

Marketisation and Appearance of New Female Main Agents

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1. Preface

As the market spread in North Korea, changes have occurred in the lifestyle and consciousness of the people. In this regard, those who studied North Korea became interested in marketisation of and social changes in North Korea. In this paper, I intended to examine multi-layered aspects of change caused by marketisation, such as changes in social class, changes in daily lifestyle, reorganization of space, changes in the people's consciousness, and so on.¹ Among the social changes occurred by marketisation, the researchers paid keen attention to change in women. Since the main agents of market activities were women, they were especially interested in the changes that occurred with regard to women. As a result, more researchers attempted to review how consciousness or lifestyle of North Korean women changed and what impacts did such change have onto the social aspects, especially onto the patriarchal order and structure among other aspects of the North Korean society.²

It is well known that the market has expanded in North Korean society recently and that women are the main players of the market. According to the study by Hong Min, et. al., there are 404 official markets in North Korea and about 1,092,992 merchandise counters

¹ Park Heejin, "Marketisation of North Korea and Changes in Urban Space: Relationship between public and private spaces", the North Korean Studies, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2008; Kim Byungro, "Marketisation of North Korea and Changes in Class Structure", the Modern North Korean Studies, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2013; Jang Insook and Choi Daeseok, "Changes in Politics and Society and Consciousness of North Koreans in the Kim Jungeun Period", the North Korean Studies, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2014; Kang Dongwan, "State of Social Changes in North Korea in Kim Jungeun Period and Survey on Consciousness of North Koreans", Journal of North Korean Studies, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2014; Kim Byungro, "Recent Changes in North Korean Society Observed Through Interviews with North Korean Defectors", the North Korean Studies Society Bulletin, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2014; etc.

² Jung Eunchan, "Changes in North Korean Women's Economic Role Caused by Introduction of Market", the Global Regional Studies Papers, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2019; Cho Youngjoo, "Marketisation of North Korea and Gender Politics", the North Korean Studies Society Bulletin, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2014; Kwak Yeonsil, "Reconstitution of North Korean Women's Identity after 'the March of Ordeal'", Doctoral Thesis, North Korean Studies Department, Ewha Womans University, 2020; etc.

that do business in those markets.³ And it is estimated that there are 1,099,052 persons who work at the official markets, including merchants and market management personnel, which amounts to about 4.4~4.6% of the entire North Korean population.⁴ When considered that the persons who do business in most of the merchandise counters are women, it can be deemed that the number of women who work at the markets is equivalent to the number of merchandise counters, which will be at least 1,092,992. In this paper, it was estimated that there are about 7,356,183 persons who can engage in businesses when assumed that the women in between 20 to 65 years of age were able to engage in businesses in the official markets, and 15% of them are actually engaged in business.⁵ The North Korean women engage in businesses in other places than the official markets. They engage in business near the official market building illegally and moving from one region to another. Thus, it can be deemed that a greater number of people than what was estimated are engaged in business. We can assume as such, when we review the result of the study by Jang Yongsuk, et. al. (2015), which found that 76.7% of the North Koreans who defected from North Korea and participated in the study in 2015 had engaged in business.⁶

The North Korean women are experiencing different phenomena from the past in the socio-economic environment of North Korea which has been changed. It seems that they can express their opinions within their families using resources and information they acquired through the markets while they were actively engaged in activities in the markets. Also, many phenomena that can be discovered through many North Korean women are clearly distinguished from those could be discovered in the period before marketisation and placed on the continuous lines of the experiences before marketisation and the socio-economic context. In this paper, I intend to study the meaning of various aspects of North Korean women's experiences from the perspective of composition of female main agents.

³ Hong Min, et. al., *Information on Markets in North Korea: Focused on the present situation of the official markets*, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2016, p. 31.

⁴ Hong Min, et. al., *Information on Markets in North Korea: Focused on the present situation of the official markets*, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2016, p. 32.

⁵ Hong Min, et. al., *Information on Markets in North Korea: Focused on the present situation of the official markets*, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2016, p. 33.

