

NORTH KOREANS IN CHINA: DEFINING THE PROBLEMS AND OFFERING SOME SOLUTIONS *

Hazel Smith

University of Warwick

The presence of North Korean migrants in China has become a source of international political controversy despite the fact that very little knowledge is available as to the numbers involved, the reasons for migration, the conditions and patterns of living in China, and the outcomes for individuals and their families of the choice made to migrate to China.¹ Instead largely unfounded speculation has replaced factual analysis and sober research – permitting the serious consequences that policies of major states including the United States, are being founded on hearsay, exaggeration and heavily skewed ideological agendas.

The purpose of this essay is to set out what we know about illegal migration of citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to China, to identify research lacunae, to think about ways in which we could improve our knowledge and to offer some preliminary policy options for states whose responsibility it is to respond to the needs of those North Koreans living precarious and poverty-stricken existences in China. This short report does not deal specifically with the interests, agendas and activities of foreign governmental and non-governmental actors involved with North Korean migration in China, except in so far as it is necessary to analyze or illustrate the primary focus of my research. Such research and analysis is crucial in order to provide a full understanding of the internal/external dynamics of Korean migration to China, but would warrant a lengthy investigation in and of itself. Research on foreign intervention in northeast China will therefore have to wait for a future research paper.

In this paper I first clarify my terminology and second, I identify the demographic and geographical context in which illegal Korean migration takes place in China. I discuss six research problems and their attendant policy dilemmas. Of the six, some have been fairly well-covered in reputable literature including the better journalistic accounts. I also find that although much more systematic research needs to take place before we can obtain a clear map of what is happening to North Korean migrants in China we know enough to identify the core policy problems. We also know enough to make appropriate and realistic policy recommendations to governments whose responsibility it is to respond to the severe human insecurity suffered by many North Koreans living in China.

Terminology and Politics

Terminology is never neutral but in respect of North Koreans in China the terminology is part of what is contested - reflecting as it does competing claims about legal status and international responsibilities. For the purposes of this essay I use the term "migrants" to categorize all citizens of the DPRK that have settled in China. The usage of this term does not presume a judgment of the legal status of North Koreans living in China.

Koreans in China

Illegal migrants from the DPRK are not the only Koreans living in China.² There are around 2.2 million ethnic Koreans of Chinese nationality – of which around 854,000 live in the Korean Autonomous Region of Yanbian – situated in Jilin Province in the far North-East of China.³ Koreans in China represent a tiny fraction of the total Chinese population and the South Korean National Office of Statistics expects the numbers of Koreans in China to become even smaller - as they disperse throughout China, inter-marry with ethnic Chinese and migrate, some to

South Korea.⁴ Some citizens of the DPRK and the ROK are also legally resident in China for a number of different reasons – in Beijing and other areas, particularly in northeast China. DPRK legal residents include diplomats, students and traders.⁵ The largest concentration of Koreans is in Yanji City, capital city of Yanbian, whose total population is around 350,000 – of which around 210,000 are ethnic Koreans.⁶

Yanbian

Yanbian borders Russia and the DPRK and is part of the Changbai mountain area – a major tourist attraction for Chinese and South Koreans. Main industries include agriculture and forestry, coal mines and the power industry – and the region provides a transport hub to Russia and Japan. Yanbian residents are highly educated with the rate of college education twice as high as the whole of China.⁷ The area's dynamism is fueled by South Korean investment such that Yanbian has sometimes been called “the South's Guangdong.”⁸ The shops are full of South Korean goods and South Koreans invest in hotels, food processing, skills training and run a major university, the Yanbian University of Science and Technology.⁹ The local airport has frequent flights to Seoul as well as domestic connections. Two of North Korea's provinces, North Hamgyong and Ryanggang, border Yanbian.

The Pattern of Migration and the Number of Migrants

China and the DPRK are divided by a long and porous border demarcated by the Yalu and Tumen rivers. The most important official border crossing points are at Sinuiju, in the North Korean province of North Pyongan (DPRK) that faces Dandong, in the Chinese province of Liaoning in the West; and Onsong county in the North Korean province of North Hamgyong that faces Tumen, in the prefecture of Yanbian, in east China. Hyesan, in the North Korean province of Ryanggang, which also borders Yanbian, provides another regular exit point into China from the DPRK. (See Appendix 1 for DPRK provincial borders).

The length of the border – about 1000 miles – and its topography and demography make it an easy border to cross without official authorization. The border region is mountainous, forested and sparsely populated. It is relatively straightforward for North Koreans to cross at narrow sections of the river, especially in the winter, when temperatures reach minus 40 degrees centigrade and the river freezes, and it is possible to walk across.¹⁰ Both sides of the border are non-militarized with a noticeable dearth of armed guards, barbed wire, sentry posts and look-out points.¹¹

The Pattern of Migration

The most credible research on North Korean migrants in China, whose results were published in the internationally respected medical research journal *The Lancet* reports that “Migrations into China can be characterized typically as short-term movements by a single member of a household whose other members remained in North Korea.”¹² This conclusion resulted from a systematic survey of North Koreans in China carried out between March and September 1998, towards the end of the worst of the food crisis in the DPRK. The findings of this survey – that most North Koreans spent only a few days in China before returning home was confirmed by researchers from Yonnam University in the ROK – who also conducted field work along the border in 1998.¹³ These survey results confirm a pattern of North Korean migration into China as that of individuals crossing the Chinese border along the Yalu and Tumen Rivers at different times of the year and for differing length of times. Some received authorization to leave and enter the DPRK and others crossed the border without papers.

The Numbers Game

There remain great difficulties in quantifying the numbers of those who have made illegal cross-border journeys or how many times they have made these journeys. Given the pattern of

migration is based around short-term stays and individuals may come and go several times, particularly if they live in a North Korean border county and have relatives in China, it is almost impossible to calculate the numbers of North Korean migrants living in China at any particular point in time. It is also difficult to assess how these numbers have changed over time. The DPRK, China, nor any other organization publishes figures of cross-border journeys, numbers of individuals involved, or numbers of North Koreans illegally resident in China at any one time. More importantly, neither China nor the DPRK has the means of collecting these figures as, by definition these migrants travel and live clandestinely and avoid contact with state authorities. Chinese and North Korean authorities would have figures of those North Koreans who are sent back to the DPRK but these figures are not published.¹⁴ Journalists and scholars have not systematically quantified the numbers of illegal North Korean migrants in China.

Estimates of the numbers of North Koreans living illegally in China, including those disseminated by journalists and scholars, come almost entirely from those organizations which are either providing humanitarian aid to North Koreans, acting as advocates for North Koreans, or religious and political groups. Those working directly with North Koreans in China tend to be most muted in their public declarations as their aim is to be able to continue with humanitarian or faith-based organizational work on the ground. Their experience is that international media attention causes constraints to be placed on their work and a tightening by Chinese and DPRK authorities such as to make life more difficult for North Koreans in China. These organizations are less likely to be providing frequent statements to the media than the foreign-based groups such as the human rights groups based in the United States and South Korea, which, by definition, are much more detached from the local environment than locally based organizations that work on a daily basis with North Korean migrants. The groups based outside China are therefore a main source of figures for the numbers of North Korean migrants in China which are circulated in the international media.

