

North Korean Defectors: Their Adaptation and Resettlement

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INTRODUCTION

In March of this year, 25 North Koreans entered the Spanish Embassy in Beijing requesting asylum, finally arriving in South Korea via a third country, the Philippines. More incidents of the same pattern have followed,¹⁾ and this new route of defection via foreign embassies and consulates in China, has raised concerns in the international community as well as South Korea and China.

In addition, the number of defectors has increased rapidly. North Korean defectors to South Korea in the early 1990s numbered about

1) Though small in number there have been frequent incidents of North Korean defectors storming foreign embassies and consulates in China seeking asylum in South Korea or the U.S. (one defector to the German embassy on April 25, two to the U.S. embassy based in Beijing on April 26, five to the Japanese consulate in Shenyang on May 8, six to the U.S. consulate in Shenyang on May 9 and 12, two to the Canadian embassy on May 9, and so on), and most of them have succeeded in getting asylum in South Korea. This year alone, twenty-six North Korean defectors have been granted asylum in South Korea after forcing their way into the South Korean embassy.

ten per year. As the food shortage in North Korea worsened in the mid-1990s, it rose to over 50, to 72 in 1998, 148 in 1999, 312 in 2000, and 538 in 2001. As indicated, defections have doubled each year for the past three years. As of the end of July this year, 630 North Korean refugees have entered the country, and at this rate, the number will reach 1,200 by the end of the year, twice the total number of the previous year. The total number of North Korean defectors residing in South Korea in 1989 was only 607, but because of the increase in the 1990s, the number is now over 2,000.

Defections from the North can be attributed to two main factors: Internally, the food shortage and externally, the efforts of defectors themselves, now living in China and South Korea, to get other family members out of North Korea. Finally, additional escape routes have also contributed to the rise in defections to South Korea.

Some North Korean defectors who have arrived since the 1990s, have successfully acclimated, but many have not. Those who have not tend to blame unfair treatment from the South Korean government as well as its citizens, claiming that South Koreans are interest-driven and boastful. Repeated failure has led some to lose the will to adapt to the new lifestyle and in a few of the worst cases, defectors feel they have no reason to go on living.

North Korean refugees face an arduous process of adaptation to a new life and culture. First, they must redirect the attitudes and values that were formed in North Korea. Second, they need to establish new relationships with South Koreans and assimilate themselves to South Korean systems, customs and culture. Third, they need to adapt to the capitalist work environment in order to find a job and a stable source of income. The last stage of adaptation is achieving psychological and emotional stability.

In addition to economical, socio-cultural, psychological and emotional adaptation, defectors need political integration. Existing studies show that the individual economic level of North Korean refugees varies greatly. Yet almost all of them experience relatively many psychological difficulties. On the other hand, there is almost

no difficulty in adapting to political ideology.²⁾ That defectors can abandon North Korean ideology relatively easily despite the 50-year long ideological confrontation between the two Koreas can be attributed to the fact that those who left, did so voluntarily, and also illustrates that North Korea's dominant ideology only functions superficially. In other words, there is a major gap between the communist ideal and reality.

The purpose of this paper is to propose ways to improve the adjustment and settlement process for North Korean refugees by analyzing the adjustment and settlement of North Korean defectors and examining the main problems, as well as their causes, which surface in the process of adjustment. The conceptual frame for analyzing the problems and proposing directions for improvement focuses on the aforementioned four tasks necessary for adjustment and settlement: re-orientation of the attitudes and value systems, socio-cultural integration, adjusting to the workplace, and psychological and emotional integration.

