

North Korean Defectors as Cultural Other in South Korea: Perception and Construction of Cultural Differences

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With around 34,000 North Korean defectors having arrived in South Korea (as of June, 2021), perceptions toward them remain ambiguous and unbalanced. The dominant discourse about North Korean defectors centers on adaptation, and cultural difference is often identified as one of the most challenging obstacles. This article examines how a specific conceptualization of culture is utilized to alienate North Korean defectors, while securing the belief in a single ethnicity of all Koreans. As a result, North Korean defectors are rendered as cultural other in South Korean society. While cultural difference is often believed to be the basis of discrimination for North Korean defectors, this article argues that social prejudice and discrimination reproduce and reinforce the discourse about cultural difference of North Korean defectors.

Keywords North Korean defectors, cultural difference, ethnicity, South Korea, cultural other

Introduction

As K. Anthony Appiah (1996) suggests, race has long functioned as a metonym of culture with discursive power. With the dissipating effectiveness of race as an analytically valid concept and the mass immigration experienced on the American continent, ethnicity appears to be a newly found banner for categorizing different groups of people in colloquial contexts. While race absurdly attempts to establish a causal link between physical appearance and behavioral patterns, intelligence, and personality, ethnicity resorts to language and culture as its defining characteristics. Anthropology has long struggled to prove the analytical value of the concept of culture (Boggs 2004; Fischer 2007; Anderson-Levitt 2012), since culture is considered as a systemic whole of shared values encompassing every aspect of human life. An ethnic group is understood as

referring to people who share language, religion, custom, values, and historical memories, all of which form the core of culture (Eriksen 2002). Engaging in such fundamental aspects of human life that have been accumulated over time, ethnicity is often assumed as having some level of primordiality and ancestry in academic circles and even more so in laypeople's views. As Stuart Hall claimed in his famous Du Bois Lectures, the concept of ethnicity has operated at the intersections of race, culture, and nation as a discursive construct and a sliding signifier (Hall 2017, 99-100). The ambiguity imbedded in ethnicity even earned an assessment in which ethnicity is understood as a cognitive phenomenon, which exists only through "perceptions, interpretations, representations, classifications, categorization, and identifications" (Brubaker et al. 2004, 45). If one agrees with Brubaker and his colleagues' assertion that ethnicity, along with race, are "not things in the world, but perspectives on the world—not ontological but epistemological realities," (ibid., 45) Koreans, broadly speaking, definitely have their share of such perspectives as they are known for their strong belief in ethnic homogeneity.

The phrase *tanilminjok* is widely used to emphasize the homogeneity of Korean people and translates into "one-ethnicity-one-nation." *Minjok* in Korean language covers both concepts of ethnicity and nation and *Hanminjok* is a term referring to Korean people. *Hanminjok* in this context is believed to have shared language, tradition, values, and even a collective psychology through a deep vertical time, which renders the boundary of Koreanness with primordial dimensions, as something heart-felt and undisputed at least among its own people. In school textbooks and curricula of primary and secondary education, the history of Korean people harkens back to the state of Kojosŏn (ca. 2333 BCE) to make the supposed five thousand years a communal time with antiquity. Criticisms of such a blood-based sense of Korean ethnic nationalism have been made by a range of scholars who contend a relatively recent origin. Han Kyung-Koo (2007, 11) has criticized the blind ethnic nationalism of Korea by pointing out that the idea of ethnic homogeneity was introduced not to emphasize the consanguinity of Korean people, but to highlight the continuity of Korean cultural and political life that is as old as China. In examining the history and nature of Korean ethnic nationalism, Shin Gi-Wook (2006) pays attention to the continued sense of community among Korean people, which forms the basis of the modern product of ethnic nationalism.

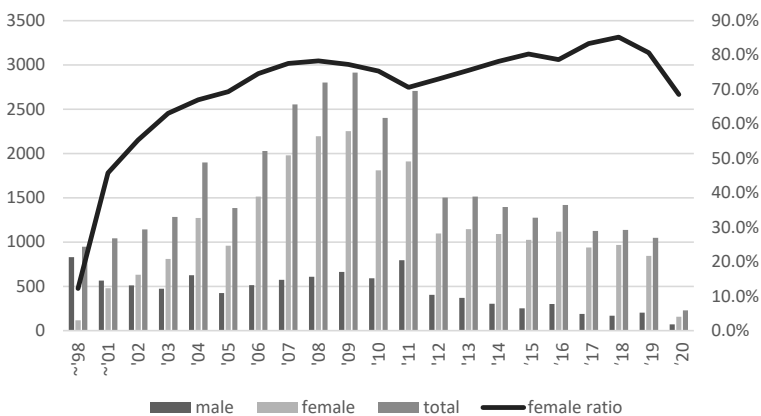
Despite the popular discourse of a single ethnicity, the reality of Korea is a divided nation resulting from a series of unfortunate historical events in the aftermath of World War II. After gaining independence from Japanese colonization in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided into North and South along the 38th parallel at the onset of the Cold War.¹ As a result, two governments were established in 1948 in the northern and southern parts, with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north and the Republic of Korea (ROK)

in the south. Since then, seventy years have passed with different political regimes and different social institutions in each half of the Korean peninsula. It was not just territory that was divided at the 38th parallel by heavily armed borders and the demilitarized zone (DMZ)—the people were divided and separated from each other.

