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Article

Stereotyping North Korean Defectors through Supporting Policy in South Korea: Policy Discourse Analysis based on Governmentality

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Abstract

This study employs Foucault's concept of governmentality as an analytical framework to investigate how North Korean defectors have been governed across political, social, and economic spheres. In Western discourse, North Korean defectors are often depicted as victims of human rights violations. However, their representations and lived experiences within South Korea present a more nuanced picture. Over the past two decades (1998-2017), while policies for defectors underwent significant institutionalization and transformation, South Korea also experienced a substantial influx of migrants from diverse global regions. As the primary host nation for the majority of North Korean defectors and a recent recipient of significant international migration, South Korea offers a unique context for examining discourses surrounding North Korean defectors within a contemporary multicultural landscape. This article contributes to deeper understanding of not only how North Korean defectors are governed in South Korea but also how their presence has contributed to the formation of an ethnic hierarchy within South Korean society.

Keywords : North Korean defectors, supporting policy, governmentality, multiculturalism, migrants

Introduction

South Korean policymakers have drawn up generous policies supporting the resettlement and self-reliance of North Korean defectors in South Korea, which are considered excessive compared to the support offered to other minorities (J.-S. Lee, 2020; H.-Y. Lee, 2015). In particular, policymakers' remarks in the era of multiculturalism seem to imply the defectors' practical position in South Korea. Conversations led by members of the National Assembly meetings illustrate this idea: "We [South Koreans] can assimilate [North Korean defectors] because they are unlike Southeast [Asians]" (FATaUC, 2008, p. 30); "They [the defectors] should be more cared for and institutionally supported than multicultural families[1)]" (SoNA, 2015, p. 19), Likewise, the defectors are often mentioned as a yardstick which policy makers reference when policies are discussed for other ethnic minorities, despite the North Korean defectors' relatively small numbers, approximately 34,000 (MoU, 2024).

North Korean defectors' maladjustment to South Korean society began to emerge as a serious social issue in the mid-2000s. Seriousness is evident in their suicide rate, which is three times higher than that of South Koreans (*Newsfreezone*, 2022).[2)] This is also apparent in their growing rates of re-defection to North Korea and migration to third countries (Hyo-Jung Kim, 2022).[3)] Therefore, there is an increasing need for research on the resettlement of North Korean defectors. While research on defectors' resettlement has been actively conducted in the fields of cultural anthropology and sociology, focusing on their integration into South Korean society (Chung, 2020; Jeon, 2023; Kim & Park, 2023; Kim H., 2021; Park, 2024), there is a notable lack of research within policy studies examining the impact of support policies for North Korean defectors on their lives, South Korean society, and other migrants within the political context of South Korea. Despite this lack of comprehensive analysis, the support and preferential treatment of defectors has been steadily growing. Therefore, it is worth examining the gap between the policies that support North Korean defectors and the stark realities that

they face, which will help to determine which policies affect the defectors' inclusion in (or exclusion from) South Korean society and will contribute toward an enhanced understanding of the conditions that influence other migrants questions, this analysis helps us not only to understand how social inclusion or exclusion is created among North Korean defectors, but also to predict a form of ethnic hierarchy in the development of migrant-relevant policy in the era of multiculturalism.

Methodology

I adopt governmentality as the analytical framework and genealogy as the method. Governmentality is useful for examining the attributes of power dynamics that permeate the lives of defectors. Being governed by governmentality referred to as "conduct of conducts" (Foucault et al., 1991) or the "art of government" (Lemke, 2016, 191) signals that people's behaviors and thought are implicitly steered. Therefore, governmentality studies are premised on the assumption that social issues are politicized rather than objective. Based on the structural approach used in this article, governmentality can be understood as a combination of political rationality and technologies, which together practice government (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1981; N. Rose & Miller 1992). Rationalities are inscribed onto technologies, such as morals, churches, schools, and administrations (Foucault, 1981) and are produced, disseminated, defended, or disrupted through technologies that allegedly govern the general public's everyday lives (Lemke, 2016, p. 191). Therefore, governmentality studies are essential for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions in the discourse on minorities, particularly those who have long been stereotyped. This study explores how the governmentality embedded in North Korean defector support policies and measures implemented by policymakers aimed at privileging defectors governs their daily lives in ways that contradict the stated rationale.

