Pride, Prejudice and Manchurian Heritage: North Korean Migrants and Memories of a Land Left Behind

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SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH: Now on My Way to Meet Who?

I have travelled to DPR Korea on enough occasions to be convinced that it is impossible for foreign academics to conduct social science research in the country. DPR Korea does not permit systematic source collection, seemingly since to do so would expose North Korean people to unacceptable outside scrutiny. It certainly doesn't allow rigorous survey and interview projects to be conducted. Moreover, not only is rigorous research not permitted; the government in P'yŏngyang devotes time and resources to maintaining its public image in a way that undermines analysis of such credible information as does exist.[1]

Nobody outside North Korea knows exactly how substantial the national budget for public relations ("propaganda and agitation") is, because budgets are a state secret.[2] However, we can intuit that the number is large as a percentage of GDP, given the observable results of mass manipulation. North Korean national narratives are backdated and post facto amended. Impediments to the smooth reproduction of new variations of old themes are systematically eliminated. Documents, texts and film footage disappear from the public sphere, only to be replaced by new iterations calibrated differently. Some of the changes are subtle, others are anything but.[3]

[1] I wish to thank Christopher Richardson for his insightful comments on an early draft of this chapter.
[2] Percentage budget increases and decreases in the various sectors of state activity are announced via the Supreme People's Assembly, usually in April, but not the actual sums. Ruediger Frank, "The 2016 Budget Report: Some Observations," *38 North*, April 8, 2016. https://www.38north.org/2016/04/rfrank040816/ (last accessed September 13, 2019).
[3] Martin Weiser, "On Reading North Korean Media: The Curse of the Web," Sino-NK, October 31, 2016. http://sinonk.com/2016/10/31/on-reading-north-korean-media-the-curse-of-the-web/ (last accessed December 23, 2016).

It is on those occasions when the system falters that its customary scope and scale is thrown into sharpest relief. One incident occurred during a spring 2016 visit to a FIFA-approved soccer school located behind the Mayday Stadium (5.1 *kyŏnggijang*) on Rŭngna-do, an islet in the center of the Taedong River that bisects P'yŏngyang approximately from east to west. There, visitors are taken around a room, ubiquitous in North Korean public buildings, known as the *hyŏngmyŏng sajŏk kyoyangsil* (revolutionary site teaching room), which tells a linear history of the institution that centers first and foremost on the interventions of the ruling Kim family.[4]

At P'yŏngyang International Soccer School, pride of place in the *hyŏngmyŏng sajŏk kyoyangsil* goes to a framed photo of Kim Chŏngŭn during an official visit to the site during its development phase. The visit took place on June 9, 2013, the midpoint of Kim's second full year as North Korean leader.

That Kim Chŏngŭn should have visited the soccer school is not in itself noteworthy; such visits are the principle staple of the country's *hyŏnji chido* ("on-site guidance") political propaganda, and serve to underwrite the political futures of the institutions. Additionally, Kim's early rule was characterized by an attempt to build North Korea's sporting reputation, a cause well served by appending his name to the opening of a FIFA-approved soccer school in the nation's capital. But at Kim's right shoulder in the photograph was something, or rather someone, wholly unexpected: Chang Sŏngt'aek.

The now infamous purge and execution of Chang Sŏngt'aek more than two years earlier in December 2013 is a quintessential example of North Korean historical revisionism. Chang was killed by the DPR Korean state for a litany of alleged crimes, the veracity of which need not

[4] This is a significantly rewritten version of a true story that features as part of the introduction to the following edited volume: Adam Cathcart, Robert Winstanley-Chesters and Christopher Green (eds.), *Continuity and Change in North Korean Politics* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016). Reproduced with permission.

detain us here. Suffice it to say that Chang was the most recent in a long line of officials to be airbrushed from DPR Korean history; others include the aforementioned former KWP International Secretary Hwang Jangyŏp (who defected in February 1997, ending up in Sŏul) and senior officials such as Sŏ Kwanhi (KWP Agriculture Secretary, who was scapegoated as an agent of foreign powers and executed for the famine of 1995-1998), Mun Sŏngsul (chief secretary of the Central Party), and Sŏ Yunsŏk (chief secretary of KWP P'yŏngannamdo branch).[5] In the aftermath of Chang's fall from grace, he was erased from documentary films shown on North Korean television, deleted from official media archives, and photos featuring him were withdrawn from public buildings. This happened without fanfare, but, in so far as the outsider can tell, it was done quickly and efficiently.

Then why, more than two years after his death at the hands of the state, would an image of Chang still be hanging there on the wall at the soccer school, a state institution? Visitors will certainly not find Chang Sŏngt'aek in any photographs at *kŭmsusan t'aeyanggungjŏn* ("Kŭmsusan Palace of the Sun"), the grand building in northeast P'yŏngyang in which both Kim Ilsŏng and Kim Chŏngil lie in state. Nor are they likely to find Chang's likeness at any of the other locations in P'yŏngyang that foreign visitors are allowed to visit (or, indeed, the great many more locations from which foreigners are kept).

The identical reaction of two state employees at the soccer school tells its own story. Seeing the enormous photo featuring Chang, they were instantly aware that something was amiss: images of Chang Sŏngt'aek were not supposed to be hanging on any walls in North Korea, because he was no longer a part of the narrative that the state wished to tell about itself. Every adult North

[5] All official positions taken from Hyŏn Sŏngil, *Pukhanŭi kukkajŏllyakkwa p'awŏ ellit'ŭ: kanbujŏngch'aek chungsimŭro* 북한의 국가전략과 파워 엘리트: 간부정책 중심으로 [North Korea's national strategy and power elite: centered on cadre policy] (Sŏul: Sunin, 2011), 392. However, Chang Jinsŏng says that Sŏ Yunsŏk was KWP secretary for P'yŏngyang. See: Jang Jin-sung, *Dear Leader: My Escape from North Korea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 175.

Korean will have known this at the time. An urgent, furtive discussion ensued as the soccer school director – who, it should be said, seemed surprisingly unconcerned – concluded his explanation of the artifacts in the room. The atmosphere cooled noticeably as my North Koreans companions ushered me out.

The story of a likeness of Chang Sŏngt'aek on an otherwise unremarkable wall at a soccer school is an example of the information environment in which North Korean studies as an academic activity operates. The presence of an executed former member of the North Korean regime elite in an official photo prompts gasps of surprise from state employees precisely because it represents an unacceptable failure of a system wherein sources of information, from which scholarly inspiration and explanation could otherwise be drawn, are systematically revised according to the needs of the state, rendering them unreliable; or even disappear overnight, never to return.

The answer to this challenge is, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, alternative primary sources. There is more than one way to do this. One can, for example, acquire satellite imagery of DPR Korea. This is an area of study that has rightly seen spectacular growth since the resolution of commercial satellite imagery improved dramatically in the early 2010s. Some of the resulting work is revelatory, some is contentious or even tendentious, but there is no doubt that there is more and more of it.[6]

A second method by which to counter official revisionism is through surveys and interviews of the resettled defector-migrant North Korean community living abroad, primarily in South Korea. This method can be highly effective. However, it is no simple matter to implement well. There is

[6] Joshua H. Pollack, "Who is deceiving whom? Open source North Korea under the microscope," *NK News*, December 11, 2018. https://www.nknews.org/2018/12/whos-deceiving-whom-open-source-north-korea-imagery-under-the-microscope/ (last accessed December 11, 2018).

a technical component involved, but that is not all. It also requires a keen awareness of the social context within which knowledge about North Korea is produced and disseminated. That, then, is the subject of this chapter.

Here, I ask how existing social structures and the situatedness of researchers impacts research in the field of North Korean studies.[7] I begin by sketching a big picture, then approach several key issues in more detail. I examine the social context of defector-migrant research, then looks at two prominent fallacies about the defector-migrant community as a source of information. In the Methodology chapter that follows, I outline the structure and approach of the survey and interview project in this thesis, and review the limitations of the data.

