MAY I CALL YOU NORTH KOREAN?
NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCES AND IMAGINING THE NATION
IN SOUTH KOREA

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For My Mother
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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I attempt to draw out how Koreans contest “imagined” homogeneity and negotiate cultural heterogeneity that are highlighted in the t’albukja (North Korean refugees) settlement process in South Korea. Since the 1990s, more than 20,000 displaced settled in South Korea. Upon admission, t’albukja are granted with citizenship and receive governmental and nongovernmental supports in forms of finance and human network for successful chŏgŭng (social integration). Despite the support system, t’albukja are considered to struggle with chŏgŭng, and numerous social and legal terms mark them as a separate category of South Korean citizens. I questioned the significance of a strong emphasis put on social integration of this group in imagining Korean nation. Over sixty years of systemic-, ideological-, and cultural separation has created a gulf between these two groups of Koreans that t’albukja require intensive retraining to become citizens of South Korea. The existing nationalist discourses of the homogeneous ethnic nation no longer satisfy as a measure to define South Korean citizens. Then, how do Koreans negotiate their differences as members of the “imagined nation” of South Korea?

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the western part of Seoul from September 2007 until December 2008, I obtained interviews and firsthand accounts from an alternative school, a neighbor in the neighborhood, and participant-observed at university meetings which enhanced my understanding about t’albukja struggle to gain full citizenship status. Interviews with various South Korean service providers revealed a pervasive perspective on t’albukja as the marginalized. In addition, a literature review on
North Korean refugees in South Korea since the Korean War times to shed a light on understanding about delicate status of t‘albukja in the nation in historical spectrum.

T‘albukja, particularly the young and the educated, assume the role of leadership in educating South Koreans about the ways of North Koreans in the ways South Koreans can understand. Such efforts should be understood as a result of contestation they face in society. Contested within the discourse of anticommunist ideology as non-belonging members, t‘albukja construct their identity as legitimate citizens through actively participating in producing a discourse of unification.
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CHAPTER 1
Contentious Past, Coalescing Future: Negotiating National Belonging in South Korea

1.1 Introduction

In May of 1992, before departing to the United States to start college, I attended a class on national security education required of all South Koreans traveling abroad.\(^1\) The Unification Training Facility was located nearby Mt. Namsan, in Seoul. I had never been near that area until that day. On the way to the facility, I enjoyed the fine weather and greenery on the hills of Mt. Namsan. Once I entered the facility, I found a seat in a comfortably large lecture room. After a while, a man who identified himself as a Kwisunyongsa, or defected hero, entered the room and gave a lecture. Most distinctively I remember his emphasizing on how to avoid “being kidnapped” by North Korean kanch’ŏp (spies) or being mistakenly dropped off at a North Korean embassy if I told a taxi driver the Korean embassy was my destination. The lecturer iterated that if I was taken to a North Korean embassy, I was sure to be tortured and then sent to North Korea. The message was clear: stay away from North Koreans abroad.

This lecturer may have talked about his past life in North Korea and his wonderful new life in South Korea, but such details do not remain in my memory as much as the fear that he generated. According to this small-statured but enthusiastic lecturer, North Koreans were dangerous people, and all South Korean travelers must stay on guard so as to return safely to South Korea. I wondered at the time whether I would

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1 I was in one of the last groups to receive this mandatory anbokyooyak (national security education) lecture. They ended in June 1992.
actually run into North Koreans in the United States while studying there. In my naïve thinking, it seemed impossible that North Korean communists would be walking around freely in the United States. This lecture impressed upon me that all South Koreans faced the danger of becoming victims of an ideological war going on inside our country that would follow us as we traveled outside of it.

Two years later on the streets of downtown Seoul, I picked up a flyer that stated “Kim Il Sung is dead” while I was accompanying a high school friend to a public talk held at Chosun Hotel. My first reaction was, “Is this a ppira (propaganda leaflet)?” It was hard to believe this iconic figure of North Korea had died, just like anybody else, and that the iron curtain in North Korea might crumble. South Korea had long expected that Kim Il Sung’s death would lead to a period of anarchy followed by North Korea opening up to the rest of the world. Despite such anticipation, Kim Jung Il succeeded the position of the national leader without much turmoil, and there were no sudden shifts in North Korea’s international relations. The two Koreas still remained divided, and the everyday life of South Koreans remained out of touch with that of North Koreans.

However, along with changes in international politics, the two Koreas starting around 1994\(^2\) began limited exchanges. Particularly spurred by the summit meeting between Kim Il Sung of North Korean and Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea in 1993, the two Koreas began to generate a talk of possible unification. Gradually, a selected number of South Korean civilians were granted a permission to enter North Korea for humanitarian relief work or travel to Kaesŏng and Mt. Kŭmgang, renowned for their

\(^2\) These changes were incorporated in national unification policies, further discussed in Chapter 4.
beauty in textbooks and folktales.³

The political and economic changes of the late 1990s brought new ways of looking at North Korea. Kim Il Sung’s death, Germany’s unification and the Soviet Union’s collapse suggested there was a possibility for North Korean regime change and unification with South Korea. In the midst of all these changes, mass media began to publish stories of North Koreans migrating to South Korea to escape the economic hardship they faced “at home” in North Korea. For the first time in my life, it became possible to encounter North Korean people whose names sounded much like mine and who were seeking a normal life in South Korea.⁴

When I visited Seoul in the summer of 2005 for the preliminary research, I began to notice that the national research focus on North Korean refugees⁵ was shifting to whether they could be incorporated in South Korean society. In 2007, when I returned to the field to begin my dissertation fieldwork, I found myself in the midst of a phenomenon that bordered on a national obsession for this group’s successful integration into South

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³ Hyundai Asan became the sole enterprise to conduct tours to Kŭmgangsan in November 1998 after Hyundai groups’ president Jung Joo Young visited North Korea with a herd of cattle in June 1998. Then Hyundai signed a contract with North Korea to develop an economic cooperative zone in 2000 in Kaesŏng during Kim Dae-jung administration. However, the factories in the Kaesŏng Industrial Complex became targeted for shutdown and South Korean business owners and managers became potential captives whenever political conflict arose between the North and South Koreans. Located approximately 30 km north of the border, with South Korea, Kaesŏng was the capital city of the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392). Tours to Kaesŏng began in 2005 and ended in 2008. However, tours were strictly controlled that one tourist who did not follow regulations was shot to death in 2008. All tours to North Korea were terminated after that.

⁴ Some of the North Korean refugees were called ideologically armored, defected heroes, or kwisunyongsa who glorified the anticommunist, liberal statehood of South Korea. This consigned identity had limited North Korean refugees to being anticommunist fighters rather than as normal citizens seeking a normal life. See Chapter Two for more discussion on North Korean refugees’ status as kwisunyongsa.

⁵ The term “refugee” is a contested term when used to refer to North Koreans in South Korea. In this dissertation, I argue that North Koreans in South Korea are refugees born out of specific historical and political contexts, rather than viewing their migration as just part of recently heightened global movement. Although I do not deny this group’s migration routes and patterns resemble current migration patterns of refugees, the historical context of their identity making in South Korea strongly dictate their settlement process. Although they are granted with South Korean citizenship upon admission, their status is similar to refugees in that North Korean refugees cannot return to their homeland nor can they gain full citizenship. I discuss the variety of terms used to categorize North Koreans in South Korea in Chapter 3.
Korean society. Often referred to as t’albukja, the North Korean refugees influx generated an involvement of South Koreans in various fields since the preexisting social structure did not support any systemic way to govern such a large number of naturalized citizens. The governmental and semi-governmental institutional support, myriad welfare campaigns, and a sheer number of volunteers\(^6\) who became involved in t’albukja chŏgŭng,\(^7\) or social integration, suggested that much was at stake for South Korean national consciousness due to the presence of North Korean refugees as South Korean citizens.

This social integration process revealed to both South Koreans and t’albukja that a large cultural gap exists between them in such a way that t’albukja miscomprehend cultural markers such as language, workplace rules, and interpersonal relationship behavior. The divergence in Korean culture seemed to be the result of six decades of systemic and ideological division between the two Koreas much like the ways Germans discovered their differences in the post-unification era (Berdahl: 1999). In this context, intensive and extensive efforts to integrate t’albukja in society should be understood as the South Korean government’s attempt to emplace this new group of citizens within the structure of the nation-state, the Republic of Korea. However, this process is not a unilateral one. North Korean refugees also actively partake in the process of chŏgŭng by participating in creating their own role in unification efforts. The movement toward t’albukja sahoe chŏgŭng, or social integration, opens up many questions about whether

\(^6\) This point will be further elaborated in the later section in which I discuss t’albukja’s settlement process and also in chapter 2.

\(^7\) Chŏgŭng can be translated to mean adaptation, conformity, or adjustment to one’s environment. Used in Korean social contexts, it means something more like ‘enculturated’ or ‘fully integrated’ with society. Other English words are possible, including terms used in immigration studies, such as assimilation, acculturation, and so forth. For the purposes of this dissertation, I feel that I prefer the neutral, flexible term ‘integration’ as the meaning for chŏgŭng.
their group identity could be freed from its historical, cultural, and political contexts which continuously excluded them from full and equal citizenship in terms of claiming their full belonging to the nation.

In this dissertation, I argue that the emphasis on North Korean refugee social integration is evidence that an ideological transition has taken place in Korean nationalism and the efforts to integrate North Korean refugees should be understood as a process to rewrite Korean nationalism in a way that would reflect the current state of South Korea. The shift in nationalism I am discussing here is a movement away from the belief all Koreans belong to hanminjok, or Korean ethnic nation, which emphasized the unity and homogeneity of all ethnic Korean people. This previous nationalism had presumed North Koreans and other ethnic Koreans as part of the nation. However, once South Koreans began to associate with North Korean refugees on a daily basis, the reality revealed that North Koreans did not understand the ways South Koreans operated in day-to-day life. The ideological transition I discuss in this dissertation is the movement away from utilizing one-ethnic nation logic in incorporating North Korean refugees and focusing on ideologies of nation-state called South Korea. The main operating ideologies in incorporating North Korean refugees in South Korean society are a paradoxical pair of pan’gongchu`i, or anticommunism, and t’ongil, or unification.

In South Korea’s national ideology of t’ongil, the dominant discourse in the past have portrayed t’albukja as lost family members (Foley 2003) of a divided nation. When North Korean refugees are regarded as returning family members, they are expected to perform their duty and live side by side with other family members. This logic of treating national members as family members does not allow a room for making mistakes
in cultural practices which many naturalized citizens in other countries experience.

When received under the “one-Korea” nationalism, North Korean refugees are expected to adjust and live a normal life as South Koreans without much difficulty. North Korean refugees are *de facto* citizens under the South Korean constitution, which states that “the territory of [the] Republic of Korea includes all of the Korean peninsula and the national subjects [are] all [the] residents who reside within this territory” (Yoon Yeo-sang, 2002:230). This assumption had been debunked by the reality of struggling North Korean refugees in South Korea. On the other hand, pan’gongchuŭi, or anticommunism in South Korea which had been a dominant state ideology since the beginning of its statehood in 1948 suggested North Korean communists were a potential and imminent threat to personal, social, and national security. Pan’gongchuŭi in South Korea for a long time has functioned as a social controlling measure that helped in unifying South Koreans as national subjects. When used internally, pan’gongchuŭi offered the society a strong guideline for identifying national subjectivity and underlying assumptions about North Korea as an enemy state. The ensuing hegemony from the two ideologies I described in t’albukja chŏgŭng process could then be found in the ways in which people practice these ideologies in everyday life. Ethnographic encounters in this dissertation trace these hegemonic practices in incorporating North Korean refugees South Korean citizens. Yet this hegemonic process is not a top-down one but a dialogic one as Gramsci (1971) had suggested. I find Comaroff and Comaroff’s explanation more useful and more fitting to my ethnographic tales. The Comaroffs (1991) discuss hegemony as an “order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a

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8 In 2007, the law was revised to accept North Korean refugees for “humanitarian” reasons (Ministry of Unification, 2008).
historically situated cultural field—that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it” (1991:23). I discuss in the following chapters how these “signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies” are played out in social interactions between North and South Koreans in South Korea.

The process in which North Korean refugees are integrated in South Korea occurred within the framework of dominant ideologies of Korean nationalism. North Korean refugees in turn actively participate in making the national discourse that encompasses cultural heterogeneity. This active participation in social integration for t’albukja is culminated in a new discourse of unification. The ways in which these state-led, essentialized ideologies of South Korea are processed in everyday life of South Koreans takes various forms particularly in the ways they talk about each other in forums, seminars, academic researches, interviews, and personal conversations. Whether people endorse or censure state ideologies of all ethnic Koreans’ belonging to one-nation and every Korean belongs to one big family, the shared understanding of these ideologies influences the ways in which South Korean identify themselves as South Koreans. In this context, I argue that South Koreans reinforce the state-centered nationalism through sharing “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 2005:3). Herzfeld has argued that the discussion of nationalism has often ignored how these state ideologies are “engaged” in everyday life of people. He describes “the centrality of cultural intimacy” as

[T]he recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation (2005:3).
Hence, I argue that cultural intimacy is not to be understood as a static form of a culture but rather a process which members of a state identify and affirm their belonging to the same nation. The process then occurs through consuming rhetoric and symbols of nationalism. I take the analysis of rhetorical practices to my research and look at the ways in which South Korean talk about North Korean refugees.

Multiple and conflicting discourses on Korean nationalism complicate t’albukja integration into South Korea. Social integration efforts are a coping mechanism for both North Korean refugees and South Korean citizens as they contest and construct a North Korean refugee identity. Through overcoming the unshared dimension of cultural intimacy of anticommunism and rewriting a new realm of shared unification, North Korean refugees become framed as leaders of future unification of the two Koreas and hence necessary members of the South Korean state.

This dissertation explores the ways in which the North Korean refugee identity is: 1) constructed as legitimately Korean within the paradox of an ethnic Korean nationalism that emphasizes the homogeneity of Korea; 2) contested in times of conflict surrounding the pan’gong (anticommunist) ideology; and 3) coalesced into leadership roles within the t’ongil (unification) ideology. As t’albukja undergo chŏgŭng in order to obtain South Korean citizenship, these intricate ideologies of the past and present mold their new identity in South Korea.

1.2 Influx of T’albukja

The term t’albukja is a common one used to refer to North Korean refugees who
are entering South Korea in the post-1997 legislation changes. The legal name for this group is *pukhan it’t’aljumin*, or misplaced North Korean resident, and they have been admitted to South Korea for humanitarian purposes (Ministry of Unification 2008). Their migration routes are considered inhumane (Muico 2005) in some cases due to the fact that the direct route from North Korea to South Korea is blocked and heavily armed. The most common routes to South Korea includes: North Korea-Northeastern China-Beijing-Southern border region of China-Cambodia, Vietnam, or-Laos-Thailand-South Korea. Considering the proximity of two Koreas, such arduous journeys of crossing multiple borders generate tales of suffering and hardship which often times become the source of prejudice. Motivation for their move also varies from person to person, but from most cases I have encountered, the majority of t’albukja migrated for economically driven reasons. This apolitical move (Chung 2008) of border crossing soon places them in serious political situations when t’albukja migrated throughout Asia.

Prior to the 1990s, incoming North Koreans numbered less than a hundred a year. Up until 1998, less than a thousand North Korean refugees had entered South Korea (Table 1). After 2000, immigration accelerated; by 2009, the annual number of incoming North Koreans numbered in the thousands. For the first time in South Korean history, North Koreans flooded into the country in search of economic relief and a new legal status. When the number of North Korean seeking residence in South Korea exceeded ten thousands, the government revised its policy on North Korean refugee settlement.
Table 1. Number of Incoming T’albukja

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<td>829</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>626</td>
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<td>Women</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>480</td>
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<td>Total9</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>1,281</td>
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<td>1,383</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>2,544</td>
<td>2,809</td>
<td>2,927</td>
<td>2,379</td>
<td>2,737</td>
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Source: Ministry of Unification

By early 2008, t’albukja il-man myŏng sidae (the era of 10,000 North Koreans in South Korea) became a catchphrase among scholars, government and NGO workers.

These and others engaged in the so-called t’albukja saŏp, or North Korean refugee business, which refers to the government, semi-government, and non-government organizations involved in t’albukja integration to South Korea. The increasing refugee population led to intensifying concern about their ability to chŏgŭng (integrate) into South Korean society given their North Korean backgrounds and refugee experiences.

South Korean government officials and various caregivers believed that people who had lived in an economically unstable country and faced many hardships while migrating through China to South Korea would be incapable of functioning well in South Korean society. The integration processes they established focused on making North Koreans into competent citizens much like other South Koreans. Embedding these newcomers in South Korean society became a mission for both South and North Koreans alike. It would result in a new unified (if not homogeneous) Korean culture, as dictated by the

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9 The disparity between women and men in this statistical report is a result of a combination of factors. According to some North Korean refugees, the North Korean government increased enforcement on attendance at work for men. Also there has been increasing demand for female North Koreans for international marriage to Chinese men and for work in entertainment industry in the Northeastern region in China.
unification ideology.

The intense effort to socially integrate North Korean refugees has not produced the intended results, however. Researchers have suggested t’albukja *bu-chŏgŭng*, or failure to integrate due to their inability to adapt to a capitalist economy; low motivation to work; poor health conditions; and lack of understanding of South Korean people (Lee 2004; Jeon 2000; Yoon 2002; Chung 2004). Their arguments about reasons why refugees fail to integrate imply that what integration really means in South Korea is the ability to find and retain employment while building stable social relationships with other South Korean citizens. Efforts to integrate North Korean refugees also have moral implications, since the successful social integration of t’albukja is expected to facilitate eventual political unification of North and South Korea.

1.3 Korean Nationalism and History

At various historical times, the political needs of the nation have led to revised definitions of North Korean identity. The first time Koreans began to imagine a nation in the sense of a modern nation-state was in the late nineteenth century and following the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) when all Korean people collectively fought for independence. Beginning with Shin Chae-ho’s *minjokjuŭi*, or ethnic nationalism, a national consciousness was awakened through the efforts of enlightenment thinkers and conservative scholars (Em 1999; Shin 2006; Schmid 2003; Robinson 1988). Korean intellectuals at the turn of the century began to articulate a national consciousness that called for people to “imagine” each other as brethren of a nation named Taehanjeguk the modernized state name given to the late Chosŏn dynasty. Japan’s annexation and
subsequent colonization of Taehanjeguk redirected the nationalist movement toward an ethnic nationalism that emphasized restoration of the nation that belonged only to Korean people. Korean ethnic identity became the center of the nationalist movement. An ideological split among the national leaders during the Japanese colonial period brought another shift (Armstrong 2003; Suh 1988). One side leaned towards a radical, socialist approach to independence and the other emphasized a progressive, democratic movement.

The end of the World War II did not bring immediate return to an independent Chosŏn state. Instead, the Soviet Union and the United States occupied the northern and southern ends of the Korean peninsula from 1945 until 1948 (Cumings 1981). From this time until the end of the Korean War, a massive internal migration of Koreans began; measuring the number of people who crossed the thirty-eighth parallel was an impossible task (Foley 2003). The Korean ethnic nationalism at the onset of modernity now shifted to heterogeneous nation-state ideologies of communism in the North and anticommunism in the South.

When the nation split into two states, the assumption of primordial unity of Korean people became contested. Whereas before there had been an assumption of the homogeneity of a Korean nation, now South Korea diverged and called only for the homogeneity of South Koreans. Benedict Anderson’s (1991) “imagined” national community is exemplified in South Korean discursive practices that portray Koreans as a homogeneous people who share the same language, history, and culture (Grinker 1997; Nelson 2000; Kim 2007; Shin 2007). This “narrated” configuration of a national history,

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10 The military demarcation line drawn at the 38th parallel line to signify the border between North and South parts of Korea after Japan left. This line was temporarily drawn but it later became the perpetuating border between North Korea and South Korea. See Cumings (1981, 1990).
language, tradition, culture, and ethnic homogeneity strengthens the bonds of citizenry (Bhabha 1990).

North Korea also had to be “imagined” in South Korea’s national discourse so that the nation’s configuration fit in with its history and territory (Nelson 2000). However, the existence of North Korea became a point of contention, since the imagined territory of the nation (encompassing the whole peninsula) and the reality of the nation’s political borders differ. The “shared history” with North Korea demanded South Koreans imagine a nation for all Korean peoples, yet South Korea’s distinctive nationalism excluded North Korea. This has presented a continuous problem in locating North Korean identity in South Korea.

Since the post-Korean War, the competing discourses of anticommunism and unification have become determinants for national belonging for South Koreans. Anticommunism is ingrained in the consciousness of South Koreans, who are constantly reminded of the destruction of the Korean War. One ideological source of “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 2005) that unified South Koreans as national subjects was their shared belief in North Korea as a collective enemy of the state. Although South Koreans are embarrassed to discuss how they were once pressured to purge their nation of potential communists, those who lived through the past national obsession with pan’gong banc’h’ŏp (anticommunism anti-spy) campaigns today react with confusion and fear when encountering North Koreans in South Korea.

In contrast, the national unification discourse glorifies the shared history of Korea and has been a constant source of pride fueling the desire for a united Korean nation. Ever since being under Japanese control, sovereign autonomy has been a national
obsession. The division of North and South Korea after its independence from Japan has always been considered the nation’s *han*, a culturally specific suffering or burden shared by Koreans (Grinker 1997). South Koreans imagine a return to a unified ethnic nation, *hanminjok*. Such imagination of return is only possible while North Korea and South Korea are separate political entities, yet this nationalist rhetoric continuously “imagines” that North Koreans are the same as South Koreans.

The varied nationalist imaginations in South Korea since the division support the notion that “national identities are continually constructed in particular contexts, in various modes, and often in a process consciously led by interested parties” (Nelson, 2000:19). Hobsbawm (1983), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1990), Chatterjee (1993), and Anderson (1991) all discuss how a nation’s history and culture are incorporated and reconfigured to establish the national identity in the present. The construction of national identities requires national ideologies that reflect the interests of national subjects. South Koreans’ sense of national belonging is confusing due to these various nationalist discourses; this complexity further affects the integration of North Korean refugees into the South Korean state.

1.4. Refugees, Migrants, and Citizenship

The migration experiences of North Korean refugees in South Korea in the 2000s differ from other North Korean groups who migrated to South Korea since the Korean War and during the Cold War era. Defining refugees is a confusing process as Liisa Malkki (1995b; 1997) has once discussed. The most obvious issue is defining who is a refugee. In the case of North Koreans in China and other Southeast Asian countries, they
have not been granted a status of internationally recognized refugees. This means they have not been able to register to seek asylum from these countries. However, most of the times, refugees are understood to have been forced to leave their homes and cannot return to their country due to the fear of persecution or death. Then what happens to these refugees who are forced to leave their homes and are relocated in another country? Ethnographic research on Cambodian refugees in the U.S. (Ong 1997; 2003) and Hutus in Tanzania (Malkki 1995a) tells us that the refugee category sometimes signifies a danger or threat to existing “national order of things” (Malkki 1995b:2) for its liminal status and that the legal citizenship does not always grant belonging to the society without fully gaining cultural citizenship (Ong 1997).

The threat may be lessened when a receiving nation has made a moral commitment to admitting certain refugees. For example, David Haines (1989; 2010), documenting the historical backdrop of refugee immigration, finds that the United States most often admits refugees from countries with which it has been at war. When admitted in this context, the refugees are not necessarily a threat but an object of sympathy. North Koreans in South Korea have been admitted under humanitarian purposes (Ministry of Unification 2008) and this can also be considered as a case in which North Koreans are treated as refugees of the Korean War and Cold War, which makes South Korea morally obligated to receive them. However, the preexisting notion of a single ethnic nation with a shared history in the pre-modern period along with the forced division between two countries complicates this perspective. North Korean refugees may be the victim of the ideological war between two states, but they did not lose the war nor did South Korea initiate the war. Despite these shortcomings, it is helpful to frame the case of t’albukja in the refugee
studies due to the national subject-making process the refugees face (Y. Kim 2009).

It is not only refugees who experience this national subject-making process. International labor migrants or international marriages often trigger hosting societies to make changes for their belonging. For this, multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1995) has gained an importance in discussing social integration policy for t’albukja in South Korea. Since their motivation for migration would not qualify for political refugee status, many social scientists in Korea began to look at t’albukja as “economic migrants” (Chung 2008; Jung 2010), “immigrants” (Kim 2009; Yoon 2009), or “settlers” (Choo 2006). Framed in these terms, North Koreans are considered “newcomers” to South Korea; as newcomers, their rights as a minority group are defined according to their historical and political circumstances in society (Yoon 2004). In Korea’s Minorities (2004), Yoon In-Jin and Chung Byung-ho claim that North Korean refugees constitute a minority group in South Korea as a result of their willingness to leave their country and cross national borders. When viewed as a minority group with a different cultural background, a multicultural perspective would offer a useful tool in establishing government policies for all members of South Korean society. However, as Oh Kyong-sok in Multiculturalism in Korea argued, multiculturalism in Korea does not reflect “the reality due to the failure to incorporate migrants” (2007: 35). Multiculturalism in Korea seems to point out the necessity to acknowledge the cultural diversity, yet it has not succeeded in creating an environment in which North Korean refugees could exercise their minority rights to fully express their North Korean identity.

Once refugees, migrants, or immigrants are granted with political citizenship, a national subject-making process enables them to gain ‘cultural citizenship’ and social
mobility (Rosaldo 2003; Ong 1997). ‘Cultural citizenship’ applies to any social context where a dominant majority culture is imbued with historical differences in ethnic categories. I argue that making refugees into national subjects involves an attempt to get rid of the categorical differences between the dominant and subordinate citizens. Aihwa Ong (1997) argued that ethnicity became the basis of discrimination which excludes full national citizenship. The national subject must be able to conform to the nation-state’s linguistic, social, and cultural requirements. This process is not unilateral, however. As Malkki (1995a; 1995b) reminds us, early refugee studies were conducted under the assumption that refugees have no agency. This dissertation demonstrates that refugees as migrants also possess agency in constructing their identity in a new society. North Koreans become “embedded” (Ong 1999:3) in the “national order of things” (Malkki 1995b:5) within the nation-state ideology.

1.5 Separation and Re-union of People in the Formerly Divided Nations

Post-socialist debates (Berdahl 1999; Verdery 1996; Holy 1996) provide another framework for discussing the t‘albukja in South Korea. German reunification was most often cited as a model for South Korean unification policy in the 1990s (Han 1998; Paik 1998; Cho-Han and Lee 2000). More recently, unification of families between China and Hong Kong (Newendorp 2008) has been added to separation and reunion of peoples. Daphne Berdahl’s (1999) ethnographic work on post-socialist Germany shows the powerful hold of cultural practices that changes in the political system cannot erase. The distinction between ‘Ossi’ (East) and ‘Wessi’ (West) illustrated the cultural divergence

See Aihwa Ong’s (1997) discussion of Cambodian refugees in the United States for another example of cultural citizenship and the national subject-making process.
between two German groups. Berdahl analyzed how physical boundaries are manifested in defining the differences. “As symbolic entities constituted in human action and interaction, boundaries are constructed out of preexisting differences, which they, in their turn, act not only to reinforce but also to create; the sense of difference they mark is an important as the cultural forms and practices they enclose (1999:5).” Berdahl’s approach assumes that there are acknowledged differences that existed between East and West Germans. Newendorp (2008) in her ethnographic work showed that the Chinese wives who are reunited with their husbands in Hong Kong face discrimination and social stigma arising from the political differences between the Mainland China and Hong Kong. Similarly, South Koreans have developed preconceived bias toward North Koreans not much different from the ways West Germans described East Germans. All of these cases show that political systemic differences in divided states develop different cultural practices. These cultural practices are stronger than ethnic ties of the group. From this we can further induce that cultural knowledge holds much stronger foothold in gaining cultural citizenship.

1.6 The Journey: Ethnographic Fieldwork

I spent approximately eighteen months in the Seoul metropolitan area in South Korea from January to March 2007 and August 2007 to December 2008. A major part of the fieldwork took place at the Alternative School, an educational facility for t’albukja youth. Two other places proved to be excellent venues for observing the social integration process. T’ongil Club which is a university student club for t’albukja students and Together Korea, a non-governmental organization that offers educational resources
to public schools in South Korea. I interviewed t’albukja students and South Korean service providers to draw out how t’albukja identity in South Korea was understood. In addition, I took a residence in a neighborhood where the second largest North Korean refugee population resided for six months. This enabled me to observe how official discourse works on the ground level through being in the firsthand contact with their daily experiences. My positionality was on the border which is an approach to fieldwork that enabled me to observe the “politics of everyday life” (Berdahl 1999:44). The organizations I was affiliated with did not produce official policies. Rather they were where the official discourses were consumed for the personal “politics of everyday life.”

My initial research question focused on North Korean identity as a concreter ethnic identity in South Korea. My formulation of this problem was based on an assumption that North Koreans were indeed like immigrants and would develop a separate community which would offer them a space to practice North Korean culture. To the contrary, as I began field research, I discovered that North Korean refugees did not wish to nor were they encouraged to develop a community of their own. Not only was there an absence of ethnic community or community organizations, t’albukja were encouraged to be like South Koreans, to speak and behave in the ways South Koreans could understand. While migrant laborers and other ethnic groups formed a separate communities such as a neighborhood called the Foreigner’s Village in Ansan in Kyŏngki province (outside of Seoul), North Korean refugees had no cultural hub where they could practice North Korean food, music, and language. Furthermore meetings with South Korean scholars and governmental and non-governmental organization workers revealed that t’albukja’s chŏgŭng was a problem in that North Korean refugees were failing to do
integrate. It seemed North Korean identity was still an uncomfortable social category. Numerous terminologies South Koreans assigned to this population intensified my curiosity about why North Korean refugee integration was so important for South Koreans. Shifting the focus of this research to social integration process for t’albukja allowed me to observe the influence of anticommunism and unification ideologies on the ways both South Koreans and t’albukja contest and construct North Korean identity.

I also changed the fieldwork sites. I had initially proposed to conduct a bulk of my research at local welfare offices. However, once in the field, I realized that these offices functioned too narrowly for my purposes. The structure of government facilities limited the kinds of social interactions between South and North Koreans that I wanted to observe. The assumed power relations in official settings would have prevented me from observing natural occurrences in the field.

My identity as a South Korean graduate student attending a university in the United States allowed me to work with people holding multiple perspectives in different agencies. It positioned me between South Koreans and t’albukja. I was considered neither an influential or powerful South Korean nor a complete foreigner. I was able to relate to South Korean office workers and researchers since we shared the common goal of learning more about t’albukja.

The people I interacted with at these sites were much more closely connected than I initially expected. T’albukja at these institutions were often friends or acquaintances with each other; they knew each other from having grown up in the same towns in North Korea, stayed in shelters in China, or been cohorts at Hanawon, the initial settlement facility in South Korea. I discovered that multiple organizations and institutions
provided various services to the same group of t’albukja. In other words, any individual refugee was usually connected to multiple places that offered services at any given time (illustrated in Figure 1 in Chapter 2).

1.7 Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 outlines crucial background information for this dissertation. I describe the fieldwork settings and research methods in detail, and then give an overview of how t’albukja are initially settled in South Korea. Chapter 2 also discusses the identity politics of the people involved in the t’albukja integration process. Since integration bears the moral agenda of becoming legitimate citizens, South Koreans disseminate as many cultural and social values to the t’albukja population as possible. Governmental policies control integration, but specific agencies act both for and against these policies under different circumstances.

Chapter 3 addresses the various ways North Koreans have been categorized since the 1950s. Referred to as silhyangmin (those who lose their homeland) and kwisunja (defectors), North Koreans in South Korea have historically been framed as a special type of South Korean citizen. I then discuss current definitions of North Korean refugees with different names such as t’albukja. This chapter also describes the personal relationships among North Koreans labeled in various ways. Finally, I scrutinize the circumstances under which t’albukja encounter marginalization and discrimination in South Korea.

Chapter 4 details this discriminatory attitude further, arguing that it is largely based historically on anticommunism education programs. Even though anticommunism education has been abolished from public schools, the past ideology still echoes in
personal interactions between North and South Koreans. I analyze a recent case in 2008 when a female t’albukja was arrested for alleged espionage and describe how anticommunist sentiments emerge in personal interactions. South Koreans who received an anticommmunism education confess their impression of North Koreans as ‘musŏun saramdŭl’ (scary people) and their discomfort when trying to treat North Korean refugees as equals. Anticommunist sensitivity leads South Koreans to avoid learning about North Koreans as well as fear associating with them. When North Koreans discover such reactionary attitudes and ignorance of their culture among South Koreans, they tend to hide their identity from them. In this context, anticommunism becomes the contested historical realm within which North Korean identity is contained.

Chapter 5 then discusses the national ideology of t’ongil (unification). The presence of North Korean refugees in South Korea has significantly contributed to a rewriting of unification ideology. Unification was once understood as a political reuniting of a divided nation. However, the discovery that North and South Koreans are culturally heterogeneous has instigated a revision of unification; it is now defined as a negotiation of these differences in the integration process. This revised approach has created an opportunity for North Koreans to construct their identity as future leaders of unification. Their successful integration to South Korean society then becomes a litmus test for the possibility of unification. As t’albukja internalize this discourse, they become active participants in revising it; this is an act of resistance in some sense, as their effort includes informing the South Korean public about North Korean culture.

The dissertation concludes in Chapter 6, wherein I summarize the highlights and shadows of being t’albukja in South Korea. Identifying t’albukja as a special population
that has become the subject of South Korean rescue at times obscures the historically
specified North Korean categories that shape t‘albukja identity in South Korea. Most
current studies of North Koreans describe them as immigrants or migrants whose
experiences are unique and worthy of documentation. In this chapter, I reiterate that the
high level of attention and concentrated effort to integrate t‘albukja as competent South
Korean citizens is better seen as an attempt by South Koreans to embed these newcomers
within preexisting national discourses. South Korea’s postwar construction of a national
identity does not provide a cultural intimacy that can include North Korean refugees as
legitimate citizens in the South Korean state. I argue that South Koreans are not engaged
in rewriting the national discourse to embrace North Korean refugees as national subjects.
CHAPTER 2
Fieldwork, Research Methods, and Identity Politics

“As identity is defined against someone else, it implies not identifying with the other.”
–Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the context as to which t’albukja identities are framed and negotiated along with personal politics between t’albukja and South Koreans surrounding the discourse of t’albukja chŏgŭng, or social integration. I also provide detailed descriptions of places and the interview processes so as to show analyses from spaces between official and unofficial, center and margin, and South Koreans and North Korea refugee identities. I am not, however, approaching this research from a structuralist point of view, but rather a poststructuralist position in that I seek out to find out processes that frame North Korean refugee identity in South Korean nationalism. This allowed me to observe the discourses of power and resistance culminating into the creation of a new “cultural intimacy” that has risen from various social dimensions. In studying t’albukja, it is important to be reminded that historically constructed ideologies dominate and influence the social dynamics between these “two” Koreas. The current understanding of t’albukja as migrants is overwritten by the powerful hegemony (Foucault 1975; Gramsci 1971) created by Korea’s history of anticommunism and unification ideologies. I take this position further by analyzing the ways in which both Koreans have utilized these discourses in order to create the cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2005) that reinforces national identity shared among national subjects of South Koreans.
The effort to reconstruct an overarching discourse that embraced heterogeneous Korean cultures is found largely in t’albukja chŏgŭng, or social integration, is concerned

I will begin this chapter by first introducing a much needed background on the process of t’albukja admittance to South Korea and what kinds of identity politics exist in this field. The second part of this chapter discusses the sites of analyses--The Alternative School, Unification Club, Together Korea, and a t’albukja neighborhood--where individuals manipulate and reinterpret the discourse of chŏgŭng to work out the cultural heterogeneity I discussed in chapter 1. In the last section, I describe interviewees highlighting the contrast between those who were willing to be tape and interviewed and those who were not. This is an important aspect of my research because it displays the hypersensitivity of North Koreans to a research setting. T’albukja’s agreement to tape-recorded interviews illustrated ulterior motives as well as personal relationship with the researcher.

By providing details of the field sites where official and unofficial encounters and conjectures occurred, I provide an overall scene in which North Korean refugees and South Koreans negotiate their differentiated national image in South Korea. In order for this research to analyze the ways in which anticommunism and unification ideologies affect North Korean identity formation, one must be out of structured official settings and enter the home, the streets, and conversational meetings observing interpersonal relationship that reflect the fading anticommunist sensitivity. Yet this does not leave out the structured official settings as the shifting unification discourse is often iterated in official settings where North Korean refugees will encounter South Koreans.

In the following section, I will present the process t’albukja undergo upon
admission to South Korea to illustrate the various kinds of institutional exposure they faced at the beginning of their lives in South Korea. Following that discussion, I present the identity politics that arise from the field.

2.2 T’albukja in South Korea

T’albukja’s life in South Korea begins in an official setting at an institution called Taesŏng Kongsa, a National Security Institute branch that is responsible for identifying North Korean residents. When a t’albukja arrives in South Korea, she is subjected to questioning in order to verify whether she is indeed from North Korea or not. Once her identity is cleared, the government of South Korea offers an issuing of a South Korean citizenship along with a financial support package. This policy attracts thousands of North Korean refugees from China and other countries who live as illegal migrants. As I have discussed in the introduction, since 2000, the number of incoming t’albukja continues to increase. To accommodate the growing number of t’albukja, the South

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12 Most t’albukcha spend about a month at the National Security Institute during this questioning. What exactly is questioned is not known to the public. However, a series of questionnaires and formal interviews regarding personal information begins from Taesŏng Kongsa. North Korean refugees’ negative reaction to interview request is perhaps natural as they are subject to interviews from this point and well after they are settled in their new housing.

13 According to the Ministry of Unification’s publication Pakhan it’aljumin chŏngch’ak chiwon ónmu silmup'yǒllam (Manual for North Korean Refugee Settlement Support Case Workers) 2008, this phase is called boho sinch’ŏng kigan, Protection Request Period. This period starts from the day t’albukja enter South Korea until they begin their life in the society (p. 116). According to this manual, this is the period when t’albukja feel relief and hope for the new future, and at the same time, they feel “anxious about South Korean government’s scrutiny on their “t’albuk ūido” or intention for leaving North Korea.” This reason for leaving North Korea becomes a crucial point for the admission to the country. Also this is when the government also verifies whether the North Korean refugee is a threat to the nation-state or not. Text in Korean: “이 기간은 새터민들이 긴 탈북 과정 끝에 남한에 처음 들어온 시점부터 정부의 조사와 보호기간을 마치고 남한의 일상생활로 들어가기 전까지의 시기로서 새터민들에게는 희망이 이루어졌다는 안도감과 함께 새로운 생활에 대한 기대감과 불안감이 겹치게 된다. 즉 남한정부의 조사 및 보호기간은 안도와 희망의 기간인 동시에 불안해하는 기간이며 남한사회에 대하여 점차로 더 많은 것을 알아가면서 자신이 이 사회에서 어떻게 살아가야 할 지 적정하게 되는 시기이기도하다. (p. 116)

14 See table 1 in chapter 1.
Korean government has constructed special buildings for (re)educating North Korean refugees about life in South Korea. One of these institutions, Hanawon, the name meaning “oneness-place,” is staffed with numerous South Koreans including part-time volunteers to facilitate North Korean refugees’ successful adaptation to things South Korean. Surrounded by rice fields in the front and mountains in the back, the facility Hanawon offers quiet seclusion, a perfect liminal space for those who are waiting to become South Koreans. During their stay in Hanawon, t’albukja learn about institutions, such as schools, employment agencies, and training centers, where t’albukja will enroll after leaving Hanawon.

During the 10-12 week-long stay at Hanawon, North Korean refugees learn about capitalism, banking, employment types and opportunities, English usage, computers and other practical skills to become familiar with South Korean society. All of these trainings are carried out in a classroom setting. In addition, t’albukja receive physical and mental health services from doctors and counselors residing at the facility. The dormitory offers a place of rest for the Hanawon residents whose stays are marked by the cohort numbers. Dormitory life and tight schedules to attend classes provide the members of the same cohort to create close relationship which last well after leaving the facility. These close relationships might have been begun in China or other places as they waited before coming to South Korea. The trust built between the members of the same cohort during their time at Hanawon becomes an important source of networking when they start to live on their own.