In this study, I use genealogical analysis to develop policy implications for an era of multiculturalism in which diverse racial and ethnic

beings coexist. Miller and Rose (1992) emphasize that genealogical studies focus on the contingent turns of history that produce a particular way of thinking. To achieve this, genealogy prioritizes dismantling stereotypes about the interpretations of events that emerge at a particular stage in a historical process. Among the broken fragments of these interpretations, genealogy seeks to analyze the roles and effects of the forces that led to the emergence of events. In this process, genealogy requires history. However, for genealogy, tracking the history of an object is not an end in itself but an indispensable process for revealing the vanity of its origins to ascertain the properties of modern domination. Foucault has described genealogy as a "critical historical-philosophical project (Walters, 2012, p. 114)" that is useful for "uncovering mutation" by de-dramatizing the history of a current and often taken-for-granted representation of a problem (Bacchi, 2009, p. 11). Governmentality is also important for interrogating the art of governing and creating empirical maps of historical-philosophical lineages that draw on political rationalities and techniques (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2012). In this sense, genealogy is well-suited for governmentality studies. Therefore, by tracing the historical development of South Korean policies and institutions for North Korean defectors, this study examines the operation of power within South Korean government policies and institutions designed for North Korean defectors. Utilizing Foucauldian governmentality and genealogy is an important step toward discovering the implications of governmental strategies that concern North Korean defectors and form part of South Korea's 21st century nation-building project.

My analysis is based on textual data, centered on the National Assembly minutes for the last 20 years (1998–2017) as well as the press, to explore policy discourse. Policy discourse that uses telegraphic speech, metaphors, and synecdoche can be effective in communicating with or persuading people in a limited amount of time (Stone, 2012). These rhetorical devices are concise and symbolic, but can still carry a large amount of information. Additionally, policy actors often use emblematic means, such as polarized words or binary pairs, to compete effectively. Binaries

can simplify complex relationships by excluding opponents or establishing hierarchies (Bacchi, 2012). Therefore, policy discourse analysis is an effective method to detect the capillary form of governmentality.

To achieve maximum effectiveness and efficiency in utilizing genealogy as a method, this study covers the last 20 years (1998–2017), excluding the current Yoon Seok-Yeol government (2022–) and the previous Moon Jae-In government (2017–2022). There are two reasons for this: First, the Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun liberal governments (1998–2007) were the first regimes after the 1945 division of Korea to recognize North Korea as a partner (Ko, 2008). The recent Moon Jae-In liberal government has declared itself a successor to the Kim and Roh government's perspectives on North Korea and Korea (S.-M. Yoon, 2023). In other words, Moon's policy toward North Korea was understood as an expanded and developed version of the two previous liberal government policies. Additionally, the current Yoon government is considered a different version of the two previous conservative governments (G.-Y. Park, 2023). Therefore, to examine the political and philosophical foundations underlying policies for North Korean defectors, it is appropriate to explore the initial approach and institutionalization. Second, a clear comparison is possible between the first 10 years (1998–2007) and last 10 years (2008–2017) of liberal and conservative governments. This allows us to observe how policies formed and developed during the liberal government period were distorted, changed, and transformed by subsequent conservative governments. This comparison helps us understand the fundamental differences in attitudes toward North Korean defectors entrenched in the policies of the political forces that led to South Korea's modern politics.

Background: Changing Perspectives toward North Korean Defectors (1960s~1990s)

It is noteworthy that slow and subtle changes have occurred in the ways in which North Korean defectors have historically been con-

ceptualized in South Korea. because naming is a political act and policy that reflects the existing power dynamics (Butler, 1997, 36; Parkin, 1988). By analyzing the process and context of naming policies, we can better understand the governmentality inherent in political actions and policies. The table below presents the transformations of how North Korean defectors have been named and how their social status has changed throughout modern South Korean history.

Table 1.
Transformations of North Korean Defectors' Names, Relevant Acts, and Government Departments in Charge

Year	Name	Definition	Act	Ministry
since 1962	*Guisoon ja* (*or Guisoon Yong Sa*)	A person (or warrior) who was an enemy but who voluntarily returns to and submissively obeys South Korea	The Act on the Special Protection and Support of *Guisoon ja* and Persons of Distinguished Services to the State (1962) The Special Compensation Law for the *Guisoon Yong Sa* (1979)	Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs
1993-1997	*Guisoon* Compatriots	Compatriot who was an enemy but who voluntarily returns to and submissively obeys South Korea	The Act on the Protection of *Guisoon* Compatriots (1993)	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
1997	*Bukhan ital jumin*	Resident escaping from North Korea	The *Bukhanitaljumin* Protection and Settlement Support Act (In English, the Act is introduced as the North Korean Refugee Protection and Settlement Support Act)	Ministry of Unification
2005~	*Saeteomin*	People seeking a new land		
The mid-2000s~	Multicultural families	Roughly indicating non-South Korean residents		

*Referred from (Ryu, 2020).