South Korean Social Context of Defector-Migrant Research

South Korean society has long had a conflicted relationship with newcomers from North Korea, in many ways mirroring the bilateral relationship between the two competitor states. On the one hand, there is a long-standing desire to emphasize the homogeneity of the ethnically identical peoples of the two states. Stemming from an ethnically-based conception of the nation, this desire treats persons of Korean blood as members of a single ethnic nation irrespective of their citizenship, and emphasizes unification of the ethnic Koreans of North and South Korea as the ultimate goal of Republic of Korea government policy.[8] Though unquestionably rooted in peninsula history to some considerable degree, this structure is also instrumentalised in the virtuous narratives that Korean politicians (on both sides of the inter-Korean border) tell their respective peoples to legitimize their political power.

[7] "Situatedness" refers here to the researcher's involvement in and impact upon the research site. It is a phenomenon often ignored by researchers themselves, even when the presence of the researcher has a demonstrable impact on the conduct and outcome of the research.
[8] This is also held up as the ultimate aim of DPR Korean government policy. In light of the actions of the governments in the two halves of the peninsula, in neither case is the claim especially credible.

But at the same time, South Korean society also evinces a contradictory desire to make Others out of arriving North Koreans, something more in keeping with the robust anti-communist discourses of the Pak Chŏnghŭi and Chŏn Tuhwan eras.[9] Differences between those from South and North Korea are foregrounded, representing the two peoples as meaningfully different. This has the effect of placing the two peoples in a hierarchical structure wherein South Koreans are regarded (by South Koreans) as superior to North Koreans.[10]

South Korean media has always participated fully in the structuring of similarity and difference along these vectors of homogeneity and Othering. However, in media the phenomenon has become more prominent since 2009, when changes to the domestic legislative framework significantly altered the broadcast media environment, resulting in the licensing of several new South Korean cable television providers.[11] The administration of the day – that of President Yi Myŏngbak (Lee Myungbak, 2008-2013) – contended that allowing a number of new cable television channels would bring fresh perspectives, achieve synergies between print and broadcast media, bring domestic broadcasters "up to global standards," and eliminate the monopoly over educational and publicly-oriented programming of terrestrial broadcasters KBS and MBC. Accordingly, four *chongp'yŏnsa*, or "comprehensive media broadcasters" were created, one owned by each of the three main conservative daily newspapers: Chosun Ilbo (TV Chosun), Joongang Ilbo (JTBC), and Dong-A Ilbo (Channel-A), as well as one by the business daily Maeil Gyŏngje (MBN).[12]

[9] This apparent desire poses a challenge to the notion that cultural Othering only occurs when groups do not have all that much contact with one another. Iain Watson, "The Korean diaspora and belonging in the UK: identity tensions between North and South Koreans," *Social Identities* 21, no. 6 (2015): 546.
[10] Ethnic Koreans from China, Japan, and the United States are also incorporated into this hierarchical structure.
[11] The creation of the new companies was made possible by legislative changes rushed through (*nalch'igi t'onggwa*) South Korea's National Assembly in July of that year that granted South Korean print media companies the right to operate broadcast media. "Big Bang or big bust," *Korea Times*, December 1, 2011. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2011/12/123_99934.html (last accessed November 19, 2013).
[12] Both before and after their creation, the four *chongp'yŏnsa* were a source of discontent (as indeed they remain). In November 2011, Kyunghyang Sinmun accused the Lee administration of "lying" or "falsifying" [hŏŏn] the benefits

The four *chongp'yŏnsa* have proven to be adept "availability entrepreneurs," a term that Kuran and Sunstein define as social agents who invest resources into promoting a specific set of beliefs.[13] Availability entrepreneurs, also known as political entrepreneurs, can be situated anywhere in a social system, from government and business to non-profit organizations and the media. The thing that all availability entrepreneurs have in common is a desire to raise the perceived salience of specific perspectives whilst omitting alternative viewpoints (that may be of equal or greater pertinence from an objective viewpoint) and downplaying countervailing information.[14] Particularly in the South Korean political and media nexus, where the media acts as a framing mechanism for political party policy in the absence of programmatic party political platforms – so-called "media-party parallelism" -- *chongp'yŏn* channels and/or their proprietors are powerful availability entrepreneurs, as are the newspapers that preceded them: Chosun Ilbo, Dong-A Ilbo, and Joongang Ilbo.[15]

The impact of the *chongp'yŏn* channels is limited in purely viewing terms. Viewing figures are low across the board, lagging behind those of the major broadcasters KBS, MBC and Seoul Broadcasting System, or SBS. In 2011, JTBC trumpeted the fact that its flagship JTBC News 10

that the new channels would bring. A series of articles lists several grievances, noting that the new channels were actually delivering low-quality programming and not achieving the synergies that were originally promised, and that as a result of their financial situations, the channels constantly place emphasis on "relatively cheaper" studio-based entertainment programs over the educational and informative content that was promised. The articles add that the channels intensify the (by implication pre-existing) media oligopoly of conservatism and the far-right [kŭgu]; and have created far fewer jobs than projected.

[13] Timur Kuran and Cass R. Sunstein, "Availability Cascades and Risk Regulation," working paper, Chicago John M. Olin Law & Economics, no. 384 (October 2007). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=138144 (last accessed June 8, 2019). Technically, the availability entrepreneur in this case would be the proprietor of the broadcaster, but for logic and readability, here I treat the broadcaster as a single unit with views that mirror those of the owner.

[14] "Located anywhere in the social system, including the government, the media, nonprofit organizations, the business sector, and even households, [availability] entrepreneurs attempt to trigger availability cascades likely to advance their own agendas.' They do so by fixing people's attention on specific problems, interpreting phenomena in particular ways, and attempting to raise the salience of certain information." Kuran and Sunstein, "Availability Cascades and Risk Regulation," 687.

[15] Hetty van Kempen, "Media-Party Parallelism and Its Effects: A Cross-National Comparative Study," Political Communication 24, no. 3 (2007): 303-320.

was the only program on any of the four *chongp'yŏn* channels to routinely attract more than just one percent of viewers in its time slot.[16]

While the political and social impact of a given broadcaster is not defined exclusively or even predominantly by the size of its regular viewership, sometimes viewer numbers matter a lot.[17] Television is an important agency of socialization, and in South Korea television carries outsized weight in deciding people's preferences (albeit decreasingly so due to the rise of digital competitors). After the 2017 presidential election, a Gallup survey found that 59 percent of people overall, and more surprisingly 70 percent of those aged 20-29, had made their decision who to vote for based on a series of televised debates, vastly more than any other tool of information dissemination (newspapers, Internet news, social networking sites, or word-of-mouth).[18]

Therefore, given that conservative media have a long history of feeding historically-grounded patterns of understanding North Korea, the decision to allow the creation of the four cable broadcasters – and the way they have subsequently contributed to shaping domestic debate

[16] "*Kaegung JTBC, 4-gae chongp'yŏnsa chung shich'ŏngnyul 1wiro sŏndu ch'aj"i* 개국 JTBC, 4 개 종편사 중 시청률 1 위로 선두 차지 [JTBC, occupies first place for viewing figures among the four comprehensive media broadcasters], *JTBC*, December 2, 2011. http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news_id=NB10011745 (last accessed February 11, 2019). The second of the cases that I use to illustrate my point in this thesis, *Ije mannarŏ kamnida* bucks this trend, achieving a creditable viewership of 4.554 percent in its allotted slot in December 2015, the third highest at the time.
[17] One rather extreme example – President Donald Trump's apparent love of Fox News – would appear to demonstrate that sometimes, a single well-positioned viewer is all a broadcaster needs to advance its agenda as an availability entrepreneur. But in South Korea, where voting preferences are decided by debates carried by broadcast media, total viewer numbers sometimes matter a lot. Jane Mayer, "The Making of the Fox News White House," *The New Yorker*, March 4, 2019. As Mayer notes, President Trump has during his tenure "appointed the former Fox contributor Ben Carson to be his Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the former Fox commentator John Bolton to be his national-security adviser, and the former Fox commentator K. T. McFarland to be his deputy national-security adviser. (McFarland resigned after four months.) Trump recently picked the former Fox News anchor Heather Nauert to be the Ambassador to the United Nations, but she soon withdrew herself from consideration, reportedly because her nanny, an immigrant, lacked a work permit." Trump also employed Bill Shine, the former co-president of Fox News, as director of communications and deputy chief of staff in July 2018.
[18] Gallup Korea Daily Opinion, *Che-19-tae taet'ongnyŏng sŏn'gŏ sahu chosa* 제 19 대 대통령 선거 사후 조사 [19th Post-Presidential Election Survey], May 12, 2017: http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=831 (last accessed September 13, 2019).