When the Korean war ended with an armistice in 1953, the two Koreas firmly shut their doors to each other, except for a handful special occasions designed or approved by the governments. People cannot cross the border to visit the other side, and no mail exchanges or media communications are allowed between North and South Korea. Under the political and military tensions between the two Koreas, South Koreans have little opportunity to develop a sense of shared life with North Koreans. Other than the propagated images of nationals of the enemy state, North Koreans have remained almost unknown to South Koreans. The only exception to this segregation is North Korean defectors who have settled in South Korea. After the “Arduous March” (1994-1999) in North Korea, which was a prolonged period of extreme hardship due to natural disasters and a resulting famine and economic difficulties, some North Korean people found their way out of the most isolated country in the world to South Korea (Lankov 2006). The exodus peaked between 2007-2009 (2,554 in 2007, 2,803 in 2008, and 2,914 in 2009), and the following years saw a decrease with the annual number of defectors at about one thousand (see Figure 1).

The current number of North Korean defectors² living in South Korea is close to 34,000 based on statistics from the Ministry of Unification of South Korea. Their ratio to the entire population of South Korea remains small, but the attention and importance placed on them certainly outweigh their numerical proportion. Due to the tensions of division between the two Koreas, North

Figure 1. Annual Number of North Korean Defectors Entering South Korea.



Source: Ministry of Unification of South Korea (n.d.).

Korean defectors represent North Korean residents, as a whole, with whom South Koreans have had little chance to interact. In addition to being treated as a sample population for the whole group, North Korean defectors hold significance as their process of adaptation and integration becomes a precursor of what will happen in the future, especially in the case of reunification. Despite the sociopolitical significance that North Korean defectors carry for people in the South, their status and identity within South Korean society remain ambiguous.

If we assume that a single ethnicity means that all Korean people belong to the Hanminjok group, then there is no reason to assume that North Koreans are any less Korean than South Koreans. Compared to the long-held master narrative and rhetoric of five thousand years, seventy years spent in separation is merely a brief moment. In reality, however, North Korean defectors in South Korea are considered somehow different from their hosting brethren, and the assumed difference supposedly has its basis in the realm of culture. It seems that there is a twofold perception toward people of North Korea. On the one hand, ethnic homogeneity applies to North Korean residents as a group as long as they exist outside South Koreans' reality. North Korean defectors who breathe the same air with South Koreans, and thus share their everyday reality, on the other hand, are subject to the discourse of cultural difference.

The familiar image of North Korean defectors involves political implications: they are portrayed as victims of an oppressive regime, witnesses of human right violations, and refugees with no home to return to. When they are removed from the context of the North Korean regime, the best image bestowed on them is of a people who share a similar appearance with South Koreans but nonetheless show different cultural traits. The discursive power of cultural difference is enough to make North Korean defectors locate the source of their hardship in cultural difference. As this article illustrates, however, it is not the cultural differences but rather the perception toward cultural differences and their association with particular social structural aspects that are to be examined in order to understand the circumstances under which North Korean defectors' lives unfold with difficulty in South Korea.

This article argues against the assumption behind the high currency of cultural differences in understanding the existence and the life of North Korean defectors. While cultural differences are often cited as one of the main challenges in successful adaptation and settlement of North Korean defectors in South Korea, little attention has been paid to how those cultural differences are constituted on a perceptual level and what the implications of that are. In other words, existing cultural differences between North Korean defectors and South Koreans have been naturalized, which informs policy as well as social discourse. Rather than following a pre-established notion of cultural differences to locate North Korean defectors in South Korean society, this article aims to examine and complicate the familiar discourse on North Korean defectors' cultural difference.

Hence, this article aims to answer the following questions: How are cultural differences perceived by both North Korean defectors and South Koreans? What are the main factors constituting and shaping those perceptions of cultural differences? What implications do registering group differences in the realm of culture have on the life of North Korean defectors? Furthermore, this article highlights that South Korean discourses and narratives about North Korean defectors consistently fail to accommodate the perception and interpretation of South Korean society from the viewpoint of North Korean defectors. Under these circumstances, North Korean defectors are otherized in cultural terms, contrary to the long-held master narrative of Korean ethnic unity. What is more problematic in this process is that North Korean defectors seem to internalize the alienating perception projected on them.

In the following sections, I explore how culture is mobilized to exclude and differentiate rather than include and integrate North Korean defectors within South Korean society. To do this, I examine questions included in two surveys conducted with North Korean defectors. The first is the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS)'s *North Korean Residents' Unification Perception Survey*, and the other is Korea Hana Foundation's *North Korean Defectors' Social Integration Survey*. The main purpose of reviewing these surveys is not to analyze the quantitative results but to scrutinize the assumptions behind the survey questions to understand North Korean defectors' responses to them. This article also makes use of the author's previous interviews with North Korean defectors to underline the main arguments about their settling experience.

Previous Research on North Korean Defectors

Studies on North Korean defectors have been accumulated in two major sectors in South Korea with different motivations and goals: government-affiliated institutions and the academia. The main focus for South Korean government agencies and affiliated research institutions, including research units subcontracting government research projects, lies on North Korean defectors' successful settlement and adaptation in South Korea. The main focus of policy reports on North Korean defectors' adaptation is on measures to facilitate the adaptation process by instructing North Korean defectors with South Korean ways of life. Here, the very term of adaptation is perceived as a unilateral adjustment process rather than a bilateral, interactive process based on mutual understanding. Another prominent feature of such policy reports is the emphasis on static numbers rather than process. This is problematic because the temporal dimension is particularly crucial to consider with the issue of adaptation. Adaptation to a new social environment happens as a processual accumulation, and the success or efficiency of adaptation is hard to gauge with snapshot measurements.

In academia, adaptation has also been a crucial theme, but other connected and relevant topics have been treated and analyzed as well. For example, the politics of identity in different countries, especially when they choose a different country to settle, and socio-economic processes of migration become the focus of analysis in these studies on North Korean defectors.