Upon leaving this institution, North Koreans are sent to their designated housing complexes. At this time, local welfare officers come to Hanawon and escort North
Koreans to the welfare office in their new neighborhood. From this office, volunteer workers accompany t’albukja to the district offices to help them with registration as a new resident. The same volunteer(s) will help the new residents with shopping for basic necessities for their new houses. Once this phase is over, t’albukja may start to live in their new homes as South Korean citizens. During these first months after leaving Hanawon, t’albukja receive various services the government offers. Unlike in Hanawon where all services are found in one facility, t’albukja now must rely on many different governmental sectors in order to find the services they need. The police department assigns a tamdang hyŏngsa, or a police officer for personal safety\(^{15}\) that is similar to liaison officer. (who at times may be the only official contact for many North Korean refugees) called tamtang hyŏngsa; welfare offices staff a group of employees in the Saet’ŏmin Chŏngch’ak Chiwŏn Sentŏ, Center for North Korean Refugee Settlement Support, who oversee overall welfare related administrative work for t’albukja; tong-samuso (regional offices), health centers, and the labor department also assign contact officers (Ministry of Unification 2008). This web of governmental agencies that provide services to t’albukja is better illustrated in the figure 1 below.

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\(^{15}\) Prior to 2000, the number of t’albukcha assigned to each private detective was only a few, but since the number of t’albukcha increased, the number each of tamdang hyŏngsa was assigned increased to a dozen. This has caused concerns among police detectives since increased workload could signify decreased level of security.
The assignment of a police officer for personal protection to each t’albukja for security purposes is a custom eerily related to the Cold War era practice of suspecting North Koreans as a potential threat to the society. Malkki (1995b) also discussed the “suspicion” and “danger” associated with refugees. This as one of the examples that illustrate how incoming North Koreans in the 2000s were understood as refugees rather than migrants. Ironically, for many t’albukja, the private detectives became the “go-to” person for employment contacts and potential spouses, among other matters (Hong, Park, and Won 2003). Also, creating a separate section in the welfare office only for t’albukja seemed to suggest their inequality to other South Korean welfare recipients. What is interesting is research findings show that t’albukja adolescents respond similarly to the benefits of additional welfare services for their education with that of South Korean adolescents. Yet, many South Koreans still insist on offering services to North Koreans through a separate office. This kind of “separate and special” services targeted towards t’albukja only ultimately segregates this group from other South Koreans.

The efforts to support successful t’albukja chōgūng, or social integration, do not
stop at the governmental level. In private sectors, registered volunteers aid with North Korean refugees settlement; non-governmental organizations for educating North Korean refugee youths have opened; and religious organizations have initiated charity work in rescuing North Korean refugees trapped in cruel conditions in China and North Korea. Within such strong institutional support, do North Korean refugees begin their lives in South Korea. During the integration period in South Korea, the “rescue work” of North Korean refugees from an illegal status in other countries transforms into “correcting” the ways of t’albukja. South Korean aid workers/volunteers/supporters are zealous to make the transition as effortless as possible so that North Korean refugees are able to obtain employment and start living like South Koreans (this part will be discussed further in chapter 3). It can be said that all this enthusiasm stems from the overall emphasis on leading t’albukja to a successful integration into society, suggesting South Korea is more concerned with the institutions’ ability to absorb the twenty seven million North Koreans in time for future unification. Therefore, by successfully adjusting to this new society the t’albukja become important collaborators in achieving the bigger project of unification.

The intensity of government and civic organizational involvement with North Korean refugee’s chŏông inadvertently triggers a feeling of self-importance among some t’albukja (Kim 2009). The creation of various departments and assigning officers to refugees is viewed as increased employment opportunities for South Koreans. In addition, the heightened level of attention to refugees by these institutions in the initial phases accompanied with positive encouragement results in false hopes of joining the upper middle class upon leaving Hanawon (Chung 2006). 16 However, the enthusiasm

16 See the edited volume on North Korean refugee migration by Chung Byeong-ho, Jeon Woo-taek, and
built up during the initial period is often deflated once they settle in their new housing. Also, unlike the enthusiasm of volunteers and government workers, the general South Korean public opinion is indifference.

Once t'albukja leave Hanawon and move into their designated apartments, their physical contacts with South Koreans turn into a need-based relationships. Governmental services are offered in separate buildings scattered throughout the city. So unless t'albukja take the initiative to make contacts, it becomes difficult to develop close relationships with South Koreans. The stark difference between the heightened attention of Hanawon and the indifference from the public present a confusing picture reflecting what Grinker calls the “ambivalent” attitude towards North Korea and its people.

As I have discussed in chapter 1, the concentrated efforts to socially integrate North Korean refugees on an official level imposes a moral burden on both North Korean refugees and South Koreans in that North Korean refugees must learn cultural traits of South Koreans and South Koreans must help North Koreans to become successfully integrated. The success of North Korean Refugee integration will serve as a beacon for unification, as t'albukja integration is not only important for social stability but also as a gauge for Koreans’ capacity to re-unify a diverged culture. More specifically, the ability to adapt and become like South Koreans is just as an important objective as South

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17 I argue that the stark contrast in attitudes from different South Korean groups toward North Korean refugees stems from the conflicting national ideologies of anticommunism and national unification that are still at work in the public’s minds. The anticommunist rhetoric in the past urged the public to avoid any contact with North Koreans who were considered spies sent from North Korea, so I argue that the South Korean public feels uneasy to personally interact with North Koreans. (This point on the role of anticommunist sentiment will be further discussed in chapter 4.) At the same time, the nation has struggled to reunite the divided half. South Korea’s history begins with the division that was solidified after the 1953 armistice. The history of the nation nags the Koreans to reunify the country that was divided against the will of the people. So the government’s efforts to reintegrate North Korean refugees seem like a natural course to establish measures for social integration after unification.
Koreans’ ability to bring t’albukja out of their marginal status. Whether it is intentional or not, this national objective of t’albukja integration produces an unequal power relation, as t’albukja are expected to become like their South Korean counterparts. South Koreans then become the source of cultural knowledge and capital, and North Korean refugees the recipients. In addition, the process of t’albukja chôgûng is accompanied by various institutional agendas.  

In the following section about my fieldwork, I present the people with whom and places of where personal politics surrounding chôgûng occur. The people I met in the field are t’albukja whose lives were intertwined with various governmental workers and service providers. The t’albukja participants for this dissertation project lived in their assigned housing.

2.3 Personal Politics in Doing the Fieldwork

When I arrived in South Korea in August 2007 for this fieldwork, I commuted from my family residence in Incheon, an adjacent city to Seoul, widely known for the international airport. I had done so during the preliminary research phases in the summer of 2005 and earlier months of 2007, so I thought it might be possible to continue my fieldwork from Incheon for my research from August 2007 until the end of the fieldwork. However, commuting to field sites posed various challenges in conducting the fieldwork.

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18 Often times the conflict arises out of the intent of policy and the needs and wants of t’albukja are different. For example, t’albukja may want to receive a lump sum amount for their settlement money rather than in installment for various personal needs. However, the government policy favors incentive based model to distribute the financial package so as to prevent t’albukja from spending the lump sum money to non-living cost purposes, such as paying off their debt or getting it stolen, other than intended living costs. As the settlement money is intended to be used for their living costs, the government is leaning toward giving incentives to those who show their efforts to find steady jobs in South Korea (Ministry of Unification 2008).
The first challenge was logistics. The average commuting time it took to commute to Alternative School during these months was three hours. Secondly, with the limited subway access from Seoul to Incheon, it was difficult to attend late hour meetings and gatherings with research participants. Not attending drinking sessions with people sent a signal that I did not wish to be part of the group and therefore created emotional distance and made it difficult to interact with interviewees on more casual and relax settings allowing for more spontaneously produced stories. This relational distance caused by the physical distance challenged the observation of the daily life of North Korean refugees. Since my interaction with t’albukja was limited to parameters within schools, welfare offices, and research institutes, I was considered as one of many South Korean researchers, social workers, and teachers who held a hierarchical position. To avoid the power relations created by structural division, I move out of my family residence and in with Mrs. Park and her 8 year-old-son in April 2008. Mrs. Park’s apartment was located in a large apartment complex where the second greatest number of t’albukja lived in Seoul.

My residence in the North Korean refugee neighborhood surprised many of both South Koreans and North Korean refugees. South Koreans told me I was “brave” and “great” to have the courage to live with North Koreans; North Koreans thought I was “strange” and “great” to not have discriminatory attitude toward living with and around North Koreans. When Mrs. Park had guests in our apartment, the t’albukja guests showed some level of discomfort at my presence. Our guests did not know how to place me. One evening, Mrs. Park told me we would have a guest coming over for tea. Our guest turned out to be Mr. Hong whom I had met at one of the Unification Club meetings.
When he saw me, he was surprised and asked me “ŏttŏk’e yŏkie kyeseyŏ?” which meant why I was living in that apartment. So I asked Mr. Hong why my cohabitation with Mrs. Park was surprising to him. His answer was: “Han’guk saramdŭl” (South Koreans) don’t like to live with North Korean refugees.” His use of “Han’guk (South Korea)” to refer to the rest of South Koreans illustrated that there was a demarcation. I became intrigued by such reactions from people I met in the field. When I had dinner with another t’albukja interviewee, Mr. Yun, I told him about the perplexed reactions from both groups. He said he was not surprised and continued in a matter of fact tone, “You’re the weird one (for living with North Korean refugees for my research). Nobody cares about North Korean refugees.” The contradiction between the t’albukja’s chŏgŭng and the reality of segregation found in t’albukja’s daily life brought me to the realization of conflicting discourses.

From these encounters, I began delving into the causes of and reality of Korean (dis)integration. I am intrigued to encounter such blunt confessions from both South Koreans and North Korean refugees alike of the unthinkable reality of cohabitation. The government policies toward integration began to feel unachievable and idealistic.

As I mentioned earlier, t’albukja often begin their social interaction with South Koreans in institutional settings. The South Koreans with whom t’albukja meet in Hanawon and other agencies such as welfare offices are regarded as sources of information on the South Korean society. The instructional curriculum at Hanawon focuses on “how to live well in South Korea” (Ministry of Unification 2008). Hanawon

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19 Han’guk is a common word used for South Korea. It is a short form of Taehanmin’guk which is the official state name of South Korea, the Republic of Korea. Han’guk saram means South Korean, and the suffix ‘–dŭl’ is used to make the noun plural.
North Korean refugees meet are informers of South Korean life and also embody the point at which they enter the next stage of their lives. Often times, these sŏnsaengnim introduce North Korean refugees to job placement agencies; technical schools where North Korean refugees can enroll and learn about computers and train in other various technical skills; and other useful institutions. South Korean caregivers who aid in initial settlement also participate in creating and negotiating identity for this group.

As the t’albukja interact with aid workers upon initial settlement, this interaction gives t’albukja their first encounter with identity politics. South Korean aid workers and caregivers in China and other Southeast Asian countries who aid North Korean refugees to escape from their illegal status assume the role of rescue workers for the people who are in vulnerable position for human rights violations. Particularly it has been documented by other social scientists (Jung 2010; Han 2011) that Christians who provide shelters for North Korean refugees through proselytizing assume a superior position. In addition, this power structure creates another kind of identity politics, in which North Korean refugees claim their presence serves as an enabling factor for creating jobs for South Koreans (Kim 2009). This can be seen as an act of resistance and an attempt to equalize positions in the power structure.

Both South Koreans and North Korean refugees use their own biases and assumptions about each other to negotiate their relational positions. Particularly, I argue that anticommunist sensitivity and unification continuously influence their interaction with North Koreans refugees on state, public, and personal levels. Discussion on

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[^20]: The term sŏnsaeng(nim) is used in various social situations. Often used to refer to any type of teacher, this term is used when social relationship is formed in a formal setting. Usually in Korea, people refer to one another with one’s titles. So when the titles are unclear, often times, sŏnsaeng(nim) replaces the title.
dominant group(s) or the majority of the society engage in the “othering” of minority
groups is not new (Said 1978; Gladney 1998; Rabinowitz 2002). In Korea’s case, the
historically dominant ideologies have become the foundation for “othering” of North
Korea categories. I believe the ethnographic findings I discovered that follow in the
following chapters will be the proof of this.

During their stays in Hanawon, t’albukja also form their own network among
themselves. The personal networking among t’albukja at times becomes problematic for
South Korean policy makers when t’albukja trust information they share among
themselves more than with South Korean officials. People in North Korea in general live
in one province for most of their lives. Many of t’albukja interviewees told me that in
North Korean people are generally well acquainted with their neighbors due to this
immobility which creates a stable environment. This habit of living in a stable
environment is thrown into confusion when they come to South Korea since it becomes
harder for them to discern who can be trusted. In Hanawon, North Korean refugees
experience and learn things together. T’albukja who are admitted to Hanawon as a
cohort would have likely spent some of their time during migration as well. For example
Hyun’s mom spent extensive period of her stay in China with Eunhee’s mom. These
women met each other in China in a village where they got married to Chinese men.
Currently, they work in the same place and live in the same apartment complex.
However, these ladies do not necessarily bond with other t’albukja women. In such cases,
the time t’albukja knew of each other and the specifics of experiences they share operate
as bonding forces that built trust among themselves. Similar pattern of networking
among t’albukja occurred at all field sites.
2.4 Vantage Point One: The Neighborhood

When I moved to my room in the Riverside apartment complex in April 2008, I learned that t’albukja in this neighborhood received many visits from a welfare office and other service providing agencies. Invitations from different organizations for special events for t’albukja came were posted in the elevators of the building, in mailboxes, and phone calls. Also while I was sharing the apartment with Mrs. Park, my landlord, I received random visits from churches, government offices, along with other sales people during the day time when Mrs. Park was at work. Much like the reactions I received about my moving to this apartment, many of these South Korean visitors were perplexed at my accent and often asked me if I were South Korean or North Korean. I will describe these incidents in Chapter 3. Various observations I made during my stay in this neighborhood from April to November 2008 included reality of life for people who depend on government welfare, the perspectives on life of different generations, invitations to various projects and events that were held exclusively for t’albukja, and random encounters that raised questions about t’albukja identity.

The apartment building that Mrs. Park and I shared contained a total of 200 units in fifteen stories with many t’albukja I met during my fieldwork. Many of t’albukja depended on welfare checks as the main source of their income. Other supplementary

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21 In 2008, the housing allowance for a single person household was 13,000,000 Korean Won (KW) which equates to about 10,000 US dollars, for a 2-4 person household 17,000,000 KW, and for a 5 or more person household, the housing money was 20,000,000 KW. The method of distribution of these amounts is initially the government pays only for the amount of security deposit for the apartment and pays the rest of the allowance after 5 years. However, if the amount of security deposit changes over time, the government will pay for the difference upon request (Ministry of Unification 2008:13).

22 This location of the welfare office in the neighborhood enables the office to run their programs much more efficiently compared to other welfare offices that specializes in North Korean refugee cares. I encountered some social workers who pointed this out at numerous meetings. It is commonly known among social workers that North Korean refugees are not cooperative in surveys or surveillance to measure effectiveness of their policy administration which sometimes creates the notion that North Korean refugees are not very honest.
income included stipend from churches, remuneration from delivering testimonials and giving security lectures, and compensation for participating in various researches such as surveys and interviews. I heard at various scholarly meetings that t’albukja relied too much on these institutions for making quick money. But I realized for young single mothers like Mrs. Park, they could not afford to work for ten hours a day at restaurants or other jobs if they were to take care of their children who returned home from school in the early afternoon. Also, most t’albukja face a challenge when they search for employment due to their North Korean identity, their lack of linguistic competence, and lack of skills. These challenges, when faced with immediate need of income, influence t’albukja to look for easier sources income.

Despite their economic struggle, t’albukja often expressed their relief and contentedness of having a permanent housing. My landlord once told me she was “lucky to get my apartment. When I was at Hanawon, the director told me he would look into finding me a suitable apartment. I waited, and they gave me this [apartment].” Her placement in the housing in Seoul was considered “lucky” since many of newly arriving North Korean refugees were relocated to other provinces due to lack of government subsidized housing in Seoul. One of the neighbors, Hyŏk and his family lived on the 12th floor. When I went to visit her to chat in December 2008, Hyŏk’s mother, Mrs. Choe and I sat on her bed and shared tangerines. As she peeled the fruit, Mrs. Choe said that she was “content with life now.” She had brought her two sons to Korea, had a house to live in, and enough money to get by every month. In her sixties, Mrs. Choe felt a sense of accomplishment for creating a stable life in Seoul even though she still struggled with money.
In this neighborhood, many t’albukja felt comforted to have other t’albukja
neighbors who might have been old acquaintances from North Korea, China, or from
Hanawon. However, when they step out of this neighborhood, South Koreans questioned
when they could not place the origin of t’albukja accent or looks. On numerous
occasions when I accompanied my landlord and my neighbors to other areas of Seoul,
upon hearing our conversations, taxi drivers and shop keepers asked us where we were
from. Most of the times, the questions were directed at my t’albukja companion whose
accents differed from South Korean accents. The interactions of these kinds occurred
when I was returning to my apartment with my students or interviewees from restaurants,
shopping centers, and schools. The discovery of South Koreans’ complete lack of
knowledge on North Korean accents and their identity led me to realize there was a stark
contrast between government-led institutional approaches to t’albukja social integration
and the attitude of general South Koreans toward North Korean identities.

At the same time, my time in this neighborhood also let me witness t’albukja’s
willingness and hope for creating a new life in South Korea. The strength and resilience
t’albukja show were often forgotten when measured in parameters set by South Korean
chōgūng standards. Throughout my fieldwork, I witnessed a movement among t’albukja
to create their lives through their own will and ability, rather than relying on South
Koreans whose expectations differ from t’albukja expectations about life. Mrs. Park
succinctly says “In some sense, Juche\textsuperscript{23} ideology is right. Your life depends on what you
do with it.”

\textsuperscript{23} See Kim, Yoon Young (2009).
2.5 Vantage Point Two: Nongovernmental Organizations and University Student Club

The questions “why is North Korean refugee chŏgŭng or integration so important?” and “What does successful chŏgŭng signify to Koreans?” became stronger as my fieldwork progressed. The field sites included Alternative School, Unification Club, and Together Korea. In this section, I discuss my field sites where these integration efforts were taking place. From the stories I heard during my time in Seoul, I found traces of the Cold War rhetoric in everyday interactions between South Koreans and North Korean refugees. Subtle and alluring, it was not until I had time to reflect on these observations I made that I could slowly trace the shape of this unspoken barrier that complicated integration and identity making process of North Korean refugees. These observations came from my fieldwork I conducted primarily in 2007 to 2008 at nongovernmental organizations and a university student club. These sites were chosen because of their “between and betwixt” nature. More specifically, non-governmental organizations at which I conducted my fieldwork were fairly independent in the ways they carried out their services. As I present the sites in the following sections, it will become clear that situating myself in these places where official and unofficial discourses merged enabled me to trace the subtle and implicit interactional dynamics. Typically, social scientists conducted their research in institutions where official discourses dominate personal interactions. For example, social workers meet t’albukja in welfare offices, counselors carried out sessions in meeting rooms, and health officials examine t’albukja health status at the public health centers and hospitals. Cho (Han), Hae-Joang once commented on the difficulty of doing an anthropological research with North
Korean refugees (Cho and Lee 2000) due to the scripted answers t‘albukja typically gave to South Korean researchers. Numerous interview requests t‘albukja receive from the time they arrive at Taesŏng Kongsa have created a sense of repeated questioning about their background and information about North Korea. Such exposure to similar questioning results in the same detailed answers in a scripted manner to most South Korean researchers they meet. I also faced a similar situation when I conducted interviews with parents at Alternative School at the principal’s request. The purpose of this school-wide interview sessions was to learn about the family environment students lived in and how the family relationship was affecting the student performance. When I met Sŏng’s mother in the teacher’s room at Alternative School, I was taken aback by when she overzealously began to tell me about her migrations stories even though I never asked her any question relating to her escape from North Korea or China (Alternative School Parent-Teacher Meeting Note, January 30, 2007). Sŏng’s mother visited Hanawon to give a lecture to other newly arrived t‘albukja about life in South Korea and delivered testimonials at various church events. The ways in which Sŏng’s mother was narrating her migration stories to me reminded me of testimonials. Conducting interviews even at this small NGO whose operation was not influenced by government or churches in January 2007 produced such scripted narratives in a structured interview. From this experience, I avoided conducting interviews with t‘albukja at an institutional setting where expectations and experiences dictated the contents of interviews. Due to these constraints, I used the following three sites primarily for carrying out participant observation.

My roles and involvement at each site varied. I spent most of my time at
Alternative School for over 12 months. I spent much less time with people at T’ongil Club where I attended the weekly meetings for approximately for eight months. Then at Together Korea, where I witnessed how unification education was conducted in public schools, I spent intensive three months while visiting public schools in seven provinces in South Korea. I will describe these more in detail in the following.

2.5.1 Alternative School

Alternative School has offered educational opportunities for t’albukja youths who wished to enter a college or technical schools yet did not possess high school degrees. Many students who were enrolled at the Alternative school came after dropping out of public schools, and after completing their training at Hanawon. The most important objectives of Alternative School were training the students to make chŏngŭng in the South Korean society. The educational opportunities offered at this school were in line with the objectives of integrating the students as competent members of society. However, unlike other organizations, this school aspired to inculcate the notion of social equality for t’albukja through obtaining competence. The school strove to empower the students through providing them with basic working knowledge about South Korea so that the students may feel equal to their South Korean counterparts. The school’s philosophy to instill a sense of equality assumed there was inequality in the way t’albukja were

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24 During the survey and interviews conducted in January, September-December 2007, I discovered the students first try out their education at the public schools. However, in late 2008, more and more students began to enroll at the Alternative School after leaving Hanawon without enrolling at the public schools. The students in 2008 said they learned about the Alternative School through instructors and information at Hanawon and came to the School to study for the government exams. The change in the trend of North Korean youths enrolling directly at these Non-governmental organizations is due to the high rate of drop outs among the North Korean refugee youths who entered South Korea prior to their arrival. Recently (since 2010), however, two of the alternative schools for North Korean refugees became accredited and the North Korean refugees who graduate from these institutes do not need to take the equivalency exams.
regarded in South Korea at the time. The school’s resistance to following indoctrinating South Korean superiority suited my interest of being in the “between” space of the dominant and marginal discourses.

My association with Alternative School began with a coincidence in 2005 and ended in connection during my fieldwork period in 2007-2008. In May 2005, I had just completed first year of my studies at University of Hawaii and went to Seoul to look for opportunities to meet t’albukja. I met numerous researchers who claimed their expertise in t’albukja studies at conferences, but none of these contacts led to meeting t’albukja. Then, at a conference, I met a graduate student named Sang who was conducting her dissertation fieldwork about t’albukja. About a week or so after the conference, Sang and I met at a coffee shop in Kyobo bookstore, one of the largest bookstores in South Korea. We were talking about reverse culture shock of being in Korea since both of us were based in a foreign university and compared our schools. Then she carefully asked me if I would like to be an English teacher at Alternative School where t’albukja youths were studying. I could not believe she invited me to teach at this school when I was struggling to find even one contact through other South Korean researchers. But when I arrived at the school about one week after this meeting, I could understand Sang’s desperation to find more teachers for the school. The lack of manpower and resources to run the school was evident in the structure of the school and the ways classroom management was carried out. It was due to operational independence of this school from other major institutions like government and churches which often times financially supported educational facilities for t’albukja.

Alternative School was in a three-bedroom apartment where about a dozen
students were running from one room to another; volunteer teachers were struggling with a printer; and Mr. Park, the principle was busy with answering phone calls and finishing paper work. The class I was assigned was called the “animal kingdom” by students and teacher due to unruly behaviors of four, adolescent male students who were struggling with adjustment to student life. All four students had been absent from schools for many years during their childhood in North Korea and China. These students experienced the famine in North Korea which caused them to leave their hometown and move to China before arriving at South Korea. During this initial phase of my research, I made observations on dynamics between the students and South Korean teachers and focused on developing rapport with the students and teachers at the school.

When I returned to the field in January 2007 with broad research questions about how anticommunist sensibility and unification ideologies worked in creating Korean national imagining, I learned that the school was now in relatively more stable environment. The school had moved to a bigger building with proper classrooms that was away from residential areas. The school also had instituted stricter rules of behavior for students. However, the school’s administration was still not well established yet. Even in 2007, the school was struggling with financial stability and reliable man power for various projects. The school was still running on individual donations and small project based funding sources. Mr. Park’s firm stance on independence from churches might have been the cause of financial difficulties, yet this independence allowed the school staff to produce creative ways to teach t’albukja students whose educational background greatly differed from other South Korean students. This was one of the reasons why I chose Alternative school as my field site. Due to Alternative School’s
unique position among organizations that offered services to t'albukja, I could observe the ways the school resisted indoctrinating t'albukja students with dominant ideologies. The school also became a marginal space where dominant discourse of educating t'albukja students to become successfully integrated South Koreans met resistance of the school’s independent spirit in learning that focused on strengthening student competency.

My duties at this school during the earlier months in 2007 included teaching a course on cultural anthropological concepts and completing a project. At the time, Mr. Park was concerned about high volume of short-term, volunteer teachers who had no knowledge about t'albukja. According to Mr. Park, volunteer teachers often asked personal questions to students during class out of curiosity. Students expressed their discomfort with revealing such personal information to volunteer teachers who were there temporarily. When new volunteers were assigned to a class, the same questioning occurred repeatedly, and the students complained of having to repeat the same answers. This kind of interaction frequently occurred not only at Alternative School but also at T'ongil Club and Together Korea where I later conducted my research. These volunteer teachers’ lack of sensitivity to t'albukja feelings about relating the personal stories illustrated the overall lack of knowledge about North Korean people. This lack of knowledge among South Korean volunteer teachers gave me a hint that the general public did not pay much attention to North Koreans. I was curious to find out how South Koreans would deal with cultural differences between North Koreans and South Koreans. Later this became the determining point for me to interview the teachers to find out their definition of t'albukja in South Korea.

To protect students from such frequent questioning and to prevent volunteer
teachers from making the same mistakes, the principle wanted to develop student records by conducting interviews with all students and their parents. The student records could help the staff with offering better services to students, and they became the basis for creating a training manual for volunteer teachers. My research interest at that time was in meeting more t’albukja adults whose identity formation as North Koreans was completed by the time of entering South Korea. When I related this interest to Mr. Park, he suggested that I should carry out student record building project. This project consisted of a school-wide survey, personal interviews with students and their parents, and creating electronics files for each student.

My intention to meet as many t’albukja adults and find potential interviewees was not the easy task as I had initially thought. As I proceeded with interviews with parents, I realized interviewing them once would not necessarily result in obtaining interviews for my research unless I paid remuneration. So I decided to wait until I returned to the field later that year in August to look for interviewees. Even though I could not produce direct result for my own research, I could obtain numerous firsthand accounts on t’albukja migration and adaptation experiences. I had read several articles on t’albukja chŏgŭng by then, and the stories from these interviews and interactions elucidated my understanding about t’albukja lives in South Korea. From this project, I also learned that t’albukja behaved in more scripted ways when encountering a South Korean interviewer. Some of the parents who were chatting and laughing comfortably with one of the full time staff at the school often stopped when I entered the room. As the staff introduced me to the parents, I could sense a little tension and feel that they were preparing for the interviews in a similar way that Hyun’s mother responded.
I returned to Alternative School to once more in August 2008 to conduct my dissertation fieldwork. Many of the students I had met in January were still enrolled, and newly enrolled students upon learning about my interviews with students requested if I could meet with them also to talk. Some of these students viewed the interviewing as a counseling session in which they could discuss some of their troubles with families, friends, and stress from studying. This time, the interviews took place outside of the school. This informal setting allowed the students to talk more freely about their troubles and hopes for the future. Students were more relaxed about telling me their stories from North Korea, China, and in South Korea which irrelevant to the student records. Yet the students voluntarily came forward with information which was selectively shared with the principle and two other full time staff so that they could understand the students better. The information I collected became instrumental in dealing with situations when students exhibited abnormal behavior. Yet it was difficult to draw out their experiences in South Korea in regards to two dominant ideologies since these students spent most of their time in school and at home. It was evident that these ideologies would be more evident among adult population than youth populations. So I focused more on building rapport with students to learn about general adaptation process.

Information I gathered at Alternative School enhanced my understanding about difficulties t’albukja faced with balancing their life. As I discussed before, numerous organizations and institutions each t’albukja was connected demanded different roles and information from t’albukja. For example, Hyŏk received: a scholarship from Alternative School to cover his tuition and meals, a stipend from a church if he regularly attended, calls from public health offices about his chronic lung disease, and calls from his private
detective about a school trip he took to Nepal. He also attended: classes, Sunday school meetings, social gatherings for t’albukja young adults, interview sessions where he received remuneration, special events organized by local welfare office, and other random demonstration against North Korea. Often, one or more of these demands weighed more than others, and at times when overwhelmed students felt that they could not meet the expectation of teachers, they dropped out of school without consulting teachers first. This kind of behavior had created friction and many South Koreans judged t’albukja as “unreliable” people (personal conversation with a school staff).

Other data I collected from Alternative School included documentaries, CDs, books, and alternative learning material for t’albukja. Documentaries that Alternative School has produced captured student experiences in China and in South Korea. These films differ from other media production about t’albukja’s “escape routes” or the gruesome stories from a political prison. Alternative School’s documentary series begins with *The Long Journey 1* in which Yangmi travels to places where she used to live in China. Next film in the series, *The Long Journey 2: Unfading Memories*, portrays experiences of students who travel to China and film their sentiments in a video journal style. The next film in the series *Almyŏn Saranghanda*, or To Know Is to Love, is a film produced during a camp in Cheju Island with a group of college students and a group of South Korean college students. In this film, students candidly talked about misconceptions and perceptions they had felt about each other. The fourth film *Show Me the Way!* (2007) told a story about leaving North Korea and coming to South Korea. The film begins with a story about leaving North Korea in the form of a puppet show that was

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25 For example, a documentary *Crossing Heaven’s Border* (2008) produced by Seoul Broadcasting Services.
based on a book called Kŭmhee’s Travels (2008). Then a musical piece with a live chorus follows to portray the students’ arrival at Seoul, a silent performance, and a narration of a poem with a silent dance. The various performances portrayed in this film were the fruit of practices at Alternative School. The last one of the series is called Rootless in which Mr. Park visits his former t’albukja students who left South Korea and settled in Europe as refugees.

Through the production of shows and documentaries, the students at Alternative School slowly developed ways to express their experiences as North Korean refugees. Many students told me that before joining Alternative School, they felt they had to hide their t’albukja identity. It was becoming clear to me that the school was influencing the ways in which the students developed the sense of their identity. Yet it was still sensitive to conduct interviews with students for my own research due to t’albukja’s strong aversion to being exposed as research subjects. Therefore, some of my analysis came from the documentaries and books published from Alternative School which might have seemed insignificant in size and power. However, the stories that I collected from this school told me the much deeper and richer reflections on t’albukja social integration process.

2.5.2 T’ongil Club: A University T’albukja Student Club

Another field site of my study, T’ongil Club, was a networking club for t’albukja who are enrolled in a university. Unlike Alternative School, T’ongil Club was a semiprofessional organization that members managed the club under the guidance of a professor. I heard about this club in early 2008 from Ms. Yu who was conducting a
survey with t'albukja at a welfare office. Ms. Yoon had been researching on t'albukja’s mental health and knew the members of T'ongil Club. When the spring semester began in March 2008, I attended the first meeting of the semester with Ms. Yu and introduced myself as a doctoral student from University of Hawaii and a visiting scholar at Yonsei University. My duties and involvement at this club were miniscule at this time since I was not fully accepted as a member. As my attendance at weekly meetings became regular, I was invited to join dinner, movies, and other informal activities.

From my association at this club, I found out more about educational policy for college education for t'albukja students. Mostly they were admitted according to policies on oegugin ip ’ak chŏnhyŏng, or Admission Policy for Foreigners. The government offers free tuition for t'albukja under thirty five years old. This special admission policy for t'albukja young adults illustrated the government’s intention to educate North Koreans in South Korean universities. The university T'ongil Club members belonged to was one of prestigious universities in South Korea. Members were aware of the cultural capital they could possess from earning a college degree from the university.

At the same time, members of the T’ongil Club since its inception in 2004 established a space for social networking. Through the club, t'albukja students voiced their collective concerns and requested for policy changes that better suited for them. In addition, the limitation to who could belong to the club served as a protective measure for the members who were at times overexposed for interview requests or a research topic. The membership was limited to North Korean refugees who were enrolled in universities.

Once in a while, non-North Korean born members like me were admitted with the approval from their advisor and members. Non-North Korean members in spring and fall
semesters in 2008 included me, a German exchange student, two South Korean graduate
students in a North Korean Studies program, a Korean-American graduate student from a
U.K based institution, and another South Korean graduate student in Christian theology.
Once in a while a group of researchers tried to visit the group in search of potential
interviewees or to distribute surveys, but the members highly criticized such visits and
said it made them feel like their lives were worthy of only for research. The resentment
came from members’ experiences with South Korean researchers who discontinued their
contacts with them as soon as the interviews were over. The students often said they felt
exploited when such visits occurred. Building trust and rapport through continual visits
and contact was considered the proper approach to interviewing t’albukja, according to
the members. The club officers assumed the role of representing such views and tried to
keep researchers out of the club. The sensitivity to research participation became evident
from the beginning.

As my participation continued at the club, the members began to include me in
important occasions, such as a luncheon with the chancellor, organizational meetings for
the fall festival events, and birthday party preparation for other members. I offered free
English tutoring services to one member for two semesters, participated in a singing
contest, and attended dinner that followed the weekly meetings. One interesting aspect of
this club was member introduction that took place at each meeting. Each week, we had a
different lecturer, and after the introduction of lecturer, each member had to make an
introduction. Most members stated their name, hometown, age, their major and year of
standing. When it was my turn to introduce myself, I always let the others know I was
born in South Korea and was studying in Hawaii. This revelation of my identity as non-
North Korea sometimes produced chuckles from other members, a surprised reaction, and ignorance of presence due to insignificance of my identity to the lecturers. Due to my insignificant identity club members allowed me to observe how the members proceeded with their lives in the university.

Interestingly, many of the T'ongil Club members have already received a post-secondary education in North Korea. Except t'albukja students in their twenties who entered the university after passing kŏmjŏnggosi in South Korea, T'ongil Club members were degree holders or enrolled in a university in North Korea for a year or more. When t'albukja introduced themselves at the beginning of the weekly meetings, this educational background from North Korea was emphasized. I interpreted this as a sign that the members of T'ongil Club endeavored to distinguished themselves as elites from other t'albukja who were mostly unskilled and uneducated (Ministry of Unification, 2007).

The educated t'albukja believed that their role in society was to become future leaders of unification of two Koreas. As interviews with some of the members of this club revealed, each strove to become experts in their fields. Yet this aspiration to become future leaders came from their realization that they could not be leaders in South Korea. The members of this club were admitted to the university under the “policy for foreigners” which differed from exams South Korean students must pass to enter. From personal interactions with the club members, I could draw out that South Korean students at this school were considered elites and were academically much more competitive than t'albukja students. T'ongil Club members who realized they could not directly compete with other South Koreans whose qualification for employment was much higher resolved to become above average in their fields. This acquisition of expertise in their field then
would become useful if Korea became one nation and northern region of Korea would need to reform. The weekly meetings served as training ground for the members to become more knowledgeable about unification.

The meetings resembled a study group which included listening to a lecture or book reviews. The lecturers were usually South Korean professors, researchers, and Christian pastors whose publications and research in North Korean studies were well known among the members. The lectures usually focused on unification and often times emphasized the importance of North Korean refugees’ roles in achieving the unification. Another popular lecture was how to become successful in South Korea. Often times the pressure to properly make chŏgŭng, or socially integrate, for university students meant not only finding an employment but also becoming “successful” so that they could become experts in their fields for the future unification. The personal network of each member indicated such possibilities. Many of their personal acquaintances included lawyers (in human rights for North Korean Refugees), doctors (Doctors without Borders or National Health Institute), religious leaders (activists in North Korean relief work), politicians (Korean Assembly or the US Congress), professors (researchers in North Korean studies) and or other government employees. This aspect did not differ from the official network of t’albukja I introduced in the earlier section.

During eight months of my participation at T’ongil Club, I was able to observe the club members’ struggle to balance their lives as students and as future leaders of the unified nation. In each class, the members struggled not only to learn a new subject but also from emotional isolation and alienation from the competitive nature of their South Korean classmates. Also, their extra curricular activities at various sponsoring
organizations demanded their participation in numerous projects and events that were organized only for t’albukja. I had mentioned about such invitations when I discussed neighborhood earlier. After spending my time at the club, it was evident that t’albukja students who distinguished themselves as elites among t’albukja in South Korea were struggling to cope with multiple attitudes and demands from various dimensions of society.

2.5.3 Together Korea

Together Korean was a non-governmental organization that promoted cultural education of North Korean refugees to South Korea. My role at this organization was a lecturer for cultural education for South Korean students in public schools. My association with this organization began in January 2007 when I attended a special lecture series that was organized by this NGO. The lecture series was a part of a project to train experts in t’albukja field (Together Korea, 2007). But more deciding factor for my participation in their project was due to physical proximity of this NGO to Alternative School which led to my realization of the importance of their unification education program for my research. Together Korea was temporarily relocated to an office right next to Alternative School. During lunch hours, the teachers at Alternative School would make a call to Together Korea and invite the secretary to join us for lunch. From these encounters, I became quite knowledgeable about struggles of this NGO to survive. One of the projects Together Korea had been working on was a cultural education program for South Korean students. The basic premise of this project was to educate South Koreans to become aware of life of young North Koreans in their age groups.
During my fieldwork, I was an instructor for this project. My job included co-developing teaching materials and teaching 45-minute-long classes at 12 different elementary, middle, and high schools in five different provinces. The closest school to deliver the lecture was in Incheon, and the farthest school was in Jeju Island. The eight schools selected for this project were T’ongil shibŏm kyŏyuk hakkyo, or Schools Designated for Unification Education. This information was intriguing to me since I was not aware of such a national project to teach South Korean youths about unification. My participation in the unification education in public schools opened up another opportunity to witness how unification discourse was produced in public schools.

Since I had some liberty to develop the contents of the teaching material, I decided to incorporate my questions regarding public school student knowledge on North Korea and its people. In a pre- and post-lecture survey distributed at each school, the lecturers included questions that gauged the student attitude and impression about North Koreans. The survey results corresponded to the predictions of the lecturers, in that these public school students mainly related Kim Jong Il, nuclear weapons, poverty, communism or communists, and hanminjok in the order of most frequent answers. During the lecture, I also asked South Korean students about the Korean War to draw out their understanding about the impact of the war and division. When I asked a question regarding the ending of the war, South Korean students could not give me a correct answer right away. At one of the schools I visited, a young teacher in training in history told me she struggled to teach about the Korean War due to lack of resources she could use to teach high school students. The disconnect between the history and the reality of public school students in South Korea was evident from these lectures. This lack of
historical understanding about in South Korea perhaps might be natural for young students who were more concerned about passing exams and entering a good college. Even so, I witnessed that generally the South Korean students did not make the connection between the division and the Korean War. Combined with general indifference to North Korea, the South Korean students in public school were not able to make the connection that North Koreans were also people who practiced culture. When I presented information about the North Korean educational system, students paid much more attention as they could relate to the topic. Students reacted with surprise and curiosity when I explained that North Korean student life was similar to South Korean student life in that North Korean students attended classes, went on school outings, and practiced musical instruments. For most of the students, this was the first time they learned about North Koreans as people with culture and daily lives. The roused curiosity about North Korean school life erupted to a series of questions during the fifteen-minute-long question and answer session that followed the lecture. A young t’albukja student led this session. The presence of t’albukja participants to answer the questions removed the curiosity students had about North Korean youths of their age.