about North Korea – is a moment in South Korean political history worthy of consideration.[19] 2009 arguably heralded a new dawn for ways in which understandings of North Korea could be formed and spread.[20]

The outcomes of such radical social change can be problematic, even on those occasions when the intentions behind it may be benign.[21] What follows are two cases in point: first, the way the uprising in Kwangju in May 1980 has been linked repeatedly to accusations of North Korean infiltration and instigation (not a benign case); and, second, the rise and impact of Channel-A television program *Now on My Way to Meet You* (a more benign case, certainly; but not entirely so), which, thanks to its relative popularity, has done more than almost any other cultural production (with the possible exception of cinema) to foster specific ways of seeing North Korea among Korean-speaking publics.[22]

[19] Jinbong Choi, "National image of North Korea in South Korean news media," *Journal of Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (2018): 1-7 (online); Yi Wŏnsŏp, "*No Muhyŏn chŏngbu shigi nambungmunje-e taehan ŏllon podo punsŏk: chosŏn, chungang, tongailbo-wa han'gyŏre, kyŏnghyang, sŏulshinmun sasŏ-rŭl chungshim-ŭro* 노무현 정부 시기 남북문제에 대한 언론 보도 분석: 조선,중앙,동아일보와 한겨레,경향,서울신문 사설을 중심으로 [Analysis of media reporting during the No Muhyŏn administration period: centered on Chosŏn, Chungang, Tongai llbo-wa Han'gyŏre, Kyŏnghyang, Sŏul Shinmun editorials], *Tongayŏn'gu* [The Journal of the Institute for East Asian Studies Sogang University] 52: 325-366.

[20] "*Han'gukkaellŏm teilli op'iniŏnr che19tae taet'ongnyŏng sŏn'gŏ sahu chosa"* 한국갤럽 데일리 오피니언: 제 19 대 대통령 선거 사후 조사 [Gallup Korea Daily Opinion: Post-19th Presidential Election Survey], *Gallup Korea*, May 12, 2017. http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=831&pagePos=6&selectYear=&search=&searchKeyword (last accessed February 11, 2019).

[21] Liv Yoon and Brian Wilson, "'Nice Korea, Naughty Korea': Media framings of North Korea and the inter-Korean relationship in the London 2012 Olympic Games," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 51, no. 5 (2016): 505-528; Choi Jong Hwan and Ha Jin Hong, "*T'ongil kwallyŏn ŏllonbodo nonjo min p'ŭreim punsŏng yŏn'gur kimdaejung min pakkŭnhye chŏngbuŭi posuwa chinboshinmunŭl chungshimŭro"* 통일 관련 언론보도 논조 및 프레임 분석 연구: 김대중 및 박근혜 정부의 보수와 진보신문을 중심으로 [News Frames of Korean Unification Issues: Comparing Conservative and Progressive Newspapers], *K'ŏmyunik'eisyŏnhang yŏn'gu* 커뮤니케이션학 연구[Korean Journal of Communication Studies] 24, no. 2 (2016): 121-145.

[22] For more on representations of North Koreans in South Korean cinema, see ch. 4, "I love you, do you love me?" in Shine Choi, *Re-imagining North Korea in International Politics: Problems and Alternatives* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 135-174.

Case 1: May 1980 and Claims of North Korean Infiltration

In 2013, two television programs on *chongp'yŏn* broadcasters TV Chosun and Channel-A aired interviews with a pair of North Korean defector-migrants. The two male defector-migrants claimed that elite members of North Korean military special forces (*t'ŭksu budae*) had played a leading role in the anti-government protests and violence that took place in Kwangju between May 18 and 27, 1980 and which ultimately precipitated the violent retaking of the city by South Korean forces. The interviewees defended the assertion, made in a self-published book, *Kim Ilsŏng, Kwangju Incident: North Korean military dispatched to the South*, that North Korean soldiers had incited the civil unrest in Kwangju by shooting citizens and promoting chaos in the city.[23]

This narrative directly contradicts the established historical understanding of the events in Kwangju. Conventional histories recount that the citizens of the city revolted against local officialdom in protest at the authoritarian rule of military dictator Chŏn Tuhwan. The events in Kwangju are a source of civic pride in Kwangju and the wider Chŏlla region, and the left in South Korean politics views the uprising as a defining moment in South Korea's fight for democracy.[24]

The first of the two controversial programs aired on May 16, days before the 33rd anniversary of the bloodshed in Kwangju. The TV Chosun show "Chang Sŏng-min's Current Affairs Tank" (*Chang Sŏng-min-ŭi shisat'aengk'ŭ*) hosted a self-identifying former member of the North Korean

[23] Similarly, *Final Analysis Report on the May 18th Kwangju Riot* claims that many North Korean officials and several senior defectors now living in South Korea took part in the Kwangju incident, including – but by no means limited to – Hwang Jangyŏp, Chang Jinsŏng (Jang Jin-sung), the founder of the media company New Focus, and Kim Sŏngmin (Kim Sung-min), the founder of Free North Korea Radio, one of a number of shortwave broadcasters targeting North Korea (*taebukpangsong*)).

[24] For a comprehensive discussion of how the events in Kwangju have since been both incorporated and contested in post-democratization South Korean history, see part two and the afterword of Shin Gi-wook and Hwang Kyung Moon, *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18th Uprising in Korea's Past and Present* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 53-139.

elite special forces.[25] The individual claimed that on May 18, 1980, one full battalion of his North Korean colleagues had entered Kwangju and occupied the provincial office. Chang then did a follow-up interview with the interviewee, during which he described the intervention in greater detail, focusing on how North Korean soldiers had shot and killed Kwangju citizens.[26]

Two days later, on the anniversary of the Kwangju uprising, May 18, Channel-A broadcast "Kim Kwanghyŏn's Balanced Views (*Kim Kwanghyŏn-ŭi t'angt'angp'yŏngp'yŏng*)." The show contained a second interview that supported the original claim of North Korean infiltration, and then doubled down, claiming that the North Korean soldiers who participated in the uprising were promoted when they returned home, implying that they had been handsomely rewarded for successfully undermining the South Korean military dictatorship.[27]

The claims incited an angry backlash, and both Channel-A and TV Chosun were ultimately found guilty of broadcasting false information by the South Korean broadcasting watchdog, the Korea Communications Standards Commission.[28] The two broadcasters were forced to issue public apologies, and received warnings from the KCSC that punitive measures would be taken if similar events were to occur in the future. But of course by then the narrative of North Korean intervention in Kwangju, a fringe perspective thrust to the forefront on cable television, had already been used to convey a specific image of North Korea, maintaining the image of the country as a rogue Other.

[25] The content was available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPbP1IsRe6U; last accessed December 15, 2014, as of September 2019 it was no longer online.
[26] "TV Chosŏn, Ch'aenŏl-A kŭdŭrŭn chinshimŭro sagwahaessŭlkka" TV 조선, 채널 A_그들은진심으로사과했을까 [TV Chosun, Channel-A, did they apologize sincerely?], video, *Minju ŏllon shimin yŏnhap* [Citizens' Alliance for Democratic Media], YouTube, December 16, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qg-FyP2EAhA (last accessed June 6, 2019).
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ko Hyŏnshil, "TV Chosŏn, 5.18 puk'an'gun kaeipsŏl pangsong sagwa" TV 조선, 5.18 북한군 개입설 방송 사과 [TV Chosun, apology for 5.18 North Korean army infiltration broadcast], *Han'gung Kyŏngje* 한국경제, May 22, 2013. https://www.hankyung.com/life/article/2013052213088 (last accessed June 6, 2019).