⁶ Jang Yongsuk, et. al., *North Korean Social Changes 2015: marketisation, digitization and social differentiation*. Seoul: Institute for Peace and Unification Studies Seoul National University, 2015, p. 98.

2. Feminist Approach to Turning Women into Main Agents

The issue of main agent is a vital issue in the feminism politics. The concern on female main agent is a vital issue, because it is the purpose of disassembling the order that oppresses women and the answer to the question of how we will explain the identity of the entity categorized as 'woman.' Feminism that has been discussing about identity and independence of women no longer considers the main agent as a term that is fixed or unchanged.⁷ In this regard, Butler saw that the independence of act: does not assume the actor in linear fashion and the main agent of act is formed only through the act; that the main agent is not an entity that has an original essence but an entity that creates argument within argument; and acts by speaking under the context that gives a new meaning to the words.⁸ Such perspective and discussion of Butler on the female main agents is important because they emphasize the importance of the acts of women themselves, not the essential existence as women, because the meaning of a woman's act can be revealed when the context under which an act is made is investigated, and because they can reveal 'women', not the essential woman or simplified woman and explain the inconsistencies exposed from choices and acts of women. And the process itself can also reveal the dynamics that reproduce and transform the gender order.

Female main agents, turning women into main agents and independence, are closely related to discussion on identity and interpretation of female experience. Until now, the gender study steadily attempted to overcome the dichotomy of structure and act in interpreting the experiences of women. The discussions on structure and act show differences under individual context, but what is common is that they have interest in how structure and act are mediated and organized individually, not giving priority to any one of structure and act. Especially with regard to gender organization, they emphasize the fact that gender is socially organized and it is also the act of the actors at the same time. It can be interpreted that gender is sometimes organized by the plans of authority or the structural context, but can be produced and reproduced by the actions of members

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Paju: Munhakdongne Publishing Group, 2008, pp. 87-88.

⁸ Cho Hyunjoon, *Gender is Parody*, Seoul: Hyeonamsa, 2014, p. 11.

of society. Furthermore, they say that gender does not actually exist but it is performed. The discussion about performativity means that the essence does not exist but is simply performed, and its meaning is reorganized through repetition, imitation and parody in the course of performance. Butler pointed out that the identity is not given but simply performed, and the order is created and fixed through repeated action and positioned as the social truth. Such concept of identity causes us to be interested in context and effect of how such performance is made.⁹ That is why we must be interested more in context and effect of carrying out such performance when we try to understand the changes of consciousness and experience of North Korean women caused by marketisation. According to such performance, any experience or change of North Korean women cannot exist being severed from the past. Also, we can examine the meanings of contradictory points that appear in female experience. It means that experience and action of women can reveal the multi-layered meaning of each experience and practice, not dichotomous interpretation that they either topple or maintain the existing order. 'Patriarchal bargains' concept of Deniz Kandiyoti can explain such act of female main agents. Kandiyoti suggested 'patriarchal bargains' as a concept that explains the acts of women under the patriarchal order. Kandiyoti said that women's strategy that makes selections under the given conditions was patriarchal bargains.¹⁰ It is a concept that asks for recognition of women's independence under the patriarchal order and pays attention to the fact that women are not in the position of victims unconditionally. And by including the method by which women exclusively possess the existing order, the patriarchal bargains concept shows its interest in revealing the points that maintain and transform the patriarchal order.

Discussion on such action, patriarchal bargains, etc. suggests that what is important is not explaining the experiences of North Korean women by simplifying the experiences using the methods of resistance or adaption, but revealing the multi-layered nature of the meaning of such act. Based on such discussion, we can understand the meaning of newly discovered actions and selections of female main agents.

⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, 1991, p.24.

¹⁰ Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender & Society*. Vol. 2. NO. 3. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

3. Changes in Social Relations and Acquisition of Individuality

The identity of 'me' is a very important concept in terms of composition of main agent. Identity is an essence that becomes a meaning through preference, belief and attitude, as well as the symbols of lifestyle and it is formed by discursive-performative.¹¹ This means that identity is not endowed or already given, but contextual, constructive and performative. Then, the social relationship is a very important point of observation in terms of how it identifies 'me' and exhibits the activity. Social relationship forms not only individual identity but also entire substance of a group and limits, transforms or regulates reproduction of social being.¹² Thus, we must look at social relationship as an important opportunity for women to exercise their independence and review how changes of social relationship newly configures the female main agents.