A March 2001 *Newsweek* International report cites “an estimated [North Korean] 300,000 refugees scattered across northeast China.”¹⁵ An April 2002 news report cites unspecified “aid agencies” giving figures of “between 100,000 and 300,000 North Koreans hiding in China’s northeastern borders.”¹⁶ Another, unsourced, report published in 2002 states that numbers could be between 100,000 and 200,000.¹⁷

In August 2001, the Committee on International Relations of the House of Representatives passed a resolution that included reference to estimates of 100,000 to 300,000 North Koreans resident in China “without the permission of the government of China.”¹⁸ These “estimated” figures were given “official” international status as reasonable estimates through their promulgation by a US governmental agency although staffers and researchers for Congress had no research available to them on which they could have based these figures.

Congressional committees relied on highly partisan and politicized organizations, some with strong anti-Communist and Christian fundamentalist agendas, as sources for information and numbers that eventually were published as part of various Congressional resolutions.¹⁹ At a May 2002 Congressional hearing, for instance, of the four persons invited to give testimony, two were sponsored by the US foundation, the Hudson Institute, one represented Medecins sans Frontieres, an organization that last had personnel in the DPRK four years previously, in 1998, and only one, John Powell of the World Food Programme, represented an organization that had worked throughout the DPRK for a considerable length of time and had accrued systematic knowledge of the country based on, among other things, around 500 visits a month to beneficiaries and institutions throughout the country, satellite photography, and literally thousands of reports and analyses from international and DPRK based experts.²⁰ Only two – from WFP and MSF – were in any way representative of publicly accountable organizations. The Hudson Institute-sponsored pair, Norbert Vollertsen, a German doctor who had resided in Pyongyang just over a year until he had left when his visa ran out in December 2000 and who called himself a “public relations manager of Jesus Christ” and a US citizen resident in South Korea, who called Vollertsen a

“Christ-like figure” were offered to the Congress as representative figures of the humanitarian agencies in the DPRK.²¹

None of the hundreds of NGOs or any of the other UN agencies working in the DPRK to alleviate suffering were called to give evidence.²² Nor were voices heard in Congress from broad-based faith-based organizations such as the international Catholic relief organization CARITAS or the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the association of Canadian protestant church network, the Mennonites or the Quakers in the US – all of which have worked in the DPRK for many years.²³ Broad-based Korean-American organizations such as the Korean American Sharing Movement – who also provided substantial relief assistance to the DPRK – were also not invited by Congress to give information and evidence.²⁴

Applying Rationality

If there were 300,000 North Koreans in Yanbian, this would amount to almost the entire population of Yanji City, and 100,000 more than the ethnic Korean population of the same city. In other words 300,000 North Koreans, even 100,000, would be highly visible. Yanji City has the largest ethnic Korean population of any city in China and if the purported 100,000 to 300,000 North Koreans are not settled in Yanji, it is most unlikely that they are being absorbed in any large numbers into non-Korean speaking cities elsewhere. Yanji City is a small city and is surrounded by mountains. These mountainous areas are sparsely populated with small villages and tiny human settlements based around farms. There are few made-up roads and the distances between settlements are large, making transportation necessary to obtain basic goods including food. Destitute North Koreans would be highly visible if they were walking around in their hundreds of thousands. In the extreme temperatures of winter and summer, it would be especially difficult for large numbers of poor, hungry, North Koreans to survive physically without support or to wander around the countryside without being noticed and picked up by the police.

There is, however, some less ideologically skewed information available about North Korean migrants in China. The US Committee for Refugees estimated that by the end of 2000 there were about 50,000 North Korean refugees living in China.²⁵ It also cites a Johns Hopkins School of Public Health figure giving a number of 50,000.²⁶ This last figure is from one of the better sources of professional analysis about North Koreans in Yanbian as their team has been working on the ground since 1997. In September 2002 local Chinese/Korean humanitarian workers in Yanbian gave a figure of around 10,000 to 20,000 North Koreans illegally resident in the area.²⁷ This source stated that numbers have decreased sharply from the previous year, when they were around 50,000. The clearest reason for the decrease in numbers is the increased surveillance by Chinese authorities in Yanbian in 2002, of vehicles moving in and out of Yanji City, with local police and the state security forces regularly stopping vehicles to check papers.²⁸

It is difficult for poor North Koreans who do not speak Chinese to establish themselves in non-Korean speaking areas of China, so most of those that manage to evade discovery and stay in China probably remain in Yanbian. The numbers of North Koreans illegally resident in Yanbian will not be equivalent to the total of North Koreans resident in China, but probably represent a large majority of the illegal North Korean migrants living in China.

The Research Problem

There remains the research problem of mapping the pattern of migration and of quantifying the numbers of North Korean migrants in China and how both have changed over time. It remains difficult to assess whether there has been a change in the pattern of migration such that those searching for long-term relocation in China or elsewhere now form the majority of migrants, as opposed to the pattern evidenced in 1998, where those who enter China for food and income and intend to return home form the majority of North Korean migrants to China. The total numbers are likely to be less than have been published by US governmental sources and a reasonable hypothesis is that there are smaller numbers staying longer and living in more difficult

conditions than ever before but such a hypothesis would have to be examined through careful empirical research.

The Legal Status of North Korean Migrants

North Korean migrants to China have been termed refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, defectors and escapees. The first three of these labels are important as they indicate legal status and consequent duties of states and international organizations in relation to migrants. The last two labels are entirely normative and have no legal connotation. Instead such labels directly relate to a conception of the DPRK that assumes it is an evil regime and lacking in legitimacy and therefore migrants from the country must be considered morally legitimate, even if their individual or immediate motivation for leaving the DPRK was not self-defined as a political act.

Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Economic Migrants

According to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”²⁹ An asylum seeker is someone applying to be treated as a refugee under international law.³⁰ For UNHCR the difference between a refugee and an economic migrant is the following.

*An economic migrant normally leaves a country voluntarily to seek a better life. Should he or she elect to return home, they would continue to receive the protection of their government. Refugees flee because of the threat of persecution and cannot return safely to their homes in the prevailing circumstances.*³¹

It is not the responsibility of UNHCR to decide who is an economic migrant or a refugee. It is governments that establish procedures to decide who constitutes a refugee and who does not.³² Governments can and often do interpret the 1951 Convention in a restrictive manner. There is no international machinery that can, legally, override the decisions of individual states as to how they apply the 1951 Convention.

The view of the Chinese government is that North Koreans illegally resident in China are economic migrants. The US Congress has argued that they should be treated as refugees. Although UNHCR has been on the whole careful not to criticize the Chinese government for abrogating international law, it has made it clear that it would prefer that China did not send illegal North Korean migrants back to the DPRK because they are likely to face penalties and punishment.³³ Its view is that to return North Koreans to the DPRK is “inhuman” treatment even if they are not “strictly speaking... eligible [for refugee status] under [international] conventions.”³⁴

What does the research indicate?

The 1998 survey of North Koreans in China showed that the majority of North Koreans migrated to China for food and to earn money.³⁵ Interviews with North Koreans since 1998 indicate that such motivations remain important and probably still dominant.³⁶

Most North Koreans leave home as economic migrants but there is sufficient evidence to indicate that there is genuine fear of persecution when or if they return to the DPRK.³⁷ The most severe penalties face those who have aligned themselves with fundamentalist Christian organizations that have an explicit anti-Communist, anti-DPRK and often anti-China agenda and whose avowed aim is to see the fall of Kim Jong Il. There have been uncorroborated reports of extreme penalties imposed on women who return to North Korea pregnant by a Chinese man

including forced abortion and baby killings.³⁸ It is impossible to verify these reports although, given the DPRK government's refusal to allow regular social interaction with DPRK citizens and foreigners and the intense social stigma applied to illegitimacy, it is not difficult to assume that single women parents face very difficult times indeed if they return to the DPRK after a period of time in China. The least punitive penalties face those who have crossed the border for short periods of time and are returning to families and communities after obtaining food and maybe some cash.³⁹

There are few asylum seekers because few North Koreans illegally settled in China directly approach the Chinese authorities to request refugee status. There are a tiny number who have attempted to claim asylum by breaking into foreign embassies and consulates in China but these activities are organized first and foremost as full-blown media "events" by non-Korean organizations based in Tokyo, Seoul, Los Angeles and Washington DC.⁴⁰ For these events press statements written in English are made available to the international media based in Beijing who are always called personally before every attempt by North Koreans to gain access to foreign embassies. These events are always professionally organized in that the "event" is filmed, the tape copied and then sent to major news organizations.⁴¹ Media access is straightforward as some of the South Korean media assist the activists.⁴² North Koreans who make it over the fence end up with a ticket to Seoul. The Chinese police arrest those that do not make it into the embassies.