THE SETTLEMENT SUPPORT SYSTEM AND ITS PROBLEMS

Changes in the Policy for Supporting North Korean Defectors

North Korean defectors have received partial social security benefits as a part of the National Merit Reward. With the establishment of the 1962 Special Relief Act for Patriots and Veterans, and North Korean defectors, and thanks to several amendments, the support for North Korean defectors gradually rose to almost the same level as benefits for patriots and veterans. However, since

2) Chun Woo-taek, "A Study of the Adaptation and Self-Identity of North Korean Refugees According to Their Social Backgrounds" (in Korean), *Unification Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1997), p. 121.

classifying North Korean defectors and veterans together ran counter to national sentiment, an act was passed, i.e., the Special Compensation Act for North Korean Defectors to South Korea. That legislation, the first bill solely for North Korean defectors, was legislated in 1978. In fact, at the time benefits of North Korean defectors were higher than those of veterans.³⁾

Then in 1993, when the Act to Protect Defecting North Korean Residents replaced the Act for Special Compensation for North Korean Defectors, the level of material support for North Korea defectors fell to the same amount as for low-income citizens. With the sudden rise in the number of North Korean defectors, along with public opposition to giving privileged status to defectors, the government began to support defectors by means of welfare, much like the kind of relief aid given to South Korean citizens.

However, there was growing concern that the policy would be ineffective in view of the continued influx of North Korean defectors. In response, the Protection of Defecting North Korean Residents and Settlement Support Act took effect in July 1997 to guarantee a long-term source of income. The law also spells out plans for future inter-Korean social integration through social adjustment counseling and vocational training programs.⁴⁾

The Current Settlement Support System⁵⁾

In 1998 and again in 1999, the South Korean government amended the system to increase funds and to enhance the support

3) Yoon Yeo-sang, "South Korean Social Adjustment Program for North Korean Defectors," Ph.D. Dissertation, Yongnam University (2001), p. 112.

4) Dokgo Soon, "A Study of North Korean Refugees from the Comparative Cultural Perspective, Ph. D. Dissertation, Yonsei University (1999), p. 71.

5) For more information, refer to the Support for Defecting North Korean Residents section of the Ministry of Unification homepage [www.unikorea.go.kr/kor/policy/citizen.php].

system, focusing on capacity building for independence rather than on material support. There are two phases in the settlement support system: initial support to ensure their independence, and post-settlement support. When a defector enters South Korea, the initial support phase begins, including education for social adaptation, registration for South Korean citizenship, and financial support. The post-settlement management phase begins when a defector enters mainstream society, and this phase falls under two headings: settlement support and personal protection.

(A) Initial Support for Settlement

In order to assist newly-arrived refugees in the earlier stage, the government provides a variety of support, as listed in <Table 1>. The initial financial support for defectors is within the limits of two tenths of a South Korean worker's monthly minimum wage, and is distributed according to such factors as the number of people per household, their ages, health conditions, and capacity to work. As for housing, the rental deposit is provided and public apartments set up by the Korean National Housing Corporation (KNHC) and local governments are arranged depending on such considerations as age and the number of members in the household. The housing aid and initial settlement fund total 37 million won per adult. In addition, the government pays a reward amounting to no more than 250 million won depending on the information or hardware provided by the defector.

(B) Protection and Support Through Hanawon

To help North Korean defectors become contributing members of South Korean society, the government enacted the Protection of Defecting North Korean Residents and Settlement Support Act on July 14, 1997 creating the legal basis for building settlement support facilities. Hanawon, which opened on July 8, 1999, is a settlement support facility that houses some 100 defectors and provides an intensive two-month survival course to help refugees adjust to South

