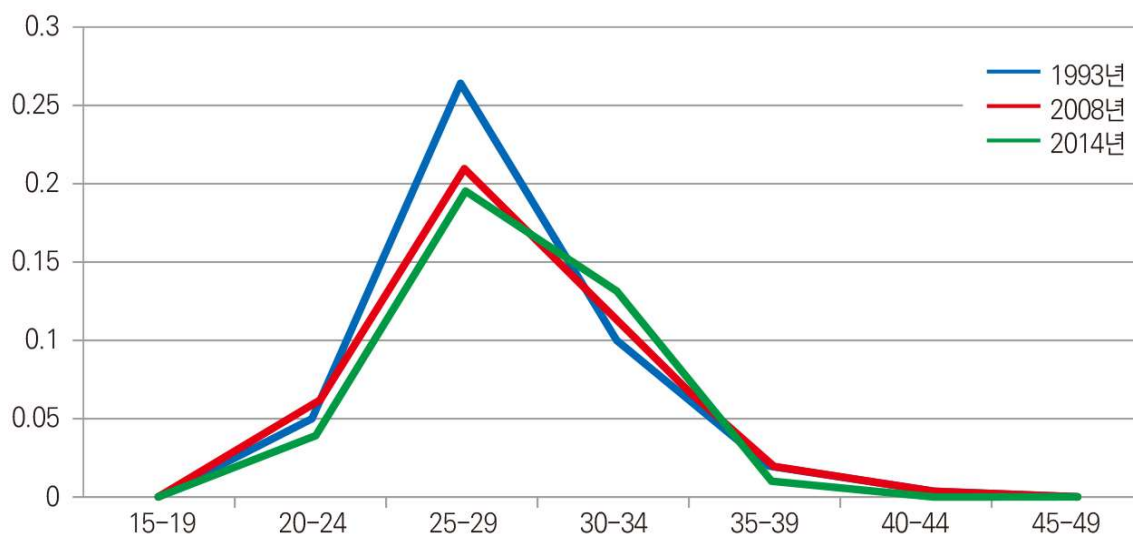
#### 4. Fertility control for a better life: lower fertility rates and reluctance to give birth

The statistical figure that shows changes in North Korean society and women most obviously is the fertility rate. The North Korean Population Census in 1993 and 2008 as well as the survey of 10,035 married North Korean women aged 15 to 49, jointly conducted by the United Nations Population Fund and the North Korean Central Bureau of Statistics in 2014, identify a continuous decline in the fertility rate of fertile women. Let's look at the birth rate and tendency in North Korea as of 2014. In the year, the birth history of married women in North Korea can be identified through the total fertility rate (TFR), birth age, birth interval, and average number of births and children both alive and dead.

First, let's examine the total fertility rate. In 2014, the total fertility rate of married women aged 15-49 in North Korea stood at 1.89 per capita. The number was 2.13 in the 1993 census, and 2.01 in the 2008 census. This shows that North Korea's fertility rate has decreased below the population replacement level over the past three decades, with the birth rate remaining low. As for birth history, the average childbirth age of married women at the age between 15 and 49 in North Korea was 29.0 years in 2014. The figure stood at 28.6 in the 1993 census and 28.7 in the 2008 census, which indicates reproductive ability has not changed less than the fertility rate. As the main reason, it can be pointed out that in the birth rate, most births were given by women aged 25-29 in the past, but the age range of mothers was gradually expanded to include those at the age of 30 to 34. In other words, late marriages and late childbirths increased.

Such a decline in the fertility rate can be identified in Figure 1 showing the fertility rate by age of married women in North Korea from 1993 to 2014.

Figure 1. Fertility rate by age of married women in North Korea in 1993-2014



Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Population Fund, “Socioeconomic Population and Health Survey of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea 2014,” Pyongyang: Central Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Population Fund, 2015, p. 52.

Figure 1 shows the birth rate by age in 1993, 2008, and 2014 in North Korea. As seen in this figure, along with the above-mentioned tendency of late marriage, married women in North Korea gave a childbirth mostly at the age of 25-29 and 30-34. This can be evaluated as a characteristic North Korean women's childbirth. In other words, it can be inferred that in North Korea where most women get pregnant naturally, most childbirths are concentrated in mothers' age between 25 and 34.

