

The Integration of North Korean Defectors in South Korea: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

As the debate over North Korea's collapse re-emerges, the mass exodus of North Koreans to China and South Korea poses a serious challenge. Already, many North Koreans have left North Korea for China and South Korea. In South Korea, over 20,000 defectors had arrived by 2010, most via China. They had gone to South Korea with high hopes, but soon were disillusioned by the realities of living there. By examining specific issues that the defectors face in adjusting to life in Korea, one can project the problems a unified Korea might encounter in integrating those who have lived under two completely different systems. The problem should be addressed as soon as possible, since it will take at least a generation to change people's mindset. Lack of preparation to integrate Koreans from north into south could lead to enduring social problems that could impact the stability of Northeast Asia. Worse, a disaffected population could be a source of support for potential factions of North Korea that may conduct insurgency operations. Social integration is one area in which affected parties can start taking action now to prepare for the future, and doing so, will help ameliorate what could become a complex and expensive endeavor.

Keywords: North Korean Defectors, North Korea, South Korea, mass movement, stability, social integration, unification

Introduction

The debate over North Korea's collapse is re-emerging as uncertainty surrounds the worsening food situation, declining economy, and leadership succession questions in North Korea. A key challenge in that scenario is the mass movement of people from North Korea to South Korea and China. Numerous problems are associated with that exodus. One crucial matter is the social integration of Koreans from north and south under a democratic and free market system existing in South Korea. Already, hundreds of thousands of North Koreans have left their homes for China, from which a portion have then moved to South Korea. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have estimated that 100,000-400,000 North Koreans are now living in China.² Over 20,000 defectors had arrived in South Korea by the end of 2010, most via China. They go to South Korea with high expectations, but often the hopes are dashed by the realities of living there, realities such as the defectors' lack of understanding of South Korean society and culture. By examining specific issues that the defectors face in adjusting to life in South Korea, one can project the problems a unified Korea might encounter.

Since it would take at least a generation to fix such problems, the predicament should be addressed as soon as possible. Lack of or insufficient preparation for integrating Koreans from north and south could lead to enduring social problems impacting regional stability. Worse, a disaffected population could be a source of support for potential factions of North Korea that might support destabilizing activities, such as insurgency operations. In a collapse scenario leading to unification, the South Korean government would likely lead, with the support of the U.S. government, in post-unification reconstruction and development. While development encompasses a variety of measures, social integration is one area in which South Korea can start taking action now to prepare for the future, and, doing so as soon as possible, will help ameliorate what could become a complex and expensive enterprise.

The article begins by examining the potential for mass migration from North Korea to South Korea. Then it will review North Korean defectors and their settlement process, followed by specific challenges to social integration. It will highlight the defector youths and their challenges since they have unique problems that differ from adults, but also provide a group that can play a greater role in future integration. The last segment provides a potential remedy, focusing on education for both North Koreans and South Koreans to help ease future integration

process.

State Failure of North Korea as a Trigger to Migration

Mass migration could occur as a result of a collapsed North Korea. North Korea's system has already failed, some argue. Andrew Scobell of the Strategic Studies Institute defines a failed regime as "one that...in many aspects has ceased to function even though significant institutions exist."³ He also stresses that collapse is a process rather than an outcome, and that the process of the collapse of the North Korean regime has already begun.⁴ A government that cannot feed its own population, especially when food is available globally, has a significant weakness in its system. North Korea's main method of central allocation of food distribution—Public Distribution System (PDS)—has failed miserably to meet the people's demand for food, at least since the early 1990s. Consequently, one million people, or about five percent of North Korea's population, died during the great famine of the mid-1990s.⁵ The North Korean regime blamed floods and drought as the cause of the country's famine and the chronic food shortages. Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland in their book on North Korean famine allege that the official interpretation of blaming only external factors, including natural disasters, is misleading.⁶ North Korea has long depended on external powers, initially the Soviet Union and later China, for aid. North Korea experienced fundamental economic shock when the Soviet Union stopped aid and demanded hard currency for its support; barter was no longer welcome. The North Korean government began to decrease food rations in 1987 when the Soviet Union cut its food assistance.⁷ Despite signs of food problems prior to the famine, Pyongyang was slow to enact measures to ensure adequate food supply, instead exhorting North Koreans to eat less with the "let's eat two meals a day" campaign in 1991.⁸ North Korea did request and receive food assistance during the famine's height. Instead of using that aid to increase the overall food supply, the North Korean government offset the assistance by reducing commercial food imports and using the savings from reduced food imports for other purposes, including arms purchases and nuclear tests.⁹ The North Korean regime's emphasis on *Seon-goon* (Military First Policy) rather than food shows the regime attempts to garner public support through strengthening the ideological basis rather than by providing basic needs.