Table 1. Contents of the Settlement Fund

Type		Criteria for Payment	Remarks
Settle- ment Fund	Basic Payment	Class 1 (over 5 persons) 160 times the monthly minimum wage Class 2 (4 persons) 140 times the monthly minimum wage Class 3 (3 persons) 120 times the monthly minimum wage Class 4 (2 persons) 100 times the monthly minimum wage Class 5 (1 person) 80 times the monthly minimum wage	The monthly minimum wage for 2002 is 474,600 won
	Additional Payment	Households with member(s) under 18 or over 55 (up to 2 persons) - 10 times the monthly minimum wage per person Households with a member who needs long-term medical treatment or has a serious physical disability - 10 times the monthly minimum wage for over 3 months of treatment and 20 times the wage for over a year of treatment Those who are deemed to be in need of additional aid during rehabilitation -10 times the monthly minimum wage	If 2 or more conditions for support apply to the same person or s/he has been counted as a household member elsewhere, payment of no more than 40 times the monthly minimum wage
Housing	Rental Deposit	Class 1 (over 6 persons) 21-25 pyong* Class 2 (5 persons) 19 pyong Class 3 (4 persons) 17 pyong Class 4 (3 persons) 15 pyong Class 5 (1 to 2 persons) 13 pyong	"B," "C" areas based on classification and "A" area additional payment of 40% and 70% respectively (promotional funds for rural residency) - 7.54 million won for 13 pyong
Medical Aid	Free	In cases in which the household head requires long-term medical treatment or has a serious physical impairment, or other special reasons	Each case will be deliberated by the council for decision and paid accordingly
Rewards	Information Hardware	Below 150 million won Warships, fighter-bombers: below 150 million won Tanks, guided weapons and other airplanes: below 50 million won	Pay according to the guideline for rewards

Valuables	Cannons, machine guns, small arms, and other weapons: below 10 million won Market value	
Tuition	Middle and high schools: tuition waived	Tuition: enrollment fees, class registration fees, school dues (support funds for the school)
Aid	Private university: Government aid 50% and university aid 50%	National and public
	universities: tuition waived	

*1 pyong: 3.954 square yards.

Korean society. Its three programs address the various needs of newly-arrived defectors. The first treats emotional and psychological trauma stemming from the escape and life as a fugitive afterward. It also helps refugees to cope with differences between North Korean and South Korean society. Second, the program focuses on resolving cultural misperceptions about a free democratic society, differences in language, perceptions, and customs. The counseling encourages social adaptation, both in theory and practice, with emphasis on gaining an understanding of South Korean society. Third, as part of the basic job-training program, Hanawon provides career guidance during the entire program to ease newcomers' anxiety about their futures, as well as training in technical vocations such as computer skills, literacy, driving, cooking, sewing, and other practical fields.

In addition, Hanawon encourages citizen participation in its education program to provide various defectors with efficient and appropriate social adjustment education. The current citizen participation program includes weekend and holiday programs as well as hands-on training and field experience.

(C) Post-Settlement Support

After completing the adjustment program at Hanawon, and becoming members of South Korean society, defectors receive various types of support to ease the transition and settlement. To deal with the issue of employment, a major difficulty facing the defectors, the government has set up a special subdivision in local

labor departments and offices, all under the Ministry of Labor, to provide employment support. Each defector has a designated career counselor to provide professional guidance and employment opportunities, and to recommend public or private job training centers. In order to increase participation and effectiveness, the defectors receive money for transportation, food, and household management expenses during the training period. Priority is given when they want to establish convenience business facilities within public facilities. Thanks to the employment protection system for defectors, employers who hire North Korean defectors are subsidized for half of the defectors' wages (no more than 700 thousand won) for two years. This system has helped to provide stable employment.

Other forms of support include education, medical care, the livelihood protection system (LPS), and elderly care. Academic degrees from North Korea are recognized, and the defectors can not only transfer or attend the schools of their choice, but can also receive tuition waivers. A waiver for medical expenses is issued to those who need medical care. The monthly LPS payment of 500 thousand won, twice the amount given to South Korean recipients, is given to the jobless who cannot support themselves. Furthermore, special pension benefits are given to elderly defectors between the ages of 50 and 60 who arrived in South Korea after April 1, 1999.

Since August 1999, municipalities have organized a cooperative network among central, local, and civilian organizations aimed at providing follow-up counseling services and information. The Association of Supporters for North Korean Defectors, established in August 1997 to act as the hub for civilian support activities, not only subsidizes living expenses but also provides support in such specialized areas as counseling, employment, and match-making through various social and religious organizations.

As a result of continued government efforts, systematic, comprehensive support is being provided to North Korean defectors. The support system of the future, however, needs to shift towards

expanding the role of local non-governmental organizations, from central government to municipality, and from government-led to civilian participation.