Scholars who are keen on the local politics of identity of North Korean defectors pay attention to the North Korean defectors' diverse experience and its effect on their self-identity. Based on in-depth interviews, Lee Byung Soo (2014) delineates the multi-layered nature of North Korean defectors' identities that manifest in diverse forms depending on different interview topics. For example, North Korean defectors retained a strong orientation toward socio-cultural traits of North Korea, but they were inclined to sympathize with the legal and political regime of South Korea at the same time. Lee also criticizes South Korean society's discrimination toward North Korean defectors as a form of victim-blaming, which fails to grasp the structural problems of neo-liberal tendencies in South Korean society. Religion has also been shown to play a crucial role in North Korean defectors' negotiations of identity. As Jung Hyang Jin's (2020) study on Christian affiliation and practices of North Korean defectors demonstrates, religion not only increases a sense of belonging, but also mobilizes North Korean defectors to contest the established boundaries and order of things, which often leads to redefining their identities.

The ambivalent status and accumulated identity of North Korean defectors as refugees and migrants have been heated topics in recent years (Chun 2018, Shin et al. 2016; Kim 2014; Kang 2018; Song 2013). The process of negotiating identity among the youth also demonstrates how different experiences generate convoluted constructions of identity on the part of North Korean defectors. For example, Lee Soo-Jung (2011) examines how cultural citizenship and a sense of belonging form (or fails to form) among young North Korean defectors and she argues for an active role of education that encompasses multiple affiliations and experiences as a source for new visions and identity. Lee Boo-mi (2012) explores the ways in which young North Korean defectors' school experiences in South Korea help them acquire an active learner's position. This position, in turn, enables them to reconstruct their own identity as fluid and transnational. Lee Yong Eul's (2015) study on North Korean adolescent refugees also points to their cross-border experiences in the socio-cultural realm and highlights how those have contributed to their constructions of their new identities.

In addition to in-depth interviews, critical readings of media contents provide abundant material for scrutinizing identity politics and linked discourses in South Korean society. Reflecting the characteristic composition of North Korean defectors—women form the majority, exceeding 70 percent—more studies pay attention to female defectors and their double-minority status and lived experiences as women. Kang, Baek and Nam (2017) compare two popular TV talk

shows featuring female North Korean defectors with the goal of demonstrating both TV programs' ambivalent perspective toward North Koreans. The authors argue that this ambivalence reveals the conflict and confusion that North Korean defectors experience in the process of re-negotiating and establishing their new identities between the two Koreas. Tae and Whang (2012) also examine one of those two shows and contend that individual memories of female North Korean defectors were reconstructed through the talk show, and as a result, established a narrative of public memory to be circulated in South Korean society. Tae and Whang's analysis suggests that such TV talk shows have had an effect of marginalizing North Korean defectors because the format individualizes their personal memories, leaving them fragmented and decontextualized. The same talk show was also harshly criticized by Lee Sun-Min (2014) for representing female North Korean defectors' identity as second-rate citizens in South Korean society. The limited and selective representation of North Korean defectors as unequal citizens was also explored in Chun's (2015) analysis of South Korean media representations.

While government-affiliated agencies are primarily interested in the adaptation and adjustment process towards a desirable outcome that is measurable with policy-making prospective, academic and scholarly research put more weight on the importance of social integration than assimilative adaptation when thematizing the presence of North Korean defectors in South Korean society (Lee J. 2014; Kim 2018; Suh 2013; Kim and Park 2016; Choi and Kim 2013). Most policy reports and government analyses view adaptation as unilateral acculturation, which means that North Korean defectors are expected to learn, master, and internalize the South Korean way of life. For example, in the *White Book of Unification* annually published by the Ministry of Unification, North Korean defectors are mentioned only in one section solely devoted to the prospect of successful adaptation in South Korea. Even in that section, suggested ways of facilitating adaptation are discussed in terms of providing proper education and trainings, in which North Korean defectors are seen as mere recipients of South Korean governments' initiatives. In contrast, an emphasis on integration means that, in reality, adaptation requires mutual effort on both sides, and there is a sizeable literature on South Koreans' perceptions and attitudes toward North Korean defectors, which attempts to find clues about how to decrease negativity and initiate a more positive approach (Ha and Jang 2016; Son 2016). Based on opinion surveys in South Korea asking about North Korean defectors, Kwon Soo Hyun (2011) explains that ethnic identity is the single-most important determining factor and basis for South Koreans' positive perception of North Korean defectors. In a similar vein, Sohn and Lee (2012) analyzed the National Identity Survey of the year 2010 and conclude that national identity or ethnic belonging is the strongest and most influential factor in shaping South Koreans' attitude toward North Korean defectors. It is remarkable, however, that

interactions between North Korean defectors and South Koreans have often resulted in increased negative attitudes on the side of South Koreans towards defectors (Kim 2016, 531).

These studies aptly point to the difficulties North Korean defectors face as a social minority and they demand a thorough reconfiguration of the agency of North Korean defectors. However, little attention has been given to overarching discursive frame of cultural difference that has made the otherization of North Korean defectors possible in the first place. This article sets out to explore how the popular discourse of cultural difference preemptively limits the incorporation and integration of North Korean defectors into South Korean society, despite the rhetoric of ethnic unity.

North Korean Defectors as Cultural Other

Culture, as seen in the definition of ethnicity, provides the common base of a group of people. Believing in a shared culture and heritage thus serves as a binding agent even when there exist heterogenous components. In this sense, culture is shared and inclusive for in-group members and creates a sense of unity. At the same time, culture is a powerful apparatus that creates boundaries and excludes others from “us.” To distinguish us from them is a common tendency and corollary of establishing social relationships, and in many boundary-setting social processes culture is mobilized as the ground for verifying the alleged differences between groups.