It is not just followers of left-wing politics who express anger and frustration at distortions in the story of what happened in Kwangju. In November 2008, conservative columnist Cho Kapche (Cho Gab-je) memorably denounced a similar claim in an article entitled "Intervention by North Korea special forces in Kwangju is something I cannot believe!"[29] As former chief editor and president of Chosun Monthly – a part of the Chosun Media group that owns both TV Chosun and Chosun Ilbo – Cho's dissent represents an important bellwether for the credibility of this type of extreme position vis North Korean intervention in Kwangju.[30]

Of course, one may reasonably argue that if even Cho Gapche wasn't buying into radical Kwangju revisionism in 2008, it is unlikely that viewers of TV Chosun would be buying into it in 2013, or indeed today. Equally, one could argue that North Korea's own predisposition towards political violence against the South is what made the story about Kwangju believable in the first place, not distorted representation. There is truth to both points. But nevertheless, the case remains an instructive example of a systematic tendency toward distorted representations of North Korea in the print and broadcast media in South Korea.[31]

[29] Cho Kapche, "'Puk'an t'ŭksubudae ŭi kwangju kaeip' chujangŭn midŭl su ŏpta!" '북한 특수부대의 광주개입' 주장은 믿을 수 없다! [Intervention by North Korea special forces in Kwangju is something I cannot believe!], chogabje.com, November 8, 2008. http://www.chogabje.com/board/view.asp?C_IDX=25238&C_CC=AC (last accessed June 6, 2019).

[30] Cho lists seven reasons why claims about North Koreans infiltrating Kwangju are likely false, a rebuttal based on everything from official statistics to widely accepted narratives about what took place.

[31] It is the contention of Ra Chongil that North Korea undertook the October 9, 1983 bombing of the Aungsan Mausoleum in Rangoon, Myanmar that killed 21 South Korean officials and others, narrowly missing Chŏn Tuhwan, partly in response to the state violence that took place in Kwangju. Ra makes the claim in his book *Aungsan t'erŏrisŭt'ŭ Kang minch'ŏl* 아웅산 테러리스트 강민철 [Aungsan terrorist Kang Minch'ol] (Sŏul: Changbi, 2013), 44-65. Ra does not countenance the notion of large-scale North Korean involvement in Kwangju either in the book or in private, but did suggest in private conversation during 2013 that North Korea would have very much wanted to instigate the crowds in Kwangju and may have attempted to infiltrate the city with small numbers of special forces to that end. However, he also pointed out that Chŏn had placed a three-line military cordon around the city, and therefore the idea that more than a small number of North Korean agents could or would have entered is for the birds. Conversation with Ra Chongil, Sŏul, 2013.

Case 2: Defector-Migrant Females and Now on My Way to Meet You

A second, perhaps less pernicious but still noteworthy example of the same phenomenon concerns how *chongp'yŏn* broadcasters contribute to the fractious discourse on resettled North Koreans in South Korean society, even as they give the prima facie impression of wanting to help the resettlement process along. The Channel-A program *Ije mannarŏ kamnida* (Now on My Way to Meet You) is an example of this.[32]

First broadcast in 2011, *Ije mannarŏ kamnida* brings together a dozen or so female defector-migrants on a weekly basis to chat with host Nam Hwisŏk (Nam Hui-seok), an additional female co-host (in the earlier episodes, two, one of whom was a foreigner), and a panel composed of four male South Korean entertainers. Episodes typically open in a lighthearted manner, with conversation about daily life in North Korea alongside mild flirtation between the Southern male and Northern female participants, make superficial (though at times certainly entertaining) attempts to describe North Korean daily life, before climaxing with an emotionally harrowing narrative from one of the border-crossers detailing her exodus from North Korea. Personalization of the plights of defector-migrants occurs in conjunction with reminders of a shared Korean identity maintained despite the regime the woman have fled, which is depicted as cruel, repressive and backward.[33] Via this framework, the program boldly claims to nurture the integration of North Korean refugees into South Korean society, and receives some government support on that basis.[34]

[32] This section was inspired by and borrows prose from Stephen Epstein and Christopher Green, "Now on My Way to Meet Who? South Korean Television, North Korean Refugees, and the Dilemmas of Representation," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 11, no 41.2 (October 13, 2013). https://apjjf.org/2013/11/41/Stephen-Epstein/4007/article.html (last accessed on September 17, 2019). Reproduced with permission. A version of the paper was presented at the 'Years of Radical Change' conference held at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies on May 31 and June 1, 2013.

[33] Epstein and Green, "Now on My Way to Meet Who?"

[34] The Ministry of Unification's acknowledgement of Channel-A's work in highlighting defector issues and its intention to support that work underscores the close relations between the show and the South Korean authorities. See: "T'ongilbu t'ongil nambukkwan'gye kwallyŏn ŏllondŭl-ege kamsaŭi maŭm chŏnhada" 통일부 통일 남북관계 관련

The program has, at times, acquired audiences considerably larger than the average for *chongp'yŏn* broadcasters: as Cho notes, "The audience rating of Now on My Way to Meet You was […] 4.554 percent in December 2015; in other words, it was rated the third-highest of all television programs on at the same time."[35] Then, we can say that the show has proven a minor hit within South Korea. It has received coverage from local and global media.[36]

The domestic success of the show is no doubt partly because it operates comfortably within the frame of a tried and tested formula. So-called *yenŭng* (variety) shows typically include light-hearted discussion, on occasion with attractive women who are foreign but able to engage with South Korean society. Prominent examples of this phenomenon include the KBS show Global Talk Show—The Chatter of Beauties[37] (*Minyŏdŭrŭi suda*) and JTBC's Abnormal Summit[38] (*Pijŏngsang hoedam*). Personalities emerge from such shows with whom viewers are encouraged to form an imagined affective bond through regular contact. Popular panelists on *Imangap* refer upon occasion to their Internet "cafés," a specifically Korean type of social media site that allows interaction between celebrities and their fans. Like Misuda, the show can be said to reflect the

언론들에게 감사의 마음 전하다 [Ministry of Unification conveys thanks to media figures involved with unification and inter-Korean issues], press release, Ministry of Unification, November 14, 2012. https://www.unikorea.go.kr/unikorea/news/release/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000004&mode=view&cntId=14604&category=&pageIdx=54 (last accessed August 26, 2019).

[35] Eun Ah Cho, *Unwelcome Home: Ethnic Ethos, Gender and Class of North Korean Refugees and Migrants*, PhD diss. UC Irvine, 2017, 57. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7pb8b06z (last accessed July 12, 2018).

[36] Darcie Draudt and Brian Gleason, "Beautiful Defectors: An Exploration of South Korea's 'Now on My Way to Meet You," *Sino-NK*, August 3, 2012. https://sinonk.com/2012/08/03/beautiful-defectors-an-exploration-of-south-koreas-now-on-my-way-to-meet-you/ (last accessed June 6, 2019); Ch'oe Sŏngjin, "*'Misuda' t'albung minyŏ pŏjŏn? usŭmgŏri toen puk'an hyŏnshil"* 미수다' 탈북미녀 버전? 웃음거리 된 북한현실 [A Version of 'Misuda' With Northern Refugee Beauties? North Korean Reality Converted into Comedy], *Hankyoreh*, June 22, 2012. http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/entertainment/539160.html (last accessed June 6, 2019); Choe Jung-yoon, "South Korea TV Show Opens a Window on the North," *LA Times*, June 10, 2012; Kim Jiyŏng, "Saengsaenghan bukhan gyeongheomdam jaemi-wa gamdong-i ggeutnaejumneda" 생생한 북한 경험담 재미와 감동이 끝내줍네다 [Interest and emotion of vivid tales from North Korea enthralls], *Weekly Dong-A*, May 14, 2012.

[37] *Misuda* went off-air in 2010, but highlight reels of the show remain on the YouTube channel of KBS Entertainment under the title "Chitchat of Beautiful Ladies." See, e.g., "Misuda hairait'ŭ" 미수다 – 하이라이트 [Misuda Highlights], video, YouTube, June 27, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiNQRewVPHhd95vuJGvOsg1zKR1eafqEY (last accessed June 6, 2019).