To deal with famine and food shortages, North Korean's adapted in a variety of ways. Where markets were practically non-existent, they sprang up to exchange food. Although movement within as well as away from North Korea has been strictly controlled, many North Koreans went to China in search of food. In the widespread food shortages have continued with the state seeking to control the distribution of food and goods to retain power. The task of feeding the population, however, has become too complex to manage, leading to tragic consequences.

The latest currency revaluation and the negative reaction of ordinary North Koreans also signify the North Korean state's inability to deal with its crumbling economy. On December 1, 2009, North Korea suddenly announced that, within five days, it was replacing the old currency with new notes at a 100:1 ratio.¹⁰ The North Koreans could exchange up to 100,000 won (or about \$35-40), enough to feed a family for two months. Any surplus over the maximum amount had to be deposited at a bank, but only up to 300,000 won. Any savings North Koreans had over that amount, in effect, would be confiscated by the state, an action which angered many North Koreans. Many of the market traders were women in their 40s and 50s, and they openly expressed their bitterness at the currency reform by protesting against the leadership, despite the threats of arrest.¹¹ Riots reportedly had sympathy from ordinary citizens. The scale was such that the authorities summarily executed 12 'masterminds,' raised alert for mass defections across the border, and took steps to mollify the public, such as increasing the ceiling of the amount that could be exchanged to 500,000 won.¹² North Korea's Premier Kim Young-il offered a rare apology to the public and Park Nam-ki, alleged culprit for the failed reform, was dismissed and later executed.¹³ Reports of riots and large scale discontent are rare, but any sign of defiance shows that people have and can oppose the government policy in North Korea. As North Korea's fragile economy declines, perhaps the regime's monopoly on control is diminishing as well. Such organized opposition could trigger a greater movement, further weakening the regime, and possibly leading to its collapse.

Leadership transition is another major concern. Amidst health concerns, Kim Jong-il designated his youngest son, Kim Jong-eun, as his heir, and Jang Song-taek, his brother-in-law, as his caretaker. Kim Jong-eun is considered too young and inexperienced, and it is difficult to tell whether the younger Kim can inherit the power smoothly. Jang Song-taek could help ease the transition from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-eun or

may become a challenger to Kim Jong-eun for power. If the succession fails, it could lead to the loss of control, then to a collapse. In June 2008, the South Korean National Intelligence Service reported to the National Assembly that Kim Jong-il has designated his third son, Kim Jong-eun, as his heir.¹⁴ Since then, Kim Jong-eun has been named a general at the Worker’s Party gathering, setting up to a line for succession. As Katy Oh, senior researcher at the Brookings Institute stated, Kim Jong-eun was “basically anointed a crown prince.”¹⁵ Some analysts presume that some generals would be waiting to assert their power.¹⁶ Still others believe that a collective leadership from the party, the military, and the National Defense Commission, will emerge.¹⁷

It is uncertain whether a hereditary succession could continue. Power struggles may emerge. In spite of who is in power, if the regime fails to adopt reform, it may crumble under its own internal pressure produced by its systemic weakness. North Korea has managed to muddle through, but it may not be able to continue buttressing its system indefinitely. In such a case, mass migration could occur amidst disorder and lack of food and other basic services.