The question and answer sessions typically produced random questions if not carefully managed. During the brainstorming stage for this project, t’albukja participants raised issues about some of the frequently asked questions from the past. T’albukja students often complained that South Korean students asked questions about information they learned from news or from their parents such as the existence of starving people, nuclear weapon, or political prison. These were the most commonly asked questions from South Koreans that dealt with the state operation in North Korea. Most t’albukja
participants in their early twenties felt awkward to answer such specialized questions since they left North Korea at an early age. I asked the South Korean students to ask questions that were relevant to the lecture which resulted in better understanding about t’albukja. Focusing on making relevant points to student life in both countries resulted in more realistic understanding about different education systems that influenced heterogeneous Korean cultures. Even though my involvement at Together Korea was short and limited, I obtained valuable data about a national unification education project that was being institutionalized across the country. I also witnessed the knowledge level of public school students about North Korea, Korean War, and t’albukja. Also from co-developing the lecture contents with t’albukja participants, I learned that individual t’albukja felt pressure and embarrassment to answer more politicized and specialized questions about North Korea. The embarrassment they felt was due to the representation of North Korea as a place with poverty, communist dictators, and a threat of nuclear weapons. North Korea to t’albukja participants was a place where they went to school, played with friends, and enjoyed family life.

2.6 Vantage Point Three: Interviews

My interviews were conducted with both North Korean refugees and South Koreans. I collected tape recorded interviews in a semi-structured format from seven North Korean refugees and eight South Koreans.

26 All names of individuals are pseudonyms.
2.6.1 Interviews with T'albukja

The North Korean interviewees (Table 2) were adults in their 30s to 50s whose length of stay in South Korea varied from two years to nine years. I selected the interviewees who had employment history from both North Korea and South Korea. These experiential differences (or similarities) at work places illustrated the ways t'albukja understood their status in society. The age and employment history indicated that their identity as an individual had largely formed prior to coming to South Korea. I wanted to make sure their primary enculturation was completed so that their understanding about t'albukja identity in South Korea would not necessarily influence the development of individual identity. As I expected, the interviews revealed that most t'albukja who participated in this research had a strong sense of personal identity. This stability was important in analyzing their responses to situations when anticommunist sensitivity contested their identity as South Koreans.

Table 2. List of T'albukja Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Name in text</th>
<th>Occupation in South Korea</th>
<th>Occupation in North Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee Han</td>
<td>Mrs. Lee</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Planner (Forestry Department)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yun T'aeho</td>
<td>Mr. Yun</td>
<td>Bus driver</td>
<td>Police officer and businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Insu</td>
<td>Insu</td>
<td>Assistant paralegal/intern at an insurance company</td>
<td>Semi-military organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choe Hyŏnok</td>
<td>Mrs. Choe</td>
<td>Building Cleaning Staff</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Nanhŭi</td>
<td>Mrs. Kim</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ok Sunhwa</td>
<td>Mrs. Ok</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Yŏnhŭi</td>
<td>Ms. Kim</td>
<td>Secretary to an official at a semi-government organization</td>
<td>Factory manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh Sunja</td>
<td>Mrs. Oh</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Accountant at a collective farm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The employment history of the interviewees appeared quite differently from what South Korean discourse represented about t’albukja. They were portrayed as maladjusted and problem ridden people whose adjustment in South Korea is becoming a burden of the society. Even though small in number, the interviews I conducted with t’albukja revealed that they desired to be accepted as full members of South Korean society. The interviews also revealed that most North Koreans did not exhibit aversive attitude toward South Koreans as much as South Koreans did toward North Koreans. Mrs. Lee pointed out that she “was a grown up when I met South Koreans and had no reason to fear them” (Personal interview, July 14, 2008). Overall, North Korean refugees aspired to belong to South Korea in the same way they had belonged to North Korea.

I looked at the kinds of employment the interviewees had in South Korea to verify whether they were able to make the transition to the same kind of social standing from North Korea. Some of the interviewees actually were able to find jobs in career track positions. An interesting finding about the interviewees with careers was that did not depend on South Korean agencies for financial support or for their social network. Mrs. Han Lee, a 37 year old female was a registered nurse as Table 3 illustrates. She was critical of churches and Christians who tried to manipulate her life in South Korea as the rescued lamb from the refugee status in China. She had a strong sense of her own ability to establish her life, yet social stigma categorized her as a helpless dependent on her sponsors. She complained about people’s misunderstanding about her relationship with her roommate who is an American professor in Christianity in Seoul. She said people mistook her roommate as a patron. She claimed that they were roommates with equal
responsibilities for the apartment they shared. Throughout the interviews, Mrs. Lee expressed a strong desire to be treated equally with other South Koreans. She was particularly sensitive to South Koreans’ anticommunist attitude since it prevented them from understanding t’albukja as individuals, not potential spies. Ironically she had the most number of personal friends and colleagues who were not t’albukja, yet she was most sensitive to the social inequality t’albukja faced.

Interviews also revealed the hegemonic influences on the ways in which South Koreans determined employment opportunities for t’albukja. Mr. Yun Taeho was a driver for a small maul bus which was similar to a commuter shuttle in the US. Prior to driving the shuttle, he worked as a garbage collector, personal driver to a South Korean business man, and sales clerk. The reason he changed jobs so often was due to his disappointment with the ways South Korean employers manipulated his wages which were supplemented by the government. The South Korean government pays supplemental wages for t’albukja who secures a full time employment with benefits. Interviews with Mr. Yun revealed the reality t’albukja faced. Throughout his job hunting, he experienced prejudice against his identity as a Pukhan saram (North Korean). He tells the recruiters that he is from North Korea without reservation, and this simple fact becomes the factor for unemployment. At a dinner, he told me he was less and less sure of his identity as a North Korean. He said he was never shy about telling people about his North Korean identity when he first arrived in South Korea as he has nothing to hide. But over time, he realized South Koreans were uncomfortable with his identity, and he was less sure of revealing his identity. Mr. Yun’s personal experiences at work places illustrated South Koreans’ aversion to associating with North Koreans which I argue was
formed a result of anticommunist education from the past.

Another interviewee, Park Insu, was the president of Vision NK at the time of interviews in November 2008. He hoped to create a niche for t’albukja with higher degrees in South Korea as future leaders of national unification. The members of his organization focused on professional development as experts in the field of their studies so that they could be instrumental in rebuilding North Korea. Insu was one of the many educated t’albukja who started their own organizations that aimed to train for this purpose.

Interviews with Ms. Kim Yŏnhŭi who was a part time graduate student in North Korean Studies and an inactive member of T’ongil Club enabled me to understand the frustration and limitation t’albukja felt in social mobility. She worked at a semi-government organization that represents five provinces in North Korea as the secretary for an official. She had graduated from universities in North Korea and in South Korea. She reasoned that she decided to go to college again in South Korea to “learn about South Korean society.” Yet her degrees from both countries did not necessarily help her with advancing her career. She realized that she could not compete with South Koreans for jobs and carved her career as an expert in t’albukja studies. She also belonged to a North Korean Christian University Student Association whose members formed a research group that conducted qualitative research about t’albukja’s life in South Korea. At a symposium this group organized in Seoul, South Korean professors heavily criticized the papers presented for lacking proper professional evaluation by South Korean

27 Mr. Kim invited me to this event one day short. Many of the invited South Koreans are Christian activists whose names are well-known for their rescue work in China and Southeast Asia. My presence seemed to be an awkward one since I had no affiliation with any of the supporting institutions. The event took place in a large church
researchers.

I met Mrs. Ok Sunhwa at T’ongil Club in March 2008. She was in her late 30s and was a freshman. Interviews with Mrs. Ok revealed the random or accidental nature of t’albukja’s border crossing that turned them into refugees overnight. When Mrs. Ok left North Korea in search of financial support from her relatives in China, she had never imagined to move to South Korea. She had intended to borrow money and material to sell in the markets to make money. However, when she failed to secure the resources from her relatives, she looked for other sources of income in China and became a refugee. Such unplanned refugee status of t’albukja was common and surprised many South Koreans who believed t’albukja wished to come to South Korea for ideological conversion.

Mrs. Choe Hyŏnok and Mrs. Kim Nanhŭi were in their late fifties and sixties. I obtained interviews with them through their children whom I met at Alternative School and at T’ongil Club. Both of them had children who were attending a university. Both of these women had side jobs that supplemented their government welfare benefits and were content with their lives in South Korea. Both of these women were relieved that their children were out of danger in China and had opportunities to study and work in South Korea. Neither of these women expected to have the kind of status they enjoyed in North Korea due to their realization that t’albukja in their ages would not have much of a chance to a successful career. Both women clearly understood that each government produced national ideologies that best suited for its needs in governing the people, and they did not react as sensitively to social stigma against t’albukja as younger interviewees did. It seemed that they thought of it as a way a society created dominant ideologies in
negotiating power differentials. Since both of the women were not concerned with making a career in South Korea, they were more reflexive on cultural differences between North Koreans and South Koreans.

Through these interviews, I could draw out the ways in which t'albukja negotiated their differences in daily interactions with South Koreans. Some struggled to be equal to South Koreans and others tried to carve out their own niche by utilizing the existing discourses.

2.6.2 Interviews with South Koreans

Interviews with South Koreans were conducted to look at the overall attitudes of those who had working experiences with North Korean refugees. I asked them how they defined t'albukja in terms of their position in society and the significance of their social integration in South Korea. From these interviews I discovered that all of them had received anticommunist education in the past, but the impact of it varied from person to person. Usually the anticommunist sensitivity became problematic during the first encounters. In addition, South Koreans particularly the ones who worked in governmental organizations exhibited a desire to maintain emotional and social distance from t'albukja. These interviewees regarded t'albukja as socially marginalized minorities who needed government and social support to live in South Korea. Also, on a personal level, the interviewees regarded t'albukja as unequal citizens. I have already discussed the surprised reactions from South Koreans when I told them I was moving to a t'albukja neighborhood. In a similar vein, my interviewees regarded t'albukja as a separate category of citizens who were not equal to them. The longer and closer interviewees
worked with t’albukja, the stronger was this desire. This aversion to consider t’albukja as their equals in social positions was related to the interviewees’ agency in selection of their work. Some of the interviewees who worked particularly in welfare offices were assigned to their positions and counseling agencies regarded t’albukja as recipients of government support. Contrarily, those who volunteered to work in organizations that offered services to t’albukja showed strong sense of desire to participate in their social integration.

Table 3. List of South Korean Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Name in Text</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Relations to t' albukja</th>
<th>Years of working with t’albukja</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim Changho</td>
<td>Mr. Kim</td>
<td>Freelance writer</td>
<td>Volunteer teacher</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang Sunmi</td>
<td>Mrs. Kang</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Yunsŏn</td>
<td>Ms. Park</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Head of t’albukja settlement support section</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Yŏngnan</td>
<td>Mrs. Kim</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Head of t’albukja settlement support division</td>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Sŏnghŭi</td>
<td>Ms. Yu</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>A former counselor at Hanawon</td>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yun Dongsŏp</td>
<td>Mr. D Yoon</td>
<td>Director of Korean Peninsula Peace Institute</td>
<td>Relief aid worker for North Korea</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Günho</td>
<td>Mr. Kim</td>
<td>Secretary to the Assemblyman Park Jin</td>
<td>Activist in North Korean rescue work</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lim Jiŭn</td>
<td>Jiŭn</td>
<td>Freelance Photographer</td>
<td>Volunteer teacher</td>
<td>More than 1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Kim was one of the many short-term volunteer teachers I met at Alternative school. He had lived abroad for many years and traveled around the world. The interview with him revealed that he viewed t’albukja as newcomers to the society. His perspective echoed the multicultural approach that was taking place in understanding
t’albukja in South Korea. His attitude did not recognize the politicized configuration of t’albukja identity nor acknowledge the traumatized experiences of t’albukja. He was not as concerned about their social integration and believed in individual differences of each citizen. Although he willingly participated in teaching t’albukja students, he did not necessarily build personal relationships with the students beyond the school setting. This indifferent attitude probably best described the attitude many t’albukja encountered on a daily basis.

Jiŭn, who was also a volunteer teacher at Alternative School, showed a little different attitude toward working with t’albukja. Her grandmother and father were North Koreans who came to South Korea during the Korean War. She did not regard students at Alternative School as complete strangers as Mr. Kim did due to her family connection. However, she also admitted that it was not easy for her to acknowledge t’albukja as people in her life as much as other South Koreans she knew. During an interview, she realized that her students “were not part of my everyday life as much as other [South Korean] students I give private lessons to.” Such a revelation of disconnection between South Koreans and North Koreans was quite common in the field.

Like many South Korean service providers, Ms. Yu said she felt fear and despair during the time she was working as a full time counselor at Hanawŏn. She was afraid of the people because many of the inmates were “violent or emotional.” She was a devout Christian who had worked closely with Christian activists whose primary goal was to bring North Koreans refugees to South Korea. Although she spent the most time with t’albukja at closest proximity among all interviewees, she showed the strongest resistance to considering t’albukja as her friends and colleagues. She related in an interview that
she was also educated in anticommunist rhetoric, and the aversive behavior to North Korean identity seemed to have been intensified during her time she spent as a counselor at Hanawŏn.

Ms. Park and Mrs. Kim were division heads of a special section for t’albukja at two different welfare offices. Despite their differences in years of experience as social workers, both of them understood that the current situation of t’albukja inevitably categorized them as underprivileged minorities. Ms. Park’s accounts showed that the volunteer workers’ reactions to t’albukja as “scary people” were connected to anticommunist education these volunteers received. Mrs. Kim in her interview said that she believed t’albukja were collaborators in making the post-unification Korea. Both of these social workers whose primary responsibility dealt with administering policy for t’albukja related their understanding on dynamics between South Koreans and t’albukja and provided an insight that working toward unification would resolve the contentious everyday politics of Korean identities.

So far the interviews with the above-mentioned interviewees dealt with personal level of interactions. To understand the government’s position on t’albukja, I conducted an interview with Mr. Kim who was a secretary to an assemblyman since August 2007. Mr. Kim was knowledgeable about new policies that the government had implemented in January 2008. He was well aware that legal policy for North Korea refugees was becoming more systematic, and government’s role in t’albukja social integration was limited. He believed changes in social perception toward t’albukja was the most important aspect if they were to be considered as equals to other South Koreans, but he regretted that the reality was still not so at the time.
Mrs. Kang and Mr. D Yun began their career in the t’albukja field about a
decade ago. Mrs. Kang’s background of working with prisoners of war gave her an
advantage of understanding the historical context of t’albukja social standing. Mr. D Yun
also had background in working as a relief aid worker for North Korea prior to joining a
research institute and knew from what conditions t’albukja left for China. Mrs. Kang and
Mr. D Yun also understood t’albukja position as marginalized people, but both of them
seemed interested in helping t’albukja full social integration. Mr. D Yun showed
stronger desire to shorten the ideology-based, political systemic gap between North
Korea and South Korea, and he believed that t’albukja could bring their experiences for
reducing the cultural gap between two Koreans.

In this chapter, I have discussed the field sites where identity politics between the
two Korean communities occurred and introduced the individuals who consumed and
constructed discourses of t’albukja identity through their daily interactions. The people
and places in this research revealed differences in the ways North Korean refugees
thought about South Korean citizenship and South Koreans’ view on t’albukja identity.
The gap between the two Koreans was intensified when they had more personal
interactions. South Korean social workers and researchers meet North Korean refugees
as sample population of an experiment for a possibility of unification whereas North
Korean refugees seek out contacts and network for making their new lives in South Korea.
The detailed analyses of these differences and point of cultural intimacy will follow in the
next chapters.
CHAPTER 3
Constructing North Korean Identities in South Korea

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of the cultural categories found in South Korean social contexts that are used for North Korean refugees and that define North Koreans as neither South Koreans nor North Koreans. Through this discussion, I show how the marginalization of incoming t’albukja is not just an incidental phenomenon of recently intensified the “migration in globalizing context” (Ong 1999) but rather a historically continuing process that highlights heterogeneous Korean identity. First, I will lay out the social terms referring to North Korean refugees that are commonly used and found in everyday language practices.

Over the past 60 years, terms have been assigned to North Koreans who came to South Korea to differentiate them from both Pukhan saram (North Koreans) and Namhan saram\textsuperscript{28} (South Koreans). The main terms in use in South Korea that I would like to discuss here are silhyangmin (people who lost their homeland), kwisunyongsa (defected heroes), and t’albukja (displaced North Koreans) (See Figure 2). These are not necessarily part of the legal or official terminologies, but rather how the society has referred to North Korean refugees at different historical times since the division.

\textsuperscript{28} The literal meanings of the word, ‘Puk (북 北)’ is North and ‘Nam (남 南)’ is South. So when referring to North Korea and South Korea, Koreans commonly used Pukhan or Namhan. The word ‘Han (한 韓)’ connotes ethnic Koreans.
Although two of the most recent names, t‘albukja and saet‘ŏmin, come from legal terms that emerged as the South Korean government began to establish legal policies to deal with incoming North Koreans in the post-Korean War era beginning in the 1960s, the terms I discuss here are used more in social contexts. A well-known South Korean anthropologist, Chung Byung-Ho, has written about “changing social definitions and policies” in his article *Between Defectors and Migrant* (2008:1). Chung indicates that the political motivation to categorize North Korean “border-crossers” in South Korea is mainly dictated by the politics of division in the Korean peninsula (2008:5). His classification of North Koreans focuses more on the policy level and on how state power and ideology have played out in categorizing North Koreans in South Korea. In the “politics of division” North Koreans refugees have often been classified as “anticommunist heroes” (Jung 2010; Kim 2002); at other times as “enunciating subjects” who speak for the anticommmunist state of South Korea (Lee 2006). But I would like to focus on the common use of social terms that refer to North Koreans in South Korea.

Reviewing existing ethnographies and scholarly works of well-known authors
like Gwi-ok Kim (1999, 2004), Richard Grinker (1997), Taek-lim Yoon (2003), Dong-choon Kim (1997), Byung-ho Chung (2004), Soo-jung Lee (2006), and James Foley (2003) among others, show that the North Korean refugee problem has always been a part of South Korea’s struggle to develop into a nation-state. The discussion in this chapter will set the tone for the following ethnographic sections about North Korean refugees’ (bu)chŏng’ŏng or (non)integration process in South Korea. In the last section of this chapter, I will link this analysis to the ways anticommunism functions to create a cultural intimacy that binds South Korean citizens to each other yet excludes North Korean refugees. This chapter, then, is in part a historical contextualization of how North Korean identity is contested in South Korea.

I argue that South Korea, by labeling North Koreans as a separate social category, has created its own national identity. Scholars of Korean nationalism like Gi-wook Shin (2006) have argued that South Korea’s identity as a nation-state developed in opposition to North Korea. Whatever North Korea was, South Korea was the opposite. For example, North Korea was a communist state, and South Korea was an anti-communist state; North Korea runs on a socialist system, and South Korea runs on a capitalist system, and so on. The nation-building process therefore brought differences into the ways Koreans imagined what Korean culture should be. National identity making required reaching consensus on the identity of South Korean citizens within the national ideology of anticommunism. Such identity making also involved framing North Korean refugees within the society. Despite the long held “imagining of the nation” as a unified Korean nation, the divergence within Korean ethnicity has become obvious (Choo 2008; Chung et al. 2006; Jung 2010; Kim 2009). South Koreans’ desire to differentiate their own
identity from North Korean identity emerges when we look at the ways North Koreans are categorized by South Koreans.

Categorizing the newly incoming North Korean refugees into a socially marginalized group in the present time is a continuing legacy from the unfinished Korean War and ensuing Cold War politics. Some may question whether historically Northerners have been discriminated against in Korea due to regional differences. Yet it is hard to trace whether Northerners were traditionally discriminated regardless of the political situation in modern days. There is a record about social prejudice in court in history. During the Chosun dynasty (1392–1910), court officials from different regions fought over political power. In the latter part of the Chosun dynasty, a group of court officials called sŏin, or those from the northwest, which is Pyŏngan-do in the present, were frequently excluded from promotions to higher positions (Kim 2007). Nevertheless, this is not enough to clearly show whether there has been an overall tendency to discriminate specifically against northerners among civilians in Korean history. In addition, the heavy internal migration of people from both sides after the Japanese occupation makes it difficult to assume that there was a tradition of discriminating North Koreans.

What I argue in this chapter is that North Koreans are imagined in South Korea as a separate category of people in the post-division era, and this exclusionary imagination enforces the category of South Korean identity and solidifies the heterogeneity of Korean ethnic national identity. More clearly, I believe that South Korea has developed its own identity that is different from the historically existing hanminjok identity. In this process, North Korean refugees are excluded from South
Korean identity by constantly being labeled as silhyangmin, Kwisunyongsan, and t’albukja. In this context, North Korean refugee identity is as old as the history of South Korea as a nation-state. The effort to not refer to incoming North Korean refugees as North Koreans illustrates uneasiness about openly acknowledging separate ethnicities for the people of the two Koreas. Here, it is evident that there is a conflict between ethnic identity and nation-state identity of the Korean people. Therefore, social categorization of North Korean refugees is a way for South Koreans to manifest uneasiness about the current state of division. The long division and unresolved war between North Korea and South Korea has caused confusion in the identification of North Korean refugees in South Korea. This is most evident when we think about the absence of neutral terms that are not loaded with politics for naming North Korean refugees.

3.1.1 Scene One: “Are We North or South?”

In South Korea, calling North Korean refugees t’albukja is common practice. Even though there are some disagreements over the exact terms to call North Korean refugees, which I will discuss later in this chapter, it has become an ordinary act to categorize them as t’albukja in this way. Ironically, this domestically accepted identification of North Koreans as a third category becomes a bit confusing for North Korean refugees when they are outside of the national territory. An example of this occurred when the students from the Alternative School visited China in 2006 to document the places and experiences of their past, and the students had to answer questions about their confusing identity once again.
The film *The Longest Journey 2* premiered at the Art Cinema in Seoul in a cold January. This old movie theater located on the top floor of Nakwŏn Sanga, one of the oldest markets in Seoul, is known for hosting independent movies. This time, the Art Cinema allowed the Alternative School to host their film’s premiere at the theater. *The Longest Journey 2* tells the story of the Alternative School students Yŏngok, Gwanghyŏk, Ŭnchu, and Jŏngchŏl, whose childhoods were partially spent in China. In a scene towards the end of the film, they are in Tiantan Park in Beijing. The students had come back from visiting the border area between China and North Korea. In the park, which is a tourist attraction in Beijing, Yŏngok and Ŭnchu, two girls, bashfully make small talk with other visitors, attempting to converse in English. They laugh in part due to the embarrassment of speaking English and in part because they are teenagers. In some scenes, the girls chase each other and laugh with one another while the boys film their playfulness. A few minutes later, after exchanging small talk about who is going to approach other tourists, Yŏngok starts a conversation with European visitors. As Yŏngok starts to speak to the other visitors, Ŭnchu walks next to Ok and giggles in the background.

Yŏngok: Hello. Where are you from?

Visitors: Where are you from?

Yŏngok: North Korea.


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29 The Alternative School took a month-long trip to China to retrace the four students’ migration routes before coming to South Korea. The film depicts the students’ reflections on their past lives in China and their attitudes toward their transformation from fleeing refugees to visiting tourists in China.
(Yŏngok is confused at the unfamiliar accents.)

Yŏngok: What?

Visitors: North Korea? (incredulous and skeptical)

Yŏngok: (looking confused to their friends in the back)
Hey, are we North or South? (Then to the visitors) Oh, South Korea, South Korea.

Yŏngok’s inability to identify whether they are North Koreans or South Koreans when speaking in English in a third country suggests that North Korean refugee identity is still an uncomfortably unsettling one. The anxiety to claim their identity in binary categories of North Korean and South Korean in the English-speaking world heightens their attention to the non-fitting category of North Korean refugees who are neither South Korean citizens nor North Koreans. Their ethnic identity of belonging to the “Korean” ethnicity no longer ensures their identity when they are outside of the national territory. This uncomfortable truth about North Korean refugee identity limits their options to belonging either in the South Korean or the North Korean category.

3.1.2 Scene Two: “Do You Want To Be Called South Korean or North Korean?”

At the end of the screening, the students and mentors who were involved in producing the film came out and held a question and answer session. After introducing the film makers, the floor was opened to the audience for questions. One of the members of the audience raised her hand and posed a question to the students who participated in the making of the film. This female viewer attended the film showing by accident, unlike many others who were invited guests from the school, including myself. She said she saw the sign as she was passing the theater and was curious to find out what the film was
all about. This South Korean woman did not know much about the existence of North Korean refugees in South Korea before she saw the film, and she said she was deeply moved by the movie. Yet she still asked the following question, which I recorded along with other observations in my field notes.

Audience A: I have a question for the cameraman. Do you view yourself as Han’guk saram (South Korean) or Pukhan saram (North Korean)?

G.H.: I wish I could be not labeled as either this or that. I don’t want to be called North Korean or South Korean. I just wish I could just be Chosŏn saram.\(^\text{30}\)

At the theater, more discussion on identity came up after the [film] showing. Someone in the audience asked the lads from North Korea who they thought they were. Some kids answered they were Chosŏn saram. Others answered they were North Koreans who reside in South Korea. (Field notebook entry, January 12, 2007)

This anecdote illustrates an uncomfortable truth about the categorization of North Korean refugee identity in South Korea. North Korean refugees cannot see themselves as either North Korean or South Korean due to each term being associated with a political affiliation they must claim if they accept the term. In addition, the general perception about North Korean refugees in South Korea is that they have “escaped” North Korea by choice and “chose” to live in South Korea. Therefore, this group out of North Korea is labeled as t’albukja, along with other names that I have enumerated before. The very nature of their “refugee” status in South Korea limits them from identifying as either

\(^{30}\) In North Korea, oftentimes Koreans are referred to as Chosŏn saram, denoting the last Korean dynasty before the Japanese colonial period (Chosŏn: the name of the last “Chosŏn” dynasty; saram: a word for people in Korean). The ethnic Korean-Chinese are also called Chosŏn-jok, meaning ethnic persons belonging to Chosŏn group (jok: ethnic marker). In Japan, Koreans used to commonly be referred to as Josenjin, meaning Chosŏn people. In the post colonial period, the Koreans in Japan are called Zainichi Josenjin (Le 2000). However, Chosŏn is not used to refer to South Koreans.
North Korean or South Korean. Particularly when t'albukja are in a setting for self-introduction, as illustrated in the above anecdote, North Korean refugees feel conflicted about identifying their country of origin.

Many South Koreans in the 2000s tend to believe this is the first time North Koreans are present in South Korea. And this misconception, arising from the unusually high number of incoming North Koreans who are visible in society, often becomes a guiding principle in interactions. The lack in South Korea of common knowledge about North Koreans other than what is shown by the media, combined with previously established views on North Koreans that are influenced by anti-communist or unification discourses, often make us forget that North Koreans have always been present in the South Korean society. Re-naming Pukhan saram (North Koreans) and calling them with other social names metamorphoses their northern identity. However, this act of re-naming does not grant them to earn a full status as South Koreans.

3.2 Categorization of North Korean Refugees since the Division

The naming of a person is a well recognized cultural activity of humans that we no longer think of as anything new. However, language in a society can be used politically and language choices can be motivated by the desire for certain outcomes (Gumperz 1971; Labov 1971). As I briefly discussed in the introduction of this chapter, it is hard to separate the politics out of these terms that are saturated with the politico-ideological conditions of the historical times in which they emerged. Therefore, each term reflects particular sentiments and ideologies associated with the era when these terms were commonly used. The resulting terminology is as much a reflection of South
Korean society as a developing nation as of North Korean refugee identity in South Korea.

3.2.1 Silhyangmin (people who lost their homeland 설향민

Silhyangmin are the Korean War refugees who left North Korea during the conflicts for various reasons with the intention of returning to their families and homes as soon as the war ended. Most other studies of silhyangmin have reported them as saying that they all assumed the country would be united as soon as the war was over. What they had considered a brief p’inan (evacuation 피난), became a life-long separation from their homes and families (Foley 2003). Hence, this group is often referred to as isan’gajok (divided families 이산가족). Another name for this group is wŏllammin (people who crossed the border to the South 월남민). The number of this first group of border crossers is almost impossible to count since the remaining records are not consistent (Foley 2003). However, it is considered that “ilch’onman” or “ten million” Koreans have been divided due to the Korean War (Foley 2003). Since the division of the Korean peninsula in the post-World War II confusion31 (more specifically since 1945), Koreans within the peninsula migrated from North to South quite frequently (Foley 2003). Japan’s withdrawal from the Korean peninsula brought Russia and the U.S. as the governing forces of two areas arbitrarily divided by the 38th parallel line, which became the border that physically divides North Korea and South Korea. It was not until 1948,

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31 The Empire of Japan had occupied Korea (then called Joson, or Chosun) from 1910 to 1945. When Japan was defeated in the Pacific War, the United Nations decided to send allied governments’ occupational forces to oversee the transition of Korea from a colonized to an independent nation. In this process, the Korean peninsula was divided under two governments, the Soviets in the North and the U.S. in the South, with the 38th parallel as the arbitrary dividing line.
though, that migration between the two sides became more apparently ideological when
the Southern part of Korea became an independent nation-state with the name Republic
of Korea (South Korea). Shortly after, the USSR-occupied North also declared itself a
nation-state, which we now know by the name Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
(North Korea). I am not here so concerned with the creation of these two states that were
born out of the Cold War conflict. Instead, I would like to focus on what happened after
the establishment of these two separate states. Shortly after the establishment of two
separate regimes with two contending ideologies, in 1950, the Korean War erupted and
the supposedly temporary division between the northern and southern parts of the Korean
peninsula became permanent, up to the present day (Cumings 1981). The physical war
ended with a cease-fire agreement in 1953, and the subsequent Cold War conflict in the
peninsula left the 38th parallel line as one of the most heavily armed lines in the world.
Crossing this line became virtually impossible, and the people who had moved South
before and during the war became known as silhyangmin, or people without homes. This
first group of North Korean refugees in South Korea was considered “war refugees”
(Chung 2008) whose homes were lost due to the Communist aggression. Chung Byung-
ho calls this group “War Refugees” or p’inanmin from the physical war of 1950-1953.
This term refers to the population displaced during wartime and does not include those
who were unable to move back after the war.

The term, ‘isan’gajok’ was applied to this group. The focus on loss is reflected
in this terminology by gajok, family, the blood relations, which is essential in Korean
culture. When the national rhetoric of unification is employed, the focus is on reuniting

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32 This may be a contentious point since many communists were already in power in North Korea and many
pro-American, Christians in North Korea were persecuted (Suh 1983).
the families whose members have lived for decades without knowing if the others have survived. Most of this group’s sufferings and sadness have been constructed within the national discourse of division and unification (Foley 2003; Lee 2006). So in some sense, they have legitimate entitlement to claim belonging in the South Korean citizenry as the victims of the national tragedy of the Korean War.

Scholars of modern Korean history (Armstrong 2003; Cumings 1981, 1990, 2005; Foley 2003) and social sciences (Chung 2008; Kim 1988; Kim 1997; 2006; Kim 1999, 2004; Lee 2006; Yoon 2003) have worked extensively to bring to light the human suffering of families divided due to the Korean War. Most of the divided families have been in South Korea since the division of 1953, and the public sentiment about this group is much more sympathetic since the silhyangmin are the victims of the war. Attempts to obtain permission to seek the members of families that were divided prior to concretization of the division seem to highlight the situation of current Cold War tension between North Korea and South Korea. But on the other side of the seemingly warm sympathy revolving around the unification discourse to re-unite the divided families, the unfair treatment and social injustice done to silhyangmin are well documented in recent South Korean literature (Foley 2003; Kim 1999; Yoon 2003).

Kim Gwi-ok has diligently conducted ethnographic fieldwork in villages where the silhyangmin have relocated in Kangwŏn province and Chŏlla province (1999, 2004). Her work focuses on villages built by silhyangmin in times of heightened anticommunism campaigns in South Korea. She calls this group wŏllammin (1999) and isan’gajok (2004) in an attempt to focus on the apolitical nature of their migration. Although her ethnographic work focuses on collecting anthropological material, she continued to run
into traces of the ideological war that framed her as a government spy. She relates her dilemma as a researcher in a village of silhyangmin:

In a village where people are still conservative, and moreover where people have been subject to anticommunism, how can an unknown researcher without a connection enter the village? (1999: xii)

Then she reveals to the readers that she was reported to be “suspicious” and was labeled as “ppalgaengi” (communist):

A few people in the field began to look at me and my research with suspicious eyes. They fabricated the rumor of my being “ppalgaengi” (communist)…Not too long after I arrived at Ch’ŏngho-dong [her fieldsite] someone repeatedly reported to the City Hall and to the police that I was suspicious…Now that I look back, there were more than a few people who viewed me and my research negatively in both Kimje and Sokcho. Also, even if they didn’t express it, I could read a certain degree of fear—I call it “fear in the disguise of annoyance” in the book—in their eyes often. (1999: xii–xiii)

The “fear in the disguise of annoyance” toward the ethnographer who is trying to tell the stories of their lives implies the underlying fear of being framed as communists. This “framing” of spies continues on in the present subconscious when it comes to interaction between North Korean refugees and South Koreans. This will be further discussed in chapter 4.

Another sentiment about silhyangmin in South Korea is in regard to their successful chŏgŭng, or integration, in South Korea. They are the survivors of the Korean

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33 Text in Korean: 아직도 보수적인 농촌, 더욱이 반공이라는 것에 오랫동안 시달려 왔을 마을에 낯선 연구자가 어떤 연고가 있어서 들어갈 수 있을 것인가?

34 Text in Korean: 현지의 몇 사람이 나와 내 조사의 의도에 대해 사시로 바라보기 시작한 것이다. 그들은 “빨갱이” 소문을 만들어 냈다……속초에 간 지 얼마 되지 않았을 때, 청호동의 어떤 사람이 몇 차례 시청과 경찰서에 내가 수상하다는 혐의를 두고 신고했다……돌이켜보면, 김제에서도 속초에서도 나와 내 조사에 대해 비둘게 본 사람들은 어찌 있었다. 또한 내게 표현은 하나 없었을지라도 밀봉의 두려움—나는 본문에서 이를 “귀찮음을 가장한 두려움”이라고 표현했다—을 갖고 있던 눈빛을 많이 목격했다.
War, real “anti-communist” fighters, and heroes whose determination to abandon the communist North made their integration into South Korean society successful. However, this group of North Korean refugees was under the most severe surveillance as suspected communist spies. This heavy sanction against this group led to emigration to the U.S. during the post-1965 immigration wave. Later on these immigrants told stories of their reasons for leaving South Korea because of the discrimination against North Koreans for their possible affiliation with North Korean communists. At a gallery exhibit held at Bishop Museum in Honolulu named “Still Present Pasts,” which was produced by a group of second generation Korean-American scholars, I encountered first-hand accounts of many North Korean immigrants to South Korea who related the discrimination they faced during the post war period in South Korea.

Until the early 1980s, as much as 70 percent of Korean immigrants traced their birthplace to North Korea. They had been refugees who fled south where they felt marginalized in a society that placed great emphasis on hometowns, and viewed outsiders, especially those from the North, with suspicion. This post-1965 Korean immigration resulted in the development of large Korean immigrant communities in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Chicago, as well as smaller communities throughout the United States. These communities also harbor the same issues of separated families and Korean War trauma that have resulted in emotional public occasions in Korea. While South Koreans have had televised group meetings between separated family members from the North and the South, some Korean Americans have quietly visited their families in North Korea, but under fear of censure from fellow Korean Americans even though travel to North Korea is perfectly legal. The past is still present, but it goes unspoken and unnamed. (Still Present Past 2005:29)

35 The U.S. government lifted the ban on migration from East Asia in 1965.
36 Ramsey Lim and his daughter Yul-San Lim were curators of the exhibit. “Still Present Past” was shown in eight different cities including Seoul.
37 Text in Korean: 1980년대 초반까지 한인 이민자들의 70퍼센트가량이 한반도의 북쪽을 그들의 탄생지라고 말하고 있다. 그들은 허남했으나, 고항을 중시하고 특히 북한지역에서 외지사람들을 의심의 눈으로 바라보던 남한사회에 적응하지 못해 이민을 선택한 피난민들이었다. 1965년 이후 이민자들은 로스앤젤레스, 뉴욕, 샌프란시스코, 시카고 등의 메도시와 비 전역의 다른 작은 고향에서 한인 이민 지역을 탄생시켰다. 이런 한인 지역의 사람들은 또한 이산가족과 한국전쟁의 상처지유 등 한반도의 한인들의 감정의 소용돌이에 몰아넣은 것과 묶인 이슈들을 가지고 있다. 남한 사람들이 남과 북에서 이산된 가족들 사이의 상봉을 태워버린 중대로 저켜는 동안, 몇몇 재미동포들은 북조선 지역에 살고 있는 가족들을
In an effort to document the living history of the tragic influence of the war that still resonates in the present, Ramsey Lim and his daughter Yul-San, the curators of “Still Present Past,” have produced documentaries and artistic pieces to document how much human suffering the ideological division has caused among Koreans even in diaspora. The personal histories of the silhyangmin portray their longing to belong to a home country they cannot return to. Belonging to South Korea for this group had become a contentious choice and led to their re-migration to another world. This sentimental longing to belong continues on to the present and resonates in the newly incoming North Korean refugees who are called t'albukja.

3.2.2 Kwisunyongsa (defecting heroes) 귀순용사 归順勇士

As the Cold War heightened in the 1960s, the tension between North Korea and South Korea also increased. National discourse on the Korean War in South Korea focused on “remembering minjok ch’amsang (the national tragedy)” that North Korea had caused. In this context, North Koreans “defected” to democratic South Korea with military information important to the South Korean government. Kwisunyongsa (defecting heroes) or kwisunja (defect-or) in the Cold War context are often translated as “defectors” in English for lack of better terms. But this direct translation may not be sufficient to explain the underlying ideology that led to calling North Korean refugees kwisunja. It is useful for us to take a look at the literal meaning of the term. Chung

조용히 방문했다. 이들의 북조선 여행이 합법적임에도 불구하고 그들은 다른 재외동포들로부터 비난을 받을까 두려워하고 있다. 과거는 여전히 현재의 문제로 남아 있다. 다만 드러내 놓고 논의되거나 이름 붙여지지 않았을 따름이다.
Byung-ho calls this group the “Heroes Who Returned to the State” (my emphasis), interpreting the Chinese characters literally (2008:7). Chung defines the time period for this category as 1962–1993, which marks the militaristic regime. Interestingly, he separates the Kwisunyongsan from kwisun pukhan tongp’o whom he calls “North Korean Brethren Who Returned to the State” due to the regime changes⁴⁸ that brought policy changes as well (2008:8). However, I do not make this distinction, since my focus is on the sociolinguistic terms, and thus on the term kwisun that connotes the separate states. The word reflects the “action” of “defecting” or “returning” that North Korean refugees take. So the essential fact about the people thus named still remains their origin in the North, not the South. Labeling North Korean refugees according to such a political interpretation leaves no choice for the refugees on who they want to be when they arrive in South Korea.

When North Korean military men “defected” to South Korea, the media coverage glorified South Korea’s political superiority.⁴⁹ Yoon In-Jin (2009:19) states:

Until the 1980s when North and South Koreas were in Cold War ideological opposition, those who escaped North Korea and came to South Korea were well received as “Kwisunyongsan” (defected heroes). The majority of them had military backgrounds, and when pan’gong (anti-communist) ideology was a governing method, [Kwisunyongsan] were valuable to prove North Korea’s belligerence and inhumanity and the South Korean system’s superiority. As political logic overpowered economic logic, Kwisunyongsan received full support from the South Korean government. Therefore, this group’s chŏngŭng (integration) in South Korean society did not have much problem at least in its

⁴⁸ In 1993 Kim Yong-sam became the South Korean president. The change from a militaristic regime to a democratic one brought changes in legal policy toward North Korean refugees.
economic aspect. 

At this time the governmental section that controlled the administrative work for Kwisunyongsa was the veteran’s affairs section under the Ministry of Defense. The number of these migrants was small given the tight border control and North Korea’s military and economic superiority. This group of North Koreans has been recruited to give anbo kangi (security lectures and testimonies) of the hardship of being North Korean under Kim Il Sung’s communist regime. It is this particular fact of the small number of incoming Kwisunyongsa and the large temporal gap between the first influx of Korean War refugees in the late 1950s and these “defectors” that has allowed the South Korean public to forget that North Koreans have always been in South Korea.

Another legal term that referred to this group is kwisun pukhan tongp’o (defected North Korean brethren 귀순북한동포) which became a legal term in 1993. This use of dongp’o was first introduced as a legal term, although pukhan tongp’o was a common social term when referring to ethnic Koreans. Mostly this group was referred to as kwisunja (defector). Roy Richard Grinker defined this group as “defectors” in his book Korea and Its Futures (1997).