In the public discourse on the unity and perpetuity of Korean people, culture is a binding agent that enables the imagining and the delineation of Korean ethnicity with seamless homogeneity. On the other hand, it appears that the belief in this ethnic homogeneity abruptly withers away when it comes to North Korean defectors who share their social reality with South Koreans, and culture turns out to be the distinguishing feature between these two distinct Korean groups. North Korean defectors in South Korea are caught between the rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion. They are members of the same ethnicity of Hanminjok, and at the same time, they are people from the so-called main enemy state. This aligns with South Koreans’ uneasy feeling toward unification as well: unification is a necessity as an allegedly homogeneous ethnic nation’s destiny, but fully embracing North Koreans into South Korea’s established status as a developed and advanced country is not an appealing prospect for many, if not one that is feared. To resolve this dissonance, North Korean defectors are turned into a cultural other. They are considered ethnically same, but culturally different. Here, the use of culture becomes much narrower than when it is used to glorify the Korean people’s commonality.

In South Korean society, North Korean defectors thus occupy an ambivalent

position (see Park 2020). Compared to other groups with foreign origins, North Korean defectors already have many more assets for adapting to South Korean social life. In terms of language, tradition, historical experiences, and appearance, they have a head start that is unavailable to any other group of non-Koreans. However, this advantage seldom works positively for North Korean defectors. The similarity or commonality can provide a basis of sharedness, but at the same time, they cannot get out of what Homi Bhabha (1994, 86) aptly described as “almost, but not quite.” For one thing, the labeling of North Korean defectors seems to be without an expiration date regardless of the length of their residence in South Korea and the depth of their understanding of (and sometimes even degree of assimilation into) South Korean society’s value system and codes of conduct. Also, it needs to be pointed out that it is often ignored that the seemingly monolithic group of North Korean defectors encompasses people from different backgrounds, such as region, social class, level of education, gender, and so on (see Chun 2020). Unlike other Korean diasporic groups, the group of North Korean defectors seems to be treated as one big conglomerate, with little attention given to the different circumstances of defection.

When people differentiate others from themselves based on visual cues, the connection is usually found between appearances and places of origin. In the case of North Korean defectors, the look doesn’t have much of a distinguishing potential, so it is substituted with audible cues such as accent, tone, vocabulary, and communicative style. In the process by which North Korean defectors’ cultural differences serve as measures of exclusion, such traits become naturalized into negative qualities. Although there is no clear and solid connection between the so-called North Korean defectors’ cultural difference and their group personality, the former is utilized as a register, as indexical cues for the former. Irvine and Gal’s (2000) concept of naturalization through iconization is referential here. According to them, iconization is a process by which index and social meaning is reinterpreted as if there existed a fundamental relationship, and through iconization, such indexical affiliation becomes naturalized. The term of North Korean defectors only refers to the point of departure (North Korea) of those people’s journey of political defection. Other than that, they are people with different backgrounds, different experiences, different motivations, and different personalities. But the discourse of cultural difference between North Korean defectors and South Koreans selected a handful of traits among many and turned those into an index that supports the depiction of North Korean defectors as cultural others.

The ways in which a cultural other is constructed usually involves pointing out a group that becomes a showcase for conspicuous cultural difference both in behavioral and mental values. A cultural other becomes a point of reference against which either success or failure of the self is measured. Cultural others thus exist as a cautionary tale for some, and a model for emulation for others. In

the case of North Korean defectors, cultural otherization has a slightly different dimension since North Korean defectors are not entitled to being a complete other because of similarities, no matter whether they are real or imagined. Instead, turning North Korean defectors into a cultural other for South Koreans involves the condescending gaze of internal orientalism. As seen in other instances of internal orientalism, such as Japan's perspective towards its colonized people in the early 20th Century or China's approach to ethnic minorities, the main purpose is to establish a hierarchy while tolerating the coexistence of cultural others with the self. Being a system of knowledge with discursive practice toward a certain group of people, orientalism locates and naturalizes exotic elements in them. With North Korean defectors, the registered difference is found in their linguistic and communicative styles and traits, which become associated with behavioral or mental idiosyncrasies of the entire group of North Korean defectors.

In public discourse, the mass media plays the role of primary agent in circulating and fortifying the image of North Korean defectors as cultural others. TV shows featuring North Korean defectors and making them speak about their personal stories, including their difficult past and exotic customs back in North Korea, have a significant influence not just on South Koreans but also on North Korean defectors themselves. Min-Kyung Kang (2016, 172) explains that South Korean society's portrayal of North Korean defectors featured in such TV shows has an effect of destabilizing North Korean defectors' perception of their own identities, which Kang calls "cultural marginalization." Kang also argues that TV shows' way of sensationalizing their difficult past lives in North Korea aggravates the internal wound of North Korean defectors (*ibid.*, 173-75). Additionally, Park Joowon (2016, 214) reveals the gendered phenotypical normalization prevalent in media representations of North Korean defectors and argues that such gendered contours of North Korean migration "amount to...structural violence in South Korea."

In contrast to these TV programs' proposed mission to learn about and get to know each other better, the portrayal of North Korean defectors as close but distant others is consistently reproduced. At the same time, their presence in South Korea continues to be marginalized, and the prospect of taking off the label of North Korean defector is denounced. These days, as personal broadcasting utilizing SNS platforms gains popularity, many North Korean defectors engage in this business to deliver their own voices to audiences, while also trying to make a living. These individual shows present more diverse topics than those seen in programs mapped out by conventional and politically conservative broadcasting companies, but they still do not go beyond the frame of cultural other. This is because many of them aim to voice, exhibit, and emphasize their authenticity as North Korean defectors, which reinforces their difference and distance from the South Korean cultural identity.