Many North Koreans, because they arrive in China as economic migrants and because they do not seek asylum, would not satisfy the initial criteria for refugee status under the terms of the 1951 Convention. Those that would certainly have a justifiable claim to refugee status, however, are those working closely with some South Korean or Christian organizations, particularly those who have anti-Communist credentials. It is unlikely, however, that all contact with all faith-based organizations would be viewed as suspect by the DPRK authorities given the plethora and variety of Christian humanitarian organizations working with the DPRK government, including some radical Christian groups such as the Virginia USA-based Christian Friends of Korea.⁴³

The Research Problem

There is a variegation of legal status among the migrants in China. There will no doubt be a group of North Koreans who would qualify for refugee status under the 1951 Convention because they would have a genuine fear of punishment on return to the DPRK, including imprisonment, torture, and at worst death, either through execution or from the affects of ill-treatment in prisons. Many North Koreans reside in China, however, because they cannot guarantee physical survival in the DPRK and they see no other solution other than to seek work in China. As it is the responsibility in international law for the host government to interpret the 1951 Convention, there is little possibility of identifying the various legal status of North Korean migrants in China without some recognition by the Chinese government that the problem exists.

The Policy Problem

Some of the North Korean migrants are likely to qualify for refugee status, and the vast majority are in China because they are desperate to obtain food and basic income for themselves and their families.

Policy Recommendation (i)

The Chinese government should develop a package of policies towards North Korean migrants to China, that should identify those who are refugees and take appropriate action, but also find ways to assist those who need food, basic goods and help with simple survival.

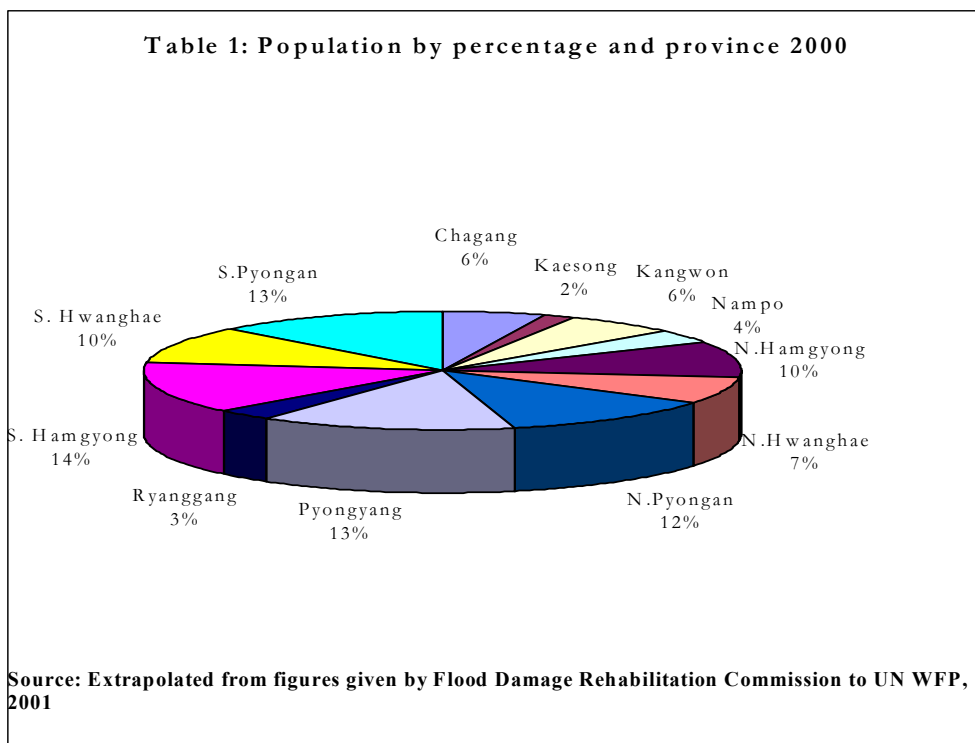
Which part of the DPRK do they come from and why?

The 1998 survey published in *The Lancet* reported that most migrants came from the province of North Hamgyong that bordered the eastern China/DPRK border and, more specifically, the autonomous Korean prefecture of Yanbian.⁴⁴ Interviews with migrants since 1998 continue to report the province of origin as mainly North Hamgyong.⁴⁵ There is no evidence that there is widespread emigration from the rest of the DPRK to China or, as might have been expected, from the other three North Korean provinces that border China – Chagang, North Pyongan, and Ryanggang.

North Hamgyong - the Main Source of DPRK Migration

North Hamgyong is a mountainous province, with extreme temperatures in winter and summer, insufficient arable land to feed its population, a large urban population, and large numbers of unemployed industrial workers. Excluding Pyongyang, in 2000 it had the third lowest grain production of 11 provinces in the DPRK at 69kg per capita.⁴⁶ This compares to a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recommended minimum per capita grain ration for basic survival at 167kg per capita per year.⁴⁷ By 2001, although there was some increase in per capita food availability, to 126kg per capita, there was still insufficient food for physical survival for most of those who live in the densely populated cities of North Hamgyong – at 2001 with an estimated 2.2 million inhabitants.⁴⁸ North Hamgyong accounts for 10% of the population of the

DPRK (See Table 1.)



Chagang, North Pyongan and Ryanggang – why so few migrants?

The mountainous border province of Chagang was almost equally food deficient to North Hamgyong in 2001 with per capita grain availability at 122kg for its 1.2 million population.⁴⁹

This province is one of the least accessible to humanitarian agencies with only seven out of 18 counties open for international assistance and monitoring.⁵⁰ Chagang is also where several military institutions are based, including munitions industries. Given the country's "army first" policy it is very likely that a disproportionate amount of the country's own harvest is directed at this province. This may reduce the impetus for "food" migrants to China. It may be also that the military sensitivity of this province ensures that border controls are tighter on these provincial borders than on other parts of the border.

North Pyongan – whose capital Sinuiju is the most important border crossing with China – is also not reported as a major source of migration to China. Its 2.5 million population live in a mixed agricultural and industrial area and the grain production per capita in 2001 was 299kg per capita per year.⁵¹ In addition, much of the DPRK/China land-based trade from the relatively speaking major economic centers of Nampo port and Pyongyang passes through North Pyongan – giving some of North Pyongan's inhabitants the opportunity to earn income from trade-related activity.

Ryongyang is located on North Hamgyong's western border and its population is spread through a mountainous, forested area – with an average altitude of 1300 meters above sea level. Its winters are notoriously harsh yet because of its upland flatlands and the investment in potato production in the province over the last five years, by 2001 grain production was more than enough to cover the needs of the population – at 223kg per capita.⁵² Unlike North Pyongan and Chagang, Ryongyang borders the Korean speaking area of China and the provincial borders with China are relatively open – with the capital, Hyesan, being located right on the China border.