THE CONDITION AND CAUSE OF PROBLEMS IN ADJUSTMENT

Despite active South Korean government support, North Korean defectors who have lived in an entirely different society for a half century find it difficult to adjust to life in South Korea. Adjustment will only become possible when a number of issues are addressed: social, cultural and value differences, economic difficulties, and psychological and emotional instability.

Differences in the Attitude and Value System

North Korean defectors are products of their environment, who bring to the South a complex set of North Korean attitudes and values. Since that value system can interfere with their adjustment, it needs to change. For example, their emphasis on saving face stems from having lived in a conformist society. It is not only an obstacle to rational thinking but can even be the cause of failure in South Korea's market economy, because of the tendency to seek justification rather than utility. Such a trait not only gets in the way of rational action but also increases the likelihood of failure.

North Korean defectors perceive South Korean politics, economy, society, and culture, in terms of their basic knowledge of, and preconceptions gained while living in the North. Tending to assume South Korea and North Korea to be diametrically opposed to each other, they experience many misfortunes.⁶⁾ Because of their

6) Testimony of Kim Seung-chul, a North Korean defector who came to South Korea in 1995.

perception that South Korea is very lenient, they fail to understand that responsibility ultimately rests on themselves. Furthermore, they think that a liberal democracy is anarchistic and that in a capitalist society, money is everything.

From the rumors heard in China and the outward image of prosperity of South Korea, defectors expect that there are plenty of opportunities to become prosperous overnight. Expecting to be compensated for the hardships experienced in North Korea, they often want to quit the jobs found for them by the government agency and start their own businesses. Often they jump into a business without sufficient understanding of the South Korean economy.

Accustomed to criticizing others publicly at daily “life review sessions” in the North, the defectors have much difficulty fitting in at work and forming relations with others because they are used to criticizing others openly.⁷⁾

While they are aware that South Korea has a very different system, they tend to be too dependent on the South Korean government, blaming the system rather than assuming responsibility for their own shortcomings.

There is a strong class distinction in the North between blue collar and white collar labor. Those who think for a living enjoy social superiority while physical laborers consider themselves inferior. North Korean defectors, who prefer white-collar jobs, shun the so-called 3D (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs or quit them on impulse. This could be one reason for the 40-50% unemployment rate among North Korean defectors.

Having been taught to value equality, defectors find it difficult to understand that some people are much better off than others. Moreover, the reward system implemented during the Cold War era to encourage North Korean defections has led to discontent and controversy.

7) Testimony of a Mr. Kim, an education supervisor at Hanawon, June 27, 2002.

Social and Cultural Disparity

During the first two years of life in South Korean society, defectors sense the disparity.⁸⁾ Having lived all their lives under a monolithic ideological system, they must try a pluralistic system. Constant strife between the majority and minority parties, collective egoism, and conflicts of interest among various social organizations create anxiety in the defectors, and, witnessing such political controversy and struggle about issues such as the North Korea question, the defectors fear for their futures. The frequency of borrowed words in the South Korean lexicon, the blurring of traditional gender roles, and cultural decadence only increase confusion and culture shock in the defectors.

Also, newcomers feel a great sense of incongruity at a natural capitalist phenomenon—socioeconomic inequality. Some defectors even remark that “it might be better to live in North Korea where the majority of the people are poor, except for Kim Jung-il.”

Unfamiliarity with the culture leads most North Korean defectors to avoid contact with others for the first two or three years, and only after four or five years, do they begin to socialize with South Koreans.⁹⁾ They are slow to socialize, or to seek out information that can be gained through reciprocity with South Koreans. That reticence stems partly from the defectors’ perception that South Koreans think North Koreans are ignorant and lazy. Unless the defectors’ feelings of marginalization are resolved, they will be unable to adjust and may even become mentally ill.

Economical Instability and Unemployment

Maintaining job stability and income is the most important task

8) Testimony of a Mr. Choi, former director of the Association of the North Korean Defector, March 20, 2002.