On the other hand, the average first childbirth age of the survey is 24.9 years old. There is no childbirth given by any teenage mother, but it should be taken into account that the survey was conducted officially by the North Korean authorities and therefore such cases may have not just been identified. The birth interval seems to be adequate. The ratio of those with high-risk of a less than 18-month interval was a quite low level of 4.4%. The average number of births was 1.74 per capita, and the average number of children alive is 1.71. Sixty percent of North Korean women at the age of 35 or older have two children on average. The number of children dead averaged 0.03, which seems to result from lower infant mortality due to alleviated economic difficulties and increased provision of nutrition.

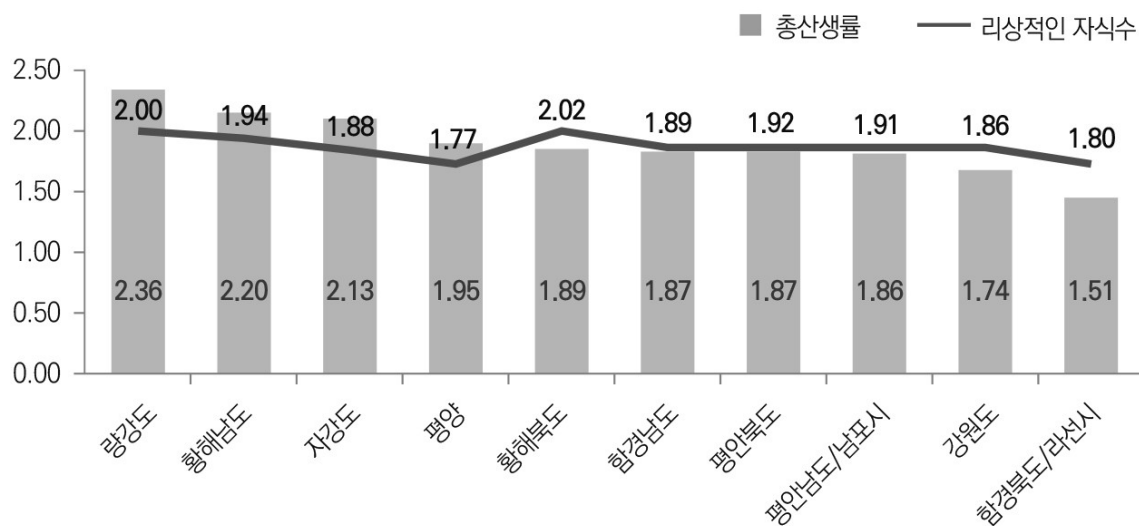
The next thing to be noted is avoidance of childbirth for a better life, along with eased financial difficulties. The North Korean regime, which lost a significant portion of its population during the Arduous March, adopted its policy to encourage childbirth in earnest from the 2000s. It has been implementing the maternity protection policy by providing longer pregnant and maternity leaves. However, in a situation where most mothers do business to provide for their families, longer legal maternity leave has little effect. As a result, North Korean women who struggle to make a living for their existing families avoid pregnancy and often choose an abortion even if they get pregnant. In addition, a couple, both of whom have to go outside to earn a livelihood, tend to avoid pregnancy and childbirth due to business or childrearing.

However, the avoidance of childbirth due to economic hardship in North Korea is now changing to the avoidance of childbirth “for a better life,” as financial difficulties have been relieved somehow. More people now think that they have to have one or two children and raise them well in a decent environment, rather than having a lot of children and struggling to provide for them. Such change is also evident among North Korean defectors

who have recently entered South Korea. Most North Korean refugees want to have one or two children. Notably, 10 to 20% of North Koreans who defected during the Kim Jong-un regime testify that they do not want kids. In particular, many young North Korean defectors in their 20s and 30s of the most fertile age group, have no children or wish to have one. Such responses were made since most of North Koreans, who left the country recently, are in their 20s and 30s, and accordingly many younger generations' opinions were reflected.

It is difficult to identify a significant change in the recent average childbirth age of North Korean women, compared to 20 years ago. However, differences are becoming apparent within the group of married women. Highly-educated married women with urban roots of high-income families tend to have few children.<sup>9</sup> Typically, the survey shows that highly educated married women of a high-income family living in Pyongyang had few children. When looking at the actual conditions of childbirth in North Korea as of 2014, there are distinct differences by education and region. In terms of education level, university and vocational school graduates have a lower fertility rate than high and middle school graduates. Regionally, fertility rates in rural areas are higher than in cities. Let's look at the difference between the total birth rate and ideal number of children by region in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Difference between per-capital fertility rate of married women and ideal number of children in North Korea (2014)



<캡션>

총산생률: Fertility rate

이상적인 자식수: Ideal number of children

(아래 지역명 순서대로)

Ryanggang

South Hwanghae

Chagang

Pyongyang

North Hwanghae

South Hamgyong

North Pyongan

<sup>9</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, United Nations Population Fund, "Socioeconomic Population and Health Survey of Democratic People's Republic of Korea 2014," pp. 52-56.