A continuing theme in South Korea seems to be the people from North Korea who

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41 Refer to table 1 on incoming North Korean refugee numbers in chapter 1. The number of incoming North Koreans from the 1960s until the 1980s remains under two digits per year. It was not until the 1990s that the number increased to hundreds and, in the 2000s, to thousands per annum (Ministry of Unification 1994).

42 Similar to one I described in the introduction. See page 1.
have failed to adjust in society. One of the first social scientific studies (Oh 1996) on defectors concluded that defectors in South Korea struggled to adapt to the South Korean society, and this continues to be the tone of the literature on the next generation of North Korean refugees. Unfortunately, reports on Kwisyungsa are the thinnest due to the political climate of the time when they entered South Korea, which prohibited social scientific studies conducted with them. Most of the writings we have on this group are on kwisunja who entered South Korea since the 1993 policy changes. Even then, the focus of the literature remains on the chŏngŭng, adjustment, of this group. One of the earliest reports of fieldwork I found in the National Assembly Library Thesis Database was entitled “Social and Cultural Assimilation of the North Korean Defectors to the South Korean Society” (Oh 1996). In the English version of the abstract, the author states: “Though this study is a small-scale pilot study with limited number of sample cases, it is expected to guide a full-scale research in preparation for building a unified society of South and North Koreans when reunited” (p. iv). As this statement indicates, along with the new political changes that took place in the early 1990s, many South Koreans were enthusiastic about using North Korean refugee adjustment to South Korean society as a measure for the social integration process that would take place at the time of reunification. I problematize this statement in more detail in Chapter 5, but it is clear that North Koreans’ social integration became a source for determining the future of unified Korea (Grinker 1997; Oh 1996).

Interestingly enough, this group perhaps benefited most in terms of governmental support as their numbers remained less than hundreds a year. As the Cold War politics had not completely subsided from the policy implementation for the kwisunja group, they
received much more generous settlement packages than the t'albukja group, which I will explain in the next section.

3.2.3 T‘albukja (Displaced North Korean 탈북자 脫北者)

As I have introduced before, the official title of this group is pukhan it’aljumin (Displaced residents of North Korea). This term was first coined by the South Korean government in the 1990s when the “plight of North Korean refugees” began to reach sympathetic South Korean activists.

Unlike silhyangmin, who suffered poverty and social instability in the post-ear period contemporary with other South Koreans, the current North Korean refugee population experienced quite contrasting events including a harsh famine in the 1990s and ensuing deaths by starvation in unprecedented numbers in North Korea (Kang and Rigoulot 2003; Kim and Kim 2009). During the time North Korea was experiencing a series of domestic crises after Kim Il-Sungs death, South Korea began to allow its citizens to travel abroad and enjoyed wealth thanks to the rapid economic growth. In a stark contrast, during their migrating period in China and other neighboring countries, t‘albukja are exposed to a danger of becoming victims of human trafficking (Human Rights Watch 2008; Muico 2005). They have witnessed the deaths of their loved ones crossing the border illegally between North Korea and China (Charny 2005; Muntarbhorn 2008). Known as kkottchebi (fluttering swallows), many refugees were children left on the streets of North Korea and China to fend for themselves after their parents died in the famine or migrated in search of food and money (Chung 2003; Patterniti 2003).  

43 Kkottchebi connotes children who steal food and other things from train stations, markets, and other
addition, there have been many biographies and media reports of repatriated North Korean refugees who have spent years in North Korean gulags (Kim and Kim 2009; Shin 2008). Such reports portray North Koreans as displaced, vulnerable, and in need of rescue.

Although the legal term is supposed to be value neutral, the stories that were connected to this group of North Korean refugees accumulated negative connotations, and social perception of t’albukja would be negative. North Koreans in South Korea are often referred to as t’albukja, translating into escapee of North Korea or displaced North Koreans. The nuances of the t’al- 탈 in Korean appear in its use in words such as t’al-chul (탈출, escape); t’al-young (탈영, decampment of a soldier); t’al-ok (탈옥, prison break); il-t’al (일탈, deviation); or in academic writings t’al-kūndaejuŭi 탈근대주의, post-modernism. As these uses in South Korean language indicate, the word t’al- carries connotations of negativity and, often, of behaviors deviating from the norm.

The term t’albukja signifies, however, much more than just an act of escape. It suggests past experience of political persecution, famine, starvation, dictatorship, human trafficking, human rights violation, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

At a workshop for fieldworkers for t’albukja (Pukhan it’aljumin silmuja wŏkshŏp 북한이탈주민 실무자 워크샵), held in the Unification Education Facility in 2007, a heated debate arose on what to name the currently incoming North Korean refugees. At this workshop, the most well-known fieldworkers and a former Hanawon head tried to assert each term they promote should be chosen to refer to t’albukja group, but no consensus
was reached.

After the collapse of Soviet Union in the 1990s and the economic crisis in North Korea that ensued after disintegration of the communist bloc, a large number of North Koreans began to arrive in South Korea. Since these economic refugees *sur place* are no longer viewed as ideological threats to South Korea, they have been admitted to South Korea on a humanitarian basis. Now their name has changed from “defectors” to “North Korean residents who are displaced” in South Korea. Despite being given citizenship in the Republic of Korea, these North Koreans are labeled with various legal and social terms that differentiate them from the rest of the South Korean population (Ministry of Unification 2008). The numerous linguistic terms attached to these people give a clear indication that there are barriers to North Korean refugees becoming South Koreans and factors that contest and construct North Korean refugee identity in South Korean society.

Many of the t’albukja relied on religious organizations working in China and Southeast Asian countries that were involved in humanitarian work to “rescue” North Korean refugees. During the time that North Koreans are under the care of South Koreans or Korean-Chinese in China and other places, the tension between frustrated North Koreans who want to escape from their “refugee” status and South Koreans who are put in charge of their care increases as the time spent waiting is prolonged. During this time, most North Korean refugees read the Bible, recite verses, sing hymnal songs, and learn to pray (Jung 2010). Even after North Korean refugees enter South Korea, the proselytizing continues after their arrival, although many North Korean refugees become uninterested in the churches’ missions once they come to South Korea. Some remain faithful to the churches, but most of them leave the churches that sponsored their escapes.
due to various reasons, which include feeling used, betrayed, exploited, and pressured to become missionaries. I have not questioned my interviewees as to whether they had such experiences, but during personal conversations, I was able to hear a detailed account of a young woman, Mrs. Lee, who spent three years in China under a Christian’s care.

I struggled to keep a relationship with those who helped me and the pastor who took me out [of China]. That is, when I was about to marry my ex-husband who was Catholic, they opposed my marriage because of his religion. I felt so guilty. But the problem was not because of the religion. They were saying “How could you go against my words. You could not have escaped China if it weren’t for me.” Yes. That was the bigger issue and the pastor tried to control everything I did. He was a strong person. I am not saying those who helped me are bad people, but they were aggressive. Of course they brought me [to South Korea] through their religious group, the church’s power, but they were people with their own opinions…The woman who was in charge of me in China was a smart woman. But she had debt. I am not sure what her intention was when she took me in at first. I don’t want to doubt her initial intention…But the time I was under her care was so…Why? Because she was taking care of me, the churches in South Korea sent her rent, spending money, and a processing fee [for Mrs. Lee to be sent to South Korea], and this money was a huge amount for her. So any NGO or other groups that take care of one or two t’albukja…I am not sure about everybody, but many t’albukja do not keep in touch any more. The reason is that they receive money from South Korea for taking care of t’albukja, but they make t’albukja under their care work for them. It’s like killing two birds with one stone. There were many cases of people who tried to use t’albukja. I don’t think it’s all bad. But they are breaking the law. In China it’s illegal to hide t’albukja. The main reason—I am sure there’s compassion too—they do it even though it’s illegal is because of the income they get from it. So there’s tension. T’albukja are not stupid, you know? They can all feel it. Compassion is something you feel, not say, in my opinion…The pastor who brought me here is the same. He must have thought I was pretty smart. He wanted to bring me all over [South Korea], and even to the US, to criticize North Korea. That was the pastor’s intention. So the interests of these two people matched. So God moved their hearts so I could come. I think that. So I told them, “Think of this as you’re being used as a device for God’s grace and don’t require me to do these things.” How terrible is that? I was so scared at myself for being able to say those things. But I said that after enduring for seven years, finally when I arrived in Korea. Normally I endured it. I save my words. After experiencing all that, I learned to save my words. But
when I can’t stand any more, I tell them directly, “Are you really believers? Then be happy that I am better now. Real salvation is never letting your left hand know what your right hand did. Grace is when you help someone without expectation to receive in return.” The pastor was so furious when I said that. He said I was too strong. When he brought me, he said, “North Koreans always lie all the time,” and asked me “Did you sleep with that man or not?” When I retorted by saying these are questions I never had to answer even at the interrogation, he told me “You would have never been able to come if it weren’t for me.” But from South Koreans’ point of view, everyone can side with that pastor and say the same thing. That was what South Koreans were thinking. (Personal interview, June 25, 2008)

As we get a glimpse from her story, Mrs. Lee was in hiding in China under a Korean-Chinese’s care with monetary support from a Christian church in South Korea. It could be argued that due to their Korean ethnicity, South Korean missionaries were willing to rescue them from their refugee status. Yet I argue that t’albukja are hardly regarded as people with the same full rights as those who provide the shelter.

3.2.4 Social Dynamics among Different Generations of North Koreans

As we have seen, ever since the division, North Koreans have crossed the border(s) to reach South Korea. Historically, these North Koreans have been called by different names depending on the socio-political environment in South Korea. Now I would like to look at how different generations of North Korean refugees interact with each other. It is often found that Koreans in the diaspora have helped each other in various ways, including the first generation of immigrants often lending a hand to the next generations (Patterson 2000).

A visitor to the T‘ongil Club, Pastor Syngman Rhee, vivaciously claimed, “I

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44 Pastor Rhee has the same name as the first president of South Korea, Syngman Rhee. He is a Korean
am from the first generation of t‘albukja” with a big smile. The group members at T‘ongil Club listened intently with respectful gazes. Pastor Rhee is a prominent Korean-American Christian leader who left North Korea in 1950 to avoid religious persecution in North Korea after the division of the country. His father, who was a pastor in Pyongyang, refused to leave his congregation and sent his two sons to safer South Korea. After migrating to South Korea, Rhee served in the Republic of Korea Army and worked as a translator for the U.S. occupation army during the Korean War. Soon after the war, he left for the United States, and now he is one of the prominent Korean-American leaders in the U.S. and a great Christian figure among Korean-Americans. His lifelong work to bring unification in Korea is quite well known among Korean Christians. His visit to a T‘ongil Club meeting took place in May, when roses were beginning to bloom on campus. The following dinner with him at a prestigious dining hall on campus was filled with tales that each member wanted to relay to this benevolent pastor from North Korea. He told his own story, which I recorded in my notes:

Around 1948, the country was divided. Many people in the North came down to the South... My father was ministering in the North at that time. He would not abandon the families under his ministry, so he stayed in the North. From 1948–1950, the North’s persecution toward Christianity intensified. Communism and Christianity are like oil and water... As the war progressed, the UN troops came, and then Chinese troops came down. I came down with my brother when the UN troops were retreating. I was 19 and my brother 17. I left my mother and four sisters behind. I only learned my mother passed away in 1998. (Field notebook entry, May 15, 2008)

immigrant to the U.S. who later became a Christian leader. His life history is very typical of the first generation of North Korean refugees who left North Korea shortly after the division. He gives lectures on unification and calls for a peaceful engagement with North Korea.

45 In the documentary Homes Apart: Korea (1991), Pastor Rhee talks about his efforts to unite with his family members, and also talks about the suffering of Koreans whose homes are apart as a result of the Korean War.
Many stories like Pastor Rhee’s are well known by now as tales from people whose lives were interrupted by the national tragedy of the Korean War. The claim Pastor Rhee makes of being “the first generation of t’albukja” is often heard among the first generation of North Korean refugees. However, their migration stories are different from those of my participants.

As we have looked at in the earlier sections of this chapter, the presence of the first generation of North Koreans in South Korea was the direct result of the Korean War. Despite the harsh treatment and prejudices against this silhyangmin group in the past, they are now recognized as well established South Koreans whose tragic division from their family members gains them sympathy. Often times, members of this silhyangmin group become sponsors of activities initiated by North Korean refugees. However, due to the past social prejudices against this group, some have denied association with newly incoming North Korean refugees who are distant relations.

At times, when more recently incoming North Korean refugees open a small restaurant that specializes in North Korean cuisine, the patrons are silhyangmin who long for a taste from their long lost home. A restaurant where my interviewee, Mrs. Park, worked for awhile belonged to a kwisunja named Kim Yong, whose business success became a model for many North Korean refugees. When I visited his restaurant with my interviewees from the T’ongil Club, he gave advice on how to be successful in South Korea to these members of the younger generation of North Korean refugees. And later, while we were having coffee after the meal, he told me he learned how to run a business after failing a few times. His patrons were normally the first generation silhyangmin who miss the North Korean cuisine and who come to reminisce about their past (personal
On the other hand, the children of the silhyangmin group often become volunteers in institutions for North Korean refugees. At teachers’ meetings at the Alternative School at the beginning of semesters, the staff members of the school hold an orientation for the new volunteer teachers and give them guidelines on how to behave. During the orientations, more seasoned volunteer teachers share their experiences. Inexperienced volunteer teachers can have a hard time earning respect from students who are at times older than they are. The most noticeably discussed points of the experiences volunteer teachers when they first encounter North Korean refugee students are how “nice” the students are or how “happy” the students seem. These reactions of the teachers relate to their not knowing what to expect in meeting North Koreans for the first time. However, the children of silhyangmin often relate that they didn’t feel kŏbugam, or a negative reaction to something offensive or anxiety-causing. One of the volunteer teachers of an ethics class at the school said during one of the meetings, “I just came here to volunteer. I didn’t have a clear objective of what I wanted to accomplish while volunteering. My father was from North Korea so I didn’t feel very estranged when I met the students here.” She was in her early thirties and was freelancing at the moment. She began volunteering at the school in 2007, around the same time I began my fieldwork there. She knew that many volunteer teachers came for research material or to fulfill volunteer hours at schools, so she emphasized “kŭnyang wassŏyo,” meaning that she just came to volunteer for no particular reason. What she means by that is she just wants to experience teaching at the alternative school for North Korean refugees. She would sometimes complain of students’ unruly behavior in classes or students not following her
instructions. Yet she seemed to be natural about teaching at the school.

Another teacher who taught occasional photography classes, Jiŭn, was also a daughter of a silhyangmin. Despite the fact they both came from families whose parents arrived from North Korea during the Korean War period, these teachers did not openly claim their place of origin. It is usually the first generation of silhyangmin that will share their identity with the North Korean refugees. Most of the second generation of this group did not clearly reveal their identity until much later at the school. Children of silhyangmin who have grown up witnessing the pain and loneliness their parents go through in life and feel somewhat understanding toward North Korean refugees. Yet their identity as South Koreans who have never experienced North Korea first hand makes it hard for them to share the kind of affinity their parents do. Jiŭn once told me that she felt it strange that none of the North Korean refugee students were in her social life. She also tutored English to other South Korean students in the evenings. She takes out her South Korean students to see movies or eat out on weekends. However, this did not happen with her North Korean refugee students.

I have been teaching [at the school] about for a year and a half now, but the kids [her students at the school] are not in my life. These kids are just like my [South Korean] students I tutor and are not any different…They are not in my life. Except the one day in a week I teach a class, there is rarely any time I meet or contact [the students at the school].

46 (Field notebook entry after an interview, August 13, 2008)

This conversation took place at a bus stop while we were waiting for her bus after the

46 Text in Korean: 제가 지금 1년 반 정도 됐는데 아이들이 내 삶에 들어와 있지 않아요. 아이들이 내 삶에 들어와 있지 않아요. 아이들이 내 삶에 들어와 있지 않아요...이 아이들이 제 삶에 들어와 있지 않아요. 아이들이 내 삶에 들어와 있지 않아요. 일주일에 한 번 수업 가는 날 외에는 다르게 만나가거나 연락하는 부분이 너무 없어요.
interview at a café near her neighborhood in Chamsil, an upscale apartment complex near the Olympic Park in Seoul. I had asked her who North Korean refugees in South Korea were and she took her time to answer that question. As she relates above, she is not consciously avoiding North Korean students, yet it is clear that her role as a volunteer teacher at Set Net School is purpose oriented: to collect photos taken from the perspectives of North Korean refugees in South Korea. She wanted to create a photo essay or a collection of photos that were taken by North Korean refugee youths at the school. She wanted to capture the perspectives of North Korean refugees yet she did not fully commit herself to socially integrating her life with North Korean refugees.

Yet at the same time, many of the first generation of silhyangmin who have been subject to social stigma preferred not to engage in social interaction with recently arrived t’albukja for various reasons.

Kwisunyongsa or kwisunja at times also assume the role of mentors for t’albukja. In the spring of 2008, at one of the student retreats with the University club students, I met Kim Hyŏng Duk, a North Korean “defector” introduced in Grinker’s (1997) book “Korea and Its Futures.” He was invited to give a speech at the retreat as he was viewed as a “success case” among North Koreans. His past failure to return to North Korea after he had “defected” to South Korea seemed to have driven him to become better settled in South Korea and become a better citizen. In his speech to the newly arrived students, he emphasized hard work and perseverance if they wanted to become successful in South Korea.

You must fight against yourself. You cannot become a leader if you do not make efforts above and beyond average. To overcome your North Koreanness, you must fight with yourself. Your behaviors are barometers of your integrity. It is not easy to talk like this to
other fellow North Koreans…When I was in school, I never went to give “lectures” like other North Koreans since it took away my time to study. I chose my future rather than money…South Koreans don’t listen to North Koreans nor do they value North Korean opinions. (Field notebook entry, March 14, 2008)

As his statements make clear, there is a sense of marginalization and unfairness that North Koreans perceive in the society. In his case though, he strategically married a South Korean woman he met in his church and now is well supported by the government in a research institute. Despite every appearance of success, he talked of leaving for the U.S. to further his studies. He seemed to be at a point where he faced a glass ceiling in the society.

Another kwisunja I met was a former member of the special police force, Mr. Yoon, who now works for a South Korean government-sponsored research institute. Mrs. Lee one of my interviewees, took a day off to introduce me to Mr. Yoon soon after Mrs. Lee and I began interviews in July. Mrs. Lee and I met him at his government housing where he lives with his Chinese-Korean wife. Mrs. Lee called him kŭnabŏji,47 which translates as uncle. Although they are not sanguinely related, their relationship was born out of ties between Mr. Yoon and her ex-husband. I do not know how the two men became so close as to call each other uncle and nephew. However, it is not hard to see that North Korean refugees form close ties with one another, particularly between the recently arriving t’albukja and kwisunja due to the proximity of their times of entry. When I asked for an interview, he told me he was “not allowed” to give an interview due to his position at the research institute. He would need to obtain permission from his

47 In Korean kŭnabŏji or chakŭnabŏji refers to the uncle’s relation to the father, abŏji. The suffixes kŭn and chakŭn means “big (or older)” and “small (or young).” So kŭnabŏji refers to the father’s elder brother and chagŭnabŏji, his younger brother.
employer to give interviews, which is not often granted. Mrs. Lee was disappointed that Mr. Yoon would not agree to the interview. From my point of view, Mr. Yoon’s agreeing to my interview would have nothing to do with their relationship.

Mrs. Lee’s ex-husband actually had relatives living in South Korea. It is not uncommon for those who ties in South Korea to be subject to social discrimination in North Korea (Armstrong 2003). Mrs. Lee also recollected that her grandmother was educated in South Korea during the Japanese colonial time. Interestingly, when t’albukja find relatives that they know, the reaction is not always a welcoming one. Particularly if the relatives are South Koreans, their encounters do not necessarily continue into future relationships. In Mrs. Lee’s case also, most of her in-laws in South Korea had “status and wealth” as doctors and professors. However, the relatives did not want to acknowledge Mrs. Lee’s husband as their relative and did not wish to pursue further contact. It is not clear whether the South Korean relatives did not want to be associated with struggling, poor relatives from North Korea or if they did not wish to be affiliated with anyone from North Korea due to fear of social stigma. But it is clear that North Korean refugees are not always received warmly in society.

3.3 Social Adaptation of North Korean Refugees and Integration Process

Most popular images of t’albukja are of traumatized and helpless people. The fixed gazes on the traumatized victims make it hard for many South Koreans to understand the normalcy of a life that even the most traumatized must go through. Many South Koreans imagine North Korean refugees as too socially paralyzed to actively engage in the labor market. This perception is evident in reactions from visitors and volunteers who visit
facilities such as Set Net School and other institutions that are involved with North Korean refugees’ social integration.

The first time I visited [the Alternative School], in the midst of bustling, the school was filled with energy from students who were running around from this corner to that corner. One of the students in that midst welcomingly said “hello” to me as our eyes met. It was I, the reporter, who fumbled with words. I thought to myself “what am I to do with my own prejudice that could not connect ‘North Korean Refugees’ and ‘Liveliness’” (Kyŏngyang Daily News, August 24, 2005).

It is true to some extent that North Korean refugees who are facing life in South Korea often feel helpless and overwhelmed. However, it is common for all migrants to feel depressed and helpless (Cho, Jeon, Yoo, and Um 2006). I also experienced overwhelming pressure when I first came to the United States in the early 1990s. It is surprising then that South Koreans react to North Korean refugees’ culture shock as somewhat of an anomaly that must be “corrected” if they are to become fully integrated han’guk saram (South Korean). As the above newspaper article states, many South Koreans interpret this initial struggle to be a “gloomy” and “depressive” phase for North Korean refugees. And many South Koreans are surprised when they witness positive emotions such as “happy” and “bright” from North Korean refugees.

48 Korean citation from the newspaper: 처음 갔을 때였죠. 시끌벅적한 화중에 ‘휘~휘’ 이 쪽에서 저쪽으로 뛰어다니는 학생들로 활기가 넘치났습니다. 그 중 누군가는 눈이 마주치자 반갑게 인사를 하더군요. 어영부영 인사를 제대로 하지 못한 것은 기자였습니다. ‘탈북자’ 와 ‘활기’를 쉽게 연결시키지 못한 고정관념을 여전할 것인가 살피기요. 경향신문 8.24. 2005

49 It is interesting to note that now there are clear linguistic markers denoting South Koreans and North Koreans in each country. When South Koreans introduce themselves in an English speaking setting, South Koreans often say they are “Korean.” However, when South Koreans introduce themselves in Korean language, they identify themselves as “han’guk saram.” When South Koreans introduce Korea to North Koreans, they are from Inam, South of the border, and North Koreans, Ibuk saram, people from the North of the border.
3.4 Identity Politics of North Korean Refugees

On a bitter cold day in January 2009, I secured an interview with Kim Kunho, the secretary to statesman Park Jin, who was the head of the Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification Committee. The committee was formed in August 2007, so it was still at the very beginning of its work. This committee oversees policy for t’albukja settlement. It was almost a serendipitous meeting with the secretary, Mr. Kim, a man in his early 30s with an easy going personality. I was scheduled to leave the day after this interview when I received a call from an acquaintance who told me she could introduce me to someone at the national assembly. It was fortunate for me to finally get to hear the voice of a man behind the policy I had been reading about.

The National Assembly was an incredibly large building with many entrances. After getting lost a couple of times early in the frosty morning, I finally found the right entrance to his office. After passing through a security gate not unlike the one at the airport, I checked in at the front desk, left my chumin tungnokchung, or South Korean identification card, and received a visitor’s badge. I got on and off an elevator that did not make any sound, and passed into a large corridor. When I got to his office, a young lady informed Mr. Kim of my arrival. Then I was led to a large meeting room furnished with a large table in the middle and majestic chairs with high backs. The room was quiet and airy with light coming in from the large windows. We took a seat at a corner of this table, and began our interview. Mr. Kim explained the current situation of North Korean refugees.

I began to seriously look into the North Korean refugee policy issue around 2007.\footnote{I introduced Mr. Kim in chapter 2. As the secretary to the assembly man, he has worked on North Korea}
higher crime rates, lower employment rates, and have lower educational backgrounds (than South Koreans). When I look at data like that, the more important thing than just government policy is for the entire South Korean public to accept t’albukja as their equals. However, in reality, when [t’albukja] try to find jobs, [South Koreans] avoid them. This (aversion) happens at schools, too. In the end, the problem will not be solved until people’s perceptions change. (Personal interview January 9, 2009)

Mr. Kim states that t’albukja are not accepted as “equals” by South Koreans. He seems to suggest that the reasons for the public aversion to accepting t’albukja are their alleged criminality and lack of education. But what he was trying to emphasize was that when the public reads the statistical reports without real experiences with North Korean refugees, the public would form a bias toward North Korean refugees. Mr. Kim understood that without changes in public perception, such misunderstanding would recur. Yet as a policy maker, it seemed impossible to come up with policies to change public perception.

When North Korean refugees arrive, their experiences as refugees, illegal migrants, and newly incoming, citizenship-holding immigrants provide grounds for personal identity politics to shape and negotiate their position in the society. Even though t’albukja hold citizenship, they are not fully accepted as equal to other South Koreans (I will discuss this point later in more detail). The marginal position of t’albukja is evident in their dependence on government support, low employment rate, and other socio-economic indicators (Lee 2003; Ministry of Unification 2008; North Korean Database 2009; Yoon 2002). Even without such socio-economic statistical data, t’albukja related policy within the political party he belongs to for six years. According to the interview, his involvement with policy making for North Korean refugees was born out of policy toward North Korean human rights. In establishing the government guidelines on human rights violations in North Korea, the North Korean refugees’ situation plays a critical role (personal interview, January 8, 2008).
also feel that they are not equal to South Koreans due to their North Korean identity.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the identity politics from positionality of North Korean refugees and their South Korean care providers. In this section, I will discuss the “othering” of North Koreans in the South Korean society that sets boundaries to the identity making of North Korean refugees as a marginalized, sample population for future unification. This “othering” of a newly incoming group in the 2000s is not a new phenomenon but a part of the historical nation-state making process in the Republic of Korea. Ironically, the “othering” process is born out of South Korea’s attempt to fully integrate North Korean refugees as South Korean citizens so that they can become the beacons of successful unification. Aiwa Ong (1999:7) refers to this process as embedding [disadvantaged] newcomers in specific contexts of subject-making. However, full integration in the current South Korean context poses challenges for t’albukja since South Koreans do not accept North Korean refugees as their equal neighbors, colleagues, and fellow citizens.

I argue that the social interactions between North Korean refugees and South Koreans during the initial settlement phases intensify and reiterate the South Korean concept of North Korean identities. Despite good intentions and passionate involvement of South Koreans to assist North Korean refugees in achieving successful integration into South Korean society, preconceived biases toward North Korean refugees perpetuate the North-South dichotomy and further marginalize North Koreans in the society. The historical categorization of North Koreans since the division must be discussed for us to understand the pre-contextual notions toward North Koreans in South Korea. The following ethnographic details tell us about the commonly practiced “spotlighting” of
North Korean refugees during their reception to South Korea, a practice that Chung Byung-ho (2006: 40) has argued provides grounds for t’albukja’s “unreasonable expectation” for their role in South Korea.

3.4.1 Scene Three: Spotlights and Shadows

The drummer tapped one, two, three, four, in a fast beat, and Yŏnhwa shouted out “Pan’gapsŭmnida!” (I am glad to meet you) on a microphone attached to a stand, imitating the North Korean female singer whose song became widely popular after it was introduced at the North-South Korean summit meeting in 2000.51 Yŏnhwa, a former Alternative School student, shouted out a cue and the curtains drew open, the lights came on, the band boomed out the background music, those of us in the chorus began to sing the song Pan’gapsŭmnida, and the students-turned-actors on stage began to play out the scenes of arrival in South Korea.52 The music was upbeat, and the actors moved fast and with decision from one point to another as the song progressed. As I sang along in a dark corner of the back stage behind the curtain, my students acted out the scenes of their coming to South Korea for the first time. The scene turned into a tour around Seoul, which is an integral part of the educational program at Hanawon. The actors portrayed surprise at seeing streets full of tall buildings and busy traffic downtown; blushed and

51 The song, Pan’gapsŭmnida, depicts the delight in meeting the brethren and wishes for future unification between the two Koreas. The word pan’gapsŭmnida translates into “I am glad to meet you.” The emotion described is not limited to meeting someone for the first time but also can be for meeting someone that one has longed to meet.

52 As I explained in chapter 2, the Alternate School produces a show in the form of musical, drama, and other performance arts every year in the fall around the school’s anniversary in September. It is a part of the school’s curriculum as a healing method. Stories are based on students’ biographies and experiences. This particular musical titled “Show Me the Way!” in this chapter was shown in September 2007 at Ehwa Women’s University in Seoul. Its main purpose was to recapture the North Korean refugee youths’ experiences and emotional turmoil involving the departure from their hometowns in North Korea and dangerous lives in China. This recounting of the past is a way to open the repressed wounds from the past so that the students learn to move on to make their lives in South Korea.
clucked their tongues at boys and girls kissing in public; and shied away from an overwhelming mob of journalists pouring out questions and popping flashes. All of their actions and gestures illustrated the initial excitement and wonder of seeing a new world. The increasing beat and rising pitch of the song along with the fast movements on the brilliantly lit stage seemed to illuminate their bright future in South Korea.

Underlying theme of this musical opening scene is the anticipation of starting over in a new country where they will live as citizens. A tight network of governmental, semi-governmental, and civic personnel work to ensure a smooth transition of North Korean refugees into South Korea, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, soon North Korean refugees realize the jobs they are given are not satisfactory for them, and they begin to distance themselves from South Koreans. South Koreans interpret this as North Koreans being unreliable and distrustful. North Koreans also interpret South Korean intentions as selfish and condescending.

Shortly after I moved to Mrs. Park’s riverside apartment, I was woken up early one morning by the loud voice of a man outside of my door. It was shortly after eight o’clock in the morning. Mrs. Park was speaking with this man, who would like to hire her. The man continuously urged her to “learn” whatever she can. He emphasized and reiterated his points on her “learning” if she was to survive in South Korea. Whatever she needed to “learn” was not so clear from the conversation, but it was certain that he presumed Mrs. Park did not know much about things that were South Korean. He offered her a job in his office to work as a secretary and accountant. He finally left after about an hour of monologue to Mrs. Park on the importance of learning from him and his company. I finally got out of my bedroom after he took his leave and asked her what this
incident was all about. Mrs. Park told me she was thinking about working for this man, who was a son of a silhyangmin. He was opening an office and was in need of a secretary who could also do bookkeeping.

A few days after his visit, Mrs. Park began her commute to workplace, which is located two hours away from the apartment. She left the house around seven in the morning and returned around nine in the evening for two weeks. Then one day, she told me she wanted to quit. The owner of the company insulted Mrs. Park, calling her “ignorant” and “insolent” for asking questions about some financial aspect of the company. She learned that the company hired her to receive additional funds from the government for hiring a North Korean refugee. So the owner of the company hired Mrs. Park to receive this government supplement, but he did not want her to actually be involved in the work. She felt insulted and quit the company. The conflict between the South Korean owner and Mrs. Park seems to have arisen from different motives for hiring and working. The owner did not really expect Mrs. Park to perform the duties of a secretary whereas Mrs. Park wanted to learn everything about being a secretary and working in an office in South Korea. However, in the statistics, she would be labeled as “unreliable” for quitting her job after two weeks. (Field notebook entry, May 26, 2008)

In the discussion in chapter 1, I said that the representation of North Korean people in South Korea focuses on the helplessness and desperation of the refugees. At the same time, the spotlights ‘talbukja receive during the initial reception period, as illustrated in Scene Three, shed light on the demand from the South Korean government for North Korean refugees’ speedy adjustment and social integration. The expectation of “successful integration” comes with the whole package of welfare support including
settlement money, housing, and consulting agencies for employment and education. Numerous studies have been conducted to get a sense of the status of their adjustment in South Korea (Chung 2006; Yoon 2004; North Korean Database 2009; Lee et al. 2000). Most of the findings point to North Korean refugees’ inability to hold on to a job in South Korea as they cannot adjust to the capitalist system. However, on the other hand, some North Koreans from my personal interactions complain of unfair treatment from South Koreans. The “fairness” that North Koreans describe includes the honesty of distribution of wage and salaries, fair treatment among all employees, and respect toward North Korean refugees. Many times, North Korean refugees feel frustrated with their lack of knowledge of the South Korean system and try to learn. Yet when they encounter what Mr. Kim called “aversion” from South Koreans like their coworkers and neighbors, North Korean refugees would interpret their attitude as “disrespectful” and quit. Often their employment is secured through the introduction of other South Koreans (particularly their police officers), so when they quit, the South Koreans criticize North Korean refugees as “lazy” “ungrateful,” and “untrustworthy.”

Mr. Kim, who I introduced in chapter 2, is also a member of T’ongil Club. One day he called me out of the blue and asked me if I had time in the afternoon to attend a t’albukja student conference. I was attending a special prayer event for North Korea with Mrs. Park at Sŏtaemun Church in Seoul that day, but I told him I would meet him after that. The T’albukja College Student Conference was held at another church not too far from Sŏtaemun Church. When I arrived, the conference had already started. I decided to meet Mr. Kim after his presentation. At the registration table, I was told the conference proceedings cost ten dollars in addition to the registration fee. As the articles in the
proceedings were written by North Korean refugee students, the fees will go to their scholarship funds. One of the articles was by one of the former Hanawon employees, Mrs. Chae. In her paper “Saet’ŏmin, kûriko namhan kungmin” (Saet’ŏmin and South Korean Citizen), she writes about how South Korean attitudes toward North Koreans change upon interaction from at first being “curious and sympathetic” to “disappointed” next, then to “indifferent” and finally to seeing “hope and feeling confident” about the future integration (T’albukja College Students Conference 2008). The last stage, “hope and confidence,” is possible when North Korean refugees are able to secure employment and successfully continue their work (2008: 66).

In addition, televised stories about North Korean refugee acculturation in South Korean tend to evoke “sympathy” from South Korean viewers and “anger” from North Korean refugees about being portrayed as such helpless people. I was returning home one evening and saw Mrs. Park watching TV program about a t’albukja couple living in our neighborhood. I could not see the title of the program since I began to watch it in the middle of the program, but I continued to watch it until the end. The young couple on TV was expecting a child. The husband was selling steamed corn out of a small truck on the corner of an apartment complex nearby and the wife was having complications with her pregnancy. The story told the viewers that they were desperate for money, and the couple would need a lot of help to get through the pregnancy and raise their child. Throughout the show, Mrs. Park kept clucking her tongue, and she said angrily, “Look at those losers. Why do they even go on TV and make all t’albukja lose face?” She was angry that the show was portraying all t’albukja as people who are so stupid they are unable to make it in South Korea. She seemed hurt, as if the show had daunted her
passion for life and hard work to make it in South Korea.

Many of the North Korean refugees I met in the field indeed were having difficulties with money and had difficulty finding employment. It is quite common knowledge that many North Korean refugees face difficulties integrating into the society, and particularly in functioning as economically independent citizens (Yoon 2002). At the same time, most of the North Korean refugees I met also worked hard to overcome these difficulties. Some refugees I have met complained that they do not like to be associated with “other” North Korean refugees due to this negative presentation of them.

At the beginning of my fieldwork in the winter of 2007–2008, I was a research assistant at Yonsei University. My job was to meet North Korean refugees, give them a survey form to fill out, deliver the remuneration for their time, and keep the receipt for it, which later on I handed over to the researcher with the filled-out survey. During this time, I learned that many North Korean refugees lived under the poverty line and immediately felt pain at seeing their barely decorated homes, which I visited to meet them. Also, I had a hard time getting in touch with them to arrange the time to visit and conduct the survey. I later found out that it was hard to schedule interviews because of their precarious employment status. Most private businesses stay open until after seven in the evening and only take Sundays off. So those who are readily available to participate in research and respond to requests to visit welfare offices are normally the unemployed North Korean refugees. In some sense, it is inevitable that so many research findings reflect strongly that this is a “problematic” population. From my observation, I realized there is a deeper issue at hand in the ways North Korean refugees are portrayed in the society. In particular, the obsession with North Korean refugees’ successful (or
failed) integration in society during the initial phase of migration seems to suggest more than the society’s concern for healthy integration of this population. Rather, this concern seems to reflect the nation’s obsession to “correct” the socialist behavior of the North so that the social integration between North Koreans and South Koreans will be smooth during reunification. Therefore, the role of North Korean refugees who initially are supported by the government is to be able to successfully overcome differences and difficulties to show the possibility of future unification. However, why North Korean refugees are having a hard time with social integration has not been thoroughly analyzed or historicized.

It is important to look at the tendency to avoid calling North Korean refugees simply Pukhan saram (North Koreans). Much discussion among South Koreans has led to the production of different legal and social terms to refer to this group, with its unique experiences of escaping North Korea, living illegally in China, crossing many national borders, and receiving South Korean citizenship. The newly incoming North Korean refugees in the 1990s and 2000s may have different, historically particular experiences, but the marginalization of North Koreans is not a new phenomenon.

3.5 Segregation

Even though t’albukja quickly gain working knowledge about Seoul, I sense it is not so easy for t’albukja to cohabit with South Koreans due to segregation. I noticed an unusual kind of segregation when I attended charitable events. One day, Mrs. Park and Mrs. Ok told me to meet them at the Kangnam Church for free giveaways. They told me the church was giving free food as well as free gifts. I had an appointment with another
interviewee that morning, so I went to the church alone, planning to meet Mrs. Park and Mrs. Ok at the church. When I arrived, I found that it was Kangnam Church, one of the mega churches in Seoul that holds about two thousand people in the sanctuary. The lobby in front of the main sanctuary was so large that it could easily hold the five or six tables where people could register. The ladies at the table asked me for my name to write it on a name tag. I gave her my name, and she asked me “Are you a t’albukja?” When my answer was negative, she said, “Oh, I thought so.” Then she told me I was not to wear any name tag as I am not a North Korean refugee, and I could not receive the lunch that was given freely to the participating North Korean refugees. When I found Mrs. Park and Mrs. Ok (whom I could not find at first due to the sheer number of people there), I sat next to them. As the event ended with the pastor’s remark that the church had decided to host the event to “entertain” t’albukja, the announcer told the crowd to make sure to pick up the bags that contained free gifts. Then, when I was struggling to leave the sanctuary as everyone was crowding around the door area where the gifts were located, someone told me, “Oh, the free gifts are only for t’albukja.” And to make it somehow less discriminatory, the staff yelled out, “The gifts are only for those wearing the name tags!” I was dumbfounded at the obvious and obtuse separation at the event. This event for t’albukja was for t’albukja only and no one else.

This separation of the population seems odd to me, but this occurred over and over throughout my fieldwork in Seoul. The events are group specific and those who do not belong to the category are considered abnormal. I find it troublesome, as the social integration the government emphasizes seems harder to achieve this way. The amount of attention and investment in the population does not culminate in social integration but
rather inculcates t’albukja dependency on government policy and an unequal power structure between South Koreans and North Korean refugees.

Another aspect of segregation of t’albukja in South Korea can be found in the development of multicultural policies. Multicultural policies became a hot topic during the 2000s when international marriages between South Korean men and women from developing or underdeveloped countries increased. As the number of South Korean citizens with different ethnic backgrounds increased, the government initiated multicultural policies to incorporate this new population (Rainbow Youth Center 2011). The name “multicultural” suggests a heterogeneous make up of the society, and this became contentious ground for some activists in the t’albukja business. Grouping North Korean refugees with non-Koreans seems offensive to some Koreans since t’albukja enter South Korea as citizens due to their ethnicity, unlike the foreign spouses who are granted citizenship after they enter.