Defectors and Settlement Process

A sign of weakening state system is the striking increase in the number of defectors from North Korea. Defectors numbered less than ten per year in the early 1990s. As seen in Table 1, the numbers started to ascend into the hundreds starting in 1999, then accelerating into the low thousands per year since 2002.¹⁸ About 17,000 North Korean defectors resettled in South Korea by August 2009 and the number exceeded 20,000 by 2010.¹⁹

Table 1: North Korean Defectors to South Korea

Year	Prior to 1990	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Number	670	9	9	8	8	52	41	56	85	72	148

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number	312	583	1,139	1,281	1,894	1,387	2,018	2,544	2,809	2,927	2,376

Source: ROK Ministry of Unification, *Tongil Baekseo 2005*; Joongangdaily.joins.com

Since 2003, North Koreans have arrived in South Korea in the thousands, 400,000 North Korean refugees live in China. They normally leave North Korea for China, which has relatively more porous border than the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between South Korea and North Korea. Many live in China for years before departing for South Korea, often through a third country. In China, North Koreans fear being caught by the Chinese police, North Korean agents, or profiteers who send defectors back to North Korea, where severe punishment awaits them. Numerous women are sold into the sex industry or as brides in the countryside. Despite adversity, they still leave North Korea at a growing rate. While the lack of food is a key reason, the loss of hope for an improved economy in general also weighs in their decisions.²⁰ This defection highlights the precariousness of North Korea's broken system.

South Korean Government Support to Defectors

Upon arrival in South Korea, defectors spend a month at a government facility designed to vet their background to investigate if they are indeed defectors and not North Korean agents. Thereafter, they are transferred to the Ministry of Unification-run *Hanawon* (House of Unity) resettlement education center in South Korea's countryside and live there for two months. At *Hanawon*, they receive social adjustment education, on-site medical and dental care, and professional counseling. *Hanawon* is an attempt to assist defectors to understand and prepare for the demands of life in capitalist South Korea. At the end of their *Hanawon* stay, the government provides additional support to help them begin their lives in the mainstream South Korean society, in accordance with provisions of the 1997 Act on the Protection and Resettlement Support for the Residents Who Escaped from North Korea. Under this law, each North Korean adult receives 36,960,000 won (about \$35,260), of which about \$7,245 is for a down payment toward a permanent apartment.²¹ In addition to rental deposit assistance, the Korean National Housing Corporation and local government set up public apartments for defectors. The apartment assignment is generous since it is not unusual for most South Koreans to live with their parents and siblings until they marry, after which couples often get their own apartment, if they can afford it, or if the parents are willing to pay for it. The total settlement fund per household is based on the age and number of members in the household. For instance, a two-person household's settlement fund is based on 100 times South Korea's monthly minimum wage, and if the

second household member is under 18 or over 55, each receives ten times the monthly minimum, and even more if they have long-term or serious medical needs.²² If the head of the household has a long-term medical illness or a serious physical impairment, medical care is free. The government provides basic welfare for six months, after which the defectors must become more proactive and find jobs to support themselves.²³

Each defector has an assigned career counselor, who provides professional guidance and job opportunities and recommends employment training centers. To promote defector participation, they are provided money for transportation, food, and household expenses during their training period. There are twenty-nine regional employment support centers throughout South Korea, and they provide three weeks of training to defectors, but the government pays for additional job training as well. It costs approximately one billion won (about \$954,016) to train and educate one defector.²⁴ Moreover, the government gives convenience store contract priority to defector-owned businesses within public facilities. The government subsidizes half of the defectors' monthly wages (up to 700,000 *won* or about \$668) for two years to encourage South Korean companies to hire defectors. The government also announced in 2011 that it will set a quota of one percent of public agency's administrative assistant jobs for North Korean defectors to raise awareness and to set an example for private companies to follow.²⁵ While unemployed, defectors receive monthly livelihood protection system payments of 500 thousand *won* (about \$477), twice the amount given to unemployed South Koreans. Additionally, elderly defectors aged 50-60 receive pension benefits.