Since the division of Korea in 1945, laws and policies relevant to North Korean defectors have been transformed according to the needs

of South Korean society throughout its modern history. Their existence in South Korea has been interpreted differently, depending on these needs. Until the 1980s, the Cold War influenced the government's vision of North Korean defectors. These modes of relating to defectors are similar to the refugee discourse in liberal Western societies during the Cold War era. This atmosphere began to change slightly in the 1990s, when South Korea's social stability and economic superiority over North Korea were accomplished. Instead of the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs began working with defectors. The annual influx of North Korean defectors grew rapidly beginning in the late- 1990s, and the terms used to describe them became more value-neutral. This illustrates how the South Korean government began to view North Korea as a partner instead of an enemy in the quest for Korean unification. There were 71 defectors in 1998, 148 in 1999, 312 in 2000, and 1894 in 2004.[4] In order to address the growing number of defectors, South Korea enacted the North Korean Refugee Protection and Settlement Support Act in 1997. In this Act, "the North Korean Refugee is referred to as *Bukhan ital jumin*, meaning "resident escaping (or deviating) from North Korea." Compared to previous terms starting with "*Gui-soon*," *Bukhan ital jumin* seems neutral because it emphasizes the South Korean government's responsibility to defectors as residents in South Korea (S.-H. Lee, 2013). The government department responsible for defectors shifted to the Ministry of Unification in 1998. This demonstrates that the South Korean government no longer considers North Korea to be a rival regime but rather a partner for Korean unification. Defectors have also begun to be perceived as human resources for future Korean unification (S.-H. Lee, 2013). Likewise, throughout modern South Korean history, defectors have been conceptualized, not in terms of their own identities, based on their utility for the South Korean government. Therefore, when analyzing policies targeting North Korean defectors, it is crucial to examine the interests and perceived benefits of the South Korean government. By doing so, we can better understand why North Korean defectors continue to face challenges despite the rela-

tively abundant policy attention.

- Policy Criteria for the Inclusion of North Korean Defectors
- Political Modes of Inclusion: Vocal Actors
- Victims of Human Rights Violation?

The liberal and progressive political forces in South Korea have been unable to take decisive action against North Korean defectors because of their adherence to the principle of non-intervention in matters related to North Korea. This principle helps define defectors as quasi-foreigners who are immune to South Korean sovereign power when they are outside the Korean Peninsula. This principle was introduced during the Kim Dae-Jung liberal government (1998–2002) and formed part of the Sunshine Policy, along with non-denunciations and non-criticism (Haggard, 2012). Advocates of the policy consider maintaining an open dialogue with North Korea a top priority, highlighting it is as a fundamental way to resolve disputes relating to the Korean peninsula, including human rights issues in North Korea. In an interview with the BBC on October 24, 2000, President Kim Dae-Jung declared that releasing North Koreans from the threat of starvation and the fear of war would significantly improve their human rights (as opposed to engaging in direct interference with their human rights issues) (Y.-M. Choi, 2000). In September 2000, as a manifestation of the non-interference principle, 63 long-term communist prisoners who were spies sent to the south were repatriated to the North by the Kim Dae-Jung liberal government (J.-M. Park, 2013). Likewise, instead of adopting a transcendent standard, such as the human rights-based approach (S.-S. Park, 2015), liberal and progressive forces try to contextualize North Korean defectors' issues and pursue Korean peninsularization by understanding the singularity of the two Koreas in their relationship with one another (J.-S. Kim, 2007).

However, in domestic politics, particularly when the North–South relationship is strained, the principle of non-interference has given conservative force ammunition the claim that universal human rights are

viciously ignored by liberal and progressive forces. For example, in 2011, the conservative party tried to pass the Resolution on Overseas North Korean Defectors' Human Rights in the National Assembly, and, in 2013, it proposed revisions to the North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act in order to legally expand the scope of the definition of defectors.[5] In these cases, the liberals and progressives could not do anything but vote against the conservatives' actions or simply give up voting on issues relating to North Korean defectors outside South Korea. Given the unstable relationship between North and South Korea, passive responses by liberals and progressives continued during Yoon's current government. Thus, National Assembly members (self-declared) representing North Korean defectors belong to the conservative party, and conservatives tend to dominate defector-relevant discourse over time.

The policies for North Korean defectors of the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye conservative governments (2008–2017) reflected the international perspective of North Korean defectors. First, the conservative content, often citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states that North Korean defectors are political refugees running away from the brutal human rights violations of an anti-government organization (understood as the North Korean government in South Korea) (H. Shin & Lee, 2018). Conservative President Lee Myung-Bak (2008–2012) kept domestic and international declarations throughout his tenure that South Korea would seek the universal values of mankind and break away from passive approaches toward North Korea on human rights issues.[6] The next conservative President Park Geun-Hye (2013–2016) followed the same route. From a conservative perspective, regardless of whether the defectors are inside or outside South Korea, they are South Korean citizens entitled to be protected or saved by the South Korean government.

In summary, the liberal government's policy toward North Korean defectors implicitly acknowledges North Korea as a sovereign state within the unique context of inter-Korean relations. Conservative governments, while championing liberal human rights, often employ Cold War imagery of desirable refugees (Whistaker, 1998) to govern both North and South

Koreans. Despite the differences in governmentality between liberal and conservative governments, North Korean defectors often find that being stereotyped as “desirable refugees” is a strategic advantage for integration into South Korean society, given the ongoing uncertainty in inter-Korean relations.