Mrs. Park’s son attends an elementary school that is about two blocks away from the apartment. On ordinary days, he comes home about one thirty or two o’clock in the afternoon and attends afterschool classes at the welfare office across the street from the apartment to do his homework, play with friends, or do some extra-curricular activities. Other South Korean students often attend private cram schools to receive English, math, taekwondo, chess, music, art, and other kinds of lessons from private teachers. However, as with many students I met at the Alternative School and at universities, Mrs. Park’s son could not attend private cram schools due to financial reasons. Whether it was to console those who could not afford extracurricular activities was not clear, but his elementary school organized an outing one Saturday in October. The letter from his school stated
that he should come to his school on Saturdays without classes. Normally, students go to school on every other Saturday. On off-Saturdays, students often spend time with their parents. What surprised me was the greeting and the addressee of the letter. The letter read “Saet’ŏmin,\textsuperscript{53} tamunhwŏrini ege” (To North Korean and Multicultural children) and stated that he should attend the school to play or go for an outing on off-Saturdays. Mrs. Park’s son refused to go to school on off-Saturdays as he does not want his classmates to find out he is from North Korea. Mrs. Park commented, “I don’t like him to mix with tamunhwaw children. They are from the Philippines or Vietnam.” What she was trying to say was that she wanted her son to mix with other South Korean children so he could learn more about the South Korean ways. As I hope to further illustrate in the later chapters of this dissertation, many of these special events and services that South Koreans provide specifically for certain group of the population are not well received by the intended group due to their desire to become more like South Koreans. Although there is much emphasis and pressure on North Korean refugees to integrate with South Koreans, many of the social services act against full integration due to such segregated activities.

The welfare office in my neighborhood was considered one of the best run offices in terms of t’albukja administration, as the office is located within the apartment complex. This office held numerous events that invited North Korean refugees for various reasons, such as undonghoe (sports day), where the North Korean refugee

\textsuperscript{53} Saet’ŏmin is one of many alternative names for North Korean refugees in South Korea as I discussed earlier in the chapter. This was considered a politically correct term during my fieldwork period. However, as this term was a social term, this was abolished when Lee Myong Bak became president and insisted that pukhan’it’aljumin was to be the legal term for this population. This was further discussed earlier in this chapter.
families come and play games and receive presents. On Ch’usŏk, which is equivalent to Thanksgiving Day which falls on the lunar August 15th, presents are distributed to North Korean refugees. Most of these events are held during the major holidays when South Koreans are spending their time with their families. In addition to providing basic services, the welfare office staff proactively “managed” the t’albukja population in their administrative bloc. On a muggy Sunday in August, I got up late as I had a late interview with Mrs. Kim at her place nearby Mt. Bukhan, on the other side of Seoul and about one hour away from my apartment. I was writing my field note details when I heard a knock on the door, as the door bells had been broken for some time. Mrs. Park and her son had left for the church already, and I was alone at home. When I asked who was at the door, I received an answer, “Pokchigwan-esŏ watmŭndeyo” (we’re from the welfare office). It was Officer Kim Kyŏngsuk with two other young women who I thought were probably volunteer workers or interns. As I opened the door, Officer Kim asked me: “Mrs. Park?” When she received a negative answer, she tried again: “Are you her daughter or daughter-on-law?” before I could tell her who I was. When she was finished with the second question, I told her I was a friend. The baffled look on her face clearly illustrated that she could not identify me—whether I was t’albukja or not. I noticed as I conversed with the three women at the door that Officer Kim and the other women were carrying gift wrapped boxes in paper bags that looked like presents for t’albukja residents. Officer Kim asked me when Mrs. Park would be home. I asked her to leave her card so Mrs. Park could call her upon returning home. But she refused and said, “Oh, just tell her to stop by at the welfare office when she has time. I sit at the very front at the office, so you can find me when you come to the office.” When I furthered the conversation by asking
what the visit was for, Officer Kim said, “Oh, I came just to see how she is doing. Also I wanted to let her know about the activities and holiday events we’re planning.” With that, she prepared to leave. Then one of her younger female companions asked me out of curiosity: “Are you saet’ŏmin?” When I told her no, she muttered “I thought so…” In my field notes on this day, I wrote:54 “Do they think many saet’ŏmin would just stay home all the time? It is so odd that they just showed up at the door without any appointment, but if that’s their method of operation, I suppose there’s nothing I can do about it.”

Such impromptu visits were not unusual in this neighborhood. A few days prior to this visit, I had a similar incident when a volunteer from the public health center knocked on our door. This time, the volunteer was using the word “kwalli,” supervision or managing t’albukja. One of the heavily emphasized aspects of North Korean refugee care is their mental and physical health. As many North Korean refugees experienced conditions that are harmful to mental and physical health yet were deprived of proper medical care, many of them are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (Jeon 2000), or chronic diseases like tuberculosis, hepatitis, or women’s disease. Inability to hold on to long term employment is often times attributed to their health conditions. So the government offers free medical services for those who are believed to be in need of medical care55 (Ministry of Unification 2008). When a t’albukja is under this medical

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54 The field note entry for August 24, 2008. “많은 새터민이 그저 집에만 있을 거라 생각하나? 불쑥 찾아 온 것이 의아했지만 그것이 관행이라면 어쩔 수 없다.”

55 Pukhan it’aljumin chŏngch’ak chiwŏn ömmu slimu pyŏllam (2008: 57–58). According to the Protection and Support for Former North Korean Residents’ Integration Law (Pukhan it’al jumin-ŭi poho mit chŏngch’ak chiwon-e kwanhan pŏnnyul) Article No. 25 and Health Care Allowance Law (ŭiryo kŭbyŏbŏp) 3.6., the t’albukcha household comprising members without ability to work can receive compensation (those who have been in the residence under 5 years and over 5 years are differentiated); the household comprising a member with ability to work can receive compensation (those who have been living in the
care, he or she is excused from having to find a job and can receive a monthly welfare stipend from the government. As of 2008, t’albukja who fell into this category could receive up to 1,231,924 won (approximately one thousand US dollars) if all of the family members were unable to work. As Mrs. Park was in this category at the time, she was a kwalli taesang, object of supervision. The government conducts follow-up visits to make sure the recipient of the medical benefits is really in that category. As the compensation for those in need of medical care is almost equal to a monthly salary for menial workers, for many t’albukja with medical conditions, this is considered an important source of income for these families.

About a quarter after ten in the morning, I heard a knock on the door and a middle-aged woman announcing that she was from the Kangsŏ public health center. I answered her that the owner of the apartment was not at home at the moment without opening the door. She asked me if anyone other than Mrs. Park was registered as a resident of the house. Out of curiosity, I opened the door for her. This lady, who seemed about 50 years old, said “saet’ŏmin-igi ttaemune kwallirŭl haeya haesŏyo” (I am visiting because Saet’ŏmin must be managed). When she discovered that Mrs. Park was not at home, she asked me for the house phone number. I asked for her phone number at the health center so Mrs. Park could call her back when she returned. Ironically, she did not have the phone number for the center with her, so she called the health center to get the number from her cellular phone. About this time, she was sitting down on the floor by the entrance. She was still wearing her shoes and left her feet at the entrance, which has a square shaped floor that is lower than the rest of the house. As is common in Korea, the residence under and over 3 years are differentiated).
rest of the house is raised slightly higher than the entrance of the house. As she got off the phone while sitting on the floor, she explained that she must ensure that recipients are not misusing the benefits, as the health center was a government institution. While I was conversing with this volunteer nurse from the health center, Mrs. Park and her son returned to the apartment. As I listened to their conversation, our visitor seemed relieved that Mrs. Park was at home and properly following the rules, as she said the following:

Usually I don’t have phone numbers, and when I visit [saet’ŏmin’s] places, they don’t open the doors when I tell them I am from the health center. *Kwallirul haeya toenündę kwalliga andoe* (They must be managed, but they cannot be managed). I don’t know why they don’t answer. Every time, when we send the notice for them to visit the Yŏngdŭngpo public health center, they are always not cooperative.

As I offered her a cup of coffee and Mrs. Park brought out fruits from the kitchen to where she was sitting down by the entrance door, the volunteer nurse began to advise Mrs. Park to take more vitamins for her joint pain. She repeatedly asked Mrs. Park for the cause of the pain and finally asked whether she worked at night. Then this middle aged housewife-turned-volunteer nurse related to us a common prejudice.

North Korean men are all so ugly but North Korean women are pretty. They [North Korean men] have such a dark complexion. I’ve once visited Kim Yong’s restaurant in Ilsan, and I thought he looked so pitiful. You don’t have an eye for a man. A man should look like Bae Yong Jun [a South Korean actor whose complexion is very fair]. North Korean men are so ugly. They are short and their faces are so dark. That’s because they are soaked in tobacco. The Yŏngdŭngpo public health center urges them to quit smoking, but these men say they cannot live without cigarettes. So many saet’ŏmin have illnesses that are infectious if not treated properly. All the services are *free!* *(Field notebook entry, August 19, 2008)*

As we talked quite casually, the volunteer nurse looked at both my face and Mrs. Park’s
face with a bit of a perplexed expression. I had grown accustomed to such confused looks by now so I ignored her uneasiness. As she checked Mrs. Park’s pulse and blood pressure while enjoying the refreshments, she relaxed a bit and began to chat with us about her life and where to find some used furniture stores. When Mrs. Park asked her for her cell phone number, she reluctantly gave her the number while murmuring “I was told not to give out my personal information.”

From such encounters, it became obvious to me that the South Korean people North Korean refugees encounter on a daily basis comprise mostly these government workers, whose job is to make sure North Korean refugees comply with the rules set by the government and to follow the instructions. Also, the time and dates of these visits seem to occur during working hours for normal people with jobs. It was not long before I realized that the kinds of interactions North Korean refugees have at these institutions are not free of power relations and personal politics, with South Koreans of course in a position to give or take away the essential benefits North Koreans need to survive.

In the next chapter, I describe the culturally intimate dimension of South Korean consciousness involving anticommunism that explains the uncomfortable reactions to North Korean refugees from the public. It is my position that unspecified “aversion” toward or “perception” of North Korean refugees in South Korea comes from the learned behavior of avoiding any contact with potential communist spies. The past practice of anticommunism is still providing influential moral guidance when it comes to North-South Korean interactions.
CHAPTER 4
From Feared to Forgotten: the Complexity of the South Korean Cultural Intimacy
of Anticommunism Education

In the previous chapter, I tried to lay out the current social status of North Korean refugees in South Korean society as somewhat alienated and marginalized people despite their full citizenship status. In this chapter, I will try to illustrate the ways in which past practices of South Korean anticommunism have created a unique social context into which North Korean refugees enter, practices which have also influenced the identity construction of North Korean refugees. In particular, the uneasy social encounters between South Koreans and North Korean refugees that I describe in this chapter mirror the uneasy relationship between the two countries that runs deep in a form of division. Despite the admittance of North Korean refugees as South Korean citizens, their cultural belonging in South Korea is still questionable when we take a look at North Korean refugees’ experiences and South Korean attitudes toward their presence.

To be more specific, it is my argument that South Koreans’ preconceived “ambivalent” (Grinker 1997) attitudes toward North Korean refugees in various social encounters are the culmination of anticommunist campaigns and sentiments of the past. In particular, the social category of North Koreans as others is deeply rooted in the strong hold of anticommunism in South Korean culture. The North Korean people have been categorized as a threat to social and national security (Kwon 1998), and this categorization has continued, even including the recent influx of a large number of North Korean refugees into South Korea. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when this ideology-based anticommunist attitude became the stumbling block for social integration.
between the two groups. Nevertheless, I argue that the following accounts tell us that
North Korean refugees bear the burden of justifying their presence in South Korea, in a
society where North Koreanness is the mark of a social category to be distrusted. In this
sense, their presence and identity as South Koreans are continuously contested, and
therefore it is inevitable that the notion of nationalism is part of the negotiation of
defining who belongs to which Korean nation.

4.1 A Spy Is Arrested

On August 27, 2008, South Korean newspapers reported the arrest of a 34-year-old female spy named Jeong-hwa Won\textsuperscript{56} who had infiltrated South Korea under the
disguise of being a t’albukja (Baek 2008). The news reported that Won had been trained
to be a spy and was sent to South Korea on a mission to infiltrate military circles. She
was then compared to Mata Hari, the legendary spy famous for her deadly feminine
charm, and to a heroine of a movie, Swiri.\textsuperscript{57} The alleged spy who used her feminine
charm to break into the circle of South Korean male officers was found guilty of
espionage. The newspaper \textit{Chosun Daily} reported the event in an article under the title

\textit{Beautiful Female Spy’s Espionage: received an order to “Kill by Poisoning.”}\textsuperscript{58}

4.2 After the News Broke: Personal accounts

After the news about Won’s arrest, I had conversations with Min, Hyok, and

\textsuperscript{56} The name is as written in newspaper articles.
\textsuperscript{57} A movie released in 1999 by Kang Chae-gyu. A North Korean female spy who was trained to blow up a
South Korean stadium at a political speech gathering falls in love with a South Korean intelligence agent, and she fails in her mission due to her conflicted loyalty. This movie has been reviewed as the first
\textsuperscript{58} See Kang, Young-su in Chosun Ilbo, August 27, 2008
Mrs. Lee and some others about the impact of this newsbreak in their lives. I happened to be with Min and her friends when I first learned about the newsbreak. It seemed that even though the newspaper emphasized the gravity of the case, most of North Korean refugees expressed unlikelihood of Won’s qualification as a trained spy. One interesting observation I made from this incident was that South Korean counterparts to these individuals showed heavier concern for personal safety of their t’albukja friends. Some of my t’albukja acquaintances received phone calls that conveyed concerns for their personal safety, and others were advised to stay low until the news was forgotten.

4.2.1 Mrs. Ok’s Story

On the same evening this news broke out, I walked to a naengmyŏn⁵⁹ restaurant in my neighborhood with a group of North Korean refugees. It was Mrs. Ok’s⁶⁰ birthday, and it seemed appropriate to celebrate her birthday with cold noodles, the famous North Korean dish favored by many Koreans. I had met her at the Unification Club in the spring. I became close to her after becoming her English tutor.⁶¹ Although she had already graduated from a junior college in North Korea with a degree in bookkeeping, she was now a freshman in a South Korean university, and she had to learn English as a subject for the first time in her life. Often she called me sŏnsaengnim, teacher, whereas I referred to her as ŏnni, older sister, following a Korean custom when referring to a

⁵⁹ Naengmyŏn literally means cold noodles, and this dish originated in North Korea. The first Korean War refugees in the post-Korean War era have opened restaurants and now the most famous naengmyŏn restaurants sell Pyongyang naengmyŏn and Hamhŭng naengmyŏn.

⁶⁰ All of the names of North Korean refugees used in this paper are pseudonyms to protect their identity.

⁶¹ Many North Korean refugees I met in the field asked me to teach them English as it is the language that all Koreans are in a fever to learn. English became a rare asset I had during the fieldwork and sometimes I was asked to tutor freely for North Korean refugees in exchange for meeting them in person.
woman who is older than oneself.62

The Unification Club members normally celebrated members’ birthdays together. But officers of the Club were taking a summer outing that week, and the regular meetings were not held during the summer break. The secretary of the Club asked me to be in charge of Mrs. Ok’s birthday party so she would not feel left out. As she was one of the main organizers of my birthday party earlier that year, I was glad to return the hospitality. Min wanted to invite her friends that she had met during her transit from China to South Korea. So I talked to Mr. Yun and Mrs. Park, both of whom I had met through Mrs. Ok, to come and celebrate her birthday. Then Mrs. Park, my landlord called Minji, another mutual friend, to join the dinner. Mr. Yun was Mrs. Ok’s close friend who she had met at a South Korean diplomatic facility in Beijing where she was detained before she was admitted to South Korea; Mrs. Park and Minji were her Hanawon tonggi (same cohort). I was renting a room from Mrs. Park, so we gathered at my apartment before heading out to the restaurant, which we finally did after Minji arrived around eight o’clock. We took the back alley, which was a short cut, instead of taking the streets along the main roads. We walked about three or four blocks under the dim street lights, which emphasized the long shadows behind us. We were walking quietly for a while. Then Minji shot out a question to everyone. “Did you hear the news?” “What news?” we asked. Minji then said, “About the t’albukja woman who was arrested for the espionage.” This opened up a conversation and everyone started talking about their knowledge or ignorance of the news. Minji elaborated that Won Jeong-hwa had a 10-year-old daughter and was a frequent

62 Min’s calling me teacher seems to suggest a learned behavior that assumes a hierarchical relationship between a South Korean researcher and North Korean refugees.
speaker at military bases near her home. Then she added, alluding to the reference to Mata Hari, “You know, the newspapers ran her photos. They said she’s a beauty, but what beauty? If she’s a beauty, all the beauties in the world are dead.” Laughter broke out at this comment, and others chimed in to add their opinion of the low level of sophistication this alleged spy exhibited. The South Korean media’s description of Won Jeong-hwa did not seem to match with their idea of trained spies. As we came closer to the restaurant, Mr. Yun said he had received a phone call from his coworker earlier. His coworker asked if he was alright and told him to “be careful.” That is when Mrs. Ok said “That’s why [police officer] called me.” Her police officer had “called to see how she was doing” and “what they had been up to lately.” The only person who did not receive a call was Mrs. Park, my landlord who said “Why haven’t I received a call?” Then Mr. Yun said jokingly that “instead of a phone call, they are probably watching you by some other methods.” We all laughed at this witty comment, yet it was obvious that North Korean refugees could not be free from this piece of news to which most South Koreans did not pay attention. In addition, South Korean surveillance of North Korean refugees had begun. Although this surveillance seemed like a routine, the fact that North Korean refugees were the target of governmental surveillance seems to suggest they cannot be free from their North Korean identity.

4.2.2 Hyŏk’s Story

Two days after Won’s arrest, I had lunch with Hyŏk, a graduate from the Alternative School who was now a college student. Before meeting at a Chinese restaurant near the City Hall for a bowl of black noodles, he sent me a text message about
his personal experience after the spy news broke out: “One of my professors told me to just lay low and keep quiet.” I had met Hyŏk in my cultural anthropology class while I was conducting preliminary research at the Alternative School in January 2007. Even though he was just a sophomore in college, he was already in his mid-twenties and was struggling to “catch up” with the life of other twenty-something South Koreans. When Hyŏk was still at the Alternative School, he impressed me with his writing skills, and when he went to college, he seemed to have impressed his professors. He often told me about his drinking sessions with his professors.

When I asked him what his professor meant by “lay low and keep quiet,” Hyŏk told me he didn’t know. But whatever the meaning was, that statement from a South Korean professor became the point of reference for what has always been in South Korean consciousness: the pan’gong panch’ŏp (anti-communist, anti-spy) slogan of the past. The kind urging to stay quiet and not be noticed by the authorities seems to suggest that because Hyŏk was North Korean, the South Korean professor was worried that he might be a target of suspicion.

4.2.3 Mrs. Lee’s Story

Another participant, Mrs. Lee, and I had a phone conversation a few days after the news of Won Jeong-hwa’s arrest. I met Mrs. Lee in December 2007 when I was conducting a survey on North Korean refugees’ mental health for a research team. During the survey, I found out that she had graduated from a university and was a registered nurse. Her “success” story impressed many South Koreans, which sparked indignation in Mrs. Lee. She seemed to be critical of the general prejudice against North
Korean refugees, and particularly the prejudice that portrays them as incompetent individuals. I was curious whether Mrs. Lee’s day to day interactions with South Koreans at school and work could tell me about the social stigma she had to deal with. Initially, she gave me a hard time about giving personal interviews for my project. She seemed quite irritated at South Korean researchers who constantly asked for interviews. Then finally in July 2008, she invited me to her place for tea. From then on, we shared many more cups of tea, coffee, and bowls of rice while we talked about her life and my life as well. I received a call from Mrs. Lee a few days after the news. Over the phone, she spoke in a calm voice but it was obvious that she was upset. “About Won Jeong-hwa, what is going to happen to her daughter? I feel so terrible for that child. What has the child done?” Then she told me she was afraid of contacting people she knew, not for her own safety but for theirs.

I called my police officer and told her she does not need to contact me. I will call her when things calm down…I push away people around me so they won’t get close to me. I do not want people around me to be in an awkward position. An older nurse [who I work with] has a husband in the military, and she says talking to me is a delicate matter. Then how would people like Park 63 think? I can talk to you because you understand. We should find some time to talk about this freely. (Field notebook entry, August 31, 2008)

Unlike the other interviewees, Mrs. Lee, who had spent almost ten years in South Korea, called her police officer first. But she did that out of fear for her police officer’s connection to Mrs. Lee herself. As she mentioned in our phone conversation, Mrs. Lee did not feel she could talk about this case freely with people she was associated with due to the potential “implications” of being associated with her. South Korea’s long practice 63 Park is a South Korean friend of Soon Young who believes that there is a deep distrust against North Koreans in South Korea. This conversation will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.
of yŏnjwaje, guilt by association, still lingers in social behaviors South Koreans exhibit in associating with anyone who could potentially be suspected of being a communist (Foley 2003; Kang and Kim 2004). Although yŏnjwaje has been abolished in South Korea since the 1990s, the fear of associating with North Koreans still lingers on in social behavior among South Koreans. Mrs. Lee once in a while told me about times when her colleagues told her they were afraid to become close to her or be in the same photo since she was North Korean. Particularly her friends whose husbands or family members are in the military did not want to associate with Mrs. Lee so as to prevent any “suspicion” from the authorities. So when the spy arrest story was broadcasted, Mrs. Lee took the initiative and told her acquaintances not to contact her. This discomforting attitude from South Koreans in association with North Koreans is not exclusive to this case. When Mr. Yun tried to find jobs at South Korean companies, the owners of the companies he applied to told him they didn’t have a job for him. The reason for their rejection was because Mr. Yun was North Korean. He used to call me on his off-days to have a meal, and he would tell me, “I used to tell people I was from North Korea whenever I was introduced when I first came to South Korea. But now I don’t do that. They say they can’t hire me when I tell them I’m Pukhan saram (North Korean).”

4.3 Putting the Spy Case in a Context

The personal accounts surrounding an arrest of a North Korean refugee woman created a ripple in the North Korean refugee community. But the news did not seem to affect South Koreans as much as it created a ripple among t’albukja, or have the same impact. By August 28, headlines of news no longer mentioned Won, Jung-hwa and the
public did not seem to remember yesterday’s news as much. Such stark contrast between reaction from t’albukja whose identity was contested by the news reports and South Korean public who took it as a piece of news seemed to reflect the current reality of two Koreans in society.

4.3.1 Misuk’s Account

The most obvious clue to the insignificance of the news to South Koreans is illustrated in the next conversation I had with the Alternative School teachers during dinner after a workday. The school offered occasional meals to volunteer teachers or others who were involved in the school’s projects. I was finishing up an English textbook project for the school around that time, so I had been working at the school until evening that day. Around 5:30, I went to a small restaurant for dinner with a couple of staff members. The school staff and teachers were regulars at this restaurant that was located across the street from the school and run by an elderly couple. While we waited for our food to arrive, I brought up the story of Won Jeong-hwa. Misuk, who was in charge of administrative matters at the school, was surprised to hear the story and asked, “The one arrested for espionage was saet’ŏmin?” She said she saw the news but she did not read the article or know any details. In addition, she did not have time to discuss the news at the school, where Misuk was always overloaded with more work than she could finish. Then, as if she was reminded of something, she told us the following.

Oh, that [the news] must have been the reason [a police officer] asked why our student [Hyeran] went abroad. I received a call from a police officer inquiring after Hyeran. The police officer wanted to know why she had gone to Nepal, what she did there, and how long she had stayed. Hyeran told me she needed some kind of proof of this so I had prepared
the document he needed. Then I received a call again. I just told him what I knew and didn’t think anything of it. Now you tell me [about Won’s arrest] it makes sense why the police would have called. (Field notebook entry, September 2, 2008)

Mr. Shin, another full time staff person who is in charge of the academic cycle of the school, spoke after Misuk. “Yes, Ha (one of the students) told me the other day, ‘It’s just us who are going to die now,’ and she sighed.” Of course the student did not mean she was actually going to die. The student was referring to the social stigma and hardship that would ensue afterwards. Such anticipation from the North Korean refugee student may have come from the past practice of being subject to suppressive measures in North Korea. However, North Korean refugees are well aware that their lives are not as free from the political situations of the country as the lives of other South Koreans, as the statement illustrates. As South Korea is still in a state of ideological war and division with North Korea, the fate of North Korean refugees is inevitably influenced by the political atmosphere between the two countries. The personal accounts I heard during the next few weeks after the spying news highlighted this point which suggested North Korean refugee identity potentially could be identified as kanch ’ŏp (spies).

4.3.2 Mrs. Chŏn’s Account

In addition to hearing the North Korean refugees’ experiences after this incident, it is also important to look at the reactions from South Koreans. When I spoke to South Koreans who worked with North Korean refugees, they were concerned about the negative impacts of the news on the North Korean refugee community. This concern, paired with the pervasive marginalization of North Korean refugees in the society,
suggests there is a “national order” (Malkki 1995b:7) of people in South Korean nationalism. With South Koreans as the majority and North Korean refugees a minority in the society, the hanminjok notion of nationalism has made a major shift to acknowledge the existence of heterogeneous Koreans. The multiple Korean identities that emerge during the encounters of North Koreans and South Koreans seem to highlight the distinctive South Korean nationalism that continuously contests North Korean refugees’ identity in South Korea. In particular, the belief in anticommunism has become the major force that contests t’albukja’s national belonging. In a personal interview, a Hanawŏn staff person in charge of employment training related her opinion regarding this incident.

A group of owners of small businesses were scheduled to visit Hanawŏn for recruitment but after the news it was canceled. Also an appointment for two-three North Korean refugees who were to be hired as low level government employees was delayed a little. More than anything, the North Korean refugees in Hanawŏn suffered psychologically. I heard their questions like, “Who would hire us for an important post?” The majority of North Korean refugees will be hired to work in the manual labor force. They will not be hired as managers or positions that assume responsibilities. So, many of the North Korean refugees who suffer the most are those who were called intellectuals or the upper class. (Personal interview with Mrs. Chŏn on September 12, 2008)

When some time had passed, the site visits from small business owners resumed, I heard, and job placement training for North Korean refugees at Hanawon continues. Some things seemed to go back to business as usual, yet some things cannot. The trust and hope of becoming fully functioning citizens without social stigma has been tarnished for North Korean refugees. Now they realize they may have to face the social prejudice of
being distrusted while working and living in South Korea.

The stories I heard after this spy arrest incident illuminate a part of the South Korean consciousness that still fears the threat of North Korean communist spies. But who are North Korean spies in the minds of South Koreans? Why do South Koreans avoid associating with North Korean refugees when the Cold War era has passed and there is no longer the threat of a communist invasion of South Korea? To understand, it is important for us to take a look at the ways in which communist spies are understood in South Korea, and the kinds of social measures that took place to get rid of communists—the practice of anti-communist campaigns.

4.4 Negotiating National Belonging

Beginning in the early 1990s, South Korean scholars began to produce a body of literature that reflected on the past practice of anti-communist campaigns (Kim 1997; Kim 2004; Kang and Kim 2004). Many of their stories begin to tell us about the social stigma, as well as the governmental surveillance, that the first generation of North Korean refugees lived under during the repressive regime. According to Chun-man Kang and Hwan-pyo Kim, anti-communism in South Korea created a structural opposition of good and evil. Of course, in this case, the good refers to the anti-communists and the evil to the communists (2004: 22–23). The division of the country into the Communist North and the Capitalist South caused ideological opposition in the Korean peninsula, and consequently South Korea, in an effort to build a nation apart from the North, implemented strong anti-communism as a state ideology (Cho and Lee 2000; Kim 1997; Kim 2004; Yoon 2003). The anti-communist fervor became the mechanism to
differentiate “us” in South Korea from “them” in the North. However, this process of “othering” of communists in South Korea produced the unforeseen effect of creating a dichotomous national consciousness that required the citizens to belong to either one or the other ideological group.

Dong Choon Kim, in his book *Division and Korean Society*, claims that “anticommunism reflects average Koreans’ ‘war experiences,’ and the fear among the ruling classes under the critical condition of division as well as a need for self-justification” (2004:22–23). He further points out the reasons for the continuing paranoia toward spies as a combination of “historical specificity” and “social-psychological factors” (ibid: 23). To elaborate, the historical specificity that Dong Choon Kim refers to is of course the sad fact that many North and South Koreans fought against each other and killed each other during the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. This experience has led some historiographers, such as Bruce Cummings, to call the Korean War a civil war in the Korean Peninsula (1981). The important fact of meeting them across battle lines created the notion of North Koreans as the “enemy” and thus anticomunmism (Kim 2004). I argue that the hostile sentiment toward the North as enemies inevitably created camaraderie among South Koreans, and whoever was not joining in this sentiment became communist sympathizers. Therefore, anticomunmism became an important aspect of South Korean nationalism, which called for citizen unity in being South Koreans.

According to Kim, during the Cold War era, South Korea emphasized anticomunmism as an ideology in nation-state building:

Anti-icommmunism during the post-war era definitely exhibits the characteristics of an ideology used to justify the opposition structure
between South and North Koreas and the division. (Kim 1997:24)64

Establishing national identity was important to newly developing South Korea in the post Korean War era. Shin Gi-Wook further elaborates on the strong sentiment against communism expressed by the earliest political leaders of South Korea in his book, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*:

Rhee65 established anti-Communism as the basis of a new Korea…He contrasted Communism to “freedom and democracy” and maintained that “the two can’t be combined.” For Rhee, communists’ support of trusteeship attested to the fact that communism was not compatible with nationalism. (2007:155)

The “red complex” pervaded South Korean society when anti-communism became the national ideology, and it played an important role in creating much needed national identity. The spread of the red complex in South Korean society took stronger hold at the beginning of the 1960s (Shin 2007) and continued on until the fall of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s. The red complex as a form of anti-communism worked as a mechanism to maintain administrative power and caused a countless number of people much suffering and discrimination (Foley 2003; Kim 2004; Kim 1997; Kim 2008). Anyone who had family members who were left in North Korea or went to North Korea at the end of the Korean War was subject to frequent questioning and was discriminated against in every aspect of social life (Foley 2003). Others, who had moved from Northern Korea during and after the Korean War, were labeled “anti-communist heroes” and were pressured to speak against the North (Kim 2005). Any association with a person in North

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64 Text in Korean: 필자는 전쟁 후의 반공주의가 분명히 남북한 대결구도와 남북한의 분단을 정당화하기 위한 ‘이데올로기’로서의 성격을 갖고 있다고 보았다.
65 Syngman Rhee (1875–1965) was the first president of the Republic of Korea from 1948–1960.
Korea was considered “guilty” as reflected in yŏnjwaje (guilt by association), which was practiced until the early 1990s. Such pervasive fear for associating with North Korea during the Cold War era led South Koreans’ consciousness to erase North Korea from their daily experiences. This practice of forgetting led South Koreans to regard North Korea only as lost brothers to be united with in some unknown future. Therefore, North Korea was allowed to be imagined only in the context of national unification. In short, the Korean War started because of communist North Korea, particularly Kim Il-Sung. However, we must unify with North Korea to resolve decades of suffering of divided families.

To get a glimpse of some personal experiences of anticommunism in the past, it is worthwhile to take a look at ethnographic works on the previous generations of North Korean refugees. The influence of anticommunism among South Koreans is well documented in Gwi-ok Kim’s (1999) ethnography on the first generation of North Korean refugees who crossed the border during the Korean War. Taek-Lim Yoon’s (2003) historical anthropological work on the oral history of villagers in a mid-western province records some of the vivid memories of North Korean refugees’ experiences from the days when anticommunist campaigns affected everyone’s lives. James Foley (2003), in his study on divided families, narrates personal accounts of the first generation of North Korean refugees that illustrate their experiences of being labeled as “ppalgaengi” (communist), a derogatory term referring to a communist.

Other South Korean scholars in various fields have begun to do more research on the impact of anticommunism in South Korean society. Hyuk Bŏm Kwon’s (1998)
article “Reading the Circuit of Anticommunism in South Korea” illustrates how the ideology engendered suppressive social controlling mechanisms. Dong-Choon Kim (2006) argues that the division of the Korean peninsula generated citizen consciousness not by allowing citizens to exercise their rights but by excluding “suspicious” citizens or “non-citizens” (168). Kim alludes to anticommunism as the mechanism that was used to sort out suspicious citizens who did not belong in South Korea (2006:169).

Although the anticommunist campaigns and education were abolished in the 1990s as the government changed from the military dictatorship to a democratic regime, and the policy toward North Korea has shifted from containment to engagement, the effects of anticommunism cannot be ignored or erased from peoples’ minds overnight. As Kwon points out, the “anticommunism circuit” transmits behavioral codes for South Koreans’ reactions when they encounter North Koreans in life, which I will elaborate on in later sections of this chapter. Before we get into the discussion of the socio-cultural behavior surrounding anticommunism, it is important to take a look at how anticommunism seeped into South Korean nationalism.

4.4.1 Remembering the 6.25 and Anticommunism

One way to understand the extent of anticommunism in South Korea is through understanding the ways in which the Korean War was remembered in the past. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, the structural opposition of “us” against “them” during the physical war and the need to separate oneself from the communist North was a survival strategy as well as a personal agenda for many South Koreans during the post-Korean War era. Particularly during the time of the military regime in the 1980s, the
dominant discourse regarding North Korea was to destroy the demonic Northern communists and to protect South Koreans from another attack from the North (Kang and Kim 2003; Kim 2004). Of course, anticommunism existed in South Korea as early as the 1900s, when some independence leaders took up communism as a strategy to fight against the colonial government (Robinson 1988; Suh 1988; Armstrong 2003). However, I would like to focus on the 1980s, as this was the last decade before the influx of t’albukja in the 1990s, when the anticommunism campaigns stopped. By exploring political measures against communists in the 1980s we can understand the lingering effects of anticommunism in social interactions between South Koreans and North Korean refugees.

The South Korean government in the 1980s implemented anticommunism as a social controlling measure through heavy emphasis on anticommunist education for the masses, which included public broadcasts through media, nation-wide campaigning to draw anticommunist posters, and public education in schools. For this dissertation, I focus my analysis on media representations, particularly in Chosun Ilbo, the number one newspaper company that has been criticized as the voice of the government. The newspapers have been instrumental in instilling national consciousness in most modernizing nations (Anderson 1983), and South Korea is not an exception in this case. The national—or we could say official—discourse on anticommunism is well reflected in newspapers, as in the old days newspapers were the major source of public information. From Park Jung-Hui’s dictatorship in the 1970s to Jun Doo-Hwan’s military regime in the 1980s, South Korean society was far from being a free, open society as far as expression of opinion was concerned, and individual opinions were under heavy
censorship when it came to discussing ideology (Kim 2004). The information flow was top-down, from the government to the public, and the newspapers and television stations were known to be mechanisms for transmitting information to the masses. *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, and *Choong-Ang Ilbo* are the three major newspaper companies that survived during the oppressive regime periods. Their role in creating an outlet for the government’s agendas has been widely acknowledged in South Korea.

As it is hard to tease out *pundan*, or the division, of the Korean peninsula as the root cause of anticommunism, it is useful to take a look at the commemoration of the Korean War as a way to survey this public discourse on anticommunism. The Korean War commemoration requires closer examination in regards to South Korea’s unique history as a modern nation. South Korea did not become an independent modern nation until 1948 (Hastings 1987; Lee 1984; Suh 1984). Prior to that time, Korea was occupied by Japan from 1910 to 1945. Two years after South Korea’s launching of its government in 1948, the Korean War (1950–1953) erupted and disrupted the course of nation making. Particularly, the South Korean government’s decision to become a nation despite the division of the country triggered dissatisfaction and anxiety. Communists in the North became uneasy with the thought that Korea might not become a united country, and the North, in an attempt to unite the nation, attacked the South to get rid of the government that stood against the creation of one Korea (Cumings 2004; Hastings 1987).

The media representation of North Korea as a threat to the national security intensified around the Korean War commemoration day, June 25th, during the 1980s when a new military regime was in power.⁶⁷ June 25th for South Koreans is not only the

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⁶⁷ Jeon Doo-hwan led a coup-d’etat after the assassination of President Park. Although the vice president
day the Korean War erupted but is the very name Koreans used to call the Korean War. Known as 6.25 (pronounced yu-gi-o\textsuperscript{68}), the Korean War commemoration day became the day to remind the South Korean public of the tragedy and violence inflicted by the evil North Korean communist regime.

The nation’s remembering and forgetting of the collective past allows a nation’s history to flow at the same time it is fixated on a conflict. The conflict during the Korean War induced much pain, anger (\textit{han}),\textsuperscript{69} and fear of the next attack from North Korea. These feelings gave legitimacy to South Korea’s implementation of anticommunism and allowed South Koreans to believe that the history of suffering is what all Koreans as a nation had experienced. Yet as a nation-state, South Koreans emphasized the outbreak of the Korean War in South Korea in the spectrum of the national history. This meant exclusion of North Korea as a physical part of South Korea. Thus South Korea, the anticommunist state, has created the kind of cultural realm that remembers North Koreans as part of an “imagined” nation, but not of South Korea. To trace how North Korea was remembered in South Korea, I looked at articles published on June 25 in the 1980s and 1990s in \textit{Chosun Ilbo}, one of the oldest and largest South Korean newspapers. Commemoration of a historical event like a war often signifies a nation-state’s discourse making, and, in addition, the ways in which the national discourse becomes internalized in individual memories. The news is shared in everyday conversations and in turn

\textsuperscript{68} This is a pronunciation of the numbers, six, two, and five. For a long time, the Korean War was known as \\textit{Yugio}, not \textit{Han’guk ch\textcircled{\textjaeng}}, which is the Korean translation of the English term. The term \textit{Han’guk ch\textcircled{\textjaeng}} became popularized after Korean movies using it became more popular.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Han} (한) has been known as a specifically Korean psychological phenomenon that comes from extreme suppression of anger and pain. See Grinker 1997.
becomes the social reality.

Analysis of front page newspaper articles published on June 25th from 1980 to 1997 revealed several changes. At the beginning of the 1980s, the front page of *Chosun Ilbo* reported national commemorative events that hosted massive demonstrations against the communist North. The contents of the news were highly propagandizing against North Korea and warned the citizens of a possible new attack by North Korea. However, toward the end of the 1990s, the front page cover stories did not mention the Korean War. In the 1990s, the majority of articles told stories of individuals who had been subject to hardship during the war. These changes in commemoration seemed to echo changes in the political atmosphere and specific agendas at the time.

The Korean War left North and South Koreans with trauma, grief, and pain from the loss of their beloved ones and their homes. The casualties of the war did not stop at the counting of dead bodies, but included the division of the two countries that led to a complete halt of communication among the people (Grinker 1997).

### 4.4.2 History and Memory of the Korean War

The fluid nature of memory allows the state to manipulate how the past is remembered and thus utilize commemorative remembrance in the construction of a national history that gives the nation an identity. Since, as Gillis claims, “memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena” (1994:7), the context and position of the nation at the time of commemoration must be carefully examined. As Gillis further states, “National memory is shared by people who have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard
themselves as having a common history. They are bound together as much by forgetting as by remembering” (1994:7). Cole (2001) also describes how the memory is reconstructed according to the needs of the nation that is in the process of building its identity in the present.

Our memories are constantly reconstructed in keeping with the needs of the present. Since memories constantly change as groups evolve, they need stable anchorage in space through acts of commemoration. It is through commemoration that collective memory is localized—given shape, form, and feeling and thus made memorable. In turn, commemorations help constitute authoritative versions of a group’s past (23).

A war memory in particular in a national history becomes a foundation for its national identity. Losses of lives, as well as discontinuity of normalcy, create a disrupted juncture in a nation’s history. This offers a nation an opportunity to look back and reconfigure its identity as it reflects on the past conflict. The Korean War, sometimes referred to as the Forgotten War in the U.S., remains in the memories of the people of Korea. However, how these memories remember the war has not been left to the people but to the state.

The war between South and North Korea broke out on June 25, 1950. The war is remembered to have begun on a quiet Sunday morning while everyone was peacefully asleep, when the North Korean army suddenly attacked South Korea (Chosun Ilbo 1982). Discussion on what led to the attack is never included in commemoration. Only the attack by the communists of the North is continuously emphasized. As Sturken points out,

All memories are “created” in tandem with forgetting; to remember everything would amount to being overwhelmed by memory. Forgetting is a necessary component in the construction of memory.
Yet the forgetting of the past in a culture is often highly organized and strategic…The writing of historical narrative necessarily involves the elimination of certain elements…A desire for coherence and continuity produces forgetting. (1997:7–8).

What is forgotten in commemorating the Korean War is the part that addresses the cause of the conflict. Only the outcome—the war, atrocities, loss, and hatred of communism—remained in memories, and thus in history.