Among various social relationships of North Korean women, relationships with spouse, the opposite sex, family members and the country had been meaningfully changed due to marketisation. First, in terms of relationship with spouse or opposite sex, the North Korean government has been signifying the intimate relationship through 'revolutionary comradeship.' Accordingly, revolutionary fidelity and comradeship rather than personal 'intimacy' were emphasized in the relationships with opposite sex (for love and affection), friend and spouse, and each relationship had not been accepted as person-to-person relationship because the totalitarian society believed that the state could easily control people only when they become atomized,¹³ and because the people of socialist country did not exchange only the politically acceptable discourses in the institutionally provided network of relationships.¹⁴

However, the romantic relationship is changing as women's consciousness changed due to the spread of marketization. In North Korea romantic relationship was regarded as revolutionary relationship based on revolutionary fidelity and comradeship, rather than private sentiment. Also, marriage was not based on affection between persons - rather,

¹¹ Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski (writers), Baek Sunki (translator), *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis* (Seoul Communication Books, 2008), pp. 46-47.

¹² John Clark, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts (writers), "Subculture, Culture and Class", *Culture, Daily Life, the Public: 8 studies on culture*, (Seoul: Hannarae, 2005), p. 212.

¹³ Seo Jaejin, *Yet Another North Korean Society* (Seoul: Nanam Publishing House, 1995), p. 310.

¹⁴ Nam Youngho, "What is Private, What is Personal and What is Social: Experience of socialist country", *the Slavo Academic Bulletin*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012), p. 41.

combination of revolutionary relationship was regarded to be ideal. However, the romantic relationship that emphasize personal emotion became an object of attention in recent North Korean society, and this had an impact on marriage. Until the 1970s, the North Koreans used to choose their spouses through matchmaking according to their tradition on marriage. In the 1980s, the number of love marriage started to increase, and it outgrew arranged marriage in the 1990s. The North Koreans started to put emphasis on personality and taste rather than will of family or organization, and such increase of free love sometimes resulted in separation of marriage and love affair.¹⁵ Such rise of emotion and strengthened focus on love relationship was transformed to a greater awareness in autonomy as a modern individual, because the free love is an event that goes beyond a simple love song - it is an event where one acquires her own individuality and a process where one breaks away from her place designated by the social order to build her own identity through intimate person-to-person relationship.¹⁶ Through this process, a woman selects how she will position herself and what standard she will follow in a relationship where intimacy has the priority. Then comes a room for reinterpretation of awareness and customs that she used to regard as natural. As the intimate relationship is recognized as the person-to-person relationship, an awareness on freedom of marriage and romantic relationship is created, and such creation allows the woman to reinterpret many events or experiences that occur in a relationship from her own perspective. Avoidance of marriage and childbirth can be understood in this context. While marriage and childbirth were regarded as a natural responsibility of women as the members of society in the past, women started to believe that they had a choice. In other words, women were 'acting' (exercising) their rights to avoid childbirth and marriage in their relationships. Such acquisition of individuality and expansion of awareness on the rights will reshape relationships, and change in social relationship will ultimately change the social order.

A change appeared in the relationship with children among the relationships with the members of family other than the husband. Until the mid-1990s, it was important for women to feed and clothe her children as a mother. Later, it became important to raise

¹⁵ Lee Injeong, "Study on Changed Values of North Korean 'New Generation' since the 1980s: based on the analysis of 'the Young Avant-garde'" (Doctoral Thesis, National Ethics Education Department, Seoul National University, 2004), pp. 190-191.