The Special Admission System for Expatriates offers defectors extraordinary opportunities. It allows North Koreans with high school diplomas to enter universities on a non-competitive basis, remarkable in South Korea's intensely competitive education system. In South Korea's educational system, admission to top universities is a dream for the parents who spend over a third of the household income on their children's education, and for students who have prepared most of their lives for the moment. Rejection from top universities sometimes drives students to commit suicide or to suffer from lengthy depression. The symbolic and practical value of admission to top universities is enormous, as it can establish an alumni connection and provide social capital to open doors to jobs, better marriage prospects, and social connections that

can lead to a middle-class lifestyle. Some prestigious universities have been, and still are, generous in admitting North Korean defectors, although they have become more selective in recent years given the high dropout rate. Additionally, the government pays one hundred percent of the tuition in public colleges, and, for a private institution, the government and the private college split the tuition 50/50.²⁶

Challenges to Integration in South Korea

Despite governmental support, defectors feel marginalized and isolated. Assimilation of North Koreans into the South Korean society has proved especially challenging. They have lived in a completely different system for over half a century, roughly three generations. The adjustment problems the North Korean defectors face in South Korea currently offer a glimpse of the social integration challenges likely after unification.

Some of the social problems are already emerging. Northerners, who have diverged economically, politically, and culturally during the sixty-year division, are unfamiliar with the South's systems, customs, and even language. As North Koreans are products of their environment, they bring with them a complex set of attitudes and values. They perceive South Korean politics, economy, society, and culture through their own preconceptions and basic values from North Korea. For instance, they view liberal democracy as anarchistic as they have become accustomed to strict, authoritarian control. In a pluralistic society, there is constant strife between various social groups, which create anxiety in defectors. They feel a great sense of incongruity as they witness socioeconomic inequality, a natural capitalist occurrence, as they were taught to value equality in North Korea.

After having lived in a totalitarian society, many defectors feel overwhelmed with their newly-found freedom and individualism, finding it difficult to make the multiple decisions that living in South Korean society entails. Communication is difficult because of different terminology, especially English words which are widely used in South Korea. The difficulty in adjusting is reflected in the defectors' low employment rate of 39.9% and relatively low monthly salary of around \$1,000.²⁷ Most defectors are jobless and rely on government subsidies, and many of those who do work are employed in low-paying jobs. In addition, some South Korean employers discriminate against North Koreans, making it hard for them to earn an adequate income. South

Koreans' reluctance to hire North Koreans stems not only from discrimination, but also from some defectors' inability to compete with South Koreans in work ethics, habits, and skills. Some frequently missed work, citing illness. Many suffer various illnesses due to not receiving proper medical care in North Korea, where there are shortages of medical and related supplies; even psychological sufferings manifest themselves as physiological sickness.²⁸ Still others who are not sick find ways to acquire a doctor's note to miss work. Such a high absence rate compared to South Korean workers creates an impression among South Korean business owners that the defectors are not dependable and hard working. Subsequently, employers are reluctant to hire defectors.

From expectations of prosperity they developed while in China or observed during their first several months in South Korea, they have high expectations that they, too, will quickly enjoy prosperous middle-class lives.²⁹ Many often quit jobs that the government has found for them because they consider these jobs to be inferior or they wish to start their own businesses, only to fail without sufficient understanding of the South Korean economy. By jumping into businesses, which often fail, they can deplete their settlement money quickly. They bring with them a strong sense of distinction between white collar and blue collar labor, and prefer white-collar jobs, while eschewing the blue-collar work, or quitting them on impulse. Working as a blue-collar laborer is not the image of a prosperous life they had imagined. North Koreans do not want to be marginalized into the lower class. They feel and expect they deserve more. As a result, maintaining a stable income is difficult, which leads to other problems.

When defectors first arrive in South Korea, they feel confident about their future. After all, the language is also Korean, and they share thousands of years of common history for the most part. After a while, they realize that six decades of division have created two entirely different cultures and systems. They find that even the language is difficult to understand. South Koreans use a large number of English words and use terms such as *budongsan* (real estate) and *boheom* (insurance), concepts ubiquitous in capitalist societies, but foreign to North Koreans.³⁰ They also lack experience and knowledge in computers and other aspects of modern capitalist society, which make their working lives challenging. At social gatherings after work, which are frequent in South Korea, they feel out of place. North Koreans also suffer from guilt about the families they left behind. They worry over

political consequences their defection may have on those families, as North Korea treats defection as treason and can punish families accordingly.