On Cultural Differences: Cases of Two Surveys

In many related policy reports and academic research, the main focus on North Korean defectors centers on the so-called current state of adaptation (*chöküngshilt'ae*). Upon setting foot on South Korean soil, North Korean defectors go through a standardized process. The first step is undergoing an investigation by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) to see if they are involved in espionage. Once their intention of coming to South Korea is proven to be genuine, North Korean defectors move to a resettlement assistance facility, popularly known as *Hanawon*. The three-months-long program in Hanawon includes education (including the basics of capitalist economy, such as how to use the banking system), health care, and job training. When the transitional stay at Hanawon is completed, North Korean defectors are relocated to various cities and regions to start a new life in South Korea. During this phase and afterwards, government agencies try to assess or measure the degree to which adaptation has progressed or can be deemed successful by using quantitative surveys with varying time intervals.

Quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews are the two major research methods used in research studies on North Korean defectors. Governmental institutions, research centers, and media corporations have been conducting periodic surveys to accumulate data on North Korean defectors. While in-depth interviews are a good methodology to reveal and record personal experiences and interpretations, surveys are preferred for tracking patterns and trends, diagnosing current situations, visualizing progress, and making further suggestions. For the analytical purpose of this article, two surveys serve as representative because of their scope, reputation, and longevity: the first one is *Unification Perception of North Korean Residents* (hereafter *North Korean Unification Perception Survey*), conducted by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) at Seoul National University, and the second one is *Social Integration Survey*, conducted by the Korea Hana Foundation (KHF). Another major research institute conducting similar annual surveys is the Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU), a research body devoted to unification-related issues, but it does not publicly disclose the survey results due to its status as a fully government-sponsored research institution. This implies that its mission lies in providing research results to the government and related agencies for policy purposes.

Although more scholars are showing interest in North Korean defector studies in recent days, sources of publicly released data remain very few, and it is even more difficult to find information and data that are accumulative, standardized, systemized, and regularly released. The major reason for this is that information and data on North Korean defectors are highly classified and safeguarded due to the political tension between North and South Korea. While the Ministry of Unification and also the KINU regularly and continuously

conduct and supervise various surveys and interviews on North Korean defectors, the results are seldom publicly released, except the number, gender, age range, and the place of origin. As a result, many studies on North Korean defectors are based on personal interviews and memoirs, usually involving small groups of people. With this backdrop in studying North Korean defectors, two surveys chosen for discussion in this article stand as exceptional and crucial, not just for this article's purpose, but also for examining the dominant discourse and widespread rationale toward North Korean defectors in South Korea.

The first survey of the two, the *North Korean Unification Perception Survey* began in 2008. The previous year in 2007, the IPUS launched a different survey called the *Unification Perception Survey*, which was designed to measure South Korean people's idea about North Korea on various levels. The *North Korean Unification Perception Survey* set out as a counterpart to that first survey, asking North Korean people about their ideas on North-South relations. This survey is based on the premise that North Korean defectors serve as former residents of North Korea, considering that conducting the survey directly with people residing in North Korea is impossible. Under the current circumstances of division between North and South Korea, it is understandable that the survey designers had few options other than substituting North Korean residents with North Korean defectors as a sample. However, making the assumption that North Korean defectors can switch their identity and position across time and space leaves ample room for limitations and erroneous thinking.

With variations depending on the circumstances of each year, the *North Korean Unification Perception Survey* usually involves slightly more than one hundred direct comers (defectors who did not reside in other countries prior to arriving in South Korea) annually.³ Although the number of participants is relatively small, demographic characteristics of the sample group are similar to those seen in the entire group of North Korean defectors. For example, the sample group of direct comers shows female dominance in gender composition—for the 2019-2020 period, women accounted for more than 65% of total number which reflects the gender ratio observed among the entire population of North Korean defectors (Kim et al. 2020, 22). The place of origin of the sample group is also in tune with the broader group of North Korean defectors, with North Hamkyung (13.8%) and Yanggang (70.6%) provinces accounting for close to 85% of the entire survey participants (ibid., 26). The participants are recruited on a voluntary basis. Again, since any personal information of North Korean defectors is not publicly available for researchers, only those who voluntarily respond to recruitment advertisements are included in the survey.

The survey consists of around sixty questions in five different topical sections: unification, South Korea, North Korea, neighboring nation-states, and adaptation to South Korean society. Because the first four topics focus on unification and international relations in a similar way, the last section of "adaption to South

Table 1. Adaptation Questions on the *North Korean Unification Perception Survey*.

1. How close do you feel with South Korean residents?
2. How open do you think South Koreans are toward North Korean defectors?
3. Do you identify yourself with North Koreans or South Koreans?
4. How much are you satisfied with your life in South Korea?
5. Mark the difficulty level (very much, somewhat, a little, not at all) based on your experiences on the following issues: cultural difference, health problems, economic problems, social relationships, social prejudice, feeling of loneliness.
6. Do you find the government's support for North Korean defectors satisfactory?
7. Other than governmental support, where do you get the most help in the process of adapting to South Korean society?
8. Do you have any regrets about having chosen to come to South Korea?
9. What was the deciding factor that made you leave North Korea?

Source: 2020 *North Korean Residents' Unification Perception Survey*.