¹⁶ Kwon Soohyun, "Intimacy of Life as Politics", the Korean Feminine Philosophy, Vol. 15 (2011), p. 103.

children as capable persons. The change in what was considered to be important with regard to the rearing of children changed the role of women as mothers, and subsequently made an impact onto the women's network. Mothers became more interested in practical education and the schools that provide the practical education to improve the abilities of their children. And in order to make their children more capable than others, they began to give their children private education. The private education made an impact on the academic abilities of the children and changed the woman's role as a mother. Before, the major role of a mother with regard to education was to delegate education entirely to the schools and provide economic support for the children, so that they could receive education from the schools. However, a mother directly manages education of her children by engaging her children with private education, and the active intervention in education of children meant that the role of woman as a mother was reinforced. After all, the social change that emphasized a person's ability resulted in adding the role of education manager to the existing list of roles a woman had to carry out as a mother. Women had to carry out the role of managing the career path of their children by: recognizing the reality of current society; mulling over and deciding the career path of children to provide them the education they need; collecting various information to do so; and implementing the education plan. In this way, marketisation and shift of awareness thereby caused North Korean women to carry out the new role as mothers, as they gave shape to awareness in and plan for the future of their children and survival in the North Korean society and to become active planners for the future of their children. The active action of woman is magnified because plan for the future based on awareness regarding the current life is required to carry out the role of mother. Before, North Korean women used to rely on men when they decided the career path or acquired information for their children. Because men were engaged in various activities in relatively public areas had greater amount of information than women did, women sometimes decided the career path of their children together with their husbands, but usually followed the opinions of their husbands. However, the recent North Korean women try to acquire information related to education of their children by themselves and form networks among them. This shows that their scope of activity is expanding. Such expansion of scope is meaningful in that it can strengthen accessibility to various information and bring changes to culture and lifestyle. Also, the fact that women

became able to express and claim their opinions related to rearing of children to their husbands based on the information they acquired and make important decisions within the family can represent the meaning of new role of the mother. Of course, the responsibility of child rearing is still shifted onto women and the amount of such responsibility has become rather greater, but for the women to become active planners for the lives of their children they need to be aware of their realities, be able to plan for the future, acquire detailed information and expand personal network. We can find the possibility of change created by actions of the new female main agents from these facts.

4. Expansion of Economic Space and Diversified Acts of Women

1) Women as the creators of personal profit

The North Korean government tried to identify women as those who engage in labor just as men do after liberation of the Korean Peninsula from Japan. It tried to position women as the workers by implementing various policies, such as equal pay for equal work, maternity protection leaves, etc. Such policies became the basis on which the North Korean women naturally accepted labor. At this time, labor became something that had to be carried out naturally for the leader and the country within the framework of standards suggested by the North Korean government. Women's labor had simply been signified as contribution to development of national economy. Women's labor was simply a means of enhancing the productivity of the country and maintaining the minimum level of livelihood through rations, etc., not an activity by which personal gain was accumulated.

However, women's labor no longer belonged to the state realm as the market spread - it is becoming a means of creating personal profit for themselves. The market activity they started for their survival was the challenge against the existing standards. They broke away from their daily lives regulated by on labor and standards on labor to engage in the market activity. They frequently left their families and their hometowns to new spaces. Also, the standard and the moral values that regarded dedication to labor in the official domain to be moral and engagement in business activities to be shameful started to fade.

Engagement in business activities which used to be 'shameful' became natural. Rather, those who did not engage in business activities were regarded 'unadaptable.' Accepting only the work recognized by the state as labor, confirming the value of existence by carrying out such labor and trying to be socially recognized for doing so used to be the dignified and socially accepted practice. However, earning a living for oneself and family and accumulating wealth through the market have become what were dignified and socially accepted. When one returned home with empty backpack, he/she felt 'ashamed,' and those who carried heavy backpacks full of things were regarded as 'capable persons.'¹⁷ Market activity changed description of what used to be socially regarded as 'capability'. To become 'capable persons,' the North Korean women created opportunities for them to acquire information by themselves and started to build personal and material networks. In the course of doing so, women who actually created large amount of economic profit started to appear. The North Korean women are now mobilizing resources from state and personal domains to develop their capabilities.