Subjects Dedicated to the Liberal Democracy

North Korean defectors, during their first re-socialization process, do not have opportunities to experience diverse perspectives, but liberal democracy, which is almost synonymous with anti-communism injected by the U.S. (D.-C. Kim, 2018). In South Korea, the term “liberal” in “liberal democracy” has evolved as a politically symbolic term used as ammunition against socialism or communism recalling the North Korean regime. In the first phase in South Korea, defectors are quarantined in government institutions, which generally reflects a conservative standpoint. During this phase, the defectors must be closely scrutinized and judged by the NIS as North Korean defectors, North Korean spies, or Korean-Chinese, who covet government aid to defectors (Lim, 2020; S.-J. Choi, 2012). This process appears sensible given that both Koreas are still technically at war. However, while in the investigation center, which is notoriously known as the “South Korean Guantanamo” (S.-S. Kim, 2014), defectors were in danger of being held in solitary confinement during the entire investigation process (for one to three months) (Noh, 2017). Thus, the coercive investigation of defectors who do not know about the South Korean social system or their proper rights in South Korea, including their right to access lawyers, renders them obedient to NIS officers (S.-S. Kim, 2014). Furthermore, after this investigation, the defectors were sent again to the North Korean Refugee Protection Center. After completing the program in the center (it takes three months or longer), defectors are released into society.[7] However, they have been continuously protected by local policemen for five years or longer to ensure their safe settlement and integration into South Korean

society. From the defectors' perspective, police officers' protection is often considered surveillance (J. Lee, 2022).

Meanwhile, South Korean conservative groups and U.S. NGOs working on North Korean human rights issues have provided various forms of support to North Korean defectors (D. D. S. Jeong, 2020; Kwak, 2016) which serve as compensation for defectors who take anti-communist or pro-American stances (J.-T. Lee, 2015; Yoo-Mee Kim, 2016; L.-I. Jeong, 2012). Some support is designed to encourage defectors to establish NGOs that denounce human rights issues in North Korea or destabilize the North Korean government (J.-T. Lee, 2015). However, these radical movements by defector NGOs arouse antipathy against defectors in South Korean society. Ji Seung-Ho, a North Korean defector praised by US President Donald Trump in his 2018 State of Union addresses, shows how pro-American stances can isolate defectors. Supported by the conservative side to build an NGO working for human rights issues in North Korea, Ji was recommended by the conservative party and elected as a proportional, representative member of the National Assembly in the 2020 general election. However, such support eventually estranged Ji from South Korean liberals, progressives, and other North Korean defectors who did not support these movements (Ryu, 2020). Tae Young-Ho, another North Korean defector and current National Assembly member of the conservative party, was formerly supported by the US government. His stance on South Korean politics is similar.

In summary, upon arrival in South Korea, North Korean defectors learn that their validity is conditional on their willingness or capacity to align with conservative expectations. Therefore, defectors voluntarily develop docile bodies and already have a passive attitude toward social participation. Thus, it is not surprising that Cho Myung-Chul, the first North Korean defector to become a National Assembly member, proposed a bill in 2013 to extend defectors' period of police officer protection from five to eight years. Consequently, policies targeting North Korean defectors have constructed their identities within South Korean society as compliant, ideal refugees, reflecting Cold War ideological constructs.

Social Modes of Inclusion: An Assemblage of Reminiscence

Not Migrants, But Second-Class Citizens

Although defectors generally complain about the South Korean public's indifference toward them (Kirk, 2016), they, unlike other migrants, have been given special treatment owing to their Korean ethnicity and North Korean origin. Almost all policymakers, regardless of their ideological inclinations, treat defectors residing in South Korea as special beings who fit outside the categories of migrants or welfare recipients, and who deserve more attention than other migrants. In the Unification, Foreign Affairs and Trade Committee held in September 2006, Choi Jae-Cheon, a National Assembly member from the Liberal Party, worried that if the government cared less about the defectors' social adaptation, "North Korean defectors [residing in South Korea] would turn into migrants" (UFAaTC, 2006, p. 31). In the government inspection in October 2015, a conservative National Assembly member, Kim Young-Wo, stated that "North Korean defectors are not simply subject to welfare policy, but they are also [a symbol of] unification in advance" (FAaUC, 2015b, p. 12), which is a rhetorical expression describing the defectors. A symbolic leftist politician, Roh Hoe-Chan, as well described North Korean defectors as "[a symbol of] our future we have met in advance" (Roh, 2018). These typical remarks about defectors residing in South Korea are overwhelmingly imbued with attachment to Korean ethnicity. Markus Bell (2019) observed this aspect and argued that Korean ethnic nationalism makes defectors "acceptable refugees" unlike other migrants and refugees in South Korea.