[38] Abnormal Summit is still on air. The official webpage of the show, which is broadcast by one of the *chongp'yŏnsa,* JTBC, is here: http://tv.jtbc.joins.com/nonsummit/.

growing prominence of young women within South Korea's societal fabric and its media-saturated consumer capitalism, which values youthful femininity as a commodity that can be converted into cultural content.[39]

However, while the emotional manipulations of *Imangap* fall readily within local traditions of melodrama and are not merely expected but perhaps even desired by viewers; trouble stems from the (at best) cavalier attitude taken towards accuracy. This is exemplified by montages of images of North Korean life used to highlight descriptive elements of the show. In episode 45, when discussion turns to the famine of the 1990s – certainly an important and worthy topic of conversation – footage is used of a destitute woman from the end of the 2000s, suggesting that the show's producers were more concerned with images of suffering in DPR Korea than historical veracity. Hackneyed shots of goose-stepping soldiers are positioned to provide the implicit subtext that the decisions of an uncaring regime to prioritize military needs extended the scale of the disaster. As the montage ends, a caption highlighting "the reddened eyes of escapee beauties" drives home the cruelty of visiting human-created catastrophe upon the innocent, who also happen to be attractive young women, while the studio camera pans to shots of the panelists composing themselves as the film clips fade. The show takes advantage of personal tales of food deprivation and malnutrition to render the suffering viscerally affecting.[40]

Whether or not one is inclined to agree with the implicit subtexts of the show's producers is neither here nor there. Only, they demonstrate the problematic manner in which North Korea is

[39] Kim Yeran, "Idol Republic: The Global Emergence of Girl Industries and the Commercialization of Girl Bodies," *Journal of Gender Studies* 20, no. 4 (2011): 333-345.
[40] Claims made in this section can be verified against the following YouTube playlist for Episode 45, which was curated by my co-author Stephen Epstein out of clips uploaded by the broadcaster: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8OGBxmziCzG-bVXrp4NnGbWNJLIdty70 (last accessed September 26, 2019).

Othered by the structure of the show, even if, as I am inclined to believe, it is produced at least in part with good intentions.

Certainly, North Korean defector-migrants dislike the show. In private conversation, I have been repeatedly told of the show's inconsistencies and inaccuracies, and urged not to base my views of North Korean politics or society on it.[41] Published work reflects these viewpoints. In 2013, O Yŏngsuk brought together a focus group to discuss perceptions of how defector-migrants are presented in South Korean media. Their discussion of Imangap suggests that the show is a target for substantial criticism in the defector-migrant community for how it portrays defector-migrants as objects of pity.[42] Interviewees say they feel that the show willfully, if not maliciously, misrepresents them: "If [South Koreans] see that, they'll likely say that the women left North Korea because they couldn't live there, couldn't adapt [to the changes in North Korean society]" one interviewee comments. "It'd be good to go to Channel-A and ask them to stop the show. Too many lies," added another. Yet again, we see here how the outcome of the approach of South Korean media in forming opinions of the defector-migrant community – and of North Korea itself – is that North Koreans are seen as either evil or helpless, with little in between.[43]

Two Fallacies about the Defector-Migrant Community

What are the implications of the social context within which defector-migrant research takes place? What I refer to in the previous section as the tendency of conservative media to feed "negative historically-grounded patterns of understanding North Korea" is representative of the way South Korean society tends to deal with/discriminate against incoming North Koreans.

[41] Personal conversations with multiple former participants in *Imangap*, Sŏul, 2012-13.
[42] O Yŏngsuk, "Kwan'gaekŭrosŏŭi t'albukcha t'albugŭi chagip'yosanggwa yŏnghwa suyong" 관객으로서의 탈북자: 탈북의 자기표상과 영화 수용 [North Korean defectors as audience: self-representation of defection and film reception], *Yŏnghwayŏn'gu* 영화연구 [Film Research] 55 (2013): 291-329.
[43] O, "Kwan'gaekŭrosŏŭi t'albukcha," 318-321.

Discrimination is only partly structural – resettled North Koreans are South Korean citizens by constitutional right, and as such have all the same rights and freedoms as native-born South Koreans – but it is deep-rooted, and contributes much to the prevalence of two fallacies about the defector-migrant community: first, that the community is biased as a whole; and second, that its members were generally poor and uneducated when they lived in North Korea.

As of March 2016, when this survey project began, there were 29,137 North Koreans resettled in South Korea, most of them living in Sŏul and surrounding Kyŏnggi Province. It is undeniably the case that people leaving North Korea over the last two decades have brought evidence about how North Korean daily lives were and are lived, and how the power of the state was and continues to be experienced. Whether we choose to call this group of migrants "defectors," "migrants," "defector-migrants", "*saet'omin*[44]," "forced migrants[45]" or something else entirely, its members have a great deal more knowledge about the multi-faceted nature of North Korean society than anyone else to whom we currently have access.[46]

This rich primary source is not always celebrated in the literature on North Korea, though. Quite the opposite. The credibility of defector-migrant evidence is frequently called into question and its explanatory value systematically downplayed. Every analyst of North Korea has likely been advised on more than one occasion to doubt the words of resettled North Korean migrants. Hazel Smith cites "lack of referencing, uncritical reliance on defectors, and political bias" as major obstacles to better analysis of the North Korean society of the Kim Ilsŏng era, adding that

[44] Kang Jin-woong, "Human Rights and Refugee Status of the North Korean Diaspora," *North Korean Review* 9, no. 2 (2013): 4-17.
[45] Markus Bell and Rosita Armytage, "Ethnography and Borderlands: The Socio-political Dimensions of North Korean Migration," in *Decoding the Sino-North Korean Borderlands*, ed. Adam Cathcart, Christopher Green and Steven Denney (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming)
[46] The question of how we should describe this group of people is a politically fraught one, far more so than my apparent overlooking of it would suggest. Nevertheless, that is not the subject of this thesis, and we cannot afford to get bogged down in it. Accordingly, here I refer to the group using a mixture of the various names used by others, with a focus on readability and without any political implications. I mostly employ the term "defector-migrants".

the words originated not with her, but in a briefing published by the US Central Intelligence Agency.[47] Jiyoung Song speaks of experiencing "numerous inconsistent stories, intentional omission and lies" during her research involving defector-migrant interviews, and cautions scholars to approach the community with care.[48] We might call this predisposition to disregard the words of defector-migrants the "Bias Fallacy."[49]

This is not the first time that the words of people fleeing authoritarian regimes have been disputed, downplayed or discounted by some in academia and government. The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS[50]) in the 1950s and Soviet Interview Project (SIP[51]) of the early 1980s both faced similar challenges. The SIP was contested in the United States not because it was a poorly designed experiment – it wasn't – but because of the research subjects involved. "A very high proportion of the members of the [SIP] sample frame elected to leave the Soviet Union voluntarily."[52] In other words, they wanted to leave. Therefore, "it is generally assumed on first consideration that our respondents would be uniformly hostile to the Soviet