Successful Defectors

Among more than 20,000 North Korean defectors in South Korea, three percent or about 600 arrive with college or higher level education from North Korea. They are referred to as *jishigin* (intelligentisia). While they face difficulties that confront other defectors, they tend to adapt to life in South Korea more quickly and successfully, and may help identify factors that help defectors adjust to life in their new environment.

In settling in South Korea, they have realized the system is completely different politically, economically, and culturally. Some *jishigin* have held jobs in North Korea that dealt with outside world, and have exposure to capitalist systems, which makes South Korea's capitalist society not as unfamiliar. Many also have skills that help them get better jobs. That employment may not be in their professional fields, despite their degrees or the professional certificates, because they are not recognized by South Korea, given different standards. One *jishigin* has suggested that having a family plays a crucial role in quickly adjusting, because it provides stability and a sense of responsibility.³¹ Even when considering quitting a job, a head of household must consider the impact on the family.

Defector Youths

While adults face seemingly great difficulties, so do younger defectors. The children of defectors generally do not perform well in school. The education they received in North Korea, especially during the famine, was poor, given the breakdown in the school system. In addition, heavy emphasis on Kim Jong-il and his ideology provides no help in the extremely competitive Korean schools, which emphasize math, science, and other topics more relevant to a modern South Korean society embarked on global competition. North Korean children find it difficult to adjust to South Korean schools and about fourteen percent of them drop out of elementary and middle schools.³²

In elementary schools, most defector children seem to adjust relatively well, especially those starting with the first grade, with about eighty percent successfully graduating.³³ In middle schools, the problem becomes more acute. Many of them did not attend schools while in

China because they hid to avoid being captured and deported to North Korea. Further, many became separated from their families and wandered the streets, depriving them a chance to obtain an education. Even those with Chinese fathers cannot attend school because China does not recognize these children as citizens of China. Subsequently, many of them tend to be two-to-three years older than their South Korean peers, resulting in a lower level of education attainment. Consequently, their socioeconomic status is poorer than their South Korean counterparts, and they find it difficult to adjust and catch up, instead getting in fights or becoming involved in other trouble.³⁴

There are, of course, those who adjust to their new circumstances. These youths tend to have stable families and often do not identify themselves as defectors for fear of being stigmatized. In the early 2000s, about half did not attempt to go to high school, and, of those who did, about half dropped out within a few years.³⁵ In the recent years, more defector students have remained in high school, about seventy percent.³⁶ Many find math and English especially difficult and schools extremely competitive.

Those defectors who are college-aged receive preferential admissions to South Korean colleges, a big advantage in South Korea's ultra competitive education system. The preferential treatment means some defector students with less preparation enter college, and, subsequently have difficulty staying in. According to a recent government study, 135 of 475 defectors accepted to South Korean universities dropped out due to financial difficulties or inability to keep up with their southern counterparts.³⁷ As a result, those who drop out of college lose self confidence, and some develop anti-South Korean feelings, blaming the government for not doing more to help.³⁸

Many North Korean defectors also face prejudice from some South Koreans, who perceive the defectors as socialists who are dependent, passive, lazy, and selfish.³⁹ Still other South Koreans are simply too busy, focused on their own lives, to show much interest. *Crossing*, a poignant movie released in 2008 about a North Korean defector and his efforts to bring his adolescent son out of North Korea, was not popular at the box office, despite a strong cast and positive reviews. Cha In-pyo, a famous South Korean actor who played the leading role as the defector, initially refused to take the role because "the topic was not acceptable to South Korean audiences."⁴⁰ He was moved, however, after he saw a picture of a dead North Korean boy. Low public interest in the subject is

also apparent, beyond movies. A book published in 2007 by the only North Korean to escape Prison Camp No. 14 in North Korea, Shin Dong-hyuk, saw only modest sales.⁴¹ While the unpopularity of such movies and books may be due to other reasons, it does raise questions about South Korean public's attitude toward their Northern brethren and the issue of unification in general.