9) Testimony of a Mr. Kim, an education supervisor at Hanawon, June 27, 2002.

ahead. Resolving the livelihood issue is such a basic element in adjusting to South Korean society that it makes cultural and psychological adjustment possible. According to Jeon Woo-taek, psychological health has a direct correlation to income and the degree of satisfaction derived from it. Monthly income is one of the most important variables in measuring psychological satisfaction.¹⁰⁾

However, the actual state of adjustment to workplace, the key to resolving the livelihood issue, is rather bleak, with the study showing that about half of the defectors are either unemployed, small-business owners, or part-time employees. When they first arrived in South Korea, defectors felt confident. Since they spoke the same language, they assumed they could relate to South Koreans. They also felt a great sense of accomplishment at having risked danger and overcome hardships,¹¹⁾ expecting to become prosperous once they reached the South.¹²⁾ After failure to adjust to life in South Korean society, however they lost that initial confidence.

In fact a distinct pattern has emerged. After processing and training, the newcomers begin work at jobs set up by the government, but they soon quit. First, their lack of experience and knowledge in English, Chinese characters, computer, and other elements of a capitalist economy make their work life extremely difficult. Second, in addition to work itself, they feel out of place at after-work social gatherings. Unhappy with their salary, they quit to start their own businesses with the dream of becoming rich overnight.

After experiencing difficulty adjusting, they usually choose between two paths. Young people try to improve their chances for better employment by going to college. Although this path entails some financial hardship, it holds the most potential for success since college life can help them form the human relationships necessary to

10) Chun Woo-taek, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

11) Dokgo Soon, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

12) Testimony of a Mr. Kim, an education supervisor at Hanawon, June 27, 2002.

adjust to the South Korean society. The other path is to find another job or start a business, Because they are unfamiliar with Korean economy, however, they are more likely to fail than succeed, and many either use up their settlement money, or get cheated out of it. With relatively limited opportunity to gain new employment or make a living, the rate of economic failure is much higher for defectors. This leads to further loss of confidence and greater psychological distress.¹³⁾

Psychological and Emotional Instability

Psychological and emotional stability is the final stage of successful adjustment gained only after other adjustments are made. Maladjustment to the workplace and initial anxiety caused by culture shock can be overcome as defectors become gradually accustomed to the new lifestyle. Until that time, however, they suffer long-term psychological anxiety. According to a study by Lee Jang-ho, North Korean defectors go through five stages of psychological anxiety over a period of 5 to 6 years until they fully adapt to life in South Korea.¹⁴⁾ The first stage consists of extreme fear and anxiety due to culture shock. The second is the pre-employment stage in which there is a mixture of conformity and discontent. Making the transition to life in South Korea is the third stage that comes after some basic adjustments. Conforming to South Korean society is the fourth stage that includes assimilation and re-socialization. The fifth stage is social and cultural integration when defectors begin to feel a sense of belonging and security.

13) Testimony of a Mr. Choi, former director of the Association of the North Korean Defectors, March 20, 2002.

14) Lee Jang-ho, "A Systematic Approach for Defectors' Adjustment to the South Korean Society," A paper presented at a seminar titled "Measures and Tasks for Supporting North Korean Defectors," by the Christian Academy Forum of Inter-Korean Relations, 1996.

Others never pass through these stages of adjustment,¹⁵⁾ and unless they reduce their psychological dependence on the government, the situation worsens. Such instability stems from several reasons besides social and cultural disparities.

(A) Feeling of Guilt about Family Left Behind in North Korea

One common factor for North Korean defectors is that they all suffer from guilt over the political consequences of their defection. Naturally, defectors wish to bring the rest of their family to South Korea, and there are several cases in which they have succeeded via Yanbian. Before 1995, the primary motive for defection had been political, and since South Korea was the destination from the start, the defectors were able to gain psychological stability relatively easily. Since 1995, however, economic reasons have become the primary reason, and when defectors experience economic failure in South Korea, they not only regret leaving but also feel greater guilt about their families left behind in North Korea.¹⁶⁾

(B) Loss of Self and Identity Crisis

In South Korea, defectors need to identify with a very different group than they identified with in North Korea. Even if they were professionals or worked in white-collar jobs in North Korea, it is common for many of them to work in blue-collar fields in the South. This reduction in their social status causes a loss of self, and leads to an identity crisis.