[47] Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 164. I have not been able to verify the original CIA source despite making considerable efforts to do so.
[48] Jiyoung Song, "Unreliable witness: The challenge of separating truth from fiction when it comes to North Korea," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Society Policy Forum*, August 2, 2015. http://www.policyforum.net/unreliable-witnesses/ (last accessed August 31, 2016); Song Jiyoung, "In the Making of North Korean Korean Defector-Activists," blog post, July 23, 2015. https://songjiyoung.wordpress.com/2015/07/23/in-the-making-of-north-korean-defector-activists/ (last accessed May 15, 2017).
[49] North Korea promotes skepticism as to the veracity of defector-migrant testimony by positioning all defector-migrants as *political* refugees – traitorous people with an axe to grind against the DPR Korean state. If a defector-migrant can be so-branded, it invalidates his or her words, at least in so far as those words relate to views of the North Korean government.
[50] The HPSSS involved in-depth interviews with 330 "wartime displaced persons or members of the Soviet occupation forces who had left the Soviet sectors of Germany and Austria after World War II. The majority of these respondents were currently living in camps for displaced persons or were living independently within the German economy." Alice H. Bauer, *A Guide for Interviewing Soviet Escapees* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Research and Development Command Human Resources Research Institute, 1953).
[51] In the late 1960s, the Soviet Union permitted hundreds of thousands of its citizens to leave the country permanently, mostly for Israel (265,000) but also West Germany (90,000) and other third countries (20,000). Between 1968 and 1984, a total of approximately 375,000 people thus legally migrated out of the USSR. Over time, a significant number of those travelling to Israel moved on again, resettling in the United States. By 1986, more than 100,000 had done so, with 35,000 of those arriving in 1979 alone. It was there in the US between March 1983 and January 1984, that 2,824 of these were interviewed for the SIP. Millar (ed.), *Politics, work, and daily life in the USSR*: 4-5, 17-18.
[52] The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS) interviewed 330 Soviet refugees, residents in West Germany, Austria, and the United States between 1950 and 1953. See: The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System Online (http://hcl.harvard.edu/collections/hpsss/index.html, last accessed September 26, 2019).

social system."[53] The SIP sample, made up predominantly of Russian Jews who migrated out of the USSR, was assumed to be by definition full of biased, anti-Soviet dissident opinion for the simple reason that the interviewees had chosen to leave the USSR. Though the results of the SIP were overwhelmingly positively received, the project's critics concluded that the results would not be useful or salient even for understanding the referent population within the Soviet Union, let alone Soviet society as a whole.[54]

Those departing the Soviet Union were legally, albeit reluctantly from the state's perspective, permitted to leave. In analogous cases, departures were not nearly as orderly, but the response from parts of the scholarly community was similar. Famously, Noam Chomsky was one of several academics to flatly reject compelling evidence of what was happening during the brief but bloody Khmer Rouge period in what is now Cambodia (formerly Kampuchea) from 1975-1979.[55] Chomsky's response came about largely because evidence of the atrocities then underway was obtained from people fleeing the Khmer Rouge to third countries, and had been gathered and collated by a French missionary (i.e. they were intrinsically biased, and worse still, acting in collusion with a foreign country).[56] For Chomsky, those who flee "naturally tend to report what they believe their interlocutors wish to hear."[57]

[53] Millar (ed.), *Politics, work, and daily life in the USSR*, 19.
[54] The designated referent population was the "adult European population in large and medium-sized Soviet cities." "Soviet Interview Project, 1979-1985 (ICPSR 8694)," February 16, 1992. https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/08694 (last accessed June 11, 2019). Peer-reviewed publications emerging from the project carefully document concerns over validity. See, e.g., Paul R. Gregory, Irwin L. Collier and Jr., "Unemployment in the Soviey Union: Evidence from the Soviet Interview Project, *The American Economic Review* 78 (4) (September 1988): 615-616; Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silber, "The Validity of Survey Responses: Insights from Interviews of Married Couples in a Survey of Soviet Emigrants," *Social Forces* 66 (2) (December 1987): 537-554. There is also a comprehensive review of the project: Peter Donhowe and James R. Millar, Life, Work and Politics in Soviet Cities: Results of the Soviet Interview Project," https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/0000-000-00-Donhowe.pdf (last accessed June 8, 2019).
[55] Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, "Distortions at Fourth Hand," *The Nation*, June 6, 1977; Laura Summers, "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia," *Current History* 71, no. 422 (December 1976): 213-217, 228.
[56] Francois Ponchaud, *Cambodia: Year Zero* (New York: New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978)
[57] Chomsky and Herman, "Distortions at Fourth Hand."

It would be a mistake to assume that there have been dramatic advances on Chomsky's perspective over the last forty years. The same arguments tend to come back round again and again. When research is based in part or whole upon information derived from resettled North Koreans, doubts and dismissiveness are commonplace. People who choose to flee North Korea are framed as part of a self-selecting sample, thus predisposed toward anti-government sentiment.[58] It is presumed that the decision to flee life in North Korea must stem from pre-existing bias against the DPRK political order, and that this makes respondents bad, or at a minimum irredeemably unreliable, witnesses.

The Bias Fallacy has a close relationship to concerns over the giving of compensation for survey participation. Despite the fact that – no matter what the subject area – it is widely considered best practice to compensate survey participants for their time, travel and effort, this practice attracts opprobrium in the field of North Korea studies on the spurious ground that a (however minimally) paid participant will be inclined to give the answers that the interviewer wishes to hear; i.e. that payment introduces an additional source of error to the findings.[59] Though there is little evidence for this – it is by no means a simple matter for a respondent to discern what the interviewer "wishes to hear," and other factors, such as the presence at the interview site of multiple participants (i.e. focus group interviews) or other family members, appear to have far larger impacts – the notion of a compensated participant as an unreliable witness persists.[60]

[58] There may be some truth to this. We describe those who leave as being assumed to have a lower "revolutionary threshold" than the mean average North Korean, which makes such people as both anti-government and relatively more likely to articulate that opposition – given the evident difficulty of articulating opposition at home – by leaving. See: Timur Kuran, "The East European Revolution of 1989: Is it Surprising that We Were Surprised?" *The American Economic Review* 81, no. 2 (May 1991): 122.
[59] Jay Song and Steven Denney, "Studying North Korea through North Korean migrants: lessons from the field," *Critical Asian Studies*, May 5, 2019 (published online).
[60] Anderson and Silber, "The Validity of Survey Responses," 537-554.

In the face of the challenges that this type of research face, it would perhaps be tempting to declare defeat and assert that only once random probability sample surveying of un-compensated members of the public in North Korea becomes the norm will any questions about North Korean society be answerable with confidence. However, even if that were a fair and reasonable idea in principle, which I believe it is not, in practice it would not resolve the problem. In North Korea both today and after the hypothetical fall of the existing regime, the results of public opinion polls would likely be not more but *less* reliable than the words of defector-migrants now.

Even in those places, like Leiden, where free speech is routinely protected, as Ervin Goffman noted, "We are all just actors trying to control and manage our public image, we act based on how others might see us."[61] And certainly, North Korea is no such place. It is currently impossible for a North Korean citizen in North Korea to speak publicly about their feelings of hostility to the Kim regime, in so far as those feelings exist.[62] North Korea is a brutal and dictatorship where one's life can all too easily hang on one's capacity for preference falsification.[63] Conversely, even in a hypothetical future where the Kim regime had disappeared, social desirability bias would similarly make it very difficult – albeit presumably not life-threatening – to express feelings of warmth and sincere approval of the ancien régime.[64]

[61] Ervin Goffman, *The presentation of everyday life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 22.
[62] I do not assume the existence of those feelings; the null hypothesis ought always to be that ordinary people feel no hostility toward the state.
[63] Timur Kuran, "Preference Falsification, Policy Continuity and Collective Conservatism," *The Economic Journal* 97, no. 387 (September 1987): 642-665.
[64] Derek L. Philips and Kevin J. Clancy, "Some Effects of 'Social Desirability' in Survey Studies," American Journal of Sociology 77, no. 5 (March 1972): 921-940; Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Moreover, while there is ample cause to treat defector-migrant testimony with care, the attacks leveled at the migrant North Korean community are premised on an anachronistic view of human memory, one with which cognitive psychology has long dispensed. What Hazel Smith calls a "political bias" against North Korea and Jiyoung Song describes as "intentional omission and lies" is not necessarily a conscious choice. That is why some prefer to use the term "error" rather than "bias." While I wish to thank Pak Saeyŏng for drawing my attention to this terminological distinction between "error" and "bias", I have chosen to stick with the term "bias" because it is more readily understood. Malcolm Gladwell, "A Polite Word for Liar (Memory Part 1)," *Revisionist History*, podcast audio, 31 May 2018, http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/23-a-polite-word-for-liar-memory-part-1 (last accessed September 17, 2019). Singling out the defector-migrant community for criticism on those grounds sets up a false dichotomy between the researcher and participant.