Nevertheless, the special treatment of North Korean defectors could cause unexpected problems, even if the treatment stems from the South Korean government's intention to be more inclusive. As an attempt to embrace North Korean defectors as members of South Korean society, in 2005, the Ministry of Unification under the Roh Moo-Hyun liberal government suggested that a new name be used to refer to the defectors:

Saeteomin, meaning "people having hope for life in a new land." The new term was the finalist in a contest hosted by the Ministry of Unification to remove the negative impressions and political discomfort which previous terms, such as "enemy people who submit or obey without defying (*guisoon ja*)" or "people escaped from North Korea (*talbuk ja*)" are likely to connote. Nevertheless, this new name was criticized for having been selected without meaningful consultation with North Korean defectors (H.-J. Lee, 2005). Consequently, some North Korean defectors plainly voiced their opposition to the new name, arguing that it ambiguously represented their identity and made them sound like second-class citizens who were not the same as South Koreans (S.-W. Park, 2007). By the end of 2008, the Ministry of Unification recommended that the name *Saeteomin* not be used (G.-W. Lee, 2012). Nevertheless, the attempt to change the names of the defectors was repeated. In 2017, the Seoul City Government made another attempt to look for a name for the defectors with the same rationales and "resident who has defected for a new dream (*Saekkum jumin*)" was decided as a new name. However, this attempt ended without an official announcement of the contest winner, because a rejection of the new name was expected (S.-G. Hwang, 2017; Ha, 2017). These kinds of repetitive government blunders demonstrate how technologies devised according to the South Korean-centered perspective can wander off points and backfire.

In summary, North Korean defectors have been treated differently from other migrants because they are Korean blood brothers who deserve special privileges. While presented as an act of goodwill, this specialized treatment is underpinned by a governmentality that seeks to quickly assimilate North Korean defectors into South Korean society. Consequently, the privileges afforded to defectors paradoxically serve to otherize them by obscuring their unique North Korean identity.

Nostalgic Beings of Mythical Korean-ness

Female or adolescent defectors are expected to be equipped with

traditional Korean qualities that are closer to myth than reality. When the issue of North Korean defector students' maladjustment in schools was discussed, Kim Young-Wo, a member of the conservative party, remarked that to solve their maladjustment in schools, "our [Korean] unique sentiments … can be highlighted as advantages of the adolescent defectors" (FAaUC, 2015b). This remark demonstrates the singularity of the Korean ethnicity, which is hypothetical but considered advantageous for them. Such ideas even consider adolescent defectors as "assets for unification" or "future leaders for the age of unification" (Pyun, 2015) and justify the differential treatment of adolescent defectors and other adolescent migrants. In 2014, for instance, the conservative President Park Geun-Hye declared that "unification is a bonanza" which should be understood as an investment in the future instead of a cost (K.-J. Jeong, 2014). A few days after Park's speech, the government gave elementary schools 100 won (around $895 USD) in aid for each North Korean defector child. The defector students receive special treatment because of their North Korean origin, particularly in comparison to those who also share a Korean lineage (e.g., Korean-Chinese or Korean-Russian children of multicultural families).

However, despite special treatment, the diversity among adolescent defectors is neglected. Many of them have multiple or ambiguous identities because they were not born or raised in North Korea but in China (or other countries), and their parents' backgrounds are also diverse.[8] Furthermore, many adolescent defectors deviate from the typical imagery of Koreans in reality, and depending on their backgrounds, some of the adolescents' differences can be significant enough to define them as a different ethnicity (Ryu, 2020): they do not get along with native South Korean students, they are not fluent in Korean, and their parents are, by and large, laborers working in an industrial complex near the school (Ryu, 2020).

Female defectors are doubly stereotyped as ethnic and sexual beings. In the South Korean marriage market, particularly in comparison to female marriage migrants from other countries, female North Korean de-

fectors are advertised as traditionally sexualized and ethnically Korean bodies. Thus, by bringing nostalgic and traditional images of (mythical) Korean women to the forefront, marriage agencies can justify and stimulate the distorted desire to exploit female defectors. They are generally depicted as women who embody traditional Korean values: women who respect traditions, such as men's dominance over women, obedience to their parents-in-law, and a disposition toward a family oriented, innocent, submissive, and dependent character (S. Kim, 2015, p. 238). Female defectors are also portrayed as lonely and helpless because, under the circumstances of a divided Korea, they do not have a family or hometown to go back (or run away) to unlike foreign women (S. Kim, 2015, p. 247). Conversely, the hardships and risks that female defectors endure are valuated as their strength and ability to be self-sufficient (O, 2018). Government housing is advertised as an advantage to financially challenged suitors (Y.-H. Jang, 2014). Additionally, their Korean ethnicity is advertised as an advantage in marriage because it offers not only seamless communication and cultural similarity, but also blunt assurance against mixed-blood in future generations; agencies straightforwardly advertise that "[marriage with the female defectors can] prevent mixed-blood children" or "protect [Korean] pure-blood" (S.-J. Park, 2014). Depending on how female North Korean defectors are depicted, the marriage market can be seen as part of a technology that steers these women toward serving roles that South Korean society expects them to perform. These traditional maternal roles support South Korean men's families and produce their babies.