Why North Hamgyong?

Chagang, North Pyongan, and Ryongyang do not provide major sources of North Korean migrants to China. This suggests that there are specific characteristics of North Hamgyong that propel North Koreans to make the decision to make the precarious journey to China and to attempt to live in Yanbian for lengthy periods of time. All DPRK residents live under the same political regime and therefore would face identical imperatives to emigrate. If the main reason for moving to China were for political reasons, it would be unlikely that migration would be so heavily skewed towards North Hamgyong Province. If another reason was that people from provinces bordering Yanbian could more easily assimilate in this Korean prefecture, one might have expected to see more migrants from Ryongyang in China. It seems much more likely that prime motivators for migration were the extreme food deprivation and poverty facing the population of North Hamgyong as well as the easy access to Yanbian. (Figure 2 illustrates the geographical contiguity of North Hamgyong to the China/Russia borders.)

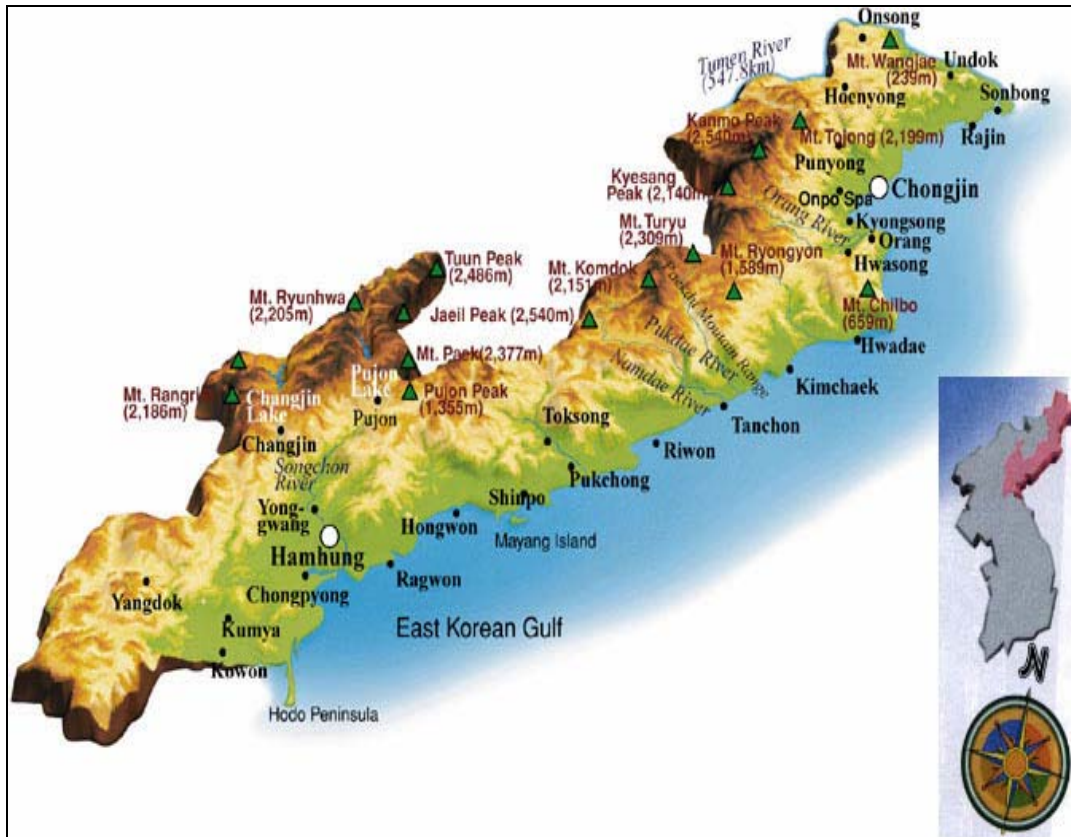


Figure 2: North and South Hamgyong Provinces. Inset map show border of North Hamgyong with China and Russia.

Not all North Korean migrants are the poorest

There is an absence of systematic research into the socio-economic backgrounds of migrants such that one could identify the various proportions of poor and better-off migrants or change in the social background of migrants over the 1990s and early 2000s. There is, however, sufficient evidence from interviews with migrants to indicate social variation. Many interviews have been conducted with unemployed workers and poor farmers from North Hamgyong. There are fewer accounts from former party officials and the relatively well-off.⁵³ This may indicate there are fewer migrants from the relatively well-off groups in the DPRK or it may simply mean these migrants have resources, such that they only need to maintain minimal contact with the humanitarian organizations, churches, and those who in some way or another engaged in providing services to North Koreans resident in northeast China. The DPRK migrants who have savings or assets to sell sometimes buy fake Chinese ID papers, or pay Chinese and Chinese-Korean middle-men to smuggle them into other parts of China or to third countries.⁵⁴

Some of those who successfully breached security at embassy compounds between 2001 and 2002 were carrying fake Chinese ID papers, which may indicate they were better off than most of those hiding in northeast China. A useful addition to knowledge about the social origins of North Korean migrants in China would be the results of the debriefing of the North Koreans who have defected to Seoul through the invasions of embassies and consulates between 2001 and 2002. This information is available to the South Korean security services and other agencies of

the ROK government that routinely engage in systematic debriefing of North Koreans who defect to Seoul.⁵⁵

The Research Problem: Geographical and Social Origins of DPRK Migrants to China

More research and more systematic research is necessary and surveys similar to the 1998 *Lancet* survey that would identify and analyze the geographical and social origins of DPRK migrants, would be a useful next step. There is already sufficient information from NGOs, UN organizations, interviews and South Korean governmental sources that would provide a base for further research. Such data, if systematized, along with a new survey of migrants by independent researchers, could provide some very credible knowledge as to where North Koreans come from in the DPRK and why they migrate to China.

Policy Problems

Impoverished, food-deficit counties in North Hamgyong provide major sources of illegal Korean migrants in China. Musan and Onsong, for instance, both sources of North Korean migration to Yanbian, and these border counties are both extremely impoverished mining areas.⁵⁶ Undok is a ghost county as heavy industry closed down after the economic collapse of the 1990s, leaving the population without food, income and coping solutions short of emigration.

Finding Solutions

It should be possible for government and other interested parties such as the South Korean government to channel targeted economic investment into the poor border counties of North Hamgyong. In 2002, engagement between North and South Korea has developed to such an extent that joint economic cooperation projects both exist and are projected to expand in the future. China remains on good diplomatic terms with both the ROK and the DPRK. Given this propitious diplomatic environment, and given that North Hamgyong is “open” to the international community, it would not be too difficult for the various parties to devise a plan for economic development in the most needy counties in North Hamgyong. Such development should be project based, transparent and subject to accountable auditing procedures. This type of investment would provide economic benefits to the neediest but, through encouraging transparency and accountability, could help introduce an element of political openness to DPRK policies and methods of operation.

Policy Recommendation (ii)

A plan for project based, transparent, and accountable investment should be drawn up by a task force of North Korean, Chinese, and South Korean technical experts. This investment should be managed multilaterally according to protocols overseen by an intergovernmental governing body comprised of North Korean, Chinese, and South Korean technical experts. A body specifically designed to coordinate such investment should be established for a finite period of time and with finite goals. This should be a low-key enterprise designed to implement a defined programme of activity and should not be a political entity.

The Plight of the Migrants

The North Korean men, women, and children that remain illegally resident in China live in appalling conditions and are vulnerable to physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation. Most are immobile, trapped in isolated settlements, whether these be in hidden rooms in apartments in Yanji City or in the surrounding mountains. Women and children, both of which continue to form part of the migrant population, are additionally deprived and subject to additional forms of exploitation. North Korean children include orphans, children with families and children born in China. There are no reliable figures as to the scale of the North Korean child population in China.