South Pyongan/Nampo

Kangwon

North Hamgyong/Rason

Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Population Fund, "Socioeconomic Population and Health Survey of Democratic People's Republic of Korea 2014," p. 60.

In terms of the total fertility rate by region shown in Figure 2, Ryanggang Province with the widest rural areas has the highest rate of 2.36, while Rason, a special economic zone with a large portion of wealthy population, has the lowest rate of 1.51. On the other hand, in the survey of married women in North Korea on the ideal number of kids, North Hwanghae with many rural areas recorded the highest number of 2.02, while Pyongyang marked the lowest number of 1.77 per married woman.

In other words, it can be evaluated that the fertility rate of women in urban areas with a developed market economy and high economic standards is relatively lower than in low-developed rural areas. It can be interpreted that this reflects modern women's view of children that they want to have as many children as they can be responsible and raise them well in a satisfactory living environment. As a typical example, women in Pyongyang responded the lowest ideal number of children.

Next, as North Korean women's activities have increased in markets and managed the family economy, preference of a daughter to a son has grown in North Korean society. Since North Korea basically has a historical tradition based on the equality of socialism, son preference in the country is not as strong as in South Korea. Nevertheless, as North Korea has experienced economic difficulties and shifted to market society, preference of a girl to a boy has become prominent. When asked which one they prefer between a son and a daughter to North Koreans who recently left the country, 40% of respondents answer that they don't care, 40% say that they like daughters, while less than 20% of respondents say they prefer a son.

On the other hand, preference for a daughter or a son differs according to respondents' gender. Males have a relatively strong preference of a son, while a relatively high portion of women prefer a daughter or think they don't care. There are two main reasons why women in North Korea prefer daughters compared to men. One reason is the idea that a daughter can be a good partner for a mother in North Korean society with strong patriarchal characteristics. The other reason must be daughters' higher economic contribution to the family than sons. On the contrary, traditional son preference has remained in North Korean men than in their female counterparts. This is because women have changed significantly amid North Korea's socioeconomic transition, while men, who had social advantage in gender relations, show a slow change in their perception.

## 5. Planning of escape from North Korea and execution of the plan

North Korean women who feel that they can no longer see any hope and future in the North Korean regime have a desire to live in a new world when obtaining information about China and South Korea. Of course, only a few with strong willingness or motives, as well as personal connections and money, flee North Korea. Nevertheless, the number of defectors is steadily increasing, and the desire for a new world is growing with the need for the opening of the regime. Particularly noteworthy is that the characteristics of the reasons behind defection after the Arduous March are changing qualitatively, compared to the period before the march. Until 2000 when survival itself was at an absolute risk, most defectors left North Korea to simply return after obtaining food or fled the country for survival. However, from

2000 after the North Korean regime overcame the urgent crisis, most refugees left the country with the longing and desire for a better society and a better life. Let's see the testimony on this.

“Basically, you tasted all the sweets and the bitters in your hometown, aren't you? It's where you lived. There, you become attached to people, you even become attached to broken dishes. It's not as easy as it sounds to abandon all the people, all the things, and all the land you are attached to. The common reasons for North Koreans to leave their country are, first of all, it was difficult to make a living. Severe food shortage was the primary reason. Also, everyone has their own excuse that they have to leave. You know, some people are good, others are not. Some people may be criminals from the viewpoint of North Korea, they cannot build their career, they are taken into custody when they are found out, some are even killed. However, the most portion of defectors came to South Korea due to extreme food shortage. For me, I can't advance my career due to my *seongbun*. I can't get married as I like, can't get married to whom I want. The fact that I can't advance my career broke my heart. This means, as a human being, all hopes are shattered. And I am a woman. For men and women, as you know, the man-women relationship is one of the most important things. However, I was so hurt because I wasn't able to get married to the type of men I wanted. In this land, I am a person who does not deserve to live, and even if I keep living, when my kids and grand kids are born, they will obviously have to experience the same pain. So I didn't want to live in that land. So I just hoped to get married to a foreigner in a foreign land and have a baby there. I wanted to bear a child in a country where people can eat as much as they like. So I left there without getting married.” (KYJ, a North Korean defector woman in her late 30s)