There is no satisfactory resolution to this dilemma, but the best of an unsatisfactory set of possible responses is the one that this thesis employs: to cautiously interpret defector-migrant testimony that has been gathered using several methodologies – e.g., surveys, structured and semi-structured interviews – and cross-reference it where possible with information from other sources, both official and unofficial. In doing so, I follow the approach of the HPSSS and SIP, which, it was subsequently established, did largely reflect their respective referent populations (specific sectors of Soviet society).[65] "To the credit of this survey, it should be pointed out that the respondents were finally living outside the realm of the totalitarian system and were relatively free to express their true views about the USSR," Shlapentokh notes of the HPSSS. "All other sources on the views of the Soviet people from inside the country (i.e. letters in the media, or even party and policy reports) were infected with much greater bias."[66]

In addition to the fallacy that evidence from defector-migrants is particularly error-prone and unreliable, a second, related fallacy is also problematic: that all defector-migrants left DPR Korea to escape poverty and hardship. This tendency has declined markedly in scholarly publications in recent years, but in media, it is still common to see defector-migrants described as one or all of the following: uneducated (therefore ignorant), naïve (therefore foolish), and/or ideologically "brainwashed."[67] BBC Newsround, a simplified news program for British schoolchildren,

[65] Hyung-min Joo, "Hidden transcripts in marketplaces: politicized discourses in the North Korean shadow economy," *The Pacific Review* 27, no. 1 (2014): 49-71; Millar, *Politics, work, and daily life in the USSR,* 18-25.
[66] Vladimir Shlapentokh, *A Normal Totalitarian Society: How the Soviet Union Functioned and How It Collapsed* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 137. Shlapentokh is also critical of the HPSSS, pointing out that a significant percentage of the respondents "for one reason or another held a grudge against their system."
[67] Robert Gellately has no truck with the notion of brainwashing as an explanatory variable in Nazi Germany: "The very idea of brainwashing a nation of more than 60 million Germans - or treating them as if they all were in a military boot-camp - is so implausible that it should be dismissed out of hand." Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 261. There are only 25 million North Koreans, but the same immediate cause for dismissal applies. Nevertheless, several interviewees used the Korean term *senoe* (brainwashing) – a term known to North Koreans with reference to education under the Japanese Empire – to describe the cognitive condition of other North Koreans, variously both inside and outside North Korea. In private conversations, former members of the North Korean elite use the term to describe the cognitive condition of the non-elite mass of North Koreans. What these two situations have in common is that the term is rarely used to describe oneself, only others. This suggests the existence of a curious dichotomy (as it were, "everyone else is/was brainwashed but me"). According to Hazel Smith, the "poverty fallacy" that incorporates the notion of North Korean citizens as brainwashed is a necessary component of the "bad actor" model, a framework of understanding

explains that "most North Koreans are extremely poor with things like fridges, washing machines, and even bicycles, hard to come by," and that in any case, "TVs and radios are tuned to state channels and people caught listening to foreign broadcasts face harsh punishments," which means that "most North Koreans may have little or no idea of world events, or how their country is thought of by the outside world."[68]

The points made by BBC Newsround are not entirely wrong, of course, representing as they do the lives of a not insignificant slice of the North Korean population. The problem is that the reality for a slice of the population is often treated as the whole story for everyone. Alternative motivations for migration besides politics and poverty seem to be either unknown or implicitly discounted.[69] I call this homogenizing tendency the "Poverty Fallacy".

In fact, people from the northern half of the Korean peninsula who leave DPR Korea come from a variety of geographical regions and socio-economics backgrounds, and migrate out for many different reasons. In 2008, cultural anthropologist Byung-ho Chung created a typology of defector-migrants to capture variation in the community, positing the existence of six major cohorts of North Korean resettled in South Korea. Each is defined chronologically, but there is

North Korean politics and IR that requires that ordinary but militarized North Koreans be ready to rise up en masse and go to war with the enemy irrespective of their objective interests. She notes that under the bad actor thesis, "Citizens are so effectively brainwashed by the propaganda of the regime that they have lost their capacity for independent thought. Rather than a potential war providing the opportunity for liberation from an authoritarian leader (as, say, seems to be happening in Serbia since the Kosovo war), the north Korean people, according to this perspective, would be expected to operate as an undifferentiated mass in support of the north Korean leadership." Hazel Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy," *International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (July 2000): 601.

[68] "North Korea: Everything you need to know about the country," BBC Newsround, June 12, 2018. https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/20692214 (last accessed June 11, 2019).

[69] In her sharply critical monograph on external representations of North Korea, Shine Choi asserts that photographic evidence of suffering is presented so as to offer "a way that we can significantly help with our direct action." I do not intend in this thesis to go into the intent behind the ways in which North Korea is represented, only to focus on the point that while there obviously is great poverty and suffering in North Korea, these are not the universal experience of "being North Korean." There is much more to it than that. Shine Choi, *Re-imagining North Korea in International Politics,* 106

also notable socio-economic variation between them.[70] Each cohort is linked to a period in post-WWII Korean peninsula migration history: (1) "system selective migrants" of the period 1945-50; (2) war refugees of the Korean War from 1950 to 53; (3) Cold War "heroes who returned to the state" between 1962 and 1993; (4) post-Cold War "returning brethren" of 1993-97; (5) the "escaping residents" of 1997 to 2004; and (6) "new settlers (*saet'omin*)" of the mid-2000s to the present day. Chung's categorization does not map perfectly onto the facts on the ground – because there is significant variation to account for – and nor is it the only possible way to structure an explanation of defector-migrant history and community, but it is an instructive typology.[71]

It is the case, however, that in his pursuit of a usable typology, Chung over-generalizes within each cohort. It is true, for example, that cohort three (Cold War "heroes who returned to the state" between 1962 and 1993) is very small and reasons for defection among its members are limited in number. It is also true that early in the history of mass migration from North to South in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, migration due to economic hardship was particularly pronounced.[72] But such broad statements ignore the complexity of the community.

Today, too, a significant percentage of defector-migrants are likely to have been relatively poor in North Korea. An annual survey of newly arrived defector-migrants by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) of Sŏul National University reveals that between 26 and 44 percent of new arrivals in the years 2011-2017 were urban laborers, and between four and nine

[70] Byung-ho Chung, "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea," *Korean Studies* 32 (2008): 1-27

[71] Chung, "Between Defector and Migrant." Chung's focus in the article is on changes in the structure of government support for incoming North Koreans, the impact of shifting South Korean societal views of resettled North Koreans on the identity of the migrants, and the (frequently rather negative) ways in which the different groups of incoming migrants view one another.

[72] Eric Bidet, "Social Capital and Work Integration of Migrants: The Case of North Korean Defectors in South Korea," *Asian Perspective* 33, no. 2 (2009): 157-158; In-Jin Yoon, "North Korean Diaspora: North Korean Defectors Abroad and in South Korea," *Development and Society* 30, no. 1 (2001): 1-26.

percent in the same period were agricultural workers. Nobody in these groups is likely to have been affluent.

However, there is also more variation among arrivals now than there was in the 1990s, indeed even as recently as 2008 when Chung was writing, and comparably lower median poverty levels. In 2011, for example, no fewer than 13.1 percent of respondents in the IPUS survey were government officials, and 8.1 percent were professionals (teachers, doctors, engineers, and suchlike). Almost ten percent described themselves as traders. In both 2016 and 2017, no fewer than 18 percent of respondents had been Korean Workers' Party members, a key variable in deciding life chances and access to resources in North Korea.[73]

One interviewee, a 49-year old female from a North Hamgyŏng Province town many tens of kilometers from the China-DPRK border, agreed that a diverse range of people from North Korean society are now making the choice to come to South Korea.[74] Though she was not among them, the interviewee said that a significant minority of migrant escapees live comfortably in North Korea – mostly but not exclusively in P'yŏngyang. She noted that this group accordingly retains a greater fondness for the DPR Korean social system, which tends to function in their favor. In the interviewee's estimation, such people migrate to South Korea for a greater degree of personal freedom or to satisfy practical goals like educational opportunities for their children, and at the same time feel privately positive about the North Korean system they lived in and benefited from.