Korea” is the most heterogeneous compared to the other four. While the first four parts ask North Korean defectors to answer based on their own experiences as North Korean residents, asking about their ideas *before* coming to South Korea, the section on adaptation is asking North Korean defectors about their ideas *after* coming to South Korea. The last part explicitly thematizes the identity and adaptation issues of North Korean defectors rather than North Korean residents, and survey questions have asked North Korean defectors about their ideas and feelings on these points (see Table 1).⁴

Of particular interest here is the fifth question, which asks North Korean defectors to measure the level of difficulty for six possible obstacles in their adaptation to South Korean society. This question was introduced into the survey for the first time in 2017, and the six areas (cultural difference, health problem, economic problem, social relationship, social prejudice, and feeling of loneliness) were provided based on other similar surveys conducted among North Korean defectors. Based on how North Korean defectors marked the level of difficulty, cultural difference has received the strongest confirmation from North Korean defectors since 2017 to up until 2020 (Jung et al. 2018; Kim et al. 2020; Kim et al. 2021).

Cultural difference is not an entirely new topic in the popular discussion about adaptation among North Korean defectors. As seen in the above surveys, the very phrase “cultural difference” is used as a preset categorical term, as if everybody understands and agrees with what it refers to. Since culture is possibly the broadest term that encompasses every aspect of human life, many different sets of concrete elements or abstract features can be included under the banner

of cultural difference. The anthropological definition of culture encompasses the systematic whole of beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and language shared by a particular group of people. With this definition, the North Korean defectors' cultural difference (from South Koreans) largely refers to linguistic registers (Agha 1999), which include dialect and sociolect features, vocabulary, and ways of speaking. Both North and South Koreans speak the same Korean language, which is comprehensible on both sides, but there are distinctive features, such as accents, pronunciation, and vocabulary typically associated with and observed among North Korean defectors. These kinds of linguistic registers are in fact observed even among South Koreans based on their place of origin, but they are seldom pointed out as significant markers of cultural difference that potentially make people's lives difficult in a meaningful way. In Lee and Yoo's (2015, 194) study on the phenomenon of stigma among young North Korean defectors and their responses, the authors observe that one of the major ways for young North Korean defectors to avoid being stigmatized was by "correcting their language," since different language styles are believed to be the main reason for stigma.

Then, why is such cultural difference considered to be a major obstacle for the adaptation and integration of North Korean defectors? A question from the survey conducted by the Korea Hana Foundation (KHF) provides a clue for the answer to this question. The Korea Hana Foundation is a non-profit public organization established by the Ministry of Unification in 2010 with the mission of "contributing to the resettlement of North Korean refugees and to the unification of Korea" (Korea Hana Foundation, n.d.). According to the KHF, they offer supports in the areas of employment, education, and integration. Since 2011, the KHF has been conducting an annual survey to show the condition of North Korean defectors in South Korea under the name *Settlement Survey of the North Korean Refugees* (hereafter *Settlement Survey*).

This survey is contrasted to the IPUS's *North Korean Residents' Unification Perception Survey* in that it involves a larger number of people and is not limited to direct comers. The annual *Settlement Survey* uses between two thousand to three thousand selected cases (persons). The data is then processed with weighting to make a census for the total population of North Korean defectors in South Korea. The survey is twofold in structure: one is the *Settlement Status Survey* and the other is the *Social Integration Survey*. The *Social Integration Survey*, which is notable for discussion here, includes questions addressing labor, social activities, welfare, health, education, family, social networks, and household economic conditions. Table 2 shows demographic characteristics of the actual participants for the 2020 *Settlement Survey*.

When asked about any experiences of being discriminated or despised by South Koreans, North Korean defectors who positively answered also marked cultural difference in communication style, lifestyle, and attitude as the main basis for such maltreatment (61.6%) (Korea Hana Foundation 2020).⁵ They

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants for the Settlement Survey-before data weighting.

Base=All		No. of Cases	Rate
		2,462	100.0
Gender	Male	842	34.2
	Female	1,620	65.8
Age	15-19 years	214	8.7
	20s	424	17.2
	30s	551	22.4
	40s	614	24.9
	50s	427	17.3
	60s and older	232	9.4
Place of Residence	Capital Area-Seoul	558	22.7
	Capital Area-Gyeonggi	666	27.1
	Capital Area-Incheon	169	6.9
	Non-Capital Area	1,069	43.4
Period of Residence in South Korea	Less than 3 years	518	21.0
	3-5 years	336	13.6
	5-10 years	778	31.6
	More than 10 years	830	33.7

Source: Korea Hana Foundation Website, reconstructed by the author.

believe that they are discriminated against because they speak with North Korean accent and tones, and they get unfair treatment because of this conspicuous way of communication. Looking at these questions and answers in relation to cultural differences, it is clear that both the survey designers (South Koreans) and the respondents (North Korean defectors) share the idea that cultural difference plays a major role in social discrimination of North Korean defectors. In short, the survey question already implies the answer without much room for a qualitatively different response.

At this point, it is necessary to scrutinize the missing link in this logic: this so-called cultural difference that is often regarded as the basis for discrimination against North Korean defectors does not involve discrimination in and of itself, especially when separated from other contexts. Linguistic particularities within the same language alone do not determine or complete the image of the Other that represents a particular group of people as being inferior. The cultural differences referred to by North Korean defectors act as distinguishing markers

for them from the viewpoint of South Korean residents. In other words, North Korean defectors are not discriminated based on their different features or ways of communicating, but they are discriminated because they were recognized through those characteristics as North Koreans, as a category. All kinds of characteristics and stereotypes that constitute this so-called cultural difference serve as “the constructed barrier of ethnic markers” (Choo 2006, 601), and overdetermine the image of North Koreans. Thus, the difference of linguistic style is used as a tool for sorting out North Korean defectors and becomes a cultural difference to stigmatized them, but this cultural difference itself does not provide sufficient ground for a discriminating attitude. The South Korean gaze, so to speak, adds much more prejudice and overgeneralized content to this idea of cultural difference. As Yang and Jung (2005) pointed out, it is the South Koreans’ perspective and attitude toward North Korean defectors that play a crucial role in their settlement in South Korea, rather than the attitude, characteristics, or effort of the North Korean defectors themselves.