In general, the basis for the formation of the desire to escape from the North Korean regime and the direct reason that influenced defectors' decision was economic problems. Especially, in border areas, more people fled North Korea because their economic conditions were worse than that of Pyongan Province including Pyoungyang, the key area of power. Those areas also have regional conditions that facilitate defectors' escape. However, most of all, focus should be put on the fact that the information facilitating the comparison of their country with others, such as the information that China and South Korea are better off, has flowed more into the region than into other inland areas. Regarding this, a North Korean refugee woman said that she sought ways to escape the country while listening to others' words, like, “Because China is next to us, we knew Chinese eat rice even if they are poor,” and “All Chinese went to South Korea to make money.” In this case, North Korean defectors often work with escape brokers and Chinese traders. (KMS, a North Korean female defector in her mid-30s).

Another major reason that triggers escape is relations with family, mainly with parents and siblings. In this case, one of the family members first flee North Korea and then suggests and supports the family's defection through a broker, a Chinese merchant, or an acquaintance. After 2010, defection helped by a family member who left North Korea first prevailed. In particular, an increased number of women left North Korea for the future of their children. Divorce also stimulates defection from North Korea. Even if divorce has increased in North Korean society, prejudice against divorced women still persists, usually hurting their heart. For this reason, some decide to escape from North Korea. Divorced men are not significantly discriminated if they get married right away after divorce and are

competent, while in women's cases, there are still rumors spreading. Another reason for escape is *seongbun*. In North Korean society, residents from the hostile class seek and attempt to escape from North Korea while suffering from food shortage and learning about information from overseas, because they are discriminated against in all aspects, such as admission to school, employment, marriage, and social life. Let's see the testimony in this regard.

“My tainted backgrounds always follow my name. They say, She makes a fortune, She has a lot of money, or Her father is a political offender. They talk about such everything. So, that's the most painful thing in North Korean society. I really wanted to earn as much money as I liked. Even when I see someone I like, such things hurt me most, because my father is a political offender. In North Korean society, being a political offender is indescribably worst thing to put you into the lowest class, which means your family is an unsalvageable trash.” (PYO, a North Korean female defector in her late 20s)

A North Korean refugee woman, who failed her first love because of her *seongbun*, witnessed a lot of deaths during the Arduous March, and finally fled North Korea, testifies as follows:

“So many people died, and as time went by, I didn't want to live there. So I decided to leave now. There, I can't get married as I like, and it was a scary place when I think about my children and grandchildren. I felt like I did something bad to my kids. Once I drank with a bowl because I couldn't sleep. I am not a good drinker, but at that time, drank so much that my head was spinning. At that time I couldn't sleep without alcohol. One day my mother told me that I had acted out when drunk, like, Why did you bring me to this world? Where is the rat poison? I'll take it to die. My mother kept me all night, staying up all night. So I asked her to leave this country.” (KYJ, a North Korean defector woman in her late 30s)

North Koreans tend to think to themselves a lot and act quickly to leave the country, but most of them cannot easily decide even if they desperately want to leave since North Koreans grow up and live in severely monitored and controlled environments and conditions. The testimony on this is as follows:

“Because they grow up in such an environment and such conditions, they think this way and that way, and during the time, they sometimes miss good luck. If they think about something, they think about it relentlessly because they are timid, and once they make a decision, they want to do it right away, but they feel it hard to make a decision. (KMH, a North Korean refugee woman in her mid-60s)

Therefore, as the number of North Korean defectors has increased and overseas information has been disseminated by them within North Korea, more women now want or attempt to escape from the North Korean regime. They are key players who have potential for changes in the North Korean regime by constantly exploring and executing growth strategies for a better tomorrow, while implementing survival strategies to live today in the current North Korean society.