[73] "2017 Pukhan sahoebyŏndonggwa chuminŭishing pyŏnhwar t'rpyŏngjinnosŏnŭi tu ŏlgul" 2017 북한 사회변동과 주민의식 변화: '병진노선'의 두 얼굴 [2017 North Korean social changes and people's awareness: the two faces of the 'pyŏngjin nosŏn'], materials published in advance of a seminar held by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies on August 30, 2017. Numbers of those surveyed by IPUS fluctuated in the period 2011-2017 between 105 (2011) and 149 (2014).
[74] Female, age 49, lived in North Hamgyŏng, spent 40 years in North Korea.

In today's migrant flow there are also **educational migrants**, such as the young female whose parents live and work in one of North Korea's industrial cities. Her father is a Korean Workers' Party official and her mother a successful market trader, a combination of positions that is particularly advantageous in modern North Korean society. The family can be considered middle class. Their daughter crossed the border in 2008 in order to obtain a high-quality university education in Sŏul – free, high-quality education is one of the benefits that accrue to young migrants from North Korea when they come to the South. This type of migration may even be considered circular – in other words, at least nominally temporary – though it is unclear if or when return to North Korea will be possible.[75]

Another young female left a position in the Korean People's Army in the capital city of a rural interior province of North Korea to cross the border in 2010. She had joined the army for the upward mobility it brings, but was dissatisfied with military life. Being from a relatively wealthy family, the young woman was able to stay safely in China for just 45 days before joining her mother, a trader who had already moved to the South. Here, again, the migration plan was circular; it was neither the woman nor her mother's intention to travel to South Korea, much less to resettle there.[76]

However, the family's temporary migration has become permanent. The young woman obtained a (free) degree in business administration from one of the top three universities in Sŏul, and does a white-collar job in the administration of a company. She has severed contact with her father, who manages a KPA sub-department managing the distribution of military goods, an excellent position from which to acquire supplementary income through bribery and the illicit resale of

[75] Charles Tilly, "Migration in Modern European History," CRSO Working Paper No. 145, October 1976: 5.
[76] This individual has been a personal friend since 2012. I most recently interviewed her about her experiences in January 2019.

state property, but one that would be at great risk were his family's departure from North Korea to become common knowledge.

Another group of migrants are what we might call **aspirational entrepreneurs**, like the young woman from North Hamgyŏng Province who had been making a living selling pre-registered mobile phones prior to her departure from North Korea in the late Kim Chŏngil era. Over the course of the 21st century, the young woman became an increasingly regular consumer of South Korean television and film, and when a close friend left for the South in the late 2000s, the two kept in touch, something made possible by the era of cross-border cellphone communications after approximately 2004. A few months later, frustrated by what the young woman saw as the strictures of the North Korean social system, she decided to liquidate her assets and leave.[77]

There are also lots of people, particularly among the young, who are not poor but chafe beneath the structural repressions of a social system wherein positions of authority are explicitly closed off to them. These ***sŏngbun***[78] **migrants** seek to leave permanently, and decisively, without any intention of returning. Take for example the ambitious and intelligent male who wanted to attend a prestigious university in P'yŏngyang, but was rejected despite having excellent grades. Upon bribing a government official working in university admissions to find out why his application had been unsuccessful, the young man learned that his family background (*sŏngbun*) was inadequate for attendance at an elite university. The young man began to do what the system intended for him – study at a mid-ranking, non-elite university and enter a mid-level job without complaint – but over time became disillusioned with the quality and style of the schooling. After

[77] I heard about this individual in a 2017 personal conversation with a Sŏul-based director of an NGO that helps defector-migrants travel from China post-defection to South Korea.
[78] A "complicated system of hereditary and semi-hereditary groups which was defined by one's family background and supposed loyalty to the regime." Andrei Lankov and Kim Seok-hyang, "North Korean Market Vendors: The Rise of Grassroots Capitalists in a Post-Stalinist Society," *Pacific Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 68.

a year of planning his migration, the man moved to South Korea and began to study in a university there.[79]

In a similar case, a second young man was studying languages at a prestigious university in P'yŏngyang when he was made aware by school staff that his family background might limit his options after graduation – positions with the diplomatic service, for example, would have been systematically denied to him. He decided that he did not wish to do what he regarded as an uninteresting mid-level job such as high school teacher, so left (with his father) for South Korea.[80]

The individual defector-migrant escape stories above are insufficient to capture the diversity of the defector-migrant community. But when added to Chung's insightful if flawed typology, they do highlight once again how that which is commonly labelled the "defector community" and treated as a homogenous entity is actually a variegated site of contestation. The "poverty fallacy", if it was ever true, is, like the "bias fallacy," not true anymore.

North Korea's Role in Defector-Migrant Research

Given the socio-political fault lines in South Korean society and the fact that the division of the peninsula in 1945 now resides in a cognitive blind spot between history and lived experience, the presence of a growing community of resettled North Koreans in the South was always bound to generate political and social discord. However, the North Korean government is also active in attempting to widen existing fissures (and create new ones) in accordance with a strategy of

[79] Lankov and Kim, "North Korean Market Vendors," 68.
[80] This individual has been a personal friend since 2017. I most recently interviewed him about his experiences in January 2019.

appealing to anti-American and anti-Japanese nationalist sentiment among the South Korean populace.

In past generations, North Korean attempts to influence politics in South Korea were regularly violent. In recent years, physical violence has diminished, though it has not disappeared, and agencies run or actively supported by the North Korean state continue to disseminate cultural productions that attack and seek to undermine the claims of high-profile defectors and affiliated organization, regularly focusing on attempting to reinforce pre-existing biases. Other videos and articles attack the defector-migrant community as a whole.

Simultaneously, P'yŏngyang seeks to discredit defector-migrant North Koreans as a group in the international arena. North Korea attacked the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (COI[81]) on the basis that it relies on 240 in-depth interviews with this group, whom P'yŏngyang called liars and "human scum" seeking only to besmirch the reputation of North Korea on false grounds.[82]

Discrediting testimony that evidences North Korea's abundant abuses of power is an important task for the government in P'yŏngyang for several reasons. First, the UN COI report testimony forms a key plank of the international community's putative legal case against the Kim government. A small number of prominent defector-migrants are vital network nodes in the

[81] Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/CommissionInquiryonHRinDPRK.aspx (last accessed June 8, 2019).
[82] "North Korea calls defectors 'human scum' in bid to deflect UN rights probe," *South China Morning Post*, January 21, 2015. https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1688233/north-korea-calls-defectors-human-scum-bid-deflect-un-rights-probe (last accessed June 9, 2019). North Korean media often us the phrase "human scum" to describe defector-migrants. The most recent instance was in November 2018, when North Korean media attacked a Human Rights Watch report on sexual violence against North Korean women, saying, "The much-hyped 'north Korean human rights issue' is based on the rubbish uttered by the human scum who committed unforgivable crimes and fled from the DPRK leaving their parents and children behind." "Scrutiny into US human rights racket," *Pyongyang Times*, November 30, 2018.

promulgation of testimony about state violence against North Korean citizens inside the country. In addition to practical concerns that incendiary defector-migrant testimony could place the state at risk and/or senior officials in future legal jeopardy, the North Korean government has an incentive to discredit the testimony because it per se challenges a historical-political norm of the North Korean state. The decision of would-be North Korean defector-migrants to leave sovereign DPR Korean territory without obtaining official permission to do so represents symbolic rupture with the concept of a benevolent leadership providing protection to a people facing off against a hostile world filled with malignant enemies. If P'yŏngyang can discredit those peoples' testimonies as credible evidence, even if only in the eyes of some at home and a small number of others abroad, it goes some way toward defending the state from attack both from within and without.

Contestation over North Korea has a predictably negative impact in South Korean society. It fosters intractable political discord – known locally as *namnamgaltŭng* ("South-South conflict") – and distracts both the conservative and liberal sides of politics from the business of governing (as well as providing a ready excuse for the worst impulses of the country's comparatively many nationalists). Additionally, and importantly, it promotes and supports the first of two fallacies about North Korean defector-migrants as sources of useful information: that defector-migrants are biased and/or liars.