In the midst of the Cold War era, it is no surprise that South Korea emphasized hatred toward communism, since at that time one could be either communist or capitalistic American allies. The occupying forces in the post-Japanese era in the Korean peninsula from 1945–1950 comprised the Soviet Union in the North and the U.S in the South. The U.S. force was there to patrol but not to govern. The following statement by Victor Cha describes world affairs at the time: “The U.S. knew little about Japan when it occupied the country in 1945 and even less about Korea when it received the Japanese surrender in the southern half of the peninsula” (2004:147). However, when the Korean War erupted, the U.S. government became involved and a new alliance between the U.S. and South Korea was formed (Hastings 1987; Suh 1984). The U.S-Korea alliance that developed in 1951–1953 (Cha 2004) was a relationship that resulted from the Cold War conflict between the Soviet Union and the U.S. As a new nation that became allied with a democratic, capitalistic society at odds with communist regimes, South Korea formed its identity as “the other,” the opposite of communist. Emphasis on anti-communism became the slogan for this newly developed nation. As White points out such binary oppositions are important in the identity making of a nation.

One of the premises of structuralist theories of society…is that
identities depend upon relations of contrast and oppositions. These oppositions in turn frame the contexts for creating or “negotiating” national identities…collective identities are always “in the making.” (White 2000: 501)

Analyzing the representation of Korean War commemoration from afar rather than during fieldwork is inevitably limited. However, discourse analysis on the media coverage of the war revealed critical aspects of the South Korean identity making process that each administration attempted. Newspapers have played major roles in portraying the North-South relationships and manipulating attitudes of South Koreans while commemorating the Korean War. The “master narrative” of offensive North Korea as the perpetrator vs. South Korea produces hegemonic values that are encoded in newspapers and television.

[C]ommemorative rites, memorials, and more recently, museums, are routinely studied as sites for the production of cultural memory…communicative practices are of interest not as a means of expressing prior cultural meanings but as acts that actively create the past, or at least create the past as understood and felt by social actors within particular and historical circumstances (White 2000: 495).

This “communicative practice” played out in various genres of discourse becomes a powerful tool in creating collective values and identities. Stories told in the media frame the war in a specific way so that it becomes a trope standing for the real event that people had once experienced but that is no longer real (White 1996).

4.4.3 Patriotic Citizens Do Not Associate with Communists

The anticommunist (pan’gong) and anti-spy (panch’ŏp) campaigns engendered citizen consciousness of staying vigilant about North Korea’s plans to destroy South
Korea by calling out “pan’gong panch’ŏp.” The effects of the anti-communist ideology of South Korea fill up a portion of recent South Korean academic literature, and many scholars whose lives were entangled with anticommunism have begun to produce reflexive accounts on the effects of the red complex (Kim 1997, 2006; Kim 2004).

Particularly in the 1980s, anticommunism worked as a social control measure, as I have discussed in the previous section. The newspapers produced the stories of the pukkoe, the Northern puppet’s schemes to attack South Korea again, and they urged South Korean citizens to stand guard against potential spies and North Korea’s propaganda to turn South Koreans into communists. The anticommunist campaigns marked who is on our side and who is not. If someone was labeled as a communist it meant betrayal and came with a heavy price. Many South Korean scholars have produced accounts of people who were labeled as Ppalgaengi (communist), a derogatory term for a communist (Kang and Kim 2004; Kim 1998; Yoon 2007).

A newspaper column published on June 25, 1980 in Chosun Ilbo and entitled “New Dimension of Anti-Communist Education” urged South Koreans not to forget the Korean War that had caused grim experiences for South Koreans.

Among the Han’guk saramdŭl, South Koreans who live in this land, at least for those of age forty and older, 6.25, the Korean War, is living history in their memories, and this history of war is none but “my” experience, “my” story, in short “my” history. For the older generation, the 6.25 was our war and our history. In this sense, the 6.25 is “living history” and “present past.” (p. 10.)

This individualized memory of the war necessarily put the responsibility to be vigilant

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70 Text in Korean: 이 땅에서 살고 있는 한국 사람들 가운데서 적어도 40대 이상의 연령층에 있어선 6.25는 그들의 살아있는 기억 속에 꿈틀거리고 있는 역사요, 그 전쟁의 역사는 다른 누구의 것도 아닌 ‘나’의 체험, ‘나’의 얘기, 바로 ‘나’의 역사이다. 기성세대로에게 있어 6.25는 곧 우리의 전쟁이었고, 우리의 역사는. 6.25는 그런 의미에서 ‘살아있는 역사요’ 현재하는 과거’이다
against North Korea on individuals, and individual readers then formed a collective awareness against North Korea. The newspaper also presented reminders of the painful past. For the years 1981, 1982, 1983, and 1984, on June 25, *Chosun Ilbo* featured commemorative articles, personal stories of wives whose husbands died while fighting the communist north, opinion columns reminding the readers of the atrocious acts by the North during the war, and articles relating foreign agencies’ reporting of North Korea’s preparation for military aggression.

Continuing the anti-communism theme, on June 25, 1982, another column was published, commemorating the war with a resolution. The column lamented a tragic incident that occurred 31 years ago and continued on to remind the readers that North Korea has not changed a bit from the same offensive North, scheming to attack at any time.

While a generation has passed, the fact that North Korean has not changed one bit while South Korea has, makes the point that we cannot forget 6.25 all the more. Because we cannot afford not to be cautious of another 6.25… behind the continuous camouflaged peace talk lies the scheme of unification by communism (*Chosun Ilbo*: 2).

Public reminders like this one continuously renewed the South Korean public’s consciousness about the potential chaos that North Korea could bring at any moment, insisting that awareness of the threat of North Korea’s attack must be kept alive in all parts of the society.

The same year, in another section, there was a more humanistic story of a widow

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*Text in Korean:* 한 세대를 지나는 동안 남쪽은 달라졌는데, 북쪽은 조금도 변하지 않았다는 점에서 6.25를 더욱더 잊을 수가 없는 것이다. 또 다른 6.25를 경계하지 않을 수 없기 때문이다…계속되는…위장된 평화공세 뒤에는 적화통일의 흉계가 도사리고 있다.
who raised four sons single handedly and won a Proud Mother’s award. Mrs. Han, who saw her husband for the last time on June 25, 1950, continued to support her family by working a series of jobs of hard labor. Her story reminds the readers of their personal sacrifice and loss that supported the national cause. The article ends with the following sentence: “Even though she offered her husband to the country, Mrs. Han transformed the despair into hope and looked into the sky silently on June 25, 1982.” So the Korean War becomes the day to remember the heroes who silently disappeared but recur on this day as stories to remind readers of their sacrifice for their beloved nation—South Korea.

Taek-lim Yoon offers a critical insight on this view in her writing:

The vast amount of researches done on Korean War so far shows several common characteristics, even though their theoretical approaches differ such as revisionist, traditionalist, and alternative perspectives. These studies at first define Korean War as a political event and determine its historical significance in domestic and international historical contexts. Underlying assumption is that Korea, as a nation, as a collective experienced the war, and Korean War is a war that occurred only within the physical boundary of the Korean peninsula. In other words, even though multiple approaches about Korean War exist, all of them assume that Koreans experienced the war in a uniformed way. These assumptions ignore the various experiences of multiple agencies within the Korean ethnic nation. Analyses on Korean War could have been drawn from various experiences of people in different regions, age groups, and gender, but the current scholarship does not consider such multiple interpretations of heterogeneous agencies (2003:21)

Constant reminders to be on guard against North Korea’s second attack were produced and displayed in public. The ideology of anticommunism seeped into every aspect of South Korean lives.
The hyper-visibility of warnings against North Korea’s threat and potential *kanch’ŏp*, spies, has made South Koreans unconsciously avoid actively engaging in North Korean issues. The awareness of spies in 2008 has broadened to include all kinds of espionage, including industrial spies. One of the billboards I saw on my way to eating the famous winter crabs in Gyeongsang province showed a strange pastiche of mismatched images that warned the viewers to prioritize security (Figure 3). The caption on the bottom of the billboard under what seems like a flying crab read “Unification for Tomorrow, Security for Today.” The message seems to say that we may think about unification was not an immediate concern for the police department.

4.5 Cultural Remnants from the Anticommunist Past

4.5.1 “Na, pan’gong kyoyuk saedaeya.”

On more than one occasion, I witnessed South Koreans blurting out “I belong to the anti-communism education generation.” I heard similar sentences spoken among
South Koreans in random settings such as at bars, on the streets, and in casual conversations. Most of the time, this phrase signified that the speaker’s age group and cultural generation. Such phrases would not occur during conversations with North Korean refugees. In this sense, anti-communism education becomes a cultural dimension with which South Koreans can gauge their social relational distances.

In Ansan, my friends were involved in a photo exhibit that was held after their visit to Nepal. A volunteer teacher from Set Net School, Jiûn, was their official photographer on an excursion to an educational outreach program to promote art education in remote villages in Nepal. When she returned, she held an exhibit in a small gallery in Ansan where an ethnic minority town called Borderless Village was located. People involved in the project were South Korean NGO workers, some journalists, and artists. Some Nepali counterparts came to participate in the photo exhibition and cultural workshop. After the show was over, I was sitting alone while waiting for my friend to go to a restaurant together. All of a sudden, I heard one of the staff members of the gallery blurting out, “Na, pan’gong kyoyuk saedaeya! (I am anti-communism education generation!)” Then, a younger staff person responded “I received anticommunism education at home!” The randomness of this statement startled me. So I looked up to observe what was happening. Young staff members as well as gallery workers were amusing themselves while everyone headed for the restaurant. They seemed to be talking about age differences among themselves. The conversation seems to have begun with a benign comment from someone to a staff member, “You don’t know anything about anticommunism education,” which usually means the person being addressed is young. Belonging to the anti-communism education generation indicates that one was in grade
school in the 1980s. So when used among South Koreans, the phrase “anti-communism education” becomes a marker of generational belonging to certain time period.

I was surprised to hear “pan’gong kyoyuk saedae” among South Koreans even though its use was as a jocular phrase to demarcate generational differences. As I was not part of the conversation, I could not really figure out the context of the outburst, but the younger one’s retort seems to suggest she also wanted to show affiliation to this education. The interaction among the staff shows how South Koreans use the notion of anticommunism as part of their being South Koreans.

At other times, when interaction occurs between North Koreans and South Koreans, this consciousness generates discomfort among South Koreans. At a local welfare office in Seoul, I asked a social worker, Mrs. Park, who is in charge of the Saet’ŏmin Settlement Section at the welfare office, whether she had any change in her notions about North Korean refugees as she began to work with them.

I: You first began to know about [North Korean refugees] as your job was transferred to this section. Was there any change in your preconceived notions about North Koreans because of your work with North Korean refugees?

Mrs. Park: First of all, that is the question I ask these days. The training I do…when I train new employees and new volunteers, I ask that the first thing. What do you think of Pukhan saram (North Koreans)? I am not as knowledgeable [about t’albukja] since I only began to work in this position eight months ago. If you ask what the foremost thing everyone acknowledges is…that they are scary people. That’s because (a little pause) even though I am not pan’gong kyoyuk saedae, I did receive education until the second grade. Even then when I hear word Pukhan saram, I associate it with communism and think “scary people.” That was the first thing I thought of (personal interview, August 26, 2008).
The negative connotation attached to the images of North Koreans among South Koreans is fairly common. Another counselor, Ms. Yu, who spent two years as a mental health counselor at Hanawon told me she also belonged to this generation and recollected his first reaction of knowing that she was counseling North Koreans. Ms. Yu claimed during a personal interview (August, 8, 2008) that he did not know that Hanawon was a facility for t'albukja and at first he thought it was just a mental facility.

I: When you heard Hanawon is a facility for t’albukja, did you feel any…

Yu: I was really surprised. Eh…the director that I met and other counselors said, “Why is this person crying?” So I asked “who is that person?” I asked that for the first time.

I: Oh, someone you saw at Hanawon was crying?

Yu: Yes. Then after that we went out for a drink. It was an official dinner. I asked at the dinner. “By the way, what kind of person was that and why was he crying so much?” Then I heard he was North Korean. I was not only surprised but shocked and said “Oh, really?” I was surprised. This was a kind of North Korean that I have never met or heard of, and the only North Koreans I have met were those instructors who came to give us anticommunism education. Now I have to deal with them personally, but instead of trying to find solution for this situation, I went into a panic. Since I do not have experience…I couldn’t remember anything and just was blank.

I: Then you’ve met kwisunyongsa through the anticommunism education?

Yu: Yeah, they came to school.

I: Really?

Yu: Yes, I am that generation. I learned that North Koreans are people with horns on their heads. Because of anticommunism education.

I: Kwisunyongsa is also from North Korea…
Yu: That’s right. They only say bad things about North Korea. Because of that, I was scared during my classes [at Hanawon]. The very fact that I had to go to class.

I: At first?

Yu: No, during the entire two years. Before each class, I prepared for the class, but I also prayed. I went to church three times a day.

I: At Hanawŏn?

Yu: Yes. Inside Hanawŏn

As time passes and the interaction among North Korean refugees and South Korean fieldworkers lengthens, their first impression of being scared subsides, and many South Korean fieldworkers become advocates for abolishing prejudice. However, as it is not so common for South Korean laypeople to be in situations to get to know North Korean refugees very well in person, it is not so easy to undo the social prejudice.

By tracing the contents of pan’gong, we can delve into the causes of this discomfort that South Koreans feel in social interactions. The barriers against North Korean refugees’ truly belonging to South Korea lie in this shared cultural intimacy of pan’gong that’s deeply ingrained in South Korean consciousness.

However, the abolition of anticommunism education in the 1990s and the social and political changes that have taken place in South Korea since then have begun to erase the traces of pan’gong kyoyuk among the public. Forgetting of the past history of anticommunism as well as the past war that took place in the 1990s has led to indifference to North Korea. Ms. Yu later elaborated on her efforts to correct misconceptions about North Koreans, saying, “There are misconceptions about the North Koreans such as they are scary people. But at the same time, there is indifference. I tell
others [South Koreans] over a thousand North Koreans live in Yangchŏn-gu alone, and then they say ‘We have that kind of people?’ Then I inform them how many live in what province and how they live.”

The abolition of anticommunism seems to have removed South Koreans’ interest in knowing about North Koreans. If anticommunism emphasized on avoiding North Koreans due to fear, then the absence of anticommunist campaigns brought indifference to North Koreans. So in normal settings, South Koreans most likely will not think about North Koreans, but when they encounter North Koreans in person, the past memory of anticommunism education brings out the practice of avoiding North Koreans out of fear of association.

4.5.2 “Morūmyŏn kanch’ŏp” You Are a Spy If You Don’t Know

On the other hand, the anticommunist education produced a more humorous use of spy when used among South Koreans. I found an example of using the term, kanch’ŏp (spy) in random in popular media. The serendipitous encounter of this finding came from a conversation with my former program officer at East West Center. I had just returned from the field and paid a visit to his office when he asked me if I had heard about a new Korean drama called Star’s Lovers. I was curious about this drama that had caught his attention and watched a few episodes.

In this drama which was aired in 2008, the heroine is an internationally famous Korean cultural icon named Ma Ri Lee who falls in love with a Korean literature professor named Chulsu Kim. The professor and Ma Ri Lee herself are sitting in a lobby where a large screen TV is showing a promotional advertisement for the actress. The
professor has no interest in the TV ad, in which several people dressed as regular citizens keep talking about Lee Ma Ri, as if every single South Korean should know the name. At the end of this supposed advertisement for the fictitious star, one young man blurts out, “morŭmyŏn kanch’ŏp iryo!” (You would be a spy if you don’t know her). This phrase, “morŭmyŏn kanch’ŏp,” connoting that one was a spy if she did not possess a common knowledge, became a common phrase among young people in the 1990s when the anti-communism had relaxed. This scene reminded me of my high school years when the use of this term was commonly used and heard. It usually added a humor to the story and an importance to the fact being discussed since lack of knowledge about the particular piece of information signified you did not know the most basic common knowledge. From this episode, it was evident that those who produced the program was my contemporary and had been exposed to anticommunism education as well. The transformation of the negative connotation of kanch’ŏp (spy) was significant since when it was used in-group settings, it actually strengthened the bond among the members who shared the same knowledge. However, the humor is lost when the word ‘kanch’ŏp’ is applied to North Korean refugees as I have illustrated and discussed in previous sections. This contesting aspect of anticommunism provides a stronger sense of ties among South Koreans.

Next, I will try to present a broad picture of the changes that have occurred since the 1990s, when North Korean refugees began to enter South Korea in large numbers.

4.6 Forgetting the 6.25

By the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, changes in the nature of the relationship between North and South Korea began to arise in
news media. In 1997, *Chosun Ilbo* reported that relief food aid to famine-stricken North Korea would arrive by the next day. The newspaper still ran commemorative articles about the war but the language was much more muted, and North Korea was referred to as Pukhan. Anti-communism or the threat of another invasion was not mentioned at this time. Rather, the articles focused on tragic events and pictures of main battles during the war. During this era, when a new government was launched in 1997, President Kim Dae-Jung’s pro-North Korean Sunshine Policy brought these changes in the commemoration of Korean War. During the 1990s when North Korea began to suffer from a serious famine and shortage of food, North Koreans began to flee from their hometowns in search of food and shelter. Many accounts of the defectors reflect that their reasons for leaving the country were economic as well as political. This fact resulted in sympathetic attitudes toward North Korea which had been called as a rough state until several years prior. In 1998, *Chosun Ilbo* again reported on the Korean War. But here for the first time, this daily newspaper uses the term, Han’guk chŏnjaeng, Korean War, instead of 6.25. The title of the special report read “Forty-eight Years Ago That Day…Korean War ‘The Scene of han.’” Pictures showed bombing sites and military units, but never mentioned “North Monsters” invading the peaceful South Korea. No columns warning of a second war appeared. As a commemorative activity, a picture of school children looking at artillery used during the Korean War was reported. The children were quoted as saying “Wow, marvelous.”

Even in 1998, *Chosun Ilbo* reported a personal story of a woman whose life has been touched by the war. This time, an American woman looking for a trace of her

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72 Richard Grinker (1997) defines this emotion, han, as loss, mourning, and resentment. He also relates this emotion to the sentiment arising from the division of country, people, and families.
brother who died during the war was introduced. Memories of Korean women’s
sufferings and their dedication to the national cause had disappeared by this time. The
political regime of this time did not need to remind individuals to sacrifice for the nation
whose identity is to be at odds with North Korea. The binary opposition of the red vs. us
had disappeared.

As Richard Grinker points out, by this time, North Korea was no longer the nation
whose people needed rescuing from an oppressive regime or the war.

The absence of images of the north and of the Korean War is
remarkable for a country whose “paramount goal” (chisang kwache) is
the reunification of the nation. Nations often trace their histories and
ideals persuasively through museums, exhibitions, ruins, and sites of
pilgrimage and festival that contain the fragments of past tragedies.
But in South Korea, visitors do not see bombed or burned buildings,
preserved for memory, and except for some photographs, museums
show few visible fragments of the Korean War. (1997:29)

As this statement points out, commemoration of the Korean War is no longer needed in
the nation-building project. With the end of the Cold War era, South Korea no longer
needed the other to construct its identity.

4.7 “Where Are You From?” South Korean Response to North Korean Accents

“When did the Korean War end?” I asked 30 South Korean 7th graders. Silence
ensued for several seconds. Confused looks on the students told me they did not know.
Someone raised a hand and said, “1945?” 73 I shook my head. Another student raised a
hand and said with more confidence, “1953.” 74 I could see the student thinking, “It has to

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73 1945 is the year Korea was liberated from the colonial rule of Japan at the end of the World War II.
74 The cease-fire agreement between North Korea and the United Nations Allied Force was signed on July
be 1953 because that’s when the fighting stopped and the line was drawn at the 38th parallel.” I answered negatively again. More perplexed and confused looks followed. “1954?” Another wrong answer. After a few seconds of silence in confusion, someone finally said, “It hasn’t ended!”

In the summer of 2008, I traveled to Kwangju, a city in North Jolla province, South Korea to visit a junior high school with a North Korean refugee youth to give lectures on unification education. The lecture I prepared focused on cultural integration, and since the lecture was to be given to students in grade schools, I organized the talk around the educational curriculum and school life in North Korea. The lecture was divided into a 20-minute talk and a 30-minute-long question and answer session. I gave a brief history of North Korean refugees who have been coming to South Korea since the Korean War to let the students know that North Koreans have always been a part of the society. Discussing the North Korean educational system engaged students since they were able to compare their lives to those of students in North Korea. After the talk, I introduced the North Korean refugee youth, Chŏl who had been sitting in the back of the class until the end of the talk. South Korean middle school students were surprised to meet a North Korean in person and let out murmurs of excitement. Chŏl’s stories about his school days in North Korea opened the eyes of the students to the fact that North Koreans also have normal school days. Discovery of North Koreans living in South Korea was a new revelation to these students.

The South Korean middle school students from that day did not know much about the Korean War—the very cause of cultural divergence and lack of information.

23, 1953.
about North Korea. Even the history teacher-in-training\textsuperscript{75} told me how hard it was for her to teach due to lack of teaching material on the Korean War. As the students’ answers to my question on the end of the Korean War illustrate, the unresolved issue of the Korean War has been shelved in South Korean memories. As time passed, North Korea became “Another Country.”

The forgetting of North Korea for the past five decades can be regarded as lack of knowledge about North Korea. The evidence for such utter absence of knowledge on anything North Korean can be found in encounters between North Koreans and South Koreans in everyday settings. In particular, the linguistic difference between North Korean and South Korean is so vast that the majority of South Koreans do not recognize North Korean accents.

In the fall of 2008, I was walking with my roommate, a North Korean refugee with whom I was sharing an apartment during my fieldwork, on the street of Gangnam in one of the affluent districts of Seoul, and we stopped for street food. We were discussing shopping for clothes, and all of a sudden, the vendor asked her where she was from. The question perplexed both my roommate and me, who were thinking of our conversation. All of a sudden, we became self-conscious of our identity.

\begin{verbatim}
The vendor: Where are you from?
Mrs. Park: Excuse me?
The vendor: I asked you where you’re from. Your accent is not from here. I know many ethnic Korean Chinese.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{75} At another school in Gyeongsang province, an education major student who was doing her curriculum training at the school confessed that she had a hard time collecting Korean War related materials for history class. Most of her talk focused on the outbreak of the war on June 25, 1950 and on casualties from the war.
Mrs. Park: Why do you ask?”

(My fieldnote entry, October 24, 2008)

At this point, the vendor realized we were not happy with his question and he changed the subject. The reason for his asking the question has to do with the large number of ethnic Korean Chinese who are working in South Korea. However, many people still do not realize that North Koreans are living in South Korea and they can be in the vicinity of their daily lives. The reason for North Korean refugees’ not revealing their identity comes from the discomfort displayed by South Koreans in social interaction with them. One of my research participants, who came to South Korea in 2007, told me that he was less and less encouraged to be who he was due to negative reactions he received from South Koreans. Particularly during a job search, the South Korean owners and managers did not want to hire North Koreans. He said that when he went to a find a job as a driver, the owner of the company asked him where he was from. He told the owner he was North Korean, and the owner told him he could not have the job since he’d know nothing about driving or the streets of Seoul. To the South Korean owner, North Korea is a place without modernity. This participant had been driving in North Korea for nearly ten years as a personal driver of a police chief. One of the North Korean refugee women told me, “I was told to lie and say I was ethnic Korean-Chinese when looking for a job. No one will hire North Koreans, but they hire Korean-Chinese.” Although it is not too clear whether the avoidance of hiring North Koreans is actually rooted in the “red-complex” that was pervasive in the past, several incidents pointed to the cause of South Koreans’ discomfort as being in anti-communist ideology. The more fundamental root cause of this has to do with the continuing division of the country. The erasure of public
memory of North Korea and its people in South Korea has resulted in amnesia in regard to the on-going war, and most South Korean youth would never think of North Korea as a part of South Korea. However, the continuing conflict between North Korea and South Korea makes it difficult for North Korean refugees to live as South Korean citizens.

The Korean War itself is remembered as a thing of the past, as an archaic event that occurred at a point in history separated from the reality of 2008. Fifty-five years of cease-fire between North and South Koreas has led the public to believe that the war ended in 1953, when in fact it was only the bloodshed that ended. As the population of the Korean War generation dwindles, the memory of the Korean War grows thin in the collective memory of South Korea. Pierre Nora once said that “we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (1989:7). And when that happens, said Nora, we are left with “lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory” (1989:7). There are no major sites of memory where the public could easily visto remember the war in South Korea. However, exception could be the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), where most civilian visits are restricted for national security, and the War Memorial (1997:33), which a few remaining war veterans and tourists visit. While other nations commemorate their past history by constructing sites of memory, Koreans are unable to create such sites due to the fact the war has not been completed. Ironically DMZ and the War Memorial reminds Koreans of the continuing ideological war, rather than providing a site for commemorating the physical war that had taken place over sixty years ago. Thus Koreans are unable to commemorate and reflect on the war. Korean War is remembered only as something that had erupted in 1950 by North Korean attack.
The history of a nation is reconstructed around memories of the people of the present and past. As a nation struggles to configure its present identity, a commemoration of major historical events such as a war is employed to create a national discourse to bring people into unity. However, the fluid nature of memory allows the state to manipulate how the past is remembered and reconstruct the past as a part of national history. In doing so, erasure of memory as much as remembering becomes a tool for constructing national identity and developing cohesion among the citizens, as Marita Sturken points out:

All memories are “created” in tandem with forgetting... Forgetting is a necessary component in the construction of memory. Yet the forgetting of the past in a culture is often highly organized...The writing of historical narrative necessarily involves the elimination of certain elements...A desire for coherence and continuity produces forgetting. (1997:7–8)

As Gillis states, “national memory is shared by people who have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard themselves as having a common history. They are bound together as much by forgetting as by remembering” (1994:7).

Even if the events reflected in the collective memory are not lived by individual members of the collective, since it’s written as the national history, the collective memory is accepted and becomes representative of the nation’s past. As a newly developing country during the post Korean War era, South Korea struggled to rewrite its past. Thus, forgetting of the stalemate status of the war allowed the nation-state making process in South Korea. In doing this, South Korea has created its identity as a nation-state against North Korea. By emphasizing the outbreak of the war on June 25, 1950, South Korea created the image of North Korea as the belligerent enemy state and its
4.8 Conclusion

Despite the discontinuation of anticommunism campaigns, the reactions to the anticommmunist and anti-spy slogans still can be traced in daily interactions among Koreans. Without much prompting to the discussion of anticommmunism per se, South Koreans associate the hardships of North Koreans with this social paranoia against Northern communists.

When I was invited to have lunch with Mrs. Lee one day, she decided to invite another South Korean friend of hers, Mrs. Park. They had been close friends for years but still were struggling with their differences. Mrs. Lee introduced me to her friend and wanted me to talk about some of the South Korean prejudices against North Korean refugees. Our conversation flew to the difficulties North Korean refugees face in finding jobs in South Korea. In particular, we were talking about many North Korean refugee women’s difficulty with revealing their identity when looking for employment in restaurants, cleaning services, and other menial jobs. Mrs. Park said, “It will be harder for t’albukja to find jobs as cleaning staff for rich families. People with money and status will never hire North Korean refugees.” I pressed her for an explanation for her statement, and she replied, “What if [North Korean refugees] are really spies? Who knows what kind of information may be leaked. The family conversations could be very confidential.” When I asked her if she could repeat that phrase for recording, she became embarrassed and avoided further discussion. As this incident suggests, it is still firmly believed among many South Koreans that North Korean refugees would not easily be
able to integrate into the society as equal members of the nation-state. The difficulty of conducting research on the South Koreans’ behavior around anticommunism is due to this avoidance, which I argue is about being ashamed to acknowledge the prejudice. Although everyone assumes these things, it is still awkward for South Koreans to claim they have this prejudice. On the flip side, North Korean refugees will not openly discuss their experiences of prejudice from South Koreans for fear of losing the very little that they have. Although I have heard more than once from my North Korean refugee friends of the lack of trust and outright denial to opportunities in the society, these things are still not openly discussed.
This chapter discusses how multiple existing discourses surrounding unification ideology have become an outlet to negotiate identity in South Korea. The unification ideology works as a dimension of “cultural intimacy” for Korean nationalism, and in return offers room for the culturally heterogeneous Korean nationalisms to culminate in the homogenized goal of unifying the divided nation. In Chapter Three, I discussed how the South Korean practice of naming North Koreans according to shifting historical contexts has resulted in the existence of multiple North Korean identities, which makes defining North Korean identities a complex matter. In a similar way, the ideology of unification has produced multiple discourses each time South Korea experienced changes in historico-political circumstances.

The chapter starts with a story about my crossing the border between South Korea
and North Korea. This story illustrates the difficulty of crossing between two nation-states for exchanges on the civilian level. The complexity surrounding the political border problem between North and South also complicates everyday life for Koreans on either side of the border when they travel to each other’s countries. My own trip to Kaesŏng reveals how fragile South Koreans’ sense of personal security is when they travel to North Korea. This example also opens up a discussion of the hardship of returning home for many t’albukja. The chapter then goes into the story of the current unification discourse. To provide a broader understanding of how unification ideology has developed in South Korea, I review the unification policies of the recent past through my readings of the “White Paper on Unification” from the 1990s and 2000s to illustrate the changes that have occurred. Then I discuss how t’albukja themselves construct their identity as future leaders of unification, which provides them incentives to become successfully integrated in society. Particularly among highly educated, young t’albukja adults, there is a discourse that their taking leadership roles in unification efforts engender a sense of legitimacy and belonging in South Korea. Utilizing their bicultural knowledge about both South and North Korea, t’albukja participate actively in unification discourse and negotiate their national identity in South Korea.

5.1 Crossing the Fragile Line, the Border

July is the monsoon season in Korea. With the onset of summer, humidity brings chill in the early mornings and heat in the afternoons. It was no exception on July 6, 2008 when I joined a day tour to Kaesŏng, North Korea,\(^76\) the old capital city of Koryŏ.

\(^76\) See footnote 4 in chapter 1.
dynasty (918–1392), which is about 60 kilometers away from Seoul. The tour was organized through Yonsei University’s Institute for Korean Unification Studies for its researchers and graduate students. The day started around six in the morning when I met the group outside Hongdae subway station in drizzling rain.

My field notes on July 6, 2008 read:

We were due at the ImjingangStation at six thirty. The van drove out of Seoul and entered Chayuro or the Liberty Road that connects Seoul to the border area. It had been drizzling since dawn. The van drove in the misty rain on an empty highway in a morning slumber, and everyone remained quiet. They seemed to be pensive about the upcoming trip to North Korea or still in an early morning stupor.

The van pulled into a large parking lot at ImjingangStation around six thirty. To my surprise, we had to board a shuttle in groups to move again to Dorasan Station. I had expected to board the tour bus at Imjingang Station and receive the pass on the bus like other group tours, but the entry permit to North Korea was to be obtained at the ch’uripsamuso or border control office at Dorasan Station. There we were guided to the second floor where breakfast was served in the cafeteria.

After breakfast, I received the tour pass in the lobby with my group. The pass was a paper about three by seven that showed a standard passport sized photo of me in the middle, my name, and my affiliation underneath the photo. The plastic cover of this pass was attached to a string so that we could wear it around our neck and exhibit our identification. Our South Korean guide advised everyone to wear the pass at all times while in North Korea, since this was the only legitimate identification we would have while in North Korea. Then before leaving the lobby, we were told to leave cell phones in a small, plastic basket that had our group number written on the front. Then I proceeded to “exit” the city with everyone else. By then it was seven thirty. The exit process was similar to an immigration process at an

77 Both Imjingang and Dorasan are geographic names in North Korea. During the Roh Moo-hyun administration, as a gesture to reconnect North and South through a railroad, two of the newly opened northernmost stations were named after these places. Dorasan Station is the final train station before the border and is connected to the ch’uripsamuso.

78 The office is called ch’uripsamuso, which can be translated as “admittance and exit office.” As North Korea and South Korea each do not recognize the other as an independent nation-state, the border control is not called “immigration.” Leaving South Korea is called ch’ulgyŏng (exit the city), and returning to South Korea is called ipkyŏng (entering the city).
I put my bag on a conveyor belt, and I walked through the scanner and proceeded to a kiosk that was covered with glass windows. I presented my “pass” to the inspector who stamped it and exited through the door to board bus number fifteen.

The scheduled departure time was eight a.m. But there was a delay from North Korea in getting the permission for our departure. We boarded the bus again at eight fifty. The guide told us we would wait until the kunsa pun’gyesón or military borderline opened. Finally, the bus started to pull out of the damp parking lot and it drove toward the border area in light rain.

My field notebook entry from that day illustrates the various steps I had to take to be on the tour bus en route to North Korea. First, I had to arrive at the parking lot of Imjingang station from where Hyundai Asan Company transported us to the ch’uripsamuso in groups. From that moment, we had to move in groups. The process to enter North Korea took more than two hours. The drive to Kaesŏng took only a half an hour at the speed of thirty kilometers. I was told before going that at a normal speed people usually drove in Seoul, the drive from the ch’uripsamuso to the city would take around fifteen to twenty minutes. But from the time we arrived at Imjingang station until we received permission to enter North Korea and could leave South Korea, everything seemed to take a longer time than I expected. Although Kaesŏng was the closest non-South Korean city I have every traveled to, the time it took before I could even board the bus seemed unusually long.

The exit process from the South Korean side resembled the exit process before going to another country. I received a permit to travel much like receiving a day visa stamp on a passport when traveling abroad, and I passed through a security inspection just like at an airport. However, the tight security measures required to enter North
Korea presented a different level of insecurity. The following field note entry depicts this sentiment.

On the way to the city, while the bus drove on the wire-fenced roads, the guide made announcements: (1) while in North Korea, do not use the terms that refer to North Korea and South Korea as nation states. Instead, use terms like pukchŭk or “North side” and namchŭk or “South side.” This is to remove any political ramification of our identity. (2) Do not make any comment that may sound like criticism of North Korea. (3) Photography is absolutely prohibited while the bus is in motion. Photographing North Korean people, houses, and particularly military personnel is also completely banned. Photographing is allowed only in designated areas. (4) Any attempt to converse with passersby is absolutely forbidden. (5) A violator of any of the rules would be fined over one thousand dollars and may face confinement in prison in North Korea.

As no cell phones were allowed in North Korea, imprisonment meant the potential danger of being completely under North Korean legal agents’ control. The guide also said that there was a lady who had been imprisoned in North Korea for several days for breaking one of these rules. (Field note on July 6, 2008)

The rules and restrictions about where we could take photographs, to whom we could talk, when and where we could walk around or should ride the bus were signs that traveling across the border between North and South was a risky business. Such controlling of tours might not have been only for South Koreans, as it seems from the accounts I have read of other foreign travelers to North Korea. But I was not sure whether these rules extended to all foreign visitors. If this was the case, it was evident that the national border between the South and North—not only the physical one but also the one that is needed for “imagining” the nation—has been solidified. This was interesting since the border between North Korea and South Korea, better known as the samp’alsŏn or the thirty-eighth parallel, was a temporarily drawn border for a cease fire, not the result of a resolution to end the war. Perhaps due to the continuing ideological war, the security
measures toward South Koreans might have been even tougher than for other foreign visitors. As the tour proceeded, I felt my level of insecurity escalated. From the initial warnings from the guide to the following incidents, the tour was an unusually restricted and fear-inducing experience.

Once we were in North Korea, our South Korean guide led us off the bus and to the entry and exit office on the “North Side.” Here, we went through a similar process. This time, a North Korean female inspector stamped a mark in red ink on my pass. This stamp mark in red ink on our pass proved that we were part of this tour. Upon returning, the North Korean security officers would check to see if the red stamp mark was intact on our pass. If the red was absent, the passenger would not be allowed to return to South Korea, as no red stamp mark would indicate the passenger might be an imposter who had infiltrated North Korea illegally. Later the guide told us this stamp was not waterproof and would easily disappear if it were to get soaked in water. Some might interpret the water soluble ink stamp as part of the backwardness of the North Korean system.

However, from the gestures and tone of the South Korean guide, I felt that this might have been one of the ways North Koreans tried to dictate the ways these tours were conducted.

The tour was controlled from the beginning to the end. Moreover, it was conducted under close scrutiny of the North Korean government. Three North Korean guides who accompanied our bus number fifteen group stayed actively engaged in conversation with the Yonsei University researchers. These guides, who were

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79 During a dinner I had with a few tour participants, one of the Yonsei University researchers told me he felt nervous as the North Korean guides kept asking questions regarding his opinion about North-South relations. Later at dinner, this participant told us that he believed he had been targeted.
supposedly North Korean *powipu taewôn* or police agents, asked many questions, particularly of the more senior male researchers. While addressing them as *sŏnsaengnim* or teacher, the North Korean guides kept close to our entire company. Also, military vehicles kept close watch on our tour. As soon as the bus crossed the *kunsapun’gyesŏn* (military demarcation line), I saw North Korean military vehicles pulling up behind us. These vehicles stayed throughout the trip at a far enough distance so they would not interrupt the tour but close enough that I could see them.

The itinerary of the tour was much like that of any other sightseeing tour around a historical city: a hike to Bakyeon waterfall and visits to sites such as the Kuanyin Temple, the Koryo Museum, which used to be a Confucian School called Sŏngkyungwan from the Koryo dynasty, and Sŏnjukkyo bridge, a historical stone bridge over a pond. However, the way the tour was conducted was tightly monitored. Almost all visits to tourist sites took only fifteen minutes each. As personal contact was prohibited, several hundred South Korean tourists walking around the city was not permissible. So we boarded the bus at each site, drove for five minutes to the next site, got off the bus, and walked from the parking lot to the site. When that site tour was over, we walked several minutes back to the parking lot, boarded the bus, drove for five to ten more minutes, and got off the bus again at the next site.

When the tour ended after souvenir shopping, the bus drove the passengers back to the North side’s entry and exit office where the guards inspected everyone’s photos and checked the red ink stamp mark on the pass. Once this was complete, I boarded the bus again. The bus once again crossed the border and drove along the wire-fenced roads. About a half an hour later, I was at the South side’s entry and exit office. As everyone
“entered” the country again at the Dorasan Station, the lobby began to be filled with bustling sounds. Some were chatting with their friends and families, and others were protesting against inspectors who confiscated some people’s souvenirs due to health advisory violations. Finally, I retrieved my cell phone from the green plastic basket with number fifteen written on it and I was on my way home.

The security rules and warnings from the South Korean tour guide, the military vehicles trailing our paths illustrated the risk involved in crossing the border. Everyone had felt the tension emitting from our South Korean tour guides whose job was to secure everyone’s safety. The overall warnings and tension contributed to an odd tour experience. No one was laughing out loud or relaxing. Everyone moved in line and behaved well. Normally at tour sites, one experiences an excitement, but this tour was filled with tension, watchfulness, and a sense of insecurity. The constant watching from North Korean military men in their military vehicles showed that we were not free tourists but visitors with limited permission. Crossing the border between North Korea and South Korea occurred under scrutiny and tight control. The uneasiness of accessing the border reflected the relationship between the two states, which still refused to recognize each other’s systems as legitimate.

The border between North Korea and South Korea remains tightly closed to most civilians. On July 11, I walked into a restaurant near the Unification Education Facility in Seoul during the unification workshop initiated by the Korean Peninsula Peace Institute. A large flat screen TV hanging on the wall of the restaurant was showing the news about Park Wangja’s death at the Mt. Kumgang resort in Kangwon province. She was allegedly walking along the beach at five o’clock in the morning to an area that was
off limits to visitors. The soldier who shot her was assumed to have acted according to rules and regulations. This incident illustrated the precarious status of the safety of South Koreans in North Korea. When such tension affects, directly or indirectly, the life of South Koreans, their social interaction with North Koreans cannot be completely free from this tension. About a month after this incident, all tours for South Koreans to North Korean sites were discontinued. When I watched the news on TV, a chill went down my back. The fact that I had been in North Korea just one week before the shooting made my experience in Kaesŏng much more surreal.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, these tours had been possible due to the beginning of economic exchanges between North Korea and South Korea in the 1990s. Since the border closed to civilian travel after the Korean War, it was the first time such a large number of South Korean civilians were allowed to travel to North Korea via land routes. Koreans from both sides now have begun to cross the border to travel to the other side of the country in large numbers: the relaxation in the relationship between North and South allowed for South Koreans to travel to North Korea; at the same time, domestic economic difficulties in North Korea led t‘albukja to migrate in large numbers to South Korea. South Koreans’ visits to North Korea and North Koreans’ migration to South Korea certainly seem to imply that unification of the Korean peoples is imminent. Whether it is at a tour site in North Korea or in a college in Seoul, contacts among Korean peoples on a personal level, face to face, has inspired South Koreans to imagine a possible unification (Gong et al. 1994). In particular, the new, incoming wave of 20 thousand North Korean refugees has created enough ripples in society that the government and civic organizations have started to recognize the importance of a concentrated effort to
integrate t'albukja. As I stated in the introductory chapter, the identity politics among Koreans during this integration process is an attempt by Koreans to negotiate and mend heterogeneous national discourses.