The political atmosphere during Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy or Rho Moo-hyun's Peace and Prosperity Policy also did not help. Focusing on reconciliation, they avoided the anti-North theme, creating a contentious debate among various social and political groups on the handling of defectors. The divisive debate created anxiety among defectors, making it harder for them to establish stable identities and acclimate to South Korean society.⁴² By law, North Korean defectors in South Korea are automatically South Korean citizens. However, legal citizenship does not automatically confer on them full membership and acceptance into the society.

A two-month re-education at *Hanawon* cannot easily reverse the mindset formed from decades of indoctrination about the greatness of the Dear Leader or the habits of the socialist system, in which the state is supposed to provide food, housing, and other basic goods and services. The South Korean government does provide defectors with an apartment and stipend, but eventually, they have to provide for themselves. Unlike the North Korean government, the South Korean government does not make major decisions for its citizens, such as whether or where they would attend college and what jobs they will have. Defectors have to make those decisions themselves, although the South Korean government does provide help, as we have seen. Defectors complain of being treated as second-class citizens by South Koreans, who, in general, are unsympathetic if not discriminatory. They are overwhelmed by their new surroundings and find it difficult to compete in South Korea, where social mobility and economic opportunities are connected to family background, education level, social standing, and school ties. Many suffer from psychological shock and disillusionment. This situation calls for greater efforts in helping North Koreans adjust. Defectors also need to adjust their own outlook and attitude. Many North Koreans dream of living in a free, affluent country, but do not necessarily understand that freedom and independence require their taking responsibility for their own lives. They need the ability to compete for decent employment and the willingness to adapt to a new and changing environment.

Prescriptions

After completing *Hanawon*, many defectors do not know exactly what they would like to do. What job should they pursue? Will it be in computers, education, or administration? Coming from a society where jobs, schools, and many other aspects of life have been dictated, it is difficult for the defectors to make such decisions on their own, especially after only a few months in South Korea. Further, the psychological trauma from having left China in fear has not dissipated. Defectors feel psychological angst in facing an unfamiliar South Korean society and are afraid to face a capitalist system. Some fall prey to con artists who target their settlement money. They find South Korean society too cold and individualistic. While at *Hanawon*, the newly arrived defectors receive psychological counseling and medical care, but psychological treatment may need to continue for some time to help them adjust to new life quicker.⁴³ Some defectors also find solace in religion. The Christian community has reached out to defectors, extending a helping hand and embracing them with warmth, reducing anxiety and easing the transition.⁴⁴ There are also about 65 NGOs that deal with defector issues in South Korea, many of them supported by the government.⁴⁵ These NGOs can play key roles in helping the newly arrived defectors with acculturation, especially during the first three years. In February 2010, twenty-two defectors trained to become the first private professional counselors for fellow defectors. As they had first-hand experience themselves, they could share their experiences and provide counseling with empathy.⁴⁶

A majority of defectors are women, and many have children. They find it difficult to find affordable child care, so that they can work. The government can encourage employment by helping to support child care.⁴⁷ While job training exists, some defectors suggest more realistic and systematic job training that prepares them better for the job market.⁴⁸ Others favor less support for defectors as it takes away the incentive to work. One North Korean defector, who has adjusted to the South Korean system, argues that the government should halt the settlement money, but instead make payments to those who do work, thus providing incentives to work.⁴⁹ In addition, while 55.7 percent of South Koreans now feel that more assistance should be given to the defectors, the rate has declined from 59.2% in 2007.⁵⁰ The government continues to adjust financial and other support to the defectors to encourage desired behavior,

such as finding and keeping jobs. However, money alone cannot accomplish the complex and difficult task of cultural assimilation. Defectors also need to try to change their mindset. Many North Koreans can be perceived as passive and dependent on the government. While they do not want to be treated like second class citizens, many prefer to receive government support, rather than work. Further, many defectors view blue-collar jobs as demeaning and consider such labor beneath them. For low-income South Koreans, the government subsidy to defectors is considered reverse discrimination as they themselves do not receive housing, preferential college entrance, or other types of government support.⁵¹ To be treated like South Koreans, the defectors need to wean themselves from government support at some point.