North Korean migrants try to find food from individuals, humanitarian organizations, and churches and, if they plan to stay long, they try to find work. The small population of Yanbian and the relatively high educational qualifications of residents, along with the work opportunities available from South Korean investment in the prefecture, means there is little local Chinese or Chinese/Korean labour for menial jobs in the agricultural and forestry sectors. The demographics of Yanbian therefore provide opportunities for North Koreans and a “pull” factor for North Korean immigration into China. North Koreans can speak the language (Korean), are prepared to work for literally next to nothing, to live in very poor conditions, and have no legal and few social rights and protections. So they are unlikely to ever complain about low pay or poor treatment.⁵⁷

In Yanbian, North Korean men, and some women, find work in the remote mountain areas.⁵⁸ They work and live for local farmers who are likely to be Korean/Chinese and have connections with local church or humanitarian organizations that are helping migrants from the DPRK. The migrants are dependent for food, shelter, work, and safety on the employer and receive pay on a piece-work basis. It is virtually impossible to save money or to find alternative employment. The condition in which these North Koreans live is akin to indentured servitude – irrespective of the motivations of those who assist them. Shelter is in makeshift wooden structures lacking sanitation, running water and any facility apart from the *kang*, the raised platform heated by underfloor pipes upon which the Korean household, sleeps, eats, and spends any leisure time. In these remote areas, the household is comprised of groups of mainly men, sometimes related to each other, with a tiny minority of women who perform the domestic labour – such as cooking and cleaning. North Koreans live in physically very poor conditions but also are without hope for improvements to these conditions. One North Korean, in a letter to the United Nations that did not exaggerate, stated, “We North Korean refugees in China... live worse than dogs in a mountain hut.”⁵⁹

Women, young adolescents, and children cannot risk being asked for papers to prove legal residence and so live confined and hidden in “safe-houses” in apartment blocks in Yanji City. They, as all Koreans, are subject to checks to see if they have legal residence and these checks can take place on the street and in the home. Surveillance and checking for illegal North Koreans in China was intensified after the beginning of the occupations of embassies and consulates in 2001. This increased surveillance is highly visible and, there is effective communication between Yanbian and northern DPRK counties by word of mouth through Chinese Koreans who regularly travel into the DPRK. There is probably a powerful deterrent to those North Koreans considering migrating to China from the DPRK’s northern counties.

Women are particularly subject to exploitation. There have been a number of reports that indicate that women had paid money to traffickers/smugglers in return for arranged marriages with Chinese males and, worse, that women have been sold into sexual servitude. Reports also indicate that such arrangements are less common as at late 2002 as North Korean women have become aware of potential abuse and are no longer choosing to enter China as part of an arranged marriage or liaison.⁶⁰ Sexual exploitation remains, however, an ever-present hazard for single North Korean women, especially for those living in isolated mountain areas, as they live communally, with large groups of men, without benefit of the protection of family or of a local community.⁶¹ As in the DPRK, they are expected to perform a highly gendered domestic role that always includes cleaning, cooking, and physically demanding household chores.⁶² These gendered roles are not intrinsically or necessarily sexually exploitative but, should abuse take place, these women have no legal protection or any way in which they can seek redress.

Homeless children and adolescents were regularly seen on the streets of Yanji City between 1994 and 1999. Since 1999 the Chinese and the DPRK government collectively both sought to prevent their migration and to return them to the DPRK if they were found in China. The combined affect of a slight growth in the DPRK economy since 2000 and the reasonably effective communication network with the northern counties of the DPRK probably ensured that county authorities could provide some minimal resources for these children and that the children

themselves were deterred from re-entering China. The North Korean children currently living in Yanbian reside in shelters provided by humanitarian organizations and some receive basic schooling. A relatively new group of vulnerable children are those born in China since the start of the food crisis in the 1990s. Children with one Chinese parent who has not entered into a legal marriage with a North Korean partner and children born from North Korean parents that are illegally resident are without legal status. They are not eligible for health, education or welfare support.

Policy Problems: The Most Vulnerable

The North Koreans remaining in Yanbian include some very vulnerable groups. These are those living a life of indentured servitude in the forests and mountains of Yanbian, single women, children and adolescents, and the stateless infants and young children born in China during the last decade. These groups are relatively small in their total number and policies could be designed to improve the conditions of these individuals, in the context of a larger package of measures to regulate migration between the DPRK and China.

Policy Recommendations (iii)

The Chinese government could consider granting semi-resident status through a special visa to those individuals who can demonstrate that they have work and shelter. For those who are employed to carry out seasonal agricultural work but who can demonstrate that the employer is prepared to house and feed them the year round, there could be an annual visa. These visas could be an extension of current arrangements whereby residents and residents of the northern counties of the DPRK have relatively easier access to their neighbor's territory provided they remain in those specific border counties.

Policy Recommendations (iv)

The Chinese government should consider a one-off amnesty for the relatively low numbers of North Korean migrants that remain in China. The Chinese government should also consider granting citizenship to those infants and young children currently without any legal status that have been born in China during the last decade.

Policy Recommendation (v)

In the medium and long term, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and China should develop a plan of investment in the manufacturing and mining sectors of North Hamgyong, from where many of the refugees originate. Project-based investment that would allow for a partnership between foreign lenders and DPRK industry and that would in its wake allow for scrutiny, transparency, and accountability of those projects would achieve a twofold objective. It could create employment and income for the residents of North Hamgyong that currently have few options other than the precarious road to Yanji City into, at best, badly paid and insecure employment. It would also help to reinforce the transition to marketization that is taking place in the DPRK. Given that North Hamgyong was the center of advanced industrial development in the DPRK until the late 1980s, a comparative advantage of North Hamgyong is the pool of technically qualified (if in obsolescent technology) but currently unemployed personnel.

Current Assistance

When North Korean migrants enter China they look for help from legally resident Chinese/Korean or Korean relatives, from individuals whose names or telephone numbers they have been given by friends or contacts in the DPRK, or they look for a church because they have heard back in the DPRK that churches provide assistance to North Koreans.⁶³ There are reports that the local Korean/Chinese population has been sympathetic to North Koreans looking for food

and sustenance but there is no systematic research on the attitude of local people to North Korean migrants.

Identification and analysis of the work of the dozens of organizations is difficult. None of the organizations publicize their work in any detail as all are technically breaking Chinese law. They can be subject to penalties if discovered although, in practice, the Chinese authorities tolerate those that remain solely engaged in humanitarian assistance while they prosecute those engaged in smuggling North Koreans out of China. These organizations are therefore inherently lacking in transparency, and information as to their funding, organization, sponsors, links with foreign organizations, objectives, methods, and achievements is scarce and almost wholly reliant on self-selection of whatever data the organization itself wants to promulgate. No systematic research has been undertaken on who is operating in the region and what they are doing although some of them maintain websites and it is therefore possible to gain some partial (in the sense of inadequate and also in the sense of non-independent or biased) information about their activities.

One experienced international humanitarian official stated that there are three types of groups operating in the Yanbian region to assist North Korean migrants - the humanitarian organizations, the advocates, and the “lunatics”.⁶⁴ Such categorization, as subjective as it may be, is useful in that it indicates the varied and differing priorities of these groups. It would be a mistake to assume that there is an automatic link by any of these three groups with any particular faith. Christians, for instance, are just as likely to be playing key roles in humanitarian-based organizational work and are likely to disapprove of activity by Christian fundamentalists who encourage migrants to reenter the DPRK, without the benefit of any organizational protection, with the sole purpose of carrying out conversion or missionary work. Such persons have no organizational protection, least of all from the organizations that send them, and without doubt will face retribution on themselves and their families if caught.