IV. Conclusion: For a Gender-Equal, Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula

The survival strategies of North Korean women are to maintain the survival of themselves and their families, while sometimes compromising and sometimes escaping from the action of power. Its typical patterns are expressed as austerity and extreme labor, maximization of individual networks, avoidance of childbirth and prostitution. However, as such efforts to survive are not recognized due to unequal gender policies and it is hard to see hopes for tomorrow, North Korean women devise growth strategies. In other words, they seek to deviate from the action of power and establish and implement their own plan for growth. This is typically shown in their lead in the shift to market society, accumulation of private property, deviations from organizations and norms, dissolution of patriarchal norms, changes in marriage and divorce, birth control, and search for defection and escape from North Korea.

Then, what are the challenges of South Korean society to develop social changes along with the changes in the perception and behavior of North Korean women into peace and gender equality on the Korean Peninsula, or to “establish a gender-equal peace regime on the Korean Peninsula”? What challenges do the South Korean women's community tackle to minimize the “impoverishment” and “destruction of sisterhood” in South and North Korea, which are expected to emerge during the process of unification? The overall solutions are as follows.

First, it is needed to broaden the understanding of the gender structure of North Korean society and North Korean women. It is necessary to look back on the suffering of East German women and the ordeals of the German female community. They were degraded to the third-class citizens following West German residents and East German men, and at the same time, experienced and resisted serious individual and social conflicts for their survival and identity, during the rapid changes of East Germany and the process of German reunification, for more than 10 years thereafter. The biggest problem was that West German women were too ignorant of East German women's history of struggling, perception, and behavior. After more than 10 years of discord and conflict, women in East and West Germany have been setting new rules of conduct. In other words, they are striving to start all over again by “acknowledging the difference and approaching first to know each other,” “clarifying the different meanings of the concepts they use,” and “understanding differences before confirming their identity.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, it is essential to start modifying South Korean men's distorted perception of North Korean women and examining the possible situation of the future in which North Korean women may be regarded as a spouse for immigration marriage seekers. For example, “The myth that North Korean women have the unchanged image of traditional women,” cherished by South Korean men, is an “imagined myth” created by the patriarchal powers of South and North Korea. The North Korean female cheering squad seen through the media are members of the groups that benefit from North Korean powers, selected after the verification of their loyalty, and have internalized the femininity of North Korean powers in the country's power class. Furthermore, some aspects of them, which were reproduced in the lack of understanding of the North Korean regime and from the patriarchal viewpoint of South Korean media, drew excessive attention and were exaggerated for the sake of arousing interests.

Such a viewpoint could partially change as the exchanges and traffic between the two Koreas increase in the process of establishing a gender-equal peace regime on the Korean

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<sup>10</sup> Given that East and West Germany were societies with higher economic power and citizenship than North and South Korea even under the Cold War system, the level and breadth of such risks on the Korean peninsula when exploring a specific unification system are expected to far exceed people's imagination. For South Korean female community's perceptions of and concerns about this, see the source book of the Symposium for Women's Peaceful Reunification (Women Making Peace, 2005).

Peninsula, but it should be noted that this may become a social issue without being properly recognized. If the North Korean regime changes rapidly and the pursuit for visits and integration between South and North Korea begins in earnest, a combination of North Korean women's survival strategies and South Korean men's preferences of them will encourage many South Korean immigration marriage seeker to turn their eye to North Korean women. Therefore, it is necessary to correct the distorted view of North Korean women so that it can serve as one of the basic perspectives for establishing a gender-equal peace regime on the Korean peninsula that allows the mutual prosperity of North and South Korean residents. Consideration is also required into the increase of personal exchanges between the two Korea and sudden changes.

Third, it is needed for the South Korean female community to shape their perception of North Korean women and examine the expected problems in an attempt to overcome the "impoverishment of women" and establish a gender-equal society. Pressed by the underdevelopment of research into North Korean women, male-centered arrangement of political, academic, and media power, and the patriarchal characteristics of the North Korean regime and its policy on gender hierarchy of power, the South Korean women's circle had hard time in properly organizing reunification movement from the perspective of gender. Most of all, in the community, which is busy fighting against the patriarchal nature of South Korean society, issues on North Korean women or reunification were rarely been recognized, and are still so. Just thinking about these issues made people feel stuffy and heavy, so they were only brought up from time to time while they were just put aside for the most of the time.

In the process, exchanges between South and North Korean women were promoted since it was impossible to completely sever relations with North Korean women as members of shared society stipulated in the Constitution. However, some South Korean women who had participated in the process or who had contacted North Korean women may have abandoned hope for solidarity with them since all North Korean female community remained loyal to the Supreme Leader and claimed that they were enjoying the gender equality and social welfare system established by the leader for the liberation of North Korean women. Particularly, some women scholars who met with senior female party leaders in North Korea recognized "North Korean women as ones whom they had to teach feminism."