After North Korea suffered a shortage of food, one of the forces that appeared as major players of market activity was 'donju.' 'Donju' literally means 'those who have money' in North Korea, and means entrepreneur or businessman in capitalist terms. In the past, donju referred to a usurer, but it refers to those who carry out the role of capitalist now. The contemporary donjus do not just provide loans - they build very close relationships with factories and companies and sometimes provide capital to them. Instead of managing the businesses themselves, donjus appoint a worker of a factory they are well aware of as the manager of the factory or enter into agreement with the factory for profit sharing. Or, they run their own businesses sometimes. According to Hong Min, et. al. (2016), factories and companies are engaging in procurement, production, maintenance and disposal of products and materials through the market, and the number of donjus' private transportation companies that distribute products is rising.¹⁸ Businessmen and entrepreneurs are growing around the market in North Korea, and the North Korean

¹⁷ "If I come back with an empty backpack or with only small amount, I get so ashamed. (Why?) They say that I got so little because I was so inept and incapable. So, I don't mind the backpack being heavy. It has to be full, so that I can make a lot of profit and they would tell me I did well. So..."

¹⁸ Hong Min, et. al., Information on Markets in North Korea: Focused on the present situation of the official markets, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2016, pp. 15-16.

women are also growing as major businessmen. No estimation is available as to what portion of donju is female. However, we can at least assume that large portion of self-employed persons are women because most of the retail businesses at the markets are run by women. One of the female North Korean defectors I met had an experience of running a photo studio. She opened a photo developer's shop in one of the North Korean provinces and had built buildings in two occasions by working with a Senior Secretary of Provincial Party. She said that she built a building to open a photo studio because there was no available building in the city. In another occasion, she took the full responsibility for an apartment building construction project required by the Province, and the Senior Secretary of Provincial Party supported her by organizing a group of workers. She took on the construction projects because it was a part of her plan to bring success to and expand her photo studio business and she wanted to build a foundation and secure momentum for her business through the relationship with the Senior Secretary of Provincial Party. As a result, she was able to grow her business and even avoid economic loss by receiving information before the currency reform. Cases of women creating economic wealth at personal level while contributing to a certain portion of the province's economy became noticeable.

Meanwhile, we can notice that women are acting as economic main agents in the area of national economy also. North Korea amended its laws related to economy during the Kim Jungeun regime, and what was especially noticeable was 'the Company Act.' "In the amended Company Act, the new concept and category of company management right appeared", and the Act "gave 'actual management right' to state-run corporations."¹⁹ North Korea granted the company management right because "the practical autonomy and decision-making right of company is expanding much beyond the scope the state allowed" due to spread of the market.²⁰ In fact, private companies are emerging not only in the official domain of economy, but also in the domains not embraced by the official domain of economy, and each company is generating economic profit based on autonomy and capability. According to the study of Yang Moonsoo and

¹⁹ Yang Moonsoo, "How to Manage Economy in Our Way' Reviewed Based on the Law Amended after Kim Jungeun Seized Power", Unification Policy Study, Vol 26, No. 2, 2017, p.87.

²⁰ Yang Moonsoo, "How to Manage Economy in Our Way' Reviewed Based on the Law Amended after Kim Jungeun Seized Power", Unification Policy Study, Vol 26, No. 2, 2017, p.87.

Yoon Inju (2016), the number of private companies in North Korea was increasing and “the increase of privately invested and operated companies, especially those employing others beyond the scope of self-employed company” could be noticed.²¹ (Yang Moonsoo and Yoon Inju, 2016:79). Such grant of practical management right emphasizes independence and autonomy of company and requires the person who would be managing the company to be capable of doing so.

Grant of autonomy and management right to companies affects female entrepreneurs also. It is difficult to understand exactly who are female entrepreneurs in North Korea. However, when assuming that those women who are in charge of managing factories, companies, shops, etc., qualify as female entrepreneurs, we can assume that female entrepreneurs are engaged mainly in the service industry. Commerce is the typical area where women are noticeably entering into and making socio-economic achievements in the period of marketisation. It seems that the number of female managers is greater in the area of commerce when compared to those in other areas and that more women are becoming managers based on their field experiences.