Depending on the individual, two types of adjustment are seen: One is assimilation, in which the defector does not wish to maintain his/her culture or identity. The other is integration, in which the defector wants to maintain his/her culture while adjusting to the new society through contact with others.¹⁷⁾ The assimilation type

15) Dokgo Soon, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

16) Testimony of a Mr. Kim, former North Korean diplomat based in China, March 31, 2002.

harbors antagonism and distrust for the North Korean system and wants to adapt to South Korean society as quickly as possible, whereas the integration type is psychologically more complex. There is more anguish about self-identity, and a feeling that South Korea has failed to provide a conducive environment for adjustment.¹⁸⁾ Ironically, some recent defectors think that they need not assimilate completely, since reunification will make adaptation to Southern customs unnecessary.

(C) The Marriage Issue

Among those who defected after 1995, less than 10 percent are married. Specifically, 70 percent of the male members of the Association of the North Korean Defectors are single. In addition to employment, marriage is another serious issue. Although marrying a South Korean would help in their adjustment to the society, the differences in values make it a difficult option for both parties, and most defectors prefer to marry other defectors.

(D) South Korean Prejudices

South Korean prejudice against North Korean defectors make it even more difficult for the latter to adjust to the life in South Korea.¹⁹⁾ First, South Koreans tend to perceive North Korean defectors as their enemies, and this perception is a major obstacle in forming trust between South Koreans and North Korean defectors. Second, that North Koreans are socialists who are dependent, passive, lazy, and selfish is also a common misconception among South Koreans. One study reports that this is even a common misconception among the police who are charged with protecting North Korean defectors.²⁰⁾

17) Dokgo Soon, *op. cit.* p. 149.

18) Quoted from Dokgo Soon, *op. cit.* p. 151.

19) Testimony of a Mr. Choi, former director of the Association of the North Korean Defectors, March 20, 2002.

20) Chun Woo-taek, "Psychological Problems in North Korean Defectors' Adaptation

WAYS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Improving the Policy Supporting North Korean Defectors

Although policies for protection and settlement support for North Korean defectors have vastly improved, there is still room for improvement. Policies tend to favor high-ranking North Korean defectors.²¹⁾ Also, the basic livelihood guarantee fund, settlement fund, and reward systems overcompensate the defectors, discouraging them from seeking employment and creating a sense of incongruity among defectors. Moreover, because their degrees and licenses from North Korea are not recognized, defectors feel they are treated unfairly compared to their South Korean counterparts.²²⁾

Current policies must improve in order to provide more benefits to the disadvantaged such as the elderly and the uneducated. There must be greater opportunities through job training and guaranteed employment. Moreover, rather than sending the defectors directly into the capitalist labor market where they are at a definite disadvantage, the government should consider providing government jobs for which they are qualified.

Complementary Measures for Educating North Korean Defectors

Most North Korean defectors go through the same training at

to South Korea: Based on the Results of a Survey of Police Guards," A paper presented at a seminar titled "North Koreans—the Quality of Life, Hunger, and Adjustment to South Korean Society," by the Research Institute of Unification at Yonsei University, December 8, 1999.

21) Park Jong-chul, Kim Young-yoon, and Lee Woo-young, *A Study of Social Adjustments of North Korean Defectors: the Current State and Measures for Improvement* (Seoul: Research Institute of Unification, 1996), p. 92.

22) Testimony of a Mr. Choi, former director of the Association of the North Korean Defectors, March 20, 2002.

Hanawon before entering South Korean society. The training courses could be developed through creating various models. That is, studies on individual defectors' adjustment process based on sex, age, occupation, and education would not only provide a good database for newcomers to become better prepared, but also would provide useful information for policymakers.