However, the "transcendental judgment" of regime-protective remarks made by the women in the North Korean power class during such official meetings could pose a huge risk in the process of seeking for future exchanges and shared growth of inter-Korean women. It is urgent to learn lessons from the trial and error of old West German women towards the old East German female world. When South Korean women approach their North Korean counterparts as "feudal and passive victims" or "those who should be enlightened," the mutual distrust in the South and North Korean female communities will destroy the sisterhood of the socially underprivileged, and act as a lethal poison to the establishment of a gender-equal peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

Fourth, it is necessary to start a concrete calculation of "whether South Korean society and women can bear the cost of reunification." Reunification costs include risk management costs, institutional integration costs, and economic reconstruction costs that South Korea has to shoulder for reunification. In 2003, United Kingdom-based Fitch, one of the world's top three credit rating agencies, announced that South Korea's reunification cost would total 200 to 500 billion dollars (about 240 to 600 trillion won). In October 2006, Goldman Sachs estimated that between 770 billion dollar (about 855 trillion won) and 3.55 trillion dollars (about 3,940 trillion won) of reunification cost will be spent for a decade after the reunification, depending on the labor productivity gap and the timing of reunification.

Can South Korea afford this massive amount of unification cost?

Although this issue was not revealed to the outside as it was eclipsed by North Korean nuclear issues, it has become a hot issue among South Korean political leaders and in the society as a whole. The North Korean economy is still tough, and the North Korean regime does not have the economic capacity to control its transition into market society. Therefore, in a situation where the income structure has been further bipolarized and the socioeconomic hierarchy among the public has been structuralized in the process of “neoliberal globalization,” this issue must be a daunting challenge to South Korean society that should help North Korea to open and reform the regime.

At this point, putting pressure on the North Korean regime to induce its collapse and replacement increases the possibility of direct intervention by the state power of the United States, China, and Japan into the internal affairs of the Korean Peninsula. In addition, it will explosively arouse issues that are difficult to solve at the democracy level on the Korean Peninsula, such as expenditures required for social turmoil and the reunification process, expected social side effects, and confrontation among forces with different political and economic interests in South Korea. Most of all, such massive expenditures should be covered by taxpayers’ money. However, companies in South Korea will not be willing to pay those high political costs in a situation where they should strive to survive in the global economy. In addition, as bipolarization of wealth intensifies, it will not be easy for ordinary residents, workers and farmers to bear the costs.

Furthermore, as more women are engaged in economic activities and their desire and willingness for economic activities are being taken for granted in South Korea, the women who are working in temporary positions of a wide range of sectors may lose those humble jobs on a large scale. In particular, low-class women who are responsible for family survival may experience greater suffering. What stance will the South Korean society and female community take on this? Should this be left to be determined by the global standard of labor flexibility and the market logic of low income?

Fifth, and as a result, we put stress on the “economic democracy” and the “right to social distribution of wealth” that can keep the structure of “permanent positions for male workers and temporary positions for female workers,” which is taken granted under the “patriarchal myth” of South Korean society, from taking hold. In the current situation, it is inevitable that many ordinary people on the Korean Peninsula have to bear the considerable amount of unification costs and cope with subsequent confusions. Therefore, what should be noted here is that the “the amount of reunification cost depends on what kind of reunification will be achieved.” South and North Korean political leaders could reduce military expenditures, and instead, invest in economic development to narrow the gap between the two Koreas, and develop economic democracy to realize the “social distribution of wealth through labor.” If the two Koreas are reunited in such a situation, the reunification costs will decrease. But if the two choose a radical unification, the cost will be huge. In addition, if the two are reunited without the development of democracy and the social consensus structure in South Korea, the cost of social chaos will be beyond imagination. Moreover, its impact will be delivered earlier and harder to socially underprivileged women than anyone else.

Therefore, laborers, who have to serve as the key players to directly solve the problems that may arise in the reunification process, and could be the victim or the beneficiary in the developments of the process, have to discuss the “economic democracy in Korean society” and the “way and purpose of reunification.” If women who pursue peace and gender-equal development do not actively respond in the process, they could be excluded from the exploration process of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and a completely alienated when any form of establishment of a peace regime or integration takes hold.

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