Other than the women with greater visibility, such as donjus and managers, there are women who show their economic ability in their areas. They create economic gain using skills acquired while working for the state-assigned jobs or skills they developed by themselves through the market. A woman was known to have made money by using the dress making skill she acquired while attending a vocational school - instead of showing up at work she was assigned to, she made money doing business in the market. This was a case where a woman generated profit from the market using the skill she acquired through the state’s plan. In another case, a woman acquired a professional skill as a nurse, quit working for the hospital, and made money by providing private medical service.

Women developing their capabilities by themselves to engage in economic activities can be clearly noticed in the market. Women who started to make a living by engaging in businesses during the food crisis naturally discovered and acquired skills and tricks of

²¹ Yang Moonsoo and Yoon Inju, "De Facto Privatization of North Korean Corporations: Quantitative analysis of levels and trends". Unification Study. Vol. 20, No. 2, 2016, p. 105.

business from their market activities. Such accumulation of experience sometimes became a resource when they created economic gain in the course of market expansion. The female North Korean defectors who experienced market activities answered that creation of profit from market activity depended on skills and talents of each person. Whether a person's characteristics suitable for business is an important element. However, acquiring business information and showing one's ability is developed by experience. In that sense, the North Korean women are discovering and developing capabilities related to market activity by themselves. Once they start the market activity, they start to show their abilities to create profit. The women who were not systematically trained or educated for trade or marketing skills accumulated capabilities required for market activity as they suffered losses, went through various troubles and overcame such difficulties in the course of maintaining their businesses. In this way, the North Korean women continue to develop their capabilities to create more profit and try to mobilize many resources with which they can make use of their abilities. Some become successful in such process, some are not. For women to become the main agents is not all that easy in the socio-economic structure and the framework of order when considered that the level of existing political and economic capitals still have an impact.

After all, for women to safely engage in economic activity and acquire fair opportunities, the structures of capital and power circulated unofficially, illegally and un-systematically need to be changed. That is, a piece of law by which one can legally engage in businesses, an institutional foundation, a path and a method to prepare funds to promote a business, a body of information, a method of providing an opportunity for fair competition and so on must be prepared. Then, the North Korean women can position themselves as the main agents of economic activities through legal and transparent path without relying on male-centric power and order.

2) Women as Main Agents of Consumption and Culture²²

²² This part was extracted from the author's research paper ("Marketisation of North Korea and Gender Politics" (the North Korean Studies Society Bulletin, 2014)) and rearranged.

Market is a space where profits are created through transactions and commodities are consumed. It is also a space where one can come in contact with various external cultures. While women are producers who generate income through market activity, they are also the main agents of consumption and culture in the market which is a space of consumption and a space where culture flows into and gets distributed. Expansion of market changed method and contents of consumption. Being 'enlightened' through the market means that one is collecting and acquiring information and acquiring and practicing strategy on how to make a living. The form of information and practice collected at this time includes 'fashion.' Recently, 'South Korea,' 'capitalism' and 'women' have become the major codes in the market and they appeal to the North Korean youth. The market has become a daily space that is essential for procuring commodities and a space that creates a culture different from before. DVDs that contain South Korean dramas and movies and electronic products that can play those DVDs are distributed through the market, and the South Korean make-up and fashion presented through those dramas or movies are gaining popularity. The new culture that found its way into North Korea through the aforementioned channel is consumed by the people who intend to act on it. Also, people visit the market and grow their curiosity about and appetite for new things displayed there although they may not buy them at all times. Such behavior means that they have recognized the market as a space of consumption and culture beyond simple economic activity.²³ Also, the North Korean government is encouraging people to produce various light industry products, such as cosmetics, of which qualities are as good as those from other countries. Unlike how it was in the past, the diversification of products is taking place.