Unification discourse originated from the desire to reunite ilch'ŏnman isan'gajok or “ten thousand divided families” (Foley 2003; Grienker 1997; Kim 1988) from the Korean War; however, this discourse referred to the united “future” of Korea but not a united Korea now. This future-focused rhetoric resulted in idealism about achieving hanbando pyŏnghwâ (Peace in the Korean Peninsula) in the future (Ministry of Unification 1994) rather than generating practical policies for a unified Korea right now. Therefore, in day-to-day interactions, South Koreans and North Korean refugees have taken the existing discourses and rewritten them to negotiate their identity. I will pick up this discussion later in this chapter.

Before going further into this discussion of the evolving unification discourse, I would like to return to the problem of border crossing. Border crossing for Koreans—whether South Koreans or North Koreans—still remains a complicated and dangerous choice. T'albukja’s border crossing continues to contextualize the North Koreans’ identity as refugees of history. More specifically, the continuing division along the border that separates the Korean peninsula has left the people who decided to cross that border as refugees of the time. North Korean refugees cannot cross the internal border, which is more commonly known as the samp’alsôn (the thirty-eighth parallel that divides the North and South). Going home for the North Korean refugee is not only extremely difficult, but also problematic in that the stereotypical prejudice assumes their departure was in search of freedom and a better life; hence, they must not want to return to their
home.

Once, Vivit Muntarbhorn in his special report to the United Nations identified t'albukja in China as refugee sur place (2008), defining their refugee status as arising from an unintended act of crossing the border. I define North Koreans in South Korea as refugees as well for their inability to return home without facing dire consequences. I will illustrate this point in the following stories.

5.1.1 Ms. Kim’s Attempt to Visit Kaesŏng

On the way to Imjingang Station on the day I visited Kaesŏng, the researchers told me a story that Yoonhee Kim, a 38-year old female t'albukja graduate student in North Korean Studies had attempted to join the tour. From personal interviews with Ms. Kim, I learned that she came from Hamgyong-do like many other t'albukja. Her father was a South Korean–born man from Seoul who went to North Korea after the war. Her father’s background of being a South Korean was a hurdle for their lives in North Korea. When I asked if she wanted to go to college rather than the military because of her parents’ influence, she said:

My parents didn’t have much influence [on my decision]. My father was inam ch’ulsin [from the South]. He came from Seoul. My father had given up about his children because of his position. No matter how good his children were, his background was too bad [for his children to succeed in society]. North Koreans care too much about the background. My father had given up since he knew his background had limitations [on what he can do for his children]. But my mother encouraged me and said I should go to college if I wanted to. So that’s how I decided to go to college. My homeroom teacher advised me about what to say and how to act if I wanted to go to college. But I could never major in anything like political science. That’s only for children of party members…Luckily

80 For further information on how South Koreans were treated in North Korea after the division, see Armstrong (2003).
when I went to college, the government allowed children of South Koreans to enter college as long as we majored in other subjects.  
(Personal interview, August 23, 2008)

Ms. Kim’s opportunities in North Korea had been limited due to her father’s background. She had hoped that by coming to South Korea she would gain more opportunities in life. So, even though she had graduated from a college in North Korea, she reentered a college in Seoul and now was working toward a graduate degree. She was working toward securing her position in the t’albukja field.

Ms. Kim had also applied to go on the day trip to Kaesŏng with the rest of the group from her school. But her entry was denied due to her North Korean background. Everyone who was discussing this story let out a bittersweet laugh at the absurdity of her trying to go back to North Korea through the land route. It was commonly known among us that t’albukja migration was considered a criminal activity, since crossing the border and migrating to South Korea was prohibited in North Korea. This crime was considered to be an act of betrayal (Charny 2005; Chung 2003) and often punished with imprisonment in a political prison, extreme fines, or constant interrogation. I knew Ms. Kim’s attempt to go to Kaesŏng was an act of defiance, as she clearly knew she would not be able to go. Later, when I asked her why she had applied for the trip, she told me “I wanted to go home and see the place and people I haven not seen in a long time. What is wrong with that?” She said this in such a matter-of-fact way, and I could not help but agree that she had the right to want to visit North Korea. During my nearly two decades of studies in the United States, I have visited Seoul on numerous occasions and never did the thought occur to me that I could not go home because I would be arrested if I tried. However, Ms. Kim knew she would not be able to go back as long as the country
remained divided. Still she had assumed that someday unification would come and she would be able to meet her family again. In a personal interview at her home, she quietly told me:

I told my mother that I was leaving North Korea. But I did not tell my siblings. Since my siblings were still young, I thought we could meet someday if we wanted to meet again. But I thought I would never see my mother again. So I told my mother that I was going to my father’s kohyang, his place of origin...My mother said it was alright so I came [to South Korea]. (Personal interview, August 23, 2008)

Ms. Kim’s resignation that she would not be able to see her mother in her lifetime illustrated her acceptance of the impossibility of returning home after crossing the border. Ms. Kim’s story suggested that the only way she could freely and legally visit North Korean would be if and when the border between North Korea and South Korea opens. The desire to visit home is a natural desire for anybody. However, visiting her “home” was not permitted for Ms. Kim.

5.1.2 Ok’s Story at the Chinese-North Korean Border

The film Longest Journey 2 (Set Net School 2006) shows stories and places from the Alternative School students’ visit to the border between China and North Korea. This is the same film I introduced in chapter 3, in which the students were relating their confusion about their North Korean identity. The journey to China for the students meant retracing the steps of old memories. As the film rolls, Bina, one of the students visiting China, starts to imitate a reporter and narrates in a journalistic tone.

Bina: Right. We’re at the Chinese border with North Korea. We can see North Korea from here. Now, I will ask the students how they feel right now.
While she is narrating, she sounds nervous from being in front of the camera, and she giggles. Her voice is clear and a bit higher in pitch than usual. After the above comment, still imitating a real reporter, Bina points the microphone at the other students and says “Čikūm, kibuni ōtteyo?” meaning “What are your feelings right now?”

Student A: How do I feel?
Bina: Yes.
Student A: I don’t know. Nothing in particular.
Bina: How about you? (now points the microphone to Ok)
Ok: I don’t know. I have been here before so I don’t really feel that special.
Bina: I am at the border. It feels so different to see my kohyang (hometown) from here…It feels weird that my kohyang is so close to here…I know people will criticize me, but now that I’m seeing my kohyang, I really want to go back.
Students: (students chime in and all say in joking manners): Go! Go! You can go right now. Nobody’s going to stop you. (Laughter)

Then the film moves on to a scene where the students are moving to the next location on the bus. Bina is standing near the front of the bus and speaking on a microphone again. This time, she is explaining her comments from the previous scene and tells the group about her own emotions. As she speaks she chokes on tears a little and says “It’s so absurd that my kohyang is right in front of me but I cannot go there.”
As was typical with the Alternative School students, the mood in the border scene was light, and their voices depicted playfulness. However, as Bina stated, a desire to go home at the border became stronger. They could see North Korea at close proximity yet they could not cross the border to go home. This desire to cross the border should be understood as their wanting to visit the place where they grew up, played with friends, and had an everyday life.

The question Bina asks the students, which I translate as “What are your feelings right now?” is about more than just feelings. The Korean word kibun signifies the emotional state of a person. It indicates the person’s overall frame of mind that lasts for a certain period of time. The students in the scene, except for Bina, said they did not feel anything particular. But this was due perhaps to the suddenness of the question. Bina’s emotional storytelling on the bus came after they had had the time to reflect on their visit. The later scenes told the viewers how they felt.

Later in the film, Ok and others narrate their story about what happened throughout the day. This is part of the video journals they had to record at the end of each day. Ok is on the screen. She is sitting in her hotel room alone facing the camera. Unlike her voice from the scenes shot during the daytime, Ok’s voice is calmer and somber, as she tells the viewers her feelings.

Today, we went to Tumen [pronounced tomun in Korean] where we could see North Korea. Looking at North Korea across the river, I felt something like disappointment. I thought I had sent off any sentiment like longing along the river. But when we started talking about North Korea on the bus, [Bina] began to cry. Seeing her cry, I also felt sad, and I missed my kohyang [hometown] more… Since I have visited [the

81 The most common comments I heard from visitors to the Alternative School were usually something like, “Wow, the students are very bright and they seem very happy.” It is quite common for people to assume North Koreans would be depressed and undermotivated.
border area] twice before, I thought I wouldn’t cry this time. But once again, I realized that I really miss my kohyang. Just because I am young, it’s not like I can’t feel that I miss my kohyang. Whenever I look over my hometown from Sanhe [the border town], the town looks so heartwarming. When I am in South Korea, I often forget about my kohyang. But whenever I visit Sanhe, I am filled with old memories, and I feel a strong urge to go back. Of course when South Koreans hear this, they will ask me why I came to South Korea in the first place. But I don’t like people who throw such questions at me. It’s natural for humans to miss their hometown. It’s sad that some people don’t understand that. (Set Net School 2006).

Often times, North Korean refugees did not consciously plan never to return to their hometown at the time of their emigration. Many of t’albukja I interviewed had gone to China to find financial relief for their families back in North Korea. The intention at their initial border crossing to China was to return to North Korea as soon as they earned enough money. However, as these stories tell us, leaving North Korea resulted in the unforeseen consequence of losing a home to return to in the present. Mere expression of missing one’s kohyang, the place of one’s origin, becomes contentious in the current situation for many North Korean refugees. Ok’s narration showed that longing to return home for North Korean refugees elicited a frowning question from South Koreans, “Why did you come to South Korea?”

T’albukja continuously face this harsh reality of their inability to return home. Unless a major change occurs in the political condition of the countries, longing for their kohyang will continue. The continuing division between North Korea and South Korea prohibits t’albukja from moving to and from the two countries.

Ms. Kim’s failed attempt to visit North Korea is a good example of this. Other failed attempts have been documented. Grinker, in his book Korea and Its Future (1998), relates the story of a young North Korean defector named Kim Hyungduk who had
attempted to visit his family in North Korea. Kim Hyungduk had come to South Korea alone as a young single man. He was suffering from isolation and attempted to go back to North Korea. However, he was arrested for illegally entering the harbor and was returned to South Korea. His lament for his inability to return illustrates the historically contextualized fate of North Korean refugees. As I mentioned earlier, once North Koreans were admitted to South Korea as citizens (which was criminalized as “defection” during the Cold War era), returning to North Korea was viewed as a threatening act to the national security of South Korea, as it could be assumed that the t’albukja who returns to North Korea just might have been a spy.

When I met Kim Hyungduk in person at the T’ongil Club’s day trip in April 2008, over a decade after his attempt to return to North Korea, he was accompanied by his South Korean wife. The visit took place at a quiet kidowŏn, a place of prayer, a Christian facility that a professor in Christian theology had secured for the group. This place was much like a small house, at the top of a steep hill, and it allowed the group to have a separate space for the membership training meeting. It was common for the club meeting to incorporate guest speakers. For this particular day, Kim Hyungduk gave a talk about how to become successful in South Korea.

With his smiling wife sitting next to him in a posed manner on a thin cushion, Kim gave advice to the younger generation of North Korean refugees on how to live

82 “[Kim Hyungduk] defected to South Korea in September of 1994 through China, and most people who knew him have said that his ‘adaptation’ was slow and confusing for him. Not long before he attempted to re-defect at Inchon on February 3, 1996, he became involved in an altercation and faced criminal charges for assault. He was sentenced to eight years in prison and two years’ probation but was released about six months after beginning his sentence. On November 30, 1996, Hankuk Ilbo reported that along with three other defectors, [Kim Hyungduk] matriculated at Yonsei’s business school, and the money the government confiscated from him upon his arrest was returned to him” (Grinker 1998:249).
83 This was one of the membership training trips I described in chapter 2.
successfully. No longer was he a college student who missed his family and felt lonely, but the head of a family himself, and a successful sŏnbae (senior) who oversaw a government-sponsored research institute. As sŏnbae who has become a role model for younger t'albukja students, he talked about his experiences in South Korea. While relating this story, he told briefly about his attempt to return to North Korea: “When I came to South Korea [in the early 1990s], passports were not issued [to North Korean refugees]. So I tried to illegally leave through China on a ship. But I was arrested for violating the national security law.” Although he was released soon afterwards, Kim Hyungduk realized the impossibility of returning to his home where his father was left behind (H. Kim 1997).

As these stories illustrate, the historical and political contexts within which people move to a host country have a strong impact in terms of identity construction. The North Korean refugees’ identities in South Korea are thus historically contextualized, and their identities are shaped according to preexisting notions and conditions. These conditions restrict t’albukja’s ability to “imagine” their home country as a place to return. A diasporic community’s “nostalgia” (Heidegger 2006; Lie 2008) about “home” is much a reflection of their present reality. In re-creating cultural identity through representation, even if in a hybridized form (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1994), the people in a diaspora continuously relive a painful reality of not being able to go home and express a desire to return someday. The nostalgia for returning to home for North Korean refugees is complex in that the possibility of returning home is contingent upon unification of the country. This longing is different from the commonly discussed nostalgia for former socialist traditions of post-socialist societies (Boyer 2006). Although some people may
remember the days when North Korea used to be able to afford to provide free education and medical care, this longing for kohyang among t’albukja should be understood as longing for the home to which they cannot return (Lie 2008). Desire to visit home is a common reaction for anyone who migrates away from their home country. But this longing for home is intensified for t’albukja due to the current condition in which they are unable to return. John Lie’s discussion on nostalgia for the homeland for North Koreans in Japan relates to the situation for t’albukja as well, in historico-political conditions have deprived Koreans in Japan a chance to go home (2008). Although fate of t’albukja might be different in that they do have a clear identity in regard to their place of origin. However, the conditions under which t’albukja long for their kohyang are similar to the conditions for the North Korean diasporic community in Japan.

Nevertheless, t’albukja’s desire to return home poses a moral dilemma for South Koreans since this desire can be understood as an expression of dissatisfaction with the current system. Ok’s monologue, quoted earlier, described her anger at South Koreans when “[hearing] this, [South Koreans] will ask why I came to South Korea in the first place then.” This comment evokes the pervasive attitude toward t’albukja that their departure from North Korea must have originated from their hatred toward North Korea and their desire never to return. Longing for kohyang in North Korea is implicitly interpreted with a moral judgment. On the other hand, t’albukja’s desire to return home may be interpreted as their inability to integrate in South Korea. Since their integration is considered to be a litmus test for the possibility of unification, their wanting and longing to visit their home can signify difficulties for integrating the rest of the North Koreans when the two countries reunite. In other words, the desire to return home could be
misinterpreted as their inability to achieve chŏgŭng, or social integration, in South Korea. This misunderstanding seems to arise from the majority of South Koreans’ lack of knowledge about North Korea or an inability to see North Korea as a place where people live, work, and have their daily life. Often times, t’albukja indicate their frustration with South Koreans’ ignorance about the ways people live in North Korea. Chŏgŭng is defined as an acquisition of South Koreanness, which requires t’albukja to make an effort to forgo their North Koreanness. Thus, this unilateral process of social integration has engendered lopsided social relations between South Koreans and t’albukja, as I have discussed in Chapter 2.

T’albukja have countered this inequality with resistance and negotiation. By taking unification as a common goal, t’albukja have demanded that South Koreans be more knowledgeable about North Korea as a place where people live everyday lives just like in South Korea. This demand claims that South Koreans should be educated about North Korean culture and society, and so it has given t’albukja an advantage in their social relationship with South Koreans. More clearly, t’albukja became the source of information about North Korea since their lived experiences could testify to how things were done and what had happened in their daily lives. Therefore, t’albukja have been presented as a significant part of achieving unification.

5.2 T'ongil Movement and T'albukja

Hyŏk was a student at the Alternative School in January 2007. When I met Hyŏk that winter, he had already passed the kŏmjŏnggosi or high school equivalency exam and was waiting to enter college in March. He was especially talented in writing and
analytical thinking. I was teaching cultural anthropology to students like Hyŏk who had passed their national exam in August 2006 and were waiting to enter college. I had assigned short essays on concepts in cultural anthropology like kinship and cultural relativism. I was impressed with Hyŏk’s ability to articulate his thoughts in writing. The overall level of student writing at the school was below average due to their disrupted education. Many of my students had been absent from school for several years while in North Korea or China. Hyŏk also told me he had to quit school to make a living while he lived in North Korea before he came to South Korea to join his parents who had migrated several years earlier than him.

Even after he graduated from the Alternative School and entered college, Hyŏk remained actively involved in school affairs, along with other graduates. When the Alternative School published a new book, *Almyŏn saranghanda* (Set Net School 2010a), Hyŏk contributed an article about t’albukja and T’ongil.

We sang “Unification” so much, but still unification seems so far away. A thought just crossed my mind. Perhaps unification may not come even after my generation is gone. Is unification a wish for only those who left their kohyang behind? As the song [“Our Wish”] also says, both South Koreans and North Koreans love to use the word *uri* [“we/our”]. The phrases “our nation,” “our people,” “our brethren,” “our country,” “our history,” “our culture,” “our language,” and “our writing system” indicate that the word *uri* is a familiar expression to us. However, in reality, these are just gestures we make to present good images of ourselves to each other. We are using the same language, but the North and South are too different to use the word *uri*. (Park 2010: 22)⁸⁴

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⁸⁴ Text in Korean: 그렇게 통일을 불렀건만 우리에겐 통일이 멀게만 느껴진다. 어쩌면 내 세대가 지나도 통일은 오지 않을 것 같다는 생각에 눈물랫 스친다. 통일은 고양을 동진 사람들만 간절한 염원이 아닐까? 노래에도 있듯이 남북한 모두는 ‘우리’라는 말을 즐겨 사용한다. 우리민족, 우리동포, 우리제세, 우리나라, 우리역사, 우리문화, 우리 글 등 우리는 모두에게 친숙한 표현이다. 하지만 현실에서 우리는 서로에게 좋은 이미지를 주기 위한 제스처일 뿐이다. 그리고 많은 인터뷰 구사하는 것일 뿐 남북한을 우리라고 말하기엔 너무 낡다.
This passage tells us that it was not just South Koreans who became aware of the cultural differences between North Koreans and South Koreans. T’albukja also felt cultural alienation and shock (Chung et al. 2006; Jeon 2000). This mutual discovery of heterogeneous Korean cultures has become the main point in discussions of unification in which both groups feel that reuniting would take a heavy toll on the nation. This point will be discussed further in the next section. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, t’albukja realized after coming to South Korea that they fell into a different citizenship category. Their unequal status in society has frustrated many t’albukja in that their existence has been devalued because they were from North Korea.  

85 As Hyŏk argued, unification is the ultimate hope for those who are unable to return home. These include silhyangmin, kwisunja, and t’albukja, whom I have discussed in chapter 3. Initially, the division of the country inspired a unification policy that was directed at the reunification of the divided families (Foley 2003). Under this premise, unification of the country became a solution to their problem for those who had lost their families. Unification for t’albukja then was a way to be able to see their family members again. Hyŏk seemed to understand this clearly in his writing.

Elderly silhyangmin’s humble wish is perhaps to be able to tidy up the ancestors’ graves and offer a glass of wine, 86 but the time allowed for them [in life to be able to do so] is not very long. For saet’ŏmin every day is a struggle. In another country of their own, where they arrived by taking the risk of losing their lives, [Saet’ŏmin] didn’t expect it would be so hard to swallow a spoonful of warm rice. They spend sleepless nights longing for their home, wives, children, parents, and siblings they left behind. Maybe that is why I felt such a strong desire for unification from them. Why must we be unified? To this question,

85 This point has been discussed in chapter 2.
86 Koreans commonly practice this tidying up of the ancestors’ graves during traditional holidays like Chusŏk, the lunar month on August 15 of each year.
they immediately answer that their home is why. To those who have left their homes, unification is really rather like visiting parents on holidays every year. (Park 2010:22)

Unification for t’albukja should be interpreted as a solution to the much more real and personal problem of their inability to return home. To solve this personal problem, t’albukja began to actively engage in consuming unification discourse as future leaders of unification. Their active engagement has meant two things: First, unification could be both a solution to the real problem of returning home for the future and a means to negotiate their identity in South Korea in the present. Their desire to be understood as a people with history and lived experiences from North Korea slipped into their involvement in the unification movement. The second intention of t’albukja involvement in unification discourse should be understood as their desire to correct South Korean ignorance or misinformation about North Korea so that t’albukja can be respected and accepted as citizens with equal status and rights.

South Korean people’s lack of knowledge about North Korean culture and people suggests that heterogeneity exists among Koreans. What I mean by “lack of knowledge” here appears in South Korean people’s misinterpreting and misreading of North Korean people’s behaviors and talk. Usually people from the same cultural group would not experience this at the group level. In the particular case of Koreans, it used to be common to assume that all Koreans belonged to one nation (this is the notion of

87 Text in Korean: 고령의 실향민들은 살아생전 고향에 두고 온 조상님 묘소를 벌초하고 술 한 잔 올리는 것 이 소박한 소망이지만 그들에게 허락된 시간은 많지 않다. 새터민들은 매일이 힘들다. 목숨을 담보로 힘겹 게 온 또 다른 조국이긴만 따뜻한 밥 한 숟가락을 넘기기 이럼게 힘들 줄을 몰랐다고 한다. 고향이 그립고 두 고 큰 처사와 부모형제가 생각나 그들은 오늘도 밤잠을 못 이룬다. 그래서 그런지 그들에게선 통일의 열망이 강렬하게 느껴졌다. 왜 통일을 해야 하는가? 라는 질문에 대해 그들은 고량이기 때문이라고 신듯 대답한다. 아마도 고향을 떠난 사람들에게 통일은 추석명절 부모님을 찾아 봐야 빛는 것처럼 해마다 찾아오는 상황이자, 다 가을 미래가 아닌, 지금 느끼고 있는 현실이다 (P. 22).
hanminjok that I discussed in the introduction), and that all Koreans shared the same culture.

Cultural intimacy in nationalism allows the citizens to talk about their nation without feeling embarrassed with each other. Herzfeld has argued that cultural intimacy is a dimension of nationalism that citizens often talk about but would become an embarrassment if presented to outsiders of that particular nation (Herzfeld 2005:3). In this way, cultural intimacy allows citizens to build bonds through participating in talking about things about their nation. If anticommunism has functioned as a contesting cultural intimacy for t’albukja, I argue that unification discourse has allowed North Koreans in South Korea to participate and construct their identity as part of the nation. Sharing through talking about unification has allowed both North Koreans and South Koreans to negotiate their identities as fellow citizens. T’albukja then have come to represent valuable resources for achieving peaceful unification. T’albukja have overcome the feeling of frustration with South Koreans’ ignorance about North Korea by becoming the providers of North Korean cultural knowledge. In this way, unification becomes getting to know about each other’s cultures. Next, I would like to discuss the shifts that have taken place in unification discourses in the past six decades to highlight the significance of t’albukja role in unification discourse. By reviewing how unification discourses have changed, I illustrate my argument that the current unification discourse functions to coalesce the tension and contestation in identity politics between t’albukja and South Koreans.
5.3 Multivocality of Unification Discourse and Theory

Unification discourse has always been a part of South Korean history. Although the political changes since the 1990s somewhat erased the traces of anti-communism and the red-complex, the continuing division demands a stronger rhetoric for unification. Unification discourse initially described the grief over the emotional and physical separation between two halves of one ethnic nation. Yet the ideological antagonism toward each other has held firmly to division and created a stumbling block for unification. Moreover, the younger South Korean population in the 2000s does not really care much about unification (Kim 2003). For these younger people in their twenties and thirties, North Korea has always been a separate country and they do not feel unification is necessary. So there has risen a tension and a gap between how people felt and what the official discourse presented about unification. Within the ideology of unification, multiple voices and perspectives have emerged and often been at odds with each other. So now it will be helpful for us to take a look at the multivocality of unification discourse. Multivocality in discussing unification must be understood not only as the multiple layers in the texts but also how different people have extrapolated on unification. Later I will connect these multiple voices within unification discourses with how these voices work in negotiation of citizenship and belonging in South Korea. As I have illustrated so far, unification for t'albukja means reunion with families and possible visits to their hometowns. But what does unification signify to South Koreans whose ties with North Korea have become thinner than a string? And what is the significance of unification for South Korea, whose state identity has developed against North Korea?
5.3.1 Official Discourse

The Ministry of Unification in South Korea annually publishes *T’ongil Paeksŏ* (White Paper on Unification, the White Paper from here) in review of each year’s unification policy. Reading the White Paper, I discovered that unification policy has been tightly connected to the government policy toward North Korea, and North Korea and unification have been treated like two sides of the same coin. I particularly paid attention to shifts in unification policies that took place around 1990, since t’albukja began to arrive in large numbers from the 1990s. The 1990s stirred South Korea to prepare for a potential collapse of and unification with North Korea. Around this time, changes in international politics (the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, German unification in 1990, the establishment of diplomatic ties between South Korea and China in 1997) instigated the development of more engaging and realistic unification policies. I will return to this point as I develop this discussion further. Changes in international settings also brought domestic changes in unification discourse.

Unification ideology reflects how South Korea views North Korea, and I use the changes that have occurred in unification policies to illustrate the changes that have taken place in Korean nationalism (from hanminjok to peaceful coexistence). Diachronic reading of unification policies allows us to see the shifts in how the Korean nation was imagined at different junctures in time. For this purpose, I referred to the summary of unification policies from the White Paper on Unification. For a briefer reference, see the table at the end of this section. To review the policies until the year 1990, I referred to the summary in the preface of the 1990 issue of the White Paper.

According to the White Paper on Unification (Ministry of Unification 1990), the
first South Korean government under President Syngman Rhee did not recognize North Korea as a legitimate state. Unification policy under Rhee’s administration (1948–1960) meant “liberating and saving North Korean people from the communist regime in the Northern region of Korea” (20). Therefore, the target of the policy was to liberate the Korean people from an illegitimate power and to incorporate them into the only legitimate nation-state for all Korean people. We can read from this policy that the South Korean government viewed North Koreans as part of the same single nation as South Koreans.

After Rhee’s administration ended, the second republic (1960–1961) tried a more engaged policy. This administration pushed for a “nation-wide election under the United Nations’ surveillance in North and South” (Ministry of Unification 1990:26). This perhaps was the only real attempt in the history of South Korea to establish a common government. This policy focused on ending the division and restoring the nation for all Korean people.

Once Park Jung Hee became president (1961–1972), the policy took a drastic change. Under Park’s policy, called sŏn’gŏnsŏl hut’ongil, or Development First and Unification Later, the national focus changed to reconstructing stability of the nation (1990:29). During this time, establishing domestic stability through economic development was the utmost national priority (Nam 2009). This policy of building a strong nation first and unifying later switched the focus of unification from a present problem to a future one. As the division continued and South Korea’s national identity began to form, the unification policy around the 1970s began to mention North Korea as

a separate political system. The summary of the 8.15 *P’yŏngwa T’ongil Kusang Sŏnŏn* (Declaration of Peaceful Unification Plan) of 1970 elucidated this point.

Previously, the Republic of Korea was considered the one and only legitimate government in the Korean peninsula and the North’s communist regime was not acknowledged. However from the moment of this declaration, [South Korea] acknowledges the presence of the North communist regime as a legitimate political system, and this communist regime has become recognized as an object of negotiation and communication for unification. (Ministry of Unification 1990:31; my translation)\(^9\)

Followed by this declaration, North and South Korea in 1972 proclaimed *Nambuk Kongdong Sŏnmyŏng* (North-South Joint Declaration) which stated the following.

Both sides agreed upon the following national unification principles.

First, unification must be achieved without depending on foreign powers and through independent means.

Second, unification must be achieved through peaceful methods rather than using violence which would deny each other’s system.

Third, unification must foster solidarity of one *minjok* or nation that can overcome ideological differences of two political systems. (Ministry of Unification 1990:34)\(^9\)

This joint declaration meant that South Korea began to acknowledge the presence of two political systems in the peninsula. Slowly, the political systemic differences became the focal point of unification policy. However, these policies had not yet recognized the divergence of cultures or peoples.

In the 1980s, the policy came to be called *Minjok hwahap minju t’ongil* (Unity of...
Ethnic Nation and Democratic Unification) (Ministry of Unification 1990:38). Under this policy, unification should be based on “our nation’s independent methods” and must utilize “democratic process and peaceful means” (38). Still, unification policy focused on bringing the two divided nations into one ethnic nation.

Then the White Paper on Unification published in 1990 presented yet another new policy that reflected the changes that I mentioned at the beginning of this section. The new policy in 1990 emphasized creating t'ongil hwan’gyŏng (conditions for unification) since the “post-Cold War movement was taking place in the communist bloc” (42). To cope with or to join this new movement, the South Korean government declared the ‘hanminjok kongdôngche’ (the Community for Ethnic Koreans) policy. This policy assumed that “South Korea has confidence as a nation-state and embraces North Korea as part of the ethnic nation” (46). Still, unification policy focused on overcoming the political systemic differences and uniting people of the same nation. This changed when North Korea’s one and only dictator died in 1994.

As I have mentioned before, Kim Il Sung’s death prompted South Koreans to think of unification as a present possibility. Under Kim Young Sam’s administration (1993–1998), the unification policy strove toward “building economic cooperatives” and “removing ijilgam (feelings of alienation) from each other” (Ministry of Unification 1994: ii). From 1994, the unification discourse mentions ijilgam, which Grinker also discussed in his book (1996:164). Now the heterogeneity of Korean cultures began to be an obstacle to overcome, and unification education became an important means for this purpose. President Kim Young Sam’s position was that “unification must be achieved through peaceful means and progressive steps” (Ministry of Unification 1994: 51).
Following that, Kim Dae Jung’s administration (1998–2003) began the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea, which provided more detailed and engaging principles (Ministry of Unification 1998). Three principles under this administration were: (1) Zero tolerance for violence that disrupts peace in the peninsula; (2) No intention to absorb or harm North Korea; (3) Engagement with North Korea in areas of possible cooperation and reconciliation (Ministry of Unification 1998: 35). Around this time, Kim Dae Jung held a summit meeting with Kim Jung Il in North Korea in 2001, and he announced the Berlin Manifesto, which stated that the South Korean government would engage in more direct communication and exchange with North Korea (Ministry of Unification 2001: 25–26). Kim Dae Jung’s unification policy looked at unification as a process and tried to establish “conditions within which unification can occur” before talking about “territory and sovereignty consolidation” (Ministry of Unification 2003: 37–38). These conditions mean exchanges on political, economic, social, cultural, and diplomatic levels between North and South. Under this policy, the conditions for unification mean ending the armistice in a peaceful resolution (38).

The next administration (2003–2008) redirected the policy toward “peace and prosperity” (Ministry of Unification 2005: 17) of the two countries. In 2006, a year before my fieldwork began, the unification policy focused heavily on pursuing “peace” in the Korean peninsula (Ministry of Unification, 2006: 28). This notion of “peace” in place of unification is an indication that now unification is no longer a desire to reunite a divided people.
Table 4. Summary of Unification Policies since 1948

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Year</th>
<th>Main Points of Unification Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948–1960</td>
<td>Liberating and saving North Korean people from the communist regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960–1961</td>
<td>A nation-wide election to establish one government for all Korean people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962–1972</td>
<td>Development first, unification later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–1989</td>
<td>Unity of ethnic nation and unification through democratic process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>One community for ethnic Koreans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Building economic cooperatives and removing feeling of Alienation between two Koreans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Direct engagement and peace in the peninsula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Creating conditions for unification and progressive unification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>Bringing peace to the peninsula</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The government policies summarized in Table 4 illustrate the changes that have taken place in the national discourse. The desire to recover and unify the divided nation has morphed into a desire for peaceful coexistence. South Korean nationalism no longer claims North Korea as a lost part of the ethnic Korean nation. Rather, North Korea has become a country to be reconciled with, and for the prosperity of South Korea, it has become necessary to peacefully coexist with North Korea. So now unification is about opening up the demilitarized zone (DMZ), which would enable exchange between the people so that they could communicate, visit each other’s countries, and work together in economic cooperatives. So far, we have taken a look at how unification ideology has produced unification policies. The latest government policy calls for peaceful coexistence. But how have Korean people thought about unification over the decades? I will discuss this in the following ethnographic sections.
5.3.2 Unofficial Discourse: Why Do We Need to Unify?

The gap between the ethnic nationalism that imagined North Koreans as part of a single Korean nation and the nationalism for a state that required the territorial boundary to imagine who belonged to South Korea also began to show up in unofficial discourse. The public, particularly the younger population, no longer imagines North Koreans as part of their nation. Some of the Alternative School’s volunteer teachers belonged to this group. During my fieldwork, the principal, Mr. Park, and I discussed the volunteers of 2008. Mr. Park said that the volunteer group in 2008 seemed to be involved in the school for the purpose of volunteerism. These volunteers were mainly interested in logging enough volunteer hours to meet requirements for admission to a foreign university or graduate school. I mentioned in chapter 2 that some of the long-term volunteer teachers were children of sylhayngmin,91 and the majority of short-term volunteers were college students who had never met North Koreans in their lives. Most of these short-term volunteer teachers came with curiosity about what it would be like to work with North Koreans. It is interesting that, around 2007 and 2008, numerous universities in South Korea established a new major in North Korean Studies. By the end of my fieldwork in late 2008, students in North Korean Studies had begun to volunteer at the school. One particular student club, called the Bora Club, accompanied the school on outings, such as for workshops and road trips. This was a college student volunteer club that sought to engage with marginalized groups.

In January 2011, I visited Korea for two weeks. During this short return visit, I

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91 See Chapter 3 for its definition and social contexts.
was invited to accompany the Alternative School’s workshop held in Sokcho city. The winter term had finished in December. This workshop was one of the school’s regular activities that I mentioned in chapter 2. This particular workshop’s participants included current and former students of the Alternative School, Myŏngji University’s North Korean Studies students, the Bora Club, and teachers. Except for the former and current students from the Alternative School, all other participants were South Koreans.

It was a bitter cold winter, and it had been snowing for days. It was one of the coldest days of the year with a temperature of -10 degrees Celsius. The previous night’s snow had piled up high in this mountainous region. After lunch, we visited T’ongil Chŏnmangdae, or Unification Lookout Point, a lookout post that was located at the border in the northeastern part of South Korea (See Figure 4). This place was the northeastern-most border with North Korea, whereas Dorasan was the northwestern-most gate to North Korea. From this point, we could see the highway to Mt. Kŭmgang. But the border was tightly shut, and we could not see a single car on that highway. At Unification Lookout Point, I had a conversation with a member of the Bora Club named Sohŭi. She said she had visited this place on numerous occasions during her school days. For this young South Korean college student, this northernmost lookout point was just a place for a school outing. She said that because she had visited this place numerous times, she could not really feel anything about it. There was no connection she could feel at this place. On the other hand, a former student of mine, Chŏl, was reminded of his older brother who had gone into the army and never returned. This was the first time I had ever heard Chŏl mention his brother. Once again, North Korea evoked family and childhood memories for t’albuchja, but the place had no meaning for South Koreans.
After taking group photos with North Korea as the backdrop in the cold, bitter wind, we started to move into the gift shop area where an electric stove emitted a little bit of warmth. Here, I began to talk to Sohūi about her studies in North Korean Studies, among other topics. When I asked her what she thought about unification, she became serious and told me she was frustrated with the current conditions.

Sohūi: The way unification is talked about varies from people to people. Scholars, government, and fieldworkers all have different views.

I: How so?

Sohūi: Scholars are so far off from the reality. Fieldworkers only talk about policies related to t’albukja. And the government is focused more on relations with North Korea. I have attended so many seminars about North Korea related issues, and it’s always different.

I: What were the main topics?
Sohūi: Transition of leadership [in North Korea], what kind of country North Korea is, and things like that. When I raised a question to a lecturer and commented “I was taught it was like such and such,” this lecturer flat out rebuked my point and said “No, that’s not true.” And, when I tell other people I am studying North Korean Studies, people ask me “Are you ppalgaengi (communist)?” and also they ask me “Why should we unify?”

I: Why do you think we must unify?

Sohūi: I used to think it’s because we are all hanminjo. But after the Yŏnp'yŏng-do\(^92\) incident and the Chŏnham\(^93\) incident, that is not a sufficient reason. Not too long ago, I began to say that when we unify, the economy will be better. Right now, South Korea is suffering from youth unemployment. South Korea has developed economically at such a fast rate. If we unify, we can continue with the economic growth. Then people start to accept it. This is the only reason I can give others why we should unify.

This young woman’s quandary was that she herself could not find a persuasive reason for others that the countries should be unified. She had a conviction about unification, yet she struggled to find a way to make it clear to others that unification was necessary. Sohūi’s struggle points to the pervasive attitude toward unification among the general public in the 2000s: “Why should we unify?”\(^94\) Such lack of interest was evident among volunteers at the Alternative School who came to work with t’albukja. For many young South Korean volunteers, working with t’albukja was a social contribution in that they were helping out a marginalized people, rather than working toward unification.

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\(^{92}\) On November 23, 2010, North Korea fired artillery shells at an island called Yŏnp'yŏng-do located on the western part of the border. For more information, see Bill Powell’s article “Behind the Koreas’ Artillery Fire: Kim’s Succession” in *Time*, November 23, 2010.

\(^{93}\) On March 26, 2010, a South Korean naval ship called Chŏnham sunk. The government announced it was destroyed by a torpedo from North Korea. But this announcement was not confirmed. The controversy surrounding the cause of the fallen ship has not been resolved. For more information, read the article “The Chŏnham (Ship)” *New York Times*, November 26, 2010.

\(^{94}\) According to a 2007 survey conducted among a thousand South Korean young adults, almost half of the respondents were not interested in unification, and more than 60 percent thought that unification should occur gradually. Minchup'yŏnghwahwa t'ongil chamunhoeui (2007:12-13).
In addition, one of Sohŭi’s criticisms was about how scholars theorize about unification but their theories are not grounded in realistic measures. I witnessed one of these unrealistic theories being spoken of at a unification lecture I gave in July 2008. After the lecture was over, a fourth grade student asked me “Why can’t we unify?” Here is what I wrote in my field notes that day to explicitly introduce it:

I could not give an answer when this elementary school student asked me “Why can’t we unify?” It was impossible to explain so many reasons and circumstances in a couple of minutes. I told the student to keep asking that question and make an effort to find an answer to his question. Afterwards Ms. Oh told me that she told her class that unification has already come. The fact that we’re trying to learn about each other means unification has already started, and that for unification to really happen, we must make efforts to get to know each other. Her answers were too abstract, vague, and emotional. But in the end, perhaps she was also repeating the words she had learned during her graduate studies. (Field notebook entry, July 7, 2008)

The notion that “unification has already come” resonates with the government policy that looks at unification as a process rather than an event. These are the “conditions for unification” that were to be created in South Korea. As Ms. Oh’s view from the above states, t’albukja are referred to as “miri-on t’ongil” or “unification that has arrived early.” The word “miri-on” is a tricky one to translate. This word signifies that an action has occurred and this action is arriving at an earlier time or event than had been expected. Ms. Oh was a graduate student in North Korean Studies at Ehwa University. She had taken many classes related to North Korea and about t’albukja, but she had no real

95 Text in Korean: “통일은 왜 안 되요?”라는 초등학생의 질문에 나는 대답을 할 수 없었다. 너무나 많은 이유와 상황을 일일이 동안 설명을 하기란 너무나 어려운 일이었다. 나는 그 학생에게 계속해서 그 질문을 하고 스스로 해결을 찾는 노력을 하라고 대답해주었다. 그런데 오선생은 통일은 이미 시작이 되었다고 말했다고 한다. 지금 우리가 서로를 알기 위해 노력하는 것이 통일이 열리 이루어진 것이라고 했다면 통일이 되면 더욱 서로를 알려 전 노력을 필요하다는 주장적이고 애매모호한 감정적인 대답을 해주었다고 한다. 이 또한 오선생이 반은 교육을 외풀이 하는 장면이 아니었을까?
experience working in the field. Ms. Oh’s statement was not the first time I heard such sentiments during my fieldwork. Mr. Yoon, the director of the Korea Peace Institute, had a similar attitude about t’albukja role as miri-on people. During our discussion about the meaning of peace in the peninsula, he said that peace was a replacement for unification, and unification for him meant resolving the conflict:

Let’s assume that unification means ending the division and say the minimal form of unification is reverting to being one. Even then, at least we can start to exchange before [unification]…Not fighting is a passive form of peace and helping each other is an active form of peace. It is not like we can’t do anything unless we’re unified. We can start exchanges and stop treating each other like enemies…So what is it about saet ‘omin? It is about whether we have the capacity to live peacefully with one another. South and North are different. We’re very different. Then what it means to open exchange or to unify is whether we have the ability to embrace these people who are different from us. In other words, these people who came before unification, if they are happy in our society, then we have the capacity for peace. But if they are unhappy, even if we start exchanges [with North Korea], then we won’t be happy. (Personal interview, November 3, 2008)  

T’albukja integration then signifies whether unification was even possible or not.