In addition, enhancement of education, and development and distribution of educational materials is needed. Materials should address the differences between values in a liberal democracy and a socialist country as well as the ethics and norms of South Korea, and the market economy. Through such programs, North Korean defectors' misguided ideas about work, and their rash confidence in free enterprise could be prevented. A key lesson should be that the best way to successfully adjust is through diligence in the workplace.

On Maladjustment

North Korean defectors, naturally, feel cultural disparity in South Korea. The ultimate solution to overcoming that sense of alienation lies not in the government support policy, but in the direct experience of being a member of South Korean society. It is also important to educate defectors that it is natural to feel alienated and different since the political and economic systems are not the only differences. The North and South have been two different countries with two different histories for more than 50 years.

Measures to Improve Psychological and Emotional Instability

(A) Mechanism to Encourage Marriage

Marriage is an important element for successful adjustment to South Korean society. Accordingly, the government or non-governmental organizations for North Korean defectors should establish matchmaking services and marriage counseling to provide more such opportunities.

(B) Education to Adjust the Standard for Comparison

Occasionally, North Korean defectors forget the misery of their lives in the North and compare themselves with their South Korean neighbors. Consequently, they feel relatively deprived and easily frustrated. It takes an average of 4 to 5 years to adjust to South Korean society, thus, they need to adjust their standards of comparison. First, they need a frame of reference by which they can observe how much their lives have improved in South Korea compared to back in North Korea and second, they must have the patience to hold off comparing their situation to that of South Koreans until they have lived in the South for an adequate period of time.

(C) Recommending Religion

According to Chun Woo-taek's research, those with a religion tend to have better mental health. Religion has proven to be beneficial for adjustment in several ways. First, it can help to create new human relations and a support network. Second, it is easier for defectors to receive aid from religious organizations. Third, it gives the defectors the emotional strength to overcome not only economic but also psychological hardships.

(D) Educating South Korean Citizens

In addition to defectors' own efforts to adjust and to support at the government level, it is extremely important for South Korean citizens to accept North Korean defectors as fellow citizens of South Korea. As mentioned, prejudice and discrimination towards North Korean defectors are major obstacles for the latter's adjustment to the life in South Korea, and this needs to change. South Koreans must realize that the reasons for defection were well-founded, including life-threatening famine.

Adjustment to South Korean society is not simply a matter of an individual welfare but a matter of building the foundation for unification of the Korean peninsula. Moreover, South Koreans need

to understand that if the numerous defectors are not accepted into the societal fold, it could cause serious social unrest.

A Proposal for an Alternative Name for North Korean Defectors

Changes in the reasons for, and the methods of defection have led to the issue of what to call North Korean defectors. North Korean defector (1962), brave North Korean defector (1978), deserted North Korean brethren (1993) or other various names were used, and since 1997 “Bukhan Yital Jumin” (defecting North Korean residents) is the official expression used to refer to the defectors. However, the word *Yital* (defecting) in Korean connotes “traitor” or “reactionary” thus North Korean defectors abhor that label. Moreover, it does not distinguish between defectors who entered South Korea and those who live in China or other countries.

Therefore, in order to distinguish their current status using more neutral terms, current terms could be changed to “North Korean settlers” and “displaced North Koreans.” North Korean settlers are those who defected from the North and settled in South Korea, while “displaced North Koreans” refers to those who seek refuge in China or other countries for political and economic reasons. Changing the terms corresponds to the purpose of “Protection of Defecting North Korean Residents and Settlement Support Act” and the international legal concept. In addition, the term “settlers” would enable a smooth transition in South Korea.

CONCLUSION

Believing that the settlement of the issue of defectors from North Korea is a symbol of the government’s will and capability for unification of Korea, the South Korean government has provided various assistance to assure their stable settlement. Considering the differences between the two Koreas, however, there are many

obstacles—the value system, social and cultural disparity, economical instability, and psychological problems—that impact their assimilation. The continued support of the defectors following the suggestions mentioned above are necessary to assure their stable settlement so that they can live as independent, law abiding citizens.