The humanitarian organizations primarily offer food, shelter, and humanitarian assistance sufficient to allow North Koreans to physically survive. Some of these groups also work in the northern counties of the DPRK, leaving “survival rucksacks” containing food, clothing and other basics at strategic locations.⁶⁵ The advocates visit Yanbian but are based in Tokyo, Washington DC, or Seoul. They raise issues of refugees’ rights and try to encourage the Chinese government to recognize the claims of North Koreans for legal status in China. The extremists or lunatics can perhaps best be understood as those who are less interested in individual North Koreans *per se* living in Yanbian but in the overall objective of replacing the governments in Pyongyang and Beijing. Their primary and prior objective is for regime change in the DPRK and sometimes in China.

Research Problem

Research needs to be undertaken on the scale, scope, and activities of the various organizations operating in and out of Yanbian on behalf of North Korean migrants. Base-line information exists in the form of website data, journalists accounts. There is also a realistic chance that independent researchers could persuade representatives and workers in these organizations to give interviews. It would be possible to establish a research protocol whereby organizations could not be identified when the research is disseminated.

Policy Problem

The organizations working in Yanbian have differing priorities, motives, and objectives. If governments are to be persuaded to respond effectively to the humanitarian need of North Koreans in China, they need to identify which of these organizations are credible and professional and which are not. Governments will need to work through reputable and locally-based non-governmental organizations to address and meet the needs of poverty and deprivation facing North Koreans in China.

Policy Recommendation (vi)

The Chinese government, in the context of the package of measures suggested here, should support those humanitarian organizations that provide for the basic needs of north Korean migrants.

Immediate and Future Needs

Short-term solutions are required to respond immediately to the extreme privations being suffered from women, children and men in Yanbian. Short-term solutions only make sense, however, if they are carried out within a context of dealing with the underlying conditions that make illegal migration into China a perceived necessity for so many North Koreans. They also will only be acceptable to the parties involved if a diplomatic route can be found that minimizes risk and maximizes effectiveness.

One solution is for an “honest broker,” trusted by all sides, to engage in some quiet diplomacy to try to produce a package of measures that respond to the needs, identified in this paper, of North Korean migrants in China, but that does so in a way that avoids “megaphone diplomacy” and that seeks to produce a set of policy options that all parties can implement. The Swedish and the Swiss governments are clear candidates for this role given their long-standing relations with the DPRK and China, their lengthy experience of working within these two countries, and their global reputation for neutrality and even-handedness in foreign affairs.

Only a package of measures that would satisfy the divergent sensitivities of the Chinese and DPRK governments would have, in practice, any chance of being implemented such as to help North Koreans in China. The package could include the various policy recommendations identified in this paper. In addition, further research needs to be undertaken to complete the knowledge gaps also identified in this paper.

Policy Recommendation (vii)

The Swiss and Swedish governments should consider whether they might have a role to play in facilitating the creation of a negotiating framework in which a comprehensive package of measures could be developed and implemented such as to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of North Korean migrants in China.

Policy Recommendation (viii)

The Chinese government, in the context of an overall package of measures, should permit credible and independent researchers from any of the many good universities and research institutes in China in partnership with researchers from a similar university of repute, to assess the nature and scale of Korean migration in China.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

- (i) The Chinese government should develop a package of policies towards North Korean migrants to China, that should identify those who are refugees and take appropriate action, but also find ways to assist those who need food, basic goods, and help with simple survival.
- (ii) A plan for project based, transparent, and accountable investment should be drawn up by a task force of North Korean, Chinese, and South Korean technical experts. This investment should be managed multilaterally according to protocols overseen by an intergovernmental governing body comprised of North Korean, Chinese, and South Korean technical experts. A body specifically designed to coordinate such investment should be established for a finite period of time and with finite goals.

This should be a low-key enterprise designed to implement a defined programme of activity and should not be a political entity.

- (iii) The Chinese government could consider granting semi-resident status through a special visa to those individuals who can demonstrate that they have work and shelter. For those who are employed to carry out seasonal agricultural work but who can demonstrate that the employer is prepared to house and feed them the year round, there could be an annual visa. These visas could be an extension of current arrangements whereby Yanbian residents and residents of the northern counties of the DPRK have relatively easier access to their neighbor's territory provided they remain in those specific border counties.
- (iv) The Chinese government should consider a one-off amnesty for the relatively low numbers of North Korean migrants that remain in China. The Chinese government should also consider granting citizenship to those infants and young children currently without any legal status that have been born in China during the last decade.
- (v) In the medium and long term, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and China should develop a plan of investment in the manufacturing and mining sectors of North Hamgyong, from where many of the refugees originate. Project-based investment that would allow for a partnership between foreign lenders and DPRK industry and that would in its wake allow for scrutiny, transparency, and accountability of those projects would achieve a twofold objective. It could create employment and income for the residents of North Hamgyong that currently have few options other than the precarious road to Yanji City into, at best, badly paid and insecure employment. It would also help to reinforce the transition to marketization that is taking place in the DPRK. Given that North Hamgyong was the center of advanced industrial development in the DPRK until the late 1980s, a comparative advantage of North Hamgyong is the pool of technically qualified (if in obsolescent technology) but currently unemployed personnel.
- (vi) The Chinese government, in the context of the package of measures suggested here, should support those humanitarian organizations that provide for the basic needs of North Korean migrants.
- (vii) The Swiss and Swedish governments should consider whether they might have a role to play in facilitating the creation of a negotiating framework in which a comprehensive package of measures could be developed and implemented such as to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of North Korean migrants in China.
- (viii) The Chinese government, in the context of an overall package of measures, should permit credible and independent researchers from any of the many good universities and research institutes in China in partnership with researchers from a similar university of repute, to assess the nature and scale of Korean migration in China.

Conclusion

We have enough knowledge on North Korean migration in China to know that we should not wait until more substantive research is completed before policy solutions are found to meet the needs of the deprived, impoverished, and hopeless North Koreans illegally resident in China as at late 2002. Instead concerned parties should consider a package of policy measures which,

with some goodwill, could realistically be implemented by governments and the more professional non-governmental organizations currently working to assist North Koreans. There is a humanitarian crisis facing the North Koreans living in Yanbian and in China. Relative to the population of China, only a very small number of people are involved but for each and every North Korean individual, especially the children, it is a crisis of extreme proportions. Given a little flexibility and imagination by all the parties concerned, it is also a crisis that is solvable.



Appendix 1: Map of DPRK Indicating Provincial Boundaries

Notes

* The field research for this piece was only made possible by a very generous grant from the United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC. I am immensely grateful for their support and forbearance, and am all the more appreciative because I fully realize that some of my conclusions may not be shared by all at the Institute. This essay is based on English language written sources – some of which refer to other language sources themselves and some of which do not. I have spoken with and formally interviewed hundreds of Chinese, North and South Korean sources over the past 12 years – some with the aid of an interpreter and some not – and some on this particular subject and some on broader issues to do with the Korean Peninsula. The essay would undoubtedly benefit from ready access to written Korean and Chinese language sources and I would welcome feedback as to those sources, which I could then arrange to have translated. My view is that the lack of easy access to these written sources does not obviate the thrust of this essay which is that, even using currently available English languages resources, it is still possible to base policy on better knowledge and to identify exaggeration and disinformation and, most importantly, to develop and implement more appropriate policies for impoverished and insecure North Koreans living in China.