Such expansion of space for consumption and diversification of contents provided a space where women can actively consume the products. Typical acts of consumption include improving one's appearance, decorating one's house, etc. 'Improving one's appearance' became popular trend from the 2000s. At first, people made similar dresses using textile imported from China and searched for appropriate shoes to imitate 'the bat dress,' t-shirts, skinny pants and the deer shoes. Later, people actively improved their

²³ Cho Jungah, Cho Youngjoo, Cho Eunhee, Choi Eunyong and Hong Min, *Birth of New Generation: Experience and characteristics of North Korean youth*, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2013, p. 160.

appearances by putting on make-up and having cosmetic surgery and renovated their houses to follow the fashion or even create a fashion.²⁴ They create their own fashion at their own levels in a specific time period by imitating and appropriating the appearances and lifestyles of others they see in the CDs, DVDs and TV.²⁵

Such consumption further strengthens individuality as it creates 'taste.' Various merchandises in the market create tastes. Taste is unique to each person and for taste to connote superiority it must be distinguished from tastes of others to connote superiority. Consumption is a process through which one understands his/her desire and it is a method of expressing such desire. Existing rules are violated in the process of discovering a new desire and acting to realize such desire. Discovering a new desire through the process of imitating a new culture can change the perception of existing order and rule. A desire to consume certain culture and a new understanding in the existing value are the process of creating a new desire. Assuming that the efforts to realize such desire reevaluate and violate the existing culture and social order, a possibility for change caused by inflow of new culture can be found.

Hence, consumption can be deemed as a process of an individual focusing on him or herself. A person builds his or her identity by paying attention to the tastes of others and by equating him or herself with or differentiating him or herself from others. Women recognize 'difference' as how the act of consumption (which used to be uniform and homogeneous) is presented in various layers and aspects. That is, they think about what makes the difference, which taste is superior and who are the ones with such taste. They recognize an individual through consumption and determine and select by themselves which culture they will select and carry out. Also, as they recognize how consumption, desire and taste are selectively organized and to whom desire and taste are allowed, they acquire yet another perspective on social structure and order. In this sense, the women who consume are the main agents of reproduction of culture through consumption - they reproduce structure, order and power of North Korean society by revealing and carrying out their political, social and economic status through consumption.

²⁴ Kim Seokhyung, "Trend and Phenomenon of Consumption by North Koreans Since 1990", the North Korean Studies Society Bulletin Vol. 16 No. 1, 2012, p. 202.

²⁵ Cho Jungah, Cho Youngjoo, Cho Eunhee, Choi Eunyong and Hong Min, Birth of New Generation: Experience and characteristics of North Korean youth, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2013, p. 216.

5. Conclusion

I have reviewed the experiences of various female main agents focusing on the experience of women actively revealing their actions through marketisation. I was not able to cover the context by which each experience could have been achieved, the process of the experience reaching its limit and the context of choice made in each moment of women's action in much more depth. Nevertheless, women are showing images different from the past through the process of planning and acting their lives under the environments and conditions given to them, and such images are relevant to the changes in the North Korean society. The experiences of North Korean women are important targets of observation in explaining the meaning of top-down or bottom-up change in the North Korean society. In addition, we need to pay attention to how the efforts of the North Korean authorities use the existing gender order to overcome the current situation and how the North Korean authorities reorganize gender by using the existing gender order. This starts from paying attention to the unequal gender structure and interest in order in North Korea. Interest in unequal gender structure will eventually lead to interest in the North Korean regimes that maintain themselves through such interest. By understanding how North Korean women conform to, negotiate with and resist against such national plan, we can understand if the existing order can be maintained and any change can take place.

Various differences inside the North Korean women revealed in the course of carrying out the independence must be discussed in greater depth. That is because the aspect of change can differ according to which experience we focus on, and its meaning can differ also. Also, to which change we pay attention and how we interpret the change are also important issues. Appearance of new female main agent cannot be deemed to contribute to social changes by itself. In the course of mobilizing resources to act as the main agent, one may maintain or strengthen the existing social order and system or fracture them. Thus, when ambivalent or multi-layered aspect appearing from the acts of North Korean women is discussed, we will be able to deduce the implication of the various acts of

North Korean women.