Here we need to contextualize the term difference and distinguish between social difference and cultural difference. Although the term “socio-cultural difference” (*sahoemunhwajök ch’ai*) is widely used in the Korean language, social difference and cultural difference need to be distinguished from each other. The former necessarily involves the structural aspects of social class and regionality, while the latter mostly focuses on the non-conformity in lifestyle, value system, and tradition. Although the term socio-cultural difference is utilized as a blanket term to explain all kinds of discrimination North Korean defectors might experience, real instances of discrimination occur when these perceived differences are combined with or linked to existing social hierarchy and discourses establishing North Koreans as the Other in South Korean society. Hence, the real obstacle that hinders adaptation or integration on the part of North Korean defectors does not lie in the ambiguous cultural difference, but should be found in the ways in which certain cultural characteristics of a group are soldered to discourses that identify those characteristics on a social topography and thus stigmatize social difference.

It is undeniable that North Korean defectors do not have as much social capital in South Korean society as South Koreans. It is not difficult to imagine that North Korean defectors who recently arrived in South Korea might have a hard time establishing stable social networks, acquiring knowledge on the capitalist system, and becoming familiarized with communication skills preferred in South Korea. Behaving not as a full-fledged South Korean citizen in terms of social capital and cultural knowledge often contributes to generating prejudice and discrimination toward North Korean defectors.

It has been argued that North Korean defectors experience difficulties in South Korea due to their ways of thinking, which has been ingrained in the collectivistic and totalitarian society of North Korea (Jung and Kim 2004, 66; Kim

2014, 50). Jung Hyang Jin (2020, 159-61) examines how North Korea's political ritual of weekly "conduct reviews" (*saenghwalch'onghwa*) has shaped North Korean people's way of conducting social communication and of expressing emotions. Most North Korean defectors exhibit interactive patterns according to social norms in North Korean society, which seem very different to observable patterns in South Korea. But removing such contextual and socio-environmental factors and naturalizing certain differences as merely cultural obscures rather than reveals the source of the problems with getting settled in South Korea. As Sung Minkyu explains, "North Korean values are never embraced but are merely *culturalized* in that North Koreans become hierarchically measured against the South Korean standard virtues" (Sung 2015, 52; emphasis in original text).

While cultural difference has generated a lot of attention in accounting for issues directly related to North Korean defectors, a wider, public discussion on factors and conditions that constitute and shape cultural difference is still missing and has not been actively pursued. In the aforementioned surveys, for example, cultural difference is mentioned both in questions and in possible answers without further explanation as a concept, with the assumption that all respondents share the same understanding of cultural difference with those who designed and conduct the surveys. The use of cultural difference as an a priori category leads to another problematic issue. In the aforementioned surveys for North Korean defectors, other questions do not leave as much room for interpretation on the responder's side as do the questions dealing with cultural differences. For example, questions such as, "How many hours do you work per week?" or "What is your reason for not preparing for retirement?" hardly require an interpretative effort to understand and answer. Unlike these, questions asking about cultural difference involves a much broader spectrum of meanings and nuances, and those inevitably need proper conceptualization. Under the broad banner of cultural difference, it is highly probable that the inquirer (South Korean survey designers) and the respondent (North Korean defectors) do not have exactly the same list of features or characteristics in mind. What is perceived as cultural difference is based on each party's experiences. As a result, questions about cultural difference can only be already biased if they are designed without consulting defectors with qualitative methods in the early stages of development.

For example, some South Korean people assume that family dynamics in North Korea are quite different from those in South Korea. The basis for this kind of conjecturing is the well-known fact that North Korea is a highly controlled society with the strongest emphasis on the role of the Supreme Leader and the Communist Party's directive. Based on what has been taught about North Korea in South Korean primary and secondary education, North Korean family life is overshadowed by ideological conformity, and the foremost function of the household is to raise and provide a youth who will remain loyal to the communist state. From the perspective of South Koreans, the familiar construct of a family—

a group of people tightly connected with love and care, competing as a team with others toward upward class-mobility (Abelmann 1997; Yi 1998)—is not in tune with North Korean society. Hence, North Korean defectors are believed to have family values that are qualitatively different from those of South Koreans, e.g., unconditional love between parents and children, parental sacrifice, and filial piety. North Korean defectors, however, show no difference at all from South Koreans when asked of such family values. Some of them indeed are surprised that South Koreans think that North Korean defectors would be different from them in regard to family values and dynamics. In the end, what is perceived as cultural difference is open to interpretations and perceptions, and there is no solid basis or guarantee that both the survey conductor and the respondent mean or think of the same elements or characteristics when they use the overarching term of cultural difference.

It is undeniable that there exist cultural differences between North Korean defectors and South Koreans, be it communication style, ways of thinking, or ways of making social relations. However, the current public discourse on cultural difference assumes that South Korean ways of life form a standardized norm, whereas North Korean defectors' behavioral patterns and traits are something of a derailment. If cultural difference between North Korean defectors and South Koreans is to be scrutinized in a meaningful and productive way, socio-structural conditions that enable certain traits in both groups need to be addressed (Lee 2015, 119; Suh 2013, 323-24).