Education in Social Integration

Most South Koreans do not understand the difficulty defectors face in integrating themselves into South Korea, and most do not want to bother. But if such attitudes persist, the social divisions could contribute to discontent, leading to serious social problems and fractures. Unification will magnify problems when hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of North Koreans arrive in South Korea. South Koreans are ill prepared for such an eventual merger. Another way to prepare for the social integration of North and South Koreans is educating and sensitizing South Koreans to show empathy and be more accommodating to North Koreans. Education is a powerful tool to inculcate certain basic facts and values into the next generation, affecting attitudes and behavior. Since it takes a generation, education should start now to prepare for the social integration that will be necessary.

The Ministry of Unification recently invited central and local education training institutes and education officials who train teachers to a workshop.⁵² The workshop aimed to promote unification education by focusing on teachers so that such education can permeate the education system. Post-unification, the major tasks for Korea's education system, include providing North Koreans "truth regarding capitalism, communism, democracy, and history, especially with respect to the former Republic of Korea and DPRK, the United States, and the range of international issues regarding North Korea."⁵³ North Koreans would need to unlearn the concept of immortality of Kim Il-sung and the myth of the Kim family. The education should attempt to reverse the decades of damage inflicted on North Koreans regarding personal initiative and

responsibility. Since the traditional educational system would not include the older generation, one suggestion is to maintain the Korean Workers Party practice of continuing education in the short-term to inspire behavioral changes constructive to the unified Korea and to develop individual skills.⁵⁴

Defector Children as Future Leaders

Another preparation would be to focus on grooming defector children to play a role in a post-unified peninsula. The young defectors are not only exposed to life in both North Korea and South Korea, but are actually undergoing transition from one system to another. As youth, they can adapt quicker and grow to play a key role in the integration of the two societies. Hangeore Middle and High School in Gyeonggi Province, designed for defector children, is an example of an effort not only to help them adapt to capitalist South Korea, but also to grow into future leaders who understand both societies. Hangeore School, opened in 2006 and subsidized by the South Korean government, has about 200 students. To tackle future integration, the number of students needs to be much greater.

Conclusion

Whether South Koreans desire it or not, they may find hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of North Koreans entering South Korea. North Korea's continued food shortages, dysfunctional economy, and unclear power transition may lead to a situation where the mass movement of North Koreans becomes a reality. For South Korea to continue to prosper in a relatively stable environment, the smooth social integration of North Koreans is a necessity, not a luxury. Examining the current challenges that the North Korean defectors face in South Korea provides a glimpse of what to expect in the future. Many defectors struggle as their high expectations are not met because too many differences have developed between South and North over the past sixty years, and they find acculturation difficult. The South Korean government has tried to assist the defectors, but some of the measures have distorted incentives on what it takes to succeed in a capitalist, competitive society. NGOs have also surfaced to assist the settlement of defectors. Some defectors have successfully changed the mindset from state-provision to self-motivation, but many have found this change difficult and challenging. Some South Koreans thus have negative views

of the defectors and treat them accordingly, breeding resentment among some of the defectors. The challenges are enormous. It takes at least a generation to change people's mindset. All—the government, NGOs, defectors, and South Koreans alike—have a role in continuing to make efforts toward a successful integration of the defectors. Cooperation among these groups now should help enormously in integrating a much larger number of North Koreans into South Korea, creating a foundation for a more stable and prosperous Korean nation.

Notes:

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Institute for National Security Studies, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

² Sung Ho Ko, Kiseon Chung, and Yoo-seok Oh, "North Korean Defectors: Their Life and Well-being after Defection," *Asian Perspective*, 28, no. 2 (2004): 68, 65-99.

³ Andrew Scobell, "Projecting Pyongyang: The Future of North Korea's Kim Jong Il Regime," Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2008, ix.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁵ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1.

⁶ Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea*, 9.

⁷ "North Korea Hunger," in *AlertNet* (Thomson Reuters Foundation, October 7, 2008), http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/KP_FAM.htm?v=timeline.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform*, 10.

¹⁰ Sung Hwee Moon, "Public Currency Announcement Broadcast," *DailyNK*, December 1, 2009, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=5722>.

¹¹ "'Women Power' Gathers Against N. Korean Currency Shock," *Chosun Ilbo*, December 8, 2009, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/12/08/2009120800307.html.

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