Ultimately, the governmentality exercised over adolescent and female North Korean defectors molds them to conform to traditional, nostalgic roles. Policies reflecting this governmentality steer the interests of these defectors toward the values demanded by patriarchal South Korean society. These policies obscure the diverse cultural identities of female North Korean defectors.

Economic Modes of Inclusion: Dutiful Workers

North Korean defectors' efforts to achieve economic self-reliance are thought to prove their contribution to South Korean society (FATaUC, 2012, p.16), and the government provides financial support to them. Support is justified by most policymakers as a privilege of the defectors who had to overcome greater difficulties than other migrants to come to South Korea (J.-H. Hwang, 2018). The North Korean Refugee Protection and Settlement Support Act includes several measures aimed at promoting the stable settlement of defectors.[9] These include endowment funds for settlements, housing, grants for purchasing household items, employment promotion subsidies, tuition exemptions for primary and secondary schools, and tuition support for universities. This has been enough to garner claims of reverse discrimination against South Koreans who occupy the lowest income bracket (S.-K. Kim, 2017).

Despite the support and attention given to North Korean defectors, they are still likely to be situated in a lower social stratum during the initial phase of their lives in South Korea. Furthermore, their lives can become increasingly isolated. After being released from the North Korean Refugee Protection Center, each defective household was housed in public rental apartments, where the lowest-income groups in South Korea generally live. However, in some areas where the number of North Korean defectors has increased, South Korean residents' dissatisfaction with defectors has also increased (W.-J. Yoon & Joo, 2016), who are prone to move out of these neighborhoods. Even when defectors move out of public rental apartments at their own expense, their situations do not differ significantly. North Korean defectors, as low-income earners, are likely to form enclaves in neighborhoods on the outskirts of urban areas, and then the spatial concentration of defectors accelerates (I.-K. Park, Choi, Ko & Shin, 2022). Consequently, defectors complain that their residences do not differ much from their community lives in the North Korean Refugee Protection Center because, in their daily lives, they rarely communicate with South Korean natives (D.-M. Jeong,

2023).

North Korean defectors have made efforts to overcome this unfavorable situation; however, ordinary defectors have experienced setbacks in their economic integration. Although the majority of North Korean defectors have limited work experience and educational backgrounds, even when defectors have decent work experience in North Korea, their credentials are hardly recognized, nor do they contribute to promotions or higher salaries in their jobs in South Korea (S.-Y. Park, 2021; Sun et al., 2005). This phenomenon is similar to the lack of recognition of foreign credentials of migrants, particularly those originating from developing countries. Epistemological and ontological misperceptions of differences and knowledge amplify the idea that foreign credentials are deficient, inferior, invalid, and incompatible in the receiving society. Commitments to positivity and universality have caused this idea to endure (Guo, 2009). Consequently, defectors who are qualified technicians generally work in 3D (dangerous, difficult, and dirty) jobs that South Koreans generally avoid. The government has a tendency to provide administrative and financial support to steer defectors toward areas of the labor market, such as agriculture, which have a high demand for labor but are typically rejected by South Korean workers (Lim, 2019). Hence, many of the defectors' coworkers are likely to be migrant workers; thus, the defectors' isolation in their workplaces and their sense of deprivation in South Korea have deepened.

North Korean defectors also experience setbacks in their economic integration because of the mechanisms that make rich defectors even richer and poor defectors even poorer. A few defectors who were well-educated in North Korea and engaged in higher-status professions in North Korea (senior military figures, professors, journalists, and other similar positions, for instance) could have opportunities to find quality jobs in South Korean society (L.-I. Jeong, 2014). Interestingly, the rich-get-richer mechanism existing among defectors is likely similar to past mechanisms that, in the aftermath of the Cold War, differentially validated defectors according to the importance of the secret information they provided about

North Korea when they defected (M.-J. Jeong, 2009; Ryu, 2020). For instance, when Cho Myong-Chul, a professor at Kim Il-sung University, one of the most prominent universities in North Korea, was elected in 2012 as a proportional representative member of the National Assembly, many ordinary defectors did not acknowledge him as their representative because he was thought to have vested interests in North Korea (P.-G. Lee, 2012; S.-W. Kim, 2012). Tae Young-Ho, another North Korean defector and National Assembly member elected in 2020, became the subject of controversy when it was revealed that his property, worth 18 billion won ($1.61 million USD), was acquired in South Korea after a short period of four years (Yu-Min Kim, 2020). Consequently, wealth becomes polarized among defectors, deepening the frustration of ordinary defectors who occupy the lowest-income bracket.

In conclusion, while the government promotes economic self-sufficiency among North Korean defectors, they are often directed toward labor markets shunned by South Koreans. This is analogous to the practice of importing foreign labor to fill labor shortages in sectors that native workers avoid. Additionally, low-income defectors face persistent segregation from South Korean natives in terms of residence, and are concentrated in areas that South Koreans tend to avoid. This contrasts with the notion that the political and social governmentality of North Korean defectors is nominally based on their shared ethnic identity as Koreans. Instead, it mirrors the broader pattern of segregating and exploiting migrant workers for economic benefit.