¹ A useful but undated survey and analysis (1999?) is Young-hwa Lee, the General-Secretary of RENK (Rescue the North Korean People: Urgent Action Network), “Situation and Protection of North Korean Refugees in China,” reproduced on <http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/bbs/board2/files/55_young-hwalee.doc>. There have been a number of unscientific “surveys” of North Korean migrants in China. The major problem with them is that the methodology is rarely made explicit and the creators of such work seem innocent of basic research conventions such as the necessity both to guard against bias and to demonstrate, through making explicit the methodology, just how bias is being avoided in the “research”. However well-meaning, the results developed from such naïve work do not provide credible data and in no case provide the basis for generalization about the status of North Koreans in general in China. See for example The Commission to Help North Korean Refugees, “A Field Survey Report of the North Korean Refugees in China,” undated but survey conducted in 1999 (stated in the text), reproduced on <<http://www.nk-refugees.or.kr/english/emain.html>>. See also Good Friends: International Peace, Human Rights and Refugees Center, “The Food crisis of North Korea: Witnessed by 1694 Food Refugees,” reproduced on <<http://www.jungto.org/gf/eng/index.htm>>.

² A most informative piece of research on North Koreans living in China is Jeanyong Lee, “Ethnic Korean Migration in Northeast Asia,” in Tsuneo Akaha, ed, Proceedings, International Seminar: Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia, Monterey: The Center for East Asian Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, January 2002, pp. 118-140. The number of 2 million comes from *ibid.*, p. 118.

³ “Tumen River Area, China,” <http://www.ecdc.net.cn/regions/english/tumen/tumenzone_e.htm>.

⁴ “Population of Ethnic Korean Community in China Expected to Be Halved by 2050,” The Korea Herald, September 13, 2002, <http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/SITE/data/html_dir/2002/09/13/200209130017.asp>.

⁵ North Korean business trainees, for instance, work in Yanji City at a Chinese hotel. See “Yanji region,” <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/095th_issue/99051904.htm>.

⁶ See “Yanji region,” <http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/095th_issue/99051904.htm>.

⁷ “Tumen River Area, China,” <http://www.ecdc.net.cn/regions/English/tumen/tumenzone_e.htm>.

⁸ “The South’s Guangdong,” Asiaweek.com, 2001, <<http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/97/0228/nat3.html>>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ For comments on how migrants simply walk across the river in winter, see Shim Jae Hoon, “North Korea: A Crack in the Wall,” Far Eastern Economic Review, April 29, 1999. I have traveled up and down the North Korean side of the border from North Hamgyong through to Ryanggang in 2000 and on the China side of the border up to Russia and back twice in 2002. It is mostly deserted and the river narrows at a number of points.

¹¹ I spoke with a representative from the US consulate in Shenyang in Yanji City, September 2002. He said that it had been a major surprise for him to observe that the Dandong/Sinuiju border crossing was not militarized.

¹² W. Courtland Robinson, Myung Ken Lee, Kenneth Hill, Gilbert M. Burnham, "Mortality in North Korean Migrant Households: A Retrospective Study," The Lancet, vol. 354, no. 9175 (July 24, 1999), p. 293.

¹³ Shim Jae Hoon, "North Korea: A Crack in the Wall," Far Eastern Economic Review, April 29, 1999.

¹⁴ One researcher reports that in 1999, 7000 North Koreans were sent back to China, and in March 2000, '5000'. None of these claims are substantiated by references to sources. This article also includes misleading statements such as the inference that the Yanbian autonomous prefecture encompasses all of China north of Korea. He states that "the area of China north of Korea is populated by ethnic Koreans, known... as the autonomous prefecture of." Other parts of the paper are informative – for instance the discussion on international law. The point is that even this sober reflection on North Korean migrants in China is based on unsubstantiated claims and "common knowledge," the latter of which can be inaccurate and misleading. See James Seymour, "China and the International Asylum Regime: The Case of the North Korean Refugees in China," July 28, 2002,

<http://www.hrwf.net/newhrwf/html/north_korea__countries__polic.html>.

¹⁵ George Wehrfritz and Hideko Takayama, "Riding the Seoul Train," Newsweek International, March 5, 2001, <http://www2.gol.com/users/coynerhm/riding_the_seoul_train.htm>.

¹⁶ "China Police Storm Plane after Botched Hijack," <<http://latelinenews.com/ll/1205714.shtml>>.

¹⁷ James Seymour, "China and the International Asylum Regime: The Case of the North Korean Refugees in China," July 28, 2002, <http://www.hrwf.net/newhrwf/html/north_korea__countries__polic.html>.

¹⁸ "Text: Resolution Urges China to Halt North Korean Repatriations,"

<<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/uschina/nkrefuge.htm>>.

¹⁹ See, for example, Chuck Downs, "Written Statement Submitted to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: Hearing on Religious Freedom for North Korea," January 24, 2002, <http://www.familycare.org/network/p01_chuckdowns.htm>.

²⁰ John Powell, "Testimony Before the Sub-committee on East Asia and the Pacific, House International Relations Committee," May 2, 2002, <http://www.house.gov/international_relations/powe0502.htm>.

²¹ These quotations come from a radio interview with Vollertsen and Peters on a Christian women's radio station – Concerned women of America - in link to "interview",

<<http://www.familycare.org/network/p01.htm>>. The radio interview has Vollertsen and Peters professing that no one else cares about the children of the DPRK but themselves and Peters refers to Vollertsen as a "Christ-like figure" because of an incident in the DPRK when the latter cut off a part of his skin to donate to a burn victim. He does not say that Vollertsen did this in support of an entire workforce who had each cut off a tiny part of their skin to offer to their colleague who had suffered burns. Would this make all these North Korean workers "Christ-like" figures?

²² For survey of humanitarian activity in the DPRK, see Hazel Smith, Overcoming Humanitarian Dilemmas in the DPRK, Special Report no. 90, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, July 2002.

²³ Hazel Smith, CARITAS, Evaluation of CARITAS activity in DPRK 1995-2001, Hong Kong: CARITAS, 2001.

²⁴ A widely circulated statement by KASM, which did not share the perspective of the unrepresentative groups advising Congressional committees, was "KASM's Position on North Korean Refugee Issues," May 22, 2002,

<<http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special%5Freports/kasm%5Fposition%5Fon%5Frefugee.txt>>.

²⁵ US Committee for Refugees, "Country Report: North Korea," reproduced on

<http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/easia_pacific/2001/north_korea.htm>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with Chinese/Korean humanitarian agency representative, Yanji City, September 2002. Anonymity given to protect the source.

²⁸ I witnessed this systematic stopping of vehicles to check for North Korean migrants on my visit to Yanji City and Yanbian in September 2002. Not all vehicles were stopped and the checks took place at the entry points to the city.

²⁹ UNHCR, Protecting Refugees: Questions and Answers, Geneva: UNHCR, 2002, p. 4.

³⁰ UNHCR, Refugees by Numbers 2000 edition, Geneva: UNHCR, 2001, p. 10.

³¹ UNHCR, Protecting Refugees: Questions and Answers, Geneva: UNHCR, 2002, p. 10.

³² Ibid., p. 8.

³³ UNHCR was itself involved in the drama of highly-publicized occupations of international premises in June 2001 when seven North Koreans walked into the Beijing UNHCR office, accompanied by a Japanese journalist, demanding to be repatriated to South Korea. UNHCR in Geneva went so far as to say that they believed the seven should be granted asylum. For discussion of the UNHCR occupation, see Elizabeth Rosenthal, "North Koreans in China Press UN on Asylum Issue," New York Times, June 29, 2001, reproduced on <<http://www.snkr.org/stories/news/news.html>>.