What Mr. Yoon described as “happy” in the end meant whether t’albukja could happily settle in South Korea. Furthermore, what this pervasive attitude of t’albukja as miri-on unification assumed is that their ability to adjust and integrate in society would be the determining factor for South Korea to decide whether to pursue unification or not.

96 Text in Korean: 분단 해소를 염두 해 두고 최소한 분단이 완전히 하나가 되는 식으로 해소되는 것을 통일이라고 본다면 그것은 아니더라도 그 이전부터 교류할 수는 있잖아요. 요한 갈퉁 박사가 얘기하는 협력적 평화.. 서로 안 쌓으는 소극적 평화가 있고, 서로 도와주는 적극적 평화가 있다면 지금은 분단을 완전히 해소하는 통일 이전에는 아무것도 못 하는냐 그건 아니고, 서로 교류하게 만들 수 있고 적대시를 안 하게 할 수는 있잖아요. 그런 모든 노력을 포함하는 거고…그럼 베타민 부분은 뭐야. 그럼 우리가 평화롭게 살 수 있는 역량이 있는지 그게요. 남북이 이질적이지 않아요. 많이 이질적인데, 우리가 서로 교류하거나 아님 통일 된단 얘기 나는 이질적인 사람들 우리가 얼마나 받아들이는 능력이 있는지…그걸 다시 말하자면 지금이라면 통일되기 전에 온 사람들은 어떤 과정을 거쳐서 이분들이 우리 사회에 들어와서 행복하면 우리만이 평화의 역량이 있는거죠. 그에 그 반등이 불행하면 그런 교류가 터지더라도 그게 행복하지 않을 것 아네요. 사로가…그렇다면 그건 우리가 생각하는 평화의 내용으로는 완결성이 멀어지는 이라나겠죠.
Combined with the concerns of a populace increasingly apathetic toward unification, heightening concerns about the successful integration of a large number of t’albukja in South Korea present a problem. Therefore, concentrated efforts from government, scholars, fieldworkers, and t’albukja have begun to make integration successful so that unification might not become completely disconnected from reality.

5.3.3 The Middle Ground: “Saramūi T'ongil,” Unification of the Peoples

The realization of the differences between North Koreans and South Koreans posed a much more complex problem in imagining a nation in South Korea after t’albukja began to settle down. The integration process became the central topic of discussion in unification. This integration was a concern not only for South Koreans but also for t’albukja.

During the evening with the T’ongil Club students that I described earlier, Kim Hyungduk talked about the importance of competence in society. After telling us the story about his attempt to return to North Korea, Kim Hyungduk began to lecture on reasons to become competitive to overcome sowae, or alienation.

To be recognized by others [in South Korea], you need to revolutionize yourself. You have to apply South Korea’s highest standards to yourself... You must be twice as diligent as South Koreans. In attitude and behavior, you must be two times better. Saet’ŏmin start at a disadvantage in everything compared to South Koreans... You cannot be a leader without making efforts. I sometimes cannot adjust to the ways of people who come from North Korea. You must fight to get out of the current situation. Your behavior must exude grace. It is not easy to say these things to saet’ŏmin who come from a closed society. They moved from a closed-off society to a free society, so their needs and wants increase exponentially. But saet’ŏmin do not possess the ability to satisfy their needs and wants, so you must learn to control the needs and wants. Also, you should carry out club activities alongside South
Koreans. I had a hard time getting along with South Koreans due to *ijilgam*.\(^{97}\) (Field notebook entry, March 14, 2008)\(^{98}\)

Kim emphasized how hard he worked to become more South Korean than other South Koreans. He seemed to suggest that the reason t'albukja would feel alienation was because they could not become like South Koreans to be accepted. The social recognition in turn meant belonging to society and this could be achieved by striving to become more South Korean than other South Koreans. He gave us an example by telling us about the time he proposed marriage to his wife. He said it was challenging to convince his South Korean father-in-law to accept him as a son-in-law. He then convinced other South Koreans like his pastor and deacons at the church so that they could recommend him as a worthy husband to his father-in-law. Kim Hyungduk’s advice to “become more South Korean than South Koreans” alluded to the categorical differences in thinking of who Koreans were. Closing the cultural gap, or what he called the feeling of alienation, was the answer to gaining access to a successful life in South Korea. Kim then explained that his reasoning for such an endeavor was so that t'albukja can prepare to become leaders in the unified Korea. At the time of my fieldwork, this attitude was quite common among educated t'albukja. To legitimize their identity and

\(^{97}\) Grinker (1997) also discussed the term ‘*ijil*’ and defined the term to connote “heterogeneity” (p.4), “different or unnatural” (p. 43), “heterogeneous, foreign, different” (p. 62). This word connotes the differentiation or heterogeneity of Korean culture between North Koreans and South Koreans.

\(^{98}\) Text in Korean: 남에게 인정받기 위해서는 자기 혁신이 필요하다. 남한의 최고 갓대를 나에게 적용해야 한다……한국사람보다 2배 이상 성실해야 한다. 때도나 행동 모든 면에서 2배 이상 해야 한다. 한국사람들 보다 모든 면에서 끌리하게 출발한다……평균이상의 노력을 하지 않고서는 리더가 될 수 없다. 북한에서 온 사람들과 만나면 적응이 안 될 때가 있다. 벗어나기 위해 싸워야 한다. 행동이 품위를 나타나야 한다. 이런 이야기는 다른 세티민들에게 하기 쉽지 않다. 단신 사회에서 살았기 때문에 욕구와 물안이 단결된 사회에 살다가 자유사회에 왔기 때문에 욕구가 급팽창한다. 그러나 그 욕구 간격을 위한 능력이 안 맞기 때문에 욕구 조절을 하는 능력을 기워야 한다. 동아리는 남한 학생들과 함께 해야 한다. 차음에는 이질감에 문화코드가 안 맞아 힘들었다. 그러나 시간이 지나면서 모르는 사이에 배우게 되었다.
presence in South Korea, t’albukja readily took the discourse of national unification and incorporated this discourse into their life.

Kim Hyungduk’s exhortation to become more diligent and to be more South Korean than South Koreans accompanied the message that t’albukja must be the future leaders in unification. His advice to his juniors implicitly emphasized the importance of integration, and Kim Hyungduk seemed to suggest that the solution to equalizing their unequal status was unification:

While I majored in management at Yonsei University, I also took courses in North Korean Studies. I knew the primary goal for people from North Korea was chŏngŭng (integration), but also their goal was to achieve p’yŏnghwajŏk t’onghap (peaceful integration after unification). After unification, North Korea will be in an inferior position and looked down upon. Unification should mean that each other’s merits can be understood and accepted…We have the advantage of being born in North Korea. We have lived experiences from North Korea, and there are things that South Koreans would not understand even if they go and visit North Korea. (Field notebook entry, March 14, 2008; my translation)

What he tried to convey to us was the reality t’albukja faced in South Korea. It was common to pursue “mutual understanding” about differences as reflected in unification policy. However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, North Koreanness or North Korean cultural traits evoked negative reactions from South Koreans, and they did not view t’albukja as their equals. Kim Hyungduk’s stories told us that this unequal identity politics must be resolved before unification so that people from the Northern region would not unnecessarily face discrimination. Therefore, it was important for t’albukja to make South Koreans understand and respect their differences if unification was to be successful. The “understanding of the differences” as the foundation for successful
unification conferred on t’albukja a unique advantage to become educators of things about North Korea.

The contested identity of t’albukja, presented in previous chapters, found a coalescing moment when North Korean refugees and South Koreans together acknowledged unification as a common goal. This started to occur in the early 2000s. Even though the motivation for unification may have been different for each group, unification opened up an opportunity for both North and South Koreans to work side by side. The unification discourse now solicited North Koreans and South Koreans to co-habit, co-exist, and co-operate.

The equalizing of the unequal identity politics required an acknowledgment of each other and discontinuation of moralization about each other’s differences. However, Kim Hyungduk’s statement reminded us that there was a hierarchy within Korean citizenship categories. Kim Hyungduk’s assertion that “unification should mean each other’s merits can be understood” presupposed mutual respect and culturally relativistic approaches to social integration. Without that, he warned, when the two countries unified, North Koreans would be regarded as secondary citizens. This point was reflected in Hyŏk’s essay, too.

Even though North Korea is a system under a dictatorship, questions [directed at people] should be healthier. [Questions should be like] what is the everyday life of the people like, and courtship, marriage, hobbies, studies, and career? Only healthy questions can produce healthy answers…Especially I am worried about whether underdevelopment [in North Korea], which is different from modern society, is going to be considered as abnormal if unification happens. When I was in kohyang [meaning North Korea], we spread fertilizer for crops with our gloved hands. Catching insects and frogs was a way to fill our stomachs, a way of snacking and playing, but that would be considered primitive in South Korea…If we forget we grew up in different environments, our misunderstandings about each other will be deeper. We must unify
before the chasm of misunderstanding widens. That’s because without understanding, even after unification we will be considered as strangers who speak the same language. To achieve unification as soon as possible, it is inevitable to understand each other. Starting from acknowledging that we lived in different worlds and developed different worldviews and understanding we speak different dialects of a language, we must find cultural commonality and foster that. In the end, peaceful unification means getting rid of misconstrued elements for unification. These misconstrued elements are prejudice toward each other and narrow mindedness that only looks at what appears on the surface. We must start to respect and understand each other. Also we should not look only at the system but look beyond the system and start to look at the humanistic stories of people who lived in that system… the reason encounters are important is because people can acknowledge each other through frequent face-to-face meetings…That is the way we can become one and achieve unification. (Park 2010:23)99

Hyŏk’s assertion that people should “respect and understand” each other was common desire for many t’albukja I met. Although it is obscured in the use of “we,” what Hyŏk is trying to convey in this passage is the desire to be respected and acknowledged for his difference from other South Koreans. Rather than moralizing about his (in)ability to be like South Koreans, Hyŏk argues that North Koreanness must be acknowledged as the ways people practice their own culture. There is only one way South Koreans can “understand” North Korean people’s lives; t’albukja must become the conveyors of

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99 Text in Korean: 북한이 독재국가이지만 그 독재체제에서 사는 사람들의 삶은 어떤지, 연애, 결혼, 여가활동, 학업, 사회진출, 문화생활은 어떤 지 등의 질문이 많아져야 한다. 건전한 질문이야가건전한 대답을 해줄 수 있기 때문이다…더욱이 통일이 되면 현대사회와 다르고 나후된 것들이 비정상적인 것으로 여겨질 수 있다. 우리는 고양 있을 때 귀절에 뿌리는 문화만을 장갑을 짓고 뿌렸다. 근본과 개구리는 잃어버린 것은 우리에게는 배고픔을 채우는 것이 아니라 간식거리이자 놀이였지만 남한에서는 야만적인 행위로 비춰질 것이다…우리가 서로 다른 환경에서 자랐다는 것을 잊는다면 서로에 대한 오해는 더 깊어질 것이다. 우리가 서로에 대한 오해를 딛어내려면 서로에 대해 이해하는 것이 중요하다…같은 언어를 쓰지만 지방사투리를 구사하고 다른 환경에서 각자의 가치관을 형성하며 살아왔다는 것을 이해하는 것으로부터 출발하여 나아가서 문화적 공통점을 발견하고 발견시켜야 한다. 결국 평화로운 통일이란 혐오의 통일요소들을 바탕고 이를는 것을 의미한다. 혐오의 통일요소가 바로 우리가 서로에 대해 가진 상호간의 만만함을 보고 평가하는 믿음의 시각이다. 지금이라도 우리가 서로를 존중하고 이해하는 자세에서 시작하여 세계관을 보고 말고 그 세계에서 살아온 사람들의 인간적 삶을 보고 해야 한다…만남이 중요한 것은 자주 만나면서 상대에 대한 존재를 인정하고 확인할 수 있기 때문이다…우리가 하나 되는 길이며 통일로 나아가는 길이다.
information about cultural differences. However, the difference can be resolved if t’albukja can successfully learn to be South Korean by becoming bicultural people. In this regard, North Korean refugees can offer valuable services to both South Koreans and North Koreans in terms of bridging the gap.

Ms. Kim often talked about this unequal relationship between t’albukja and South Koreans. When I met Ms. Kim in Itaewŏn over a dinner, she was just getting off work at a nearby establishment. Itaewŏn was a neighborhood grew out of servicing the US army base in Yongsan. The streets were full of foreigners and the restaurants offered exotic food that could not be found anywhere else in Korea. We found a burger place that was not as crowded or expensive as the others. When our order of burger and fries arrived, we began to talk about her experience in South Korea.

I once applied for a samujik, or office work, position at Hyundai but was rejected. I applied for a white collar position, but they tried to send me to a manufacturing line. I tried to find out the reason. They said when the company expands in the future and is established in North Korea, they would need someone who can work with North Korean workers side by side. (Personal interview, August 10, 2008)

Ms. Kim had graduated with a management degree. So perhaps she thought she would have a shot at an office job. But she told me that she later found out she would have limited opportunities for managerial track jobs because she was t’albukja. Instead, she was expected to train other North Koreans if and when the company expanded and opened branches in North Korea. As her statement indicates, t’albukja’s role was to be like a bridge between South Koreans and North Koreans.

Ability to navigate cultural landscape between North and South Korea becomes cultural capital for many t’albukja. Since the governmental policy shifted to open
exchange with North Korea, new areas of expertise related to North Korea have begun to emerge. I commented earlier about the establishment of North Korean Studies programs in universities. Furthermore, many government sectors, especially in social work, have established new programs like ‘pukhan it’aljumin chŏnmun’ga yangsŏng’ (training for experts in t’albukja field) to actively seek out and recruit South Korean workers who can be involved in t’albukja affairs. One of the major activities at Together Korea was to train young people to become experts in this area. I gave a couple of lectures at Unification Education Facilities in Seoul to college students who wanted to learn more about t’albukja. In addition to these expert trainings, unification education for the public also has become more popular. South Korean scholars (Jeon 2000; Lee 2004) often warn about the shock and confusion that people would experience if North Korea and South Korea unified in the current conditions. To prevent such social disturbance, which would cost the state heavily to stabilize, the Ministry of Unification has launched a unification education campaign to educate the masses about North Korea. These expanding areas to learn about North Korea have become a niche for t’albukja.

5.4 T’ongil Kyoyuk, Unification Education

Many of the t’albukja I met during the fieldwork emphasized this “born and lived in North Korea” aspect of their identity. The fact they have living knowledge about North Korea seemed to be the focal point of the legitimizing of their identity as leaders in the future of Korea. In particular, an emphasis on achieving “peaceful integration”

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100 The South Korean government established a law related to unification education in 1999. Since then, t’ongil kyoyukwŏn (Unification Education Facility) has been in charge of nationwide unification education. See more information on the Unification Education Facility homepage at www.uniedu.go.kr.
among Koreans at the time of unification suggested that there were conflicts in the current integration of two Koreas. North Korean refugees often talked about the differences between South Korea and North Korea and complained about how South Koreans would never understand the North Korean system regardless of the number of years of research and visits. Claiming their life experiences as expertise has allowed North Korean refugees to gain a niche and avoid discrimination like that Kyung experienced. Their expertise of being North Korean could be utilized during the campaigns to educate the South Korean public.

T’albukja’s lived experiences in North Korea have become educational material at workshops, seminars, and unification education classes. Although the majority of organizers are South Koreans, t’albukja give lectures to give firsthand accounts of what kind of country North Korea is. I have described my experience with national security education. Perhaps t’albukja’s participation in giving lectures about their personal experiences from North Korea reflects the Cold War era practice when national security education was provided by kwisunyongsa, or defectors. However, the tone and the contents of the education have changed significantly since the 1990s. Although some people like Hwang Jang Yup and Kang Chul Hwan had a mission to condemn the North Korean system and human rights violations, the majority of unification education lecturers I met at various seminars, workshops, and classes focused on educating the South Korean public about what people do and how people live their lives in North Korea.

101 A former secretary of North Korea defected to South Korea in late 1997. He had taken the leadership in condemning Kim Jung Il’s dictatorship. He died in 2010 at the age of 87 in his house in South Korea. During his stay in South Korea, he often complained of North Korean spies who attempted to kill him. I attended a lecture he gave in 2008 at Sōtaemun Church.

102 Author of Aquarium of Pyongyang (2003) and a North Korean human rights activist. He has given numerous lectures and testimonials both in South Korea and the United States. He has become an iconic figure in work against North Korean human rights violations.
Many of these lecturers wanted to correct the misled South Koreans. These workshops and educational seminars were held often at the Unification Education facility in Seoul.

On April 10, 2008, I attended a Unification Education session held at this facility. The Unification Education facility was equipped with seminar rooms with high-tech machines for presentations, comfortable chairs with tables at which to listen to the lecture, and a dormitory to spend the night after the lectures. Tucked away under Pukhan Mountain, the Unification Education facility offered a secluded environment for workshops. This education session included lectures about the North Korean economy and political changes. Around four o’clock in the afternoon, a special session with saet’ŏmin started. As I said earlier, it was not unusual to include t’albukja as speakers at unification education events. Unlike the lectures by previous researchers, this session was comprised of questions and answers. The moderator’s introduction was quite interesting. When he opened the session he said: “To add a live feeling about North Korea, we invited saet’ŏmin. They are saet’ŏmin, and they are also proud South Korean citizens”¹⁰³ (Field notebook entry, April 10, 2008). This introduction succinctly gave the position of t’albukja in this setting. If the main speakers were South Korean researchers, t’albukja were there to add real, firsthand accounts of life in North Korea. As the question and answer session continued, it became evident that t’albukja were taking this opportunity to correct any misapprehension South Koreans held about North Korea and about North Koreans. When an audience member asked a question about the possibility

¹⁰³ Text in Korean: 북한의 생생한 현장감을 들어가도록 새터민들을 모셨습니다. 새터민이긴 하지만 엄연히 대한민국 시민이십니다.

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of building a separate settlement area for t’albukja, the guest speakers pointed out the impossibility of this.

Audience member: If the government built a separate collective production facility for saet’ŏmin to live permanently, would they settle in that area?

Guest Speaker 1: Saet’ŏmin in Hanawon would hate to be sent to a facility together. It is better to live side by side with South Koreans. It’s hard to live only with South Koreans, but it’s hard to live only with North Koreans, too. When they came to South Korea, they came to “look for freedom” but if they were to be sent to the same place, they would be opposed to that. If you give them a choice, some may choose to live in that area and others may not choose to live there. (Field notebook entry, April 10, 2008)

The question was about a potential relocation policy for t’albukja after Hanawon. There had been a discussion on whether it would be better to send t’albukja to a collective production facility when they complete their training at Hanawon. To this, the guest speaker gave a negative answer. Guest Speaker 1 emphasized that t’albukja should have a choice about where they wanted to live rather than being sent to a designated area. However, interestingly, right after Guest Speaker 1 finished her answer, the moderator commented:

Policy for t’albukja should not be decided according to their taste. In the case of Israel, the government sent returning migrants to pre-established facilities and this helped them to develop economically. If we relocate saet’ŏmin like that, I believe it would help with economic growth. (Field notebook entry, April 10, 2008)

Even though the guest speaker clearly stated that t’albukja would not like to be relocated in one area after Hanawon, the moderator of the session opposed her idea. The moderator’s comment illustrated the struggle over authority between t’albukja and South
Korean scholars on government policies.

All the same, the knowledge about what it was like to live in North Korea continued to give them an edge to be the authoritative voice. What Guest Speaker 1 implied was that South Koreans did not have an understanding of how t’albukja felt or behaved. This lack of understanding about t’albukja is a source of frustration. When they realize how little South Koreans know about the ways North Koreans live their daily lives, they take this as an opportunity to educate South Koreans.

These efforts to educate South Koreans about North Korea were the mission of Together Korea’s saôp, or project, in 2008. When I arrived at each public school for the lecture, I found out that my lectures were understood as part of the unification education the school held occasionally. I realized that the South Korean government had launched a national program to educate young South Korean students on the importance of unification with North Korea.

On May 23, 2008, I visited Gyeongsan High School in Gyeongsang-do with six other lecturers to deliver lectures about the North Korean educational system. The team comprised four South Koreans and three t’albukja who were “teachers” for the day. After giving a fifteen-minute long lecture about the North Korean education system, I introduced Mr. Jang, my partner for the day. Mr. Jang, the father of one of my students at the Alternative School, had arrived in South Korea a month ago. He had been a math teacher in North Korea, so he was particularly excited about his participation. As soon as he stood in front of the students he opened his speech with this: “I have to swear that I will do good work for such good tongp’o. I urge you to please be the forerunners of
unification, which is the greatest mission.”¹⁰⁴

Gyeongsan High School, where this lecture took place, was a *t’ongil kyoyuk sipŏm hakkyo*, or school chosen for unification education. *T’ongil kyoyuk* (unification education) was an integral part of this high school’s curriculum. It is interesting that the curriculum development was completely under the control of each of these schools. So these exemplary schools invited outside lecturers to fulfill the required hours. Having a t’albukja lecturer gave the school a special advantage since it enlivened the classroom atmosphere.

Usually, when I made an introduction, South Korean students were in awe since they were unaware of a North Korean’s presence. Some students asked for the North Korean refugee lecturer’s phone numbers and contact information. The students viewed North Korean refugees with curiosity, as if they had stumbled upon some novelty in life. Many students wanted to confirm their knowledge of North Korea that they had learned through mass media, and no one was truly interested in unification. Questions raised by South Korean students included “Do people really starve to death in North Korea?”

During the preparatory meetings, the t’albukja lecturers explained that they did not wish to hear these questions any more. Particularly among younger t’albukja lecturers, these politically charged questions were hard to answer since they were too young to have overall knowledge about North Korea. Also, the stereotypical questions about topics such as starvation, nuclear weapons, and political prisons were so far from the t’albukja lecturers’ daily lives they had experienced in North Korea. Even if they knew about

¹⁰⁴ Text in Korean: 이렇게 좋은 내 동포들을 위해서 좋은 일을 하겠다고 맹세하게 됩니다. 통일을 위한 성업을 위해 모두 나서주기 바랍니다.
these issues, t‘albukja also learned about them through media rather than their personal experiences. My student Hyŏk also complained about these politically charged questions South Koreans asked him.

People ask me questions that they have heard from somewhere else, not the questions that come out of directly talking to saet’ŏmin. For example, they usually talk about people starving to death, suffering, and the Kim family. They don’t ask us about cultural practices, attitudes about life, things like that. When South Koreans gather with their friends, they talk about entertainers, TV drama, dating, hobbies, and so one. Shouldn’t that be the case with us [t‘albukja] too? Even in private, all the guys want to talk about is the [North Korean] army, and all the women want to know is about economic hardship. These are all very dark stories, right? So when I’m in conversations, I feel like I am at an academic conference or seminar. The talk gets gloomy. (Personal interview, December 7, 2011)

South Korean students asked North Koreans the kinds of questions they have heard from the mass media or from their parents. They wanted to verify the truth of their information through t‘albukja. However, when t‘albukja received these questions that were charged with systemic differences or political implications of North Korea’s inferiority to South Korea, they were once again reminded of the lack of general knowledge among South Koreans. T‘albukja participation in unification education was then an effort to let South Koreans know there was much more to learn about North Korea than what the media portrayed. Even though t‘albukja complained of having to answer these questions on numerous occasions, t‘albukja were reminding South Koreans that people in North Korea also worked hard to get better grades in school, dated girls, attended friends’ weddings.

T‘albukja at the same time strove to learn more about South Korea so that they could become cultural translators when the country unified. This goal of becoming future
leaders has produced various t’albukja college student associations. One of these associations included Vision NK. This group was launched in 2007 with about fifteen members. Insu was the president of this group in the fall of 2008. Insu was also the president of T’ongil Club when I joined the club. He said the reason he took the role was so that the members could improve their competency. According to Insu, becoming specialists in their fields of study was important since when the unification came, the country would need people to rebuild North Korea. Therefore, the primary objective to achieve this goal was to be very competent in their fields of study and to become successful in South Korea.

When I met the members of Vision NK, it was already November. We met at a restaurant near Insu’s apartment complex. I had told Insu that I would be interested in finding out more about the group, and he invited me to their monthly meeting on November 8, 2008. At dinner, Insu told the group that I was conducting fieldwork on t’albukja. I could see the members were not happy about my presence and the conversations during dinner remained perfunctory. After dinner, the group went to a tchimjilbang, a public bath house, which was equipped with numerous amenities such as video game rooms, sauna, restaurant, and TV rooms. After taking baths, the group started a meeting, which lasted until after midnight. Finally, around one in the morning, I was able speak to Insu. He told me the reason the meeting went on so long was due to a conflict on how to manage their budget. He was receiving training at an insurance company at the time, and he wanted to teach the members about the South Korean ways of handling group finance.

In South Korea, an organization cannot spend money illegally even though the amount is as little as fifty dollars. If any illegal activity
occurs and it is known outside, it becomes a matter of legal sanction. In South Korea, law is strict. So I am trying to train my members about this system. In South Korea, transparency is the life of an organization. So the friction between the old members and me is about this transparency of our finances. (Personal interview, November 8, 2008)

Learning about the South Korean system was exactly what successful integration required from t’albukja. Knowing how the system worked and being well versed in these practices would let t’albukja become specialists in their fields. This point was also what Kim Hyungduk had urged to his juniors. The advice to be more competent in South Korea also comes from South Korean mentors. Professor Jeon Woo-taek, gave a lecture about unification at a T’ongil Club meeting. He began the lecture with these questions: “Who would make unification possible? What kind of abilities should they possess? What are the qualifications unification leaders must possess?” After posing these questions, he lectured about political leaders who led unification of divided societies such as the United States and Vietnam. Then he clarified his points from these examples that these societies were successful in uniting their nations due to their ability to work with people with different cultures.

Forefathers of unification are not someone without faults. To achieve unification, we need to be ready to cooperate and overlook each other’s differences. What we need to focus on in training the members is how to work with people who have different opinions. What we need to do is to become people who can work with others. Students from North Korea are already trained to work as a unit in a team. They are ready to sacrifice the individual for the bigger cause. But they can do this only under an order. You must practice how to discuss things with people who disagree, integrate different ideas, and think reasonably…T’ongil Club members are students at a prestigious university. Therefore, you should become leaders in society. After graduation, the graduates of this university enjoy certain privileges. You must be responsible individuals for such privilege…You must successfully integrate so that unification
can be achieved. (Field notebook entry, May 29, 2008)\textsuperscript{105}

According to Professor Jeon Woo-taek, to be able to work with others with different opinions and attitudes was something all South Koreans needed. His lecture emphasized that T'ongil Club members must acquire abilities to work with other South Koreans for unification and that unification discourse enabled South Koreans and t'albukja to openly discuss each other’s differences. Discussing unification made both South Koreans and t'albukja openly discuss what they wanted from each other so that they could live together in South Korea.

5.5 Conclusion

Despite the general lack of interest in unification among South Koreans, successful social integration of North Korean refugees is considered the measure for the success of future unification. And despite the fact that North Korean refugees are a result of unfortunate events and that the circumstances for migration differ vastly among them, South Koreans always pointed out that North Korean refugees’ maladjustment in the South Korean society could likely be the case and when unification was achieved. The South Koreans’ solicitation to North Korean refugees to “live well” implicitly sends the message that if they failed to integrate, we would not be able to unify with North Korea.

\textsuperscript{105} Text in Korean: 통일의 아버지는 단점이 없는 사람이 아니다. 통일이 되려면 서로의 다른 점을 감안하고 협력할 수 있는 태도가 필요하다. 우리가 혼란해야 할 것은 나와 생각이 다른 사람들과 어떻게 함께 일을 할 것인가이다. “다른 사람과 함께 일할 줄 아는 사람이 되는 것”이 우리가 해야 할 일이다. 북한에서 온 학생들은 팀으로 일할 수 있는 훈련이 되어있다. 대의를 위해 나를 합의할 수 있다는 훈련이 되어있다. 그러나 이러한 것이 강압적인 요구에 의해서만 이루어진다. 나와 생각이 다른 사람과 의견을 나놓으려면 나와 다른 의견을 수용하고 합리적으로 사고하는 연습을 해야 한다…통일클럽은 **대학교의 학생이 되었다는 특별함이 있다. 그에 따른 사회적 지도자가 되어야 한다. 출업 이후 출업생이 갖는 기회가 주어진다. 그 기회에 대한 책임을 질 수 있는 사람이 되어야 한다… 여러분이 잘 적응해야 통일이 이루어진다.
Individuals I met during the fieldwork seemed to hold the position that the unification discourse provided the only ground on which North Korean refugees could be included as part of the national imagining. Christian church leaders, professors, government officials, researchers, and volunteers all worked toward achieving unification together. For North Korean refugees, national unification might be the only way they could return to kohyang they had left behind and meet their families and friends again.

Initially government-led ideologies, over time, have become ingrained in society. Integrated in education, songs, and everyday discourses of North-South relations, unification has earned the status of South Korea’s national objective. Now, unification has become a moral burden for South Korea to resolve. Thus, the unification ideology has affected the ways in which South Koreans imagined and understood who belong to the Korean nation. When the discourse of unifying the divided families dominated the unification ideology during the Cold War era, North Koreans also belonged to this familial structure of the nation. The inclusion of North Koreans in the category of the Korean nation in those days is evident in efforts such as isan’gajok ch’akki undong or the movement to find divided families in the 1980s (Kim 1988). However, when the unification discourses moved away from this familial reunion to the recent discourse that calls for a “peaceful coexistence of two political systems” (Ministry of Unification 2008), the meaning of unification shifted to being a gradual process. Now North Koreans were no longer part of the South Korean citizenry that belonged, but another group of people with which to peacefully coexist. When North Koreans mostly remained in North Korea in the past, this construction of the problem was easier to maintain. But with the influx of over ten thousand North Korean refugees in the 2000s, North Koreans became people to
be reconciled with in the everyday life of South Koreans. T’albukja integration in South Korea as newly incorporated citizens was South Korea’s problem to be reconciled with today.

Typically, unification has signified something to occur in an unknown future. According to this rhetoric of solving the problem someday in the future, North Koreans would be part of Korea someday in the future. However, the incoming t’albukja forced South Korea to resolve this integration of two heterogeneous groups now.

In the current process of integrating t’albukja into the South Korean citizenry, it has become obvious that South Korea’s nation-state identity has solidified. South Koreans feel uncomfortable calling North Koreans “South Koreans.” This point was discussed in earlier chapters when I introduced the various cultural terms assigned to North Korean refugees throughout South Korean history (Chapter 3) and when I discussed the effect of anticommunism that becomes a contesting force for North Korean refugees to belong to the “imagined nation” of South Koreans (Chapter 4). When South Koreans “imagine” their national belonging, the nation they belong to exists within the territorial boundaries of the Republic of Korea below the thirty-eighth parallel line. With this logic, North Koreans would be no part of this imagination.

Therefore, unification discourse is a convenient tool with which to engage in solving the present problem of negotiating t’albukja’s citizenship in South Korea. T’albukja’s living knowledge about North Korea and their life experience in South Korea are the foundation of a powerful rhetoric of becoming cultural bridges between North Koreans and South Koreans when and if unification “comes.”
CHAPTER 6
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that national ideologies in South Korea work as constructing and contesting forces for identity formation of t’albukja as the national subjects. I look at the realm of “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 2005) generated by anticommunism and unification, the two founding ideologies of South Korea, as the sources of contestation and construction. When we understand cultural intimacy as the part of nationalism that provides “insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld 2005: 3), we can assume that citizens of a nation rely on this intimacy when recognizing each other as citizens of the same nation. When North Korean refugees do not share such nationalist discourses that offer South Koreans the “assurance of common sociality,” their legitimacy as national subjects is contested. Once North Korean refugees realize that they are not recognized as full citizens, they take t’ongil ideology to legitimate their national belonging by actively engaging in unification movement as lecturers, workshop participants, and researchers.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I questioned the significance and meaning of heavy attention and emphasis on t’albukja’s chogung (social integration). Why were t’albukja among other groups of South Korans given generous financial packages and provided with human network? Why was their successful integration important? From these questions, I tried to delve into understanding that existing national ideologies could not provide the reasoning for including t’albukja as national subjects. Therefore, the efforts put on successful t’albukja social integration in South Korea should be understood as an effort to embed them in national structure. However, in the process, both Koreans
realize that existing national ideologies actually contest t’albukja’s belonging as full citizens. Hence, both South Koreans and talbukja endeavor to rewrite the national ideology, particularly in unification discourse so that t’albukja obtain legitimacy.

Korean nationalism has been differently “contextualized” at various historical times and under changing political conditions (Shin 2006). Once it explicitly referenced the purported blood ties of all Korean people as descendants of a primordial ancestor (unification). At other times, nationalism in South Korea depended on the unity of its citizens to protect the nation’s security (anticommunism). These multiple and conflicting dimensions of nationalism shape the ways in which people imagine the identity of South Koreans as national subjects and complicate the ways in which North Korean refugees are understood as a migrating population. From observing interactions and discourses arising from personal interactions while in the field, I found that anticommunism and unification ideologies have inculcated different identities for North Koreans: anticommunism produced a negative identity, while unification ideology generates a more positive attitude of embracing t’albukja. Grinker (1997) wrote about the ijilgam, or foreignness, North and South Koreans felt toward each other. I take this position further in arguing that the integrating effort to make t’albukja into South Korean citizens is an attempt to negotiate their relative social positions and power in society. To co-exist as fellow citizens, both kinds of Koreans must readjust to their differences, but chŏgŭng is a process of erasing North Korean identity and becoming South Korean. Erasing North Korean cultural markers includes getting rid of North Korean accent, learning how to behave like South Koreans, and becoming specialists in different fields of study. Becoming specialists did not mean for t’albukja to become specialists in South Korea.
Instead, t'albukja strove to obtain enough working knowledge to be competent in their fields so that they could train people in regard to North Korea.

In Chapter 2, I described my fieldwork in detail. Field search for this study was conducted in the western part of Seoul where the second largest number of t'albukja has settled. The fieldwork for this dissertation began with the preliminary phase in summer 2005 when I was introduced to the field. At the various sites of ethnography, from official settings to random neighborhood encounters, I observed South Koreans discussing whether t'albukja belonged to the nation or not through the discourse of chŏgŭng. During the fieldwork, I encountered numerous individuals who were greatly concerned with t'albukja successful integration. There was a movement to correct the ways North Koreans talked and behaved. This attention to making North Korean refugees into well-integrated South Korean subjects, I argue, stemmed from South Korea’s reaction to the discrepancy between the “imagined” nation and the reality of the heterogeneous Korean nations. However, due to the differences talbukja exhibited, South Koreans categorized them as people to be “managed” and in doing so marginalize their social status by lumping them with other tamunhwa (multicultural) groups in the society.

In Chapter 3, I argued that the challenges to making cultural adjustments for North Korean refugees were due to historical practices of categorizing North Koreanness as a social marker in South Korea. North Korean identities in South Korea historically were contextualized according to specific times and the political environment. They have been variously categorized as silhyangmin, kwisunyongsa, kwisunja, or pukhan it’aljumin, all politically loaded terms. These labels confine North Koreans to specific roles in South Korea. All of these socially constructed categories were connected to the
Cold War tensions that existed between the two Koreas. The connotations of these words have continued to evoke discomfort when South Koreans interact with t’albukja today. I used both ethnographic and historical approaches to analyze these social categories used to identify North Koreans and found that anticommunist sentiments still negatively influence reactions of South Koreans when they encounter t’albukja in person for the first time. Such contested t’albukja identities challenged the validity of their national belonging in South Korea. I argued in Chapter 4 that the anticommunist education that South Koreans received in the past serves as a form of “cultural intimacy” shared by South Koreans (Herzfeld 2007). Even the current critiques of this past practice reinforced the authority of the South Korean government. T’albukja, who have never received this anticommunist education, did not possess the same kind of cultural understanding about what communism means to be South Korean. In addition, t’albukja have been viewed with suspicion as potential communist spies, as illustrated by the case of Won Jung-hwa.

In Chapter 5 I have illustrated that unification ideology offered an alternative identity for t’albukja; it enabled their construction as important figures in unification of the Korean nation. However, like Korean nationalism overall, unification ideology has gone through numerous changes. The unification policy in the years 2007-2008, when I was doing fieldwork, called for peaceful coexistence and co-prosperity. Koreans having realized that cultural divergence had occurred between the two Koreas also used unification discourse to require cultural harmonization. Unfamiliarity with each other’s culture became the main issue addressed in unification discourse. Successful integration by t’albukja into South Korea became the gauge of successful unification. In this context,
unification discourse allowed South Koreans to transcend their anticommunist sensitivity when interacting with t’albukja. In return, t‘albukja found that it legitimized their position in South Korea. Unification ideology became a new form of cultural intimacy that could be shared among all Koreans. T‘albukja have taken advantage of unification discourse to assert their agency by informing South Koreans about North Korean customs and culture. Unification discourse allowed both North and South Koreans to discuss North Korean activities and ideas opening and without fear of reprisal.

The study was set in 2005-2008, a transitional time in t’albukja immigration. Both the characteristics of the t’albukja population and policies regarding how to handle them in South Korea have changed. The group that I researched consisted of people who left North Korea during or shortly after the 1990s famine and had lived in hiding in China for several years before making it to South Korea. By late 2008, this migration pattern had changed. Newly incoming t‘albukja have not usually experienced hiding in China for long periods and some of them came to South Korea at the request of their family members or friends who resided there. They were not necessarily driven out of North Korea by desperate needs for economic relief. New policies were being implemented as I was leaving the field in 2008. During short visits in 2009 and 2011, I noticed that more t’albukja businesses had been institutionalized, something that I had not seen at the beginning of my fieldwork in 2007. The study might have had different results if it had been conducted in smaller or rural settings. In personal communication, Dr. Young-a Park suggested that there seem to be regional differences in the settlement and integration processes in different areas. The stories reported in this dissertation are therefore not necessarily representative of the social integration process throughout South Korea.
6.1 New Trends in North Korean Refugee Activities and Future Direction

During a follow up visit in 2010, I learned that more and more t’albukja had joined various nongovernmental organizations focused on North Korean society as a form of employment. Many of these organizations receive support from individuals, churches, and foreign aid agencies. The purpose of these organizations was to produce reports on North Korean economy, human rights violations, and or other cultural dimensions of everyday North Korean life. These organizations provided North Korean refugees with a more obvious role to play to the South Korean public. In particular, there has been a trend toward portraying North Korean culture from afar through the witness accounts of their previous lives there (Demick 2010; Haggard and Noland 2011).

Furthermore, while the 1.5 generation t’albukja were finding jobs in some of South Korean companies, many of the first generation t’albukja joined these organizations whose agenda was to liberate North Korea from the current regime. With the death of Kim Jong Il and the transition of power to his son, the role of North Korean refugees in South Korea will change again. I expect that t’albukja participation in unification discourse and activities will increase.

The accumulation of t’albukja biographical narratives coupled with the tendency for t’albukja to congregate in organizations suggests a new avenue for research in studying t’albukja as a diasporic community. There is also an opportunity to study generational differences in identity development within this diaspora as the number of second generation t’albukja who are born outside of North Korea continues to increase.

During my fieldwork, I was unable to study North Korean community life in South Korea as there was no North Korean community. I anticipate that over time
t'albukja will be perceived more as a migrant community and less as a group of refugees. New theoretical approaches will become possible as the trend toward studying North Korea as a foreign country continues and the number of North Koreans in South Korea increases. I envision this as the future direction of my research.
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