Causes of Policy and Reality Mismatch and Policy Implications

As analyzed above, the policy discourses surrounding North Korean defectors suggest that the political, social, and economic modes of North Korean defectors are necessary for them to be included as exemplary South Korean citizens. However, the maladjustment has intensified. Therefore, it is worth analyzing what causes such a mismatch between policies and the reality faced by defectors. Based on these findings, we

propose policy recommendations to address these issues.

Diversification of defecting reasons

Although many outside observers consider human rights to be the sole issue that motivates North Koreans to defect, today the motives that drive them to leave have diversified. Most experts agree that prior to the 1990s, when the number of defectors was small, North Koreans defected mainly for political reasons, and since the 1990s, their motivations have been mainly economic (M.-S. Jang & Lee, 2009). In practice, they are regarded as a group of migrant workers in South Korea (Jeon, Yu, & Lee, 2011, p. 220). Since the 2000s, the popularity of South Korean dramas and pop songs has stimulated North Koreans' curiosity about South Korea,[10] leading the younger generations to defect (J.-H. Lee, 2019). Most recently, defectors' motives have also included the desire to expose their children to globalized education or shirk the responsibilities associated with problems related to their businesses (Hyun-Ja Kim, 2018; E.-M. Shin, 2015; Y.-J. Lee, 2018). Therefore, there is a significant gap between the reasons for defection imagined by conservatives and the real ones.

Consequently, support policies for North Korean defectors should not be predicated exclusively on Western liberal human-rights norms. This is evidenced by conflicts arising between a minority of defectors affiliated with US-based human rights NGOs and South Korean citizens, and the majority of defectors seeking to adapt to South Korean society. While defectors' human rights are undeniably significant, it is imperative to acknowledge that a country's democratization is most effectively achieved through endogenous processes. Paradoxically, external pressures can exacerbate authoritarian tendencies.

The South Korean government should prioritize policies aimed at providing North Korean defectors with the resources necessary to establish themselves in South Korea and facilitate their integration into South Korean society. Specifically, the government should develop applicable

mechanisms to validate the skills and qualifications of defectors and ensure their recognition in the South Korean labor market. Furthermore, efforts should be made to foster increased interaction between defectors and South Korean civil society. While a direct replication of the German model, which allowed East Germans to interact with civilians in West Germany after a brief period of administrative processing (Jae-Hoon Lee, 2010), may not be viable, South Korea can learn from the German experience and create an environment that empowers defectors to assume an active role as citizens in a democratic society.

Korean ethnic identity belonging nowhere

North Korean defectors have been suffering from a sense of belonging nowhere at present. First, the relationship between North Korean defectors and South Korean citizens stands in limbo due to the unstable nature of the relationship between the North and South Koreas. Second, North Korean defectors' social positions tend to oscillate between those of Koreans and multicultural beings according to their circumstances. In the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Education, for instance, defectors fall into the subcategory of multicultural families (MoEaHRD, 2006; MoHaW, 2019). Similarly, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which is in charge of the Multicultural Families Support Act, has claimed that North Korean defectors are part of the multiculture (-al) in South Korea (Kang, 2015). Although the Ministry of Unification, in charge of the administration of defectors, proclaims that North Korean defectors are not multicultural families but one people with South Koreans (Kang, 2015), the Ministry also pairs defectors and multicultural families together in areas where there are events needing cooperation with the private sector, such as visiting the demilitarized zone (DMZ) or the War Memorial of Korea and participating in camps for education about the unification of Korea. Therefore, the two groups—multicultural families and North Korean defectors—are defined as legally different, but in practice, they are treated as a single category when

deemed necessary.[11)]

However, when defectors are treated as multicultural families, their disappointment increases, unlike other migrants (Lim, 2022). Against this background, some defectors who have remigrated to America, Canada, and other European countries clarify that discrimination against them by natives in other countries is more persistent than discrimination by South Koreans. The defectors are aware that discrimination in other countries is against colored people, and the defectors can be part of "other colored minorities" (Song, 2015).

Furthermore, some North Korean defectors tragically maintained their North Korean identity because of the ceasefire situation rather than the end of the Korean War. On April 8, 2016, a high-profile news outlet reported a mass defection of North Korean restaurant workers, drawing South Koreans' attention just five days ahead of the 2016 general election in South Korea. However, later, some waitresses publicly demanded their repatriation to North Korea because the South Korean NIS had kidnapped them (Hancocks, Kim, and Seo, 2018; O'conner, 2018). In 2019, international lawyers belonging to the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and the Confederation of Lawyers of Asia and the Pacific called for waitresses' defection and abduction and recommended that the South Korean government send them back to the North (Choe, 2017; Ji, 2019). Other defectors have either publicly protested their unmet need for repatriation to North Korea or privately looked for ways to return (Carney, 2017; Hass, 2018). In addition, there are North Korean defectors in South Korea whose cognitive identities are citizens of a future united Korea instead of belonging to either North or South Korea (Ryu, 2020).