³⁴ Kris Janowski, UNHCR spokesperson, quoted by Elizabeth Rosenthal, "North Koreans Widening Escape Route to China," New York Times, August 5, 2002, reproduced on <http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/newsletter_eng/news_view.html?no=282>.

³⁵ W. Courtland Robinson. Myung Ken Lee, Kenneth Hill, Gilbert M. Burnham, "Mortality in North Korean Migrant Households: A Retrospective Study," The Lancet, vol. 354, no. 9175 (July 24, 1999), p. 293.

³⁶ I interviewed two groups of North Korean migrants in Yanbian in September 2002. They had left the DPRK at various times over the previous two years. All informed me that the main motive for leaving the DPRK was because of food shortages and lack of opportunities to work and provide for their families. See also Elizabeth Rosenthal's fine series of reporting from Yanbian as Beijing correspondent for the New York Times. See, for instance, Elizabeth Rosenthal, "North Korean in China Now Live in Fear of Dagnet," New York Times, July 18, 2002, reproduced on <<http://www.freesebia.net/Articles/2002/Dagnet.html>>.

³⁷ Various reports on detention camps for those sent back to the DPRK from China include "Exclusive Detention Centers for NK Defectors Emerge," What is new about defectors, October 2002, <http://north-korea.narod.ru/defectors_new.htm>.

³⁸ Patrick Goodenough, "Babies Killed in North Korean Prison Camps, Observers Say," CNSNews.com, June 12, 2002, <<http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewForeignBureaus.asp?Page=\ForeignBureaus\archive\200206\FOR20020612b.html>>.

³⁹ Rosenthal describes the lack of fear displayed by many North Koreans migrants in China in respect of potential harsh penalties on their return to the DPORK. See Elizabeth Rosenthal, "North Koreans Widening Escape Route to China," New York Times, August 5, 2002, reproduced on <http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/newsletter_eng/news_view.html?no=282>.

⁴⁰ For discussion of Japanese involvement and balanced analysis on those organizing the embassy and consulate "invasions", see Philip Brasar, "Who's Got the Scoop on the Shenyang Five?," The Japan Times Online, June 2, 2002, <<http://www.japantimes.com/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?fd20020602pb.htm>>. The Los Angeles based organizer is Douglas Shin who is quoted in Elizabeth Rosenthal, "N. Koreans Seek Asylum," New York Times, September 4, 2002, reproduced on <<http://www.bayarea.com/mld/bayarea/news/world/3998743.htm>>. Norbert Vollertsen moves between Seoul and Washington DC, is not a member of any organization, and does not reveal who provides him with funds.

⁴¹ Interviews with foreign journalists, Beijing, September 2002.

⁴² One organization, appealing for help for four people imprisoned in Mongolia for smuggling North Koreans from China into Mongolia, noted that one of them was Oh Young-Phil, "a South Korean freelance video documentarist whose video features have often appeared on KBS TV," in "Appeal for Imprisoned South Korean and Chinese Activists and Ten North Korean Refugees," reproduced on <<http://www.chosunjournal.com/announce.html#special1>>.

⁴³ The Christian Friends of Korea is an Evangelical organization that draws on the experience of Christian missionaries who operated in Pyongyang prior to the 1940s. Some of the children of these missionaries, who grew up in Korea, run the organization, which operates in the DPRK in partnership with the DPRK government an openly faith-based Christian humanitarian programme. See various newsletters of the Christian Friends of Korea, PO Box 396, Montreat, NC 28757, USA.

⁴⁴ W. Courtland Robinson. Myung Ken Lee, Kenneth Hill, Gilbert M. Burnham, "Mortality in North Korean Migrant Households: A Retrospective Study," The Lancet, vol. 354, no. 9175 (July 24, 1999), p. 294.

⁴⁵ My interviewees in September 2002 in Yanbian were all from North Hamgyong although they had entered China at different times and independently of each other.

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- ⁴⁶ World Food Programme, Review of Operations 2000, Pyongyang: World Food Programme, undated but 2001, p. 12.
- ⁴⁷ World Food Programme, “Emergency Operation DPR Korea No. 5959: Emergency Food Assistance for Vulnerable Groups,” in WFP, WFP Operations in DPR Korea as of 14 July 1999, Rome: WFP, undated but 1999, p. 1.
- ⁴⁸ World Food Programme, Review of Operations 2001, Pyongyang: World Food Programme, undated but 2002, p. 17.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ For reference to recent migration including teachers, doctors and other members of middle and upper classes see Robert Marquand, “A Refugee’s Perilous Odyssey from N. Korea,” The Christian Science Monitor, August 16, 2002, reproduced on <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0816/p01s02-wosc.html>>.
- ⁵⁴ One example is a North Korean physician who defected from the DPRK to the ROK in 1996. His daughter and granddaughter left for China in 1997 but were arrested in 2002 at Harbin airport as the daughter used a forged Chinese passport. See “Defector Goes Back to China for Daughter, Child, Is Caught,” JoongAng Ilbo, February 2, 2002, <<http://english.joins.com/nk/article.asp?aid=20020205101316&sid=E00>>. The rate for a fake passport at 2002 was \$10,000, more than most North Koreans would expect to see in a lifetime. For price of passport, see Robert Marquand, “A Refugee’s Perilous Odyssey from N. Korea,” The Christian Science Monitor, August 16, 2002, reproduced on <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0816/p01s02-wosc.html>>.
- ⁵⁵ A February 2002 report from the ROK secret services, for instance, indicated that 20 North Koreans who had arrived that month through third countries were unemployed workers, farmers and labourers. Only one was in a white-collar job – a teacher. See “20 North Korean Defectors Arrive in South,” JoongAng Ilbo, February 25, 2002, <<http://english.joins.com/nk/article.asp?aid=20020225102606&sid=E00>>.
- ⁵⁶ I have traveled extensively in the DPRK and Musan, which I traveled through twice in October 2000, is the poorest place I have seen in the country.
- ⁵⁷ A Time Asia article writes that North Korean refugees are subject to “unscrupulous farmers and factory owners who give them jobs but pay a pittance.” See Donald Macintyre, “Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide,” Time Asia, June 25, 2001, reproduced on <<http://www.time.com/time/asia/news/magazine/0,9754,131024,00.html>>.
- ⁵⁸ The description in this paragraph is taken from my own observations in the mountains outside Yanji in September 2002.
- ⁵⁹ Quoted in George Wehrfritz and Hideko Takayama, “Riding the Seoul Train,” Newsweek International, March 5, 2001, <http://www2.gol.com/users/coynerhm/riding_the_seoul_train.htm>, p. 14.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Chinese/Korean humanitarian agency representative, Yanji City, September 2002. Anonymity given to protect the source.
- ⁶¹ Author’s observations, Yanbian Prefecture, September 2002.
- ⁶² For analysis of the gendered dimensions of women’s life in the DPRK, see Hazel Smith, World Food Programme, WFP DPRK Programmes and Activities: a Gender Perspective, Pyongyang: WFP, 1999.
- ⁶³ Interview with Chinese/Korean humanitarian agency representative, Yanji City, September 2002. Anonymity given to protect the source.
- ⁶⁴ I am loath to maintain anonymity for the source who is a senior humanitarian official but because the person continues to work in the field I do to protect their identity and because I was asked to do so.
- ⁶⁵ Interview with Chinese/Korean humanitarian agency representative, Yanji City, September 2002. Anonymity given to protect the source.