Consequently, contrary to the preconceived notions of South Korean policymakers, North Korean defectors exhibit diverse identities that do not align with the monolithic concepts of the Korean people. Furthermore, pragmatic policy imperatives often result in the conflation of defectors with other immigrant groups, leading to feelings of alienation and marginalization. The nostalgic views of female and youth defectors reinforce harmful stereotypes and exacerbate their social challenges.

Consequently, support policies for defectors must be reconceptualized from a demand-driven perspective. From a broader perspective, North Korean children and adolescent defectors from diverse migration backgrounds should be protected from discrimination based on the notion of monolithic Koreanness. Educational programs for these individuals should foster a sense of belonging within South Korean society, while promoting intercultural understanding and respect for diversity.

Conclusion

Consequently, despite policies for North Korean defectors that allegedly support their self-reliance in South Korea, their characteristics have been fixed by a narrowly defined, exemplary citizen, which is derived from the assemblage of a set of preferential characteristics rooted in 20th century South Korea. Specifically, to be recognized as South Korean citizens, defectors are expected to show that they are politically conservative and antagonistic toward North Korea, culturally and ethnically Korean enough to integrate into society, and economically self-reliant enough to obey the orders of the South Korean economy. In terms of governmentality, it is important to understand that the political, social, and economic characteristics that North Korean defectors are expected to display not only subjectivize defectors but also contribute to determining the citizenship hierarchy of non-South Koreans. That is, the desirability of these characteristics can be projected onto other migrants and can significantly impact the identification of other ethnic minorities. For example, migrants who fail to meet at least one of their political, social, or economic expectations risk moving down the ethnic hierarchy and being valued less than other migrants. Consequently, analyzing the governmentality of North Korean defectors as part of the 21st century nation-building project in South Korea helps reveal how the ethnic hierarchy may not be determined by a single condition, such as race, gender, or religion. South Korea's ethnic hierarchy reflects its unique historical and geopolitical experiences. These findings can be utilized as criteria for

studying other societies in which issues relating to ethnicities, migrants, and multiculturalism do not match Western experiences squarely. This study serves as a foundation for reorienting support policies for North Korean defectors. Based on the policy directions articulated in this study, further research should be conducted to develop specific policies for North Korean defectors. This study did not fully explore North Korean defector policies in comparison to policies for other immigrants. Thus, future studies should compare the two policy areas to enhance the effectiveness of policies for North Korean defectors and explore ways to contribute to the integration of a multicultural society.

Note

1) Everyday usage of the term "multicultural families" refers to families composed of South Korean men and migrant women who are generally from developing countries.
2) The rate of suicide in South Korea is 26 per 100,000 in 2021. This figure is the highest among OECD member countries and South Korea has ranked the first place.
3) From 2004 to 2014, around 4000 North Korean defectors had applied refugee status in the U.S, Canada, and European countries. The majority of them were supposed as the defectors re-migrating from South Korean citizenship (H.-Y. Lee, 2015, p. 18). In addition, the New York Times reported for the 5 years (2012–2017), 25 defectors went back to North Korea (Choe, 2017).
4) The sharp increase had been caused by not only development in South Korea, but also the collapse of the socialist market economy and continuous natural disasters in North Korea (D.-H. Kim, 2005).
5) Prior to its revision in 2017, only North Korean children born in North Korea were eligible for South Korean government support.
6) President Lee Myung-Bak urged international intervention to the human rights of North Korea, in 2008, as a representative of South Korea on the United Nations Human Rights Council, and, in 2011, as a keynote speaker at the 66th UN General Assembly.
7) The defectors must spend a minimum of five months in quarantine (this entire process can last nearly one year) in the investigation center and the North Korean Refugee Protection Center.
8) Their parents' backgrounds can be classified by several cases: both North Korean defector parents, a single North Korean defector parent whose North Korean spouse is in North Korea, a single North Korean defector whose spouse is a Chinese in China (or other foreigners), a North Korean defector and a South Korean, or a North Korean and a

marriage migrant etc.

9) The amount or value of these supports has declined relative to the amounts given in the past when defectors were scarce (M.-J. Jeong, 2009). In the early 2000s, the total amount of initial financial aid (including housing) was around 3 thousand won ($26.8 thousand USD); this amount decreased to 2 thousand won ($17.9 thousand USD) in the 2010s (J.-S. Lee, 2017). Other financial supports are now given under specific conditions, such as, for instance, when they are hired and when they enter universities.

10) In the 2000s, the most available method to enjoy South Korean pop culture was compact disks smuggled through China. In the 2010s, USB substituted for compact disks.

11) One of public broadcasting companies, MBC, aired a TV show titled as “Multicultural, Hope Project: We are Korean (damunhwa huimang peulojegteu: ulineun hangugin)” (from 2010 to 2014) and its cast included multicultural families and North Korean defectors.

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