Cultural Difference in the Context of North Korean Defectors Outside South Korea

While cultural difference represents an ambiguous term that produces different connotations between North Korean defectors and South Korean residents in South Korean society, the same term has not gained much currency or traction among North Korean defectors living outside Korea. On one hand, this contrast shows that North Korean defectors in South Korea come to learn the term cultural difference as they interact with South Koreans and take the surveys mentioned earlier. On the other hand, it means that the term is used more frequently to refer to the minute and subtle differences between North and South Korean cultures rather than cultural differences that emerge between distant cultures, such as British and Korean cultures. In what follows, I will review the significance of the term cultural difference among North Korean defectors living in a so-called third country, based on research involving ethnographic fieldwork overseas.

In the official and public discourse on North Korean defectors and their adaptation and integration to South Korean society, the widespread and implicit

assumption is that South Korea has been and still remains the final destination of their journey. What is often forgotten or ignored is that a number of North Korean defectors choose to live in a country other than South Korea. They are called *talnam* North Korean defectors, which means that they are North Korean defectors who defected from South Korea as well. This group of North Korean defectors usually leave for another country in Europe or North America after having spent some time with government investigations, participating in orientation workshops, and generally adjusting to South Korea. What motivates their choice of another country over South Korea can be summarized as an expectation for a better life—better education for their children, better subsidy packages and welfare support for refugees, better job opportunities and quality of life, and last but not least, less discrimination from the same ethnic members of society (Chun 2018). The last factor is worth emphasizing, since it resonates with complaints voiced by North Korean defectors living in South Korea against their fellow citizens. Kim and Yoon's (2015, 340) study about college students among North Korean defectors shows that they refused to be labeled as a so-called multicultural (*tamunhwa*) group, and even got offended with the idea because they contended that they share the same ethnicity with South Koreans. When I interviewed North Korean defectors living in South Korea, most of them expressed an uncomfortable feeling and sometimes even anger when they experienced discrimination in South Korea. Not only do they believe that they are no less than South Koreans, they are also told and assured many times during the settling process that they have become ordinary citizens of South Korea.

We speak the same language, feel the same thing, even look similar but still South Koreans change their attitudes abruptly once they find out that I am from North Korea. In the beginning, they didn't know that I'm a North Korean defector and they treated me no different from other people, since I corrected my accent enough. But since I revealed my identity (that I came from North Korea), they don't trust me anymore, and look down on me. To them, North Korean defectors are poor and uneducated people who try to deceive them. In what ways are we so different from South Koreans other than the fact that we are from North Korea? We are victims of prejudice. (author's interview with North Korean defector A, Seoul, September 3, 2020)

Some North Korean defectors even said that the feeling of being despised is much worse when it is done by those whom they see as belonging to their same ethnic group:

As you can see, we are basically the same people, same Koreans. If white people treat me unfairly, it would be much easier to understand, since there are lots of differences. Language is different, culture is different, appearance is different, so it is possible that they don't know us well and then treat us badly. But when South Koreans do that

to us, it really hurts our feelings. (author's interview with North Korean defector B, Seoul, October 7, 2020)

These interviews resonate with some of the experiences of *talnam* North Korean defectors. These also point out that being discriminated by total foreigners is much more tolerable. It is noticeable, though, that when *talnam* North Korean defectors found themselves in foreign countries, they usually form a settlement near a community of South Korean diaspora. Korea towns, mainly filled with small businesses run by South Koreans, are good places for getting temporary jobs and helpful information in a setting where Korean language is spoken. In this ethnic enclave populated with both South Koreans and *talnam* North Korean defectors, the concept of cultural difference has a low profile and plays a diminished role compared to the situation in South Korea. Although South Koreans usually maintain a better social position as small business owners or professionals, *talnam* North Korean defectors are not turned into a version of the other or discriminated against with the rhetoric of cultural difference. As both groups retain the status of aliens in host countries, neither are in a position to compete for cultural superiority. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in New Malden, London, where the largest population of North Korean defectors outside South Korea are found, Shin HaeRan (2019) examines the formation of a diasporic ethnic community of Koreans. Through observation, Shin HaeRan describes how North Korean defectors strongly express an aversion to the possibility of being assimilated into South Korean ways of life (*ibid.*, 7-8). Once outside South Korea and in New Malden, North Korean defectors were not subsumed and marginalized by the dominant discourse about cultural difference. Rather, they strive to integrate North and South Korean ways to achieve and maintain a state of hybridity, which Shin views as the establishment of an “extra-territorial nation” (*ibid.*, 8). In committees and community meetings of this community of Korean diaspora, *talnam* North Koreans can speak up and have their voices heard equally as South Koreans, and children of both groups attend the same Korean Language School which is run by members from both groups (Shin 2021, 217-18). There is conflict and tension, but the diasporic process of integration between South Koreans and *talnam* North Koreans provides a stark contrast to the dominant discourse of cultural difference of North Korean defectors in South Korean society. Although there are frequently contestations among different Korean ethnic groups and hierarchies are reproduced through their interactions in diasporic communities (Shin 2018, 766-68; Song and Bell 2018), the dynamics between South Koreans and *talnam* North Korean defectors are different than those observed in South Korea. In a similar vein, Chung Byung-Ho (2014, 330) interprets acts of border-crossing of these overseas North Koreans as “penetrant transnational strategies” that dilute the significance of cultural difference as a useful basis for distinction in a wider, transnational context.

The case of North Korean defectors relocated to Australia also provides an important point of reference for discussing how the perceived cultural difference of North Korean defectors is employed. Jung, Dalton and Willis (2017) use such concepts as “habitus” and “cultural capital” to illuminate the different mindset and practices of North Korean defectors, both in South Korea and Australia. Most interestingly, two of the interviewees residing in Australia mentioned that they had to pretend to be from Gangwon province when they were in South Korea to avoid discrimination and ensure better job opportunities (ibid., 20) Gangwon province, which is a northeastern border province of South Korea, whose residents have a peculiar accent and tone that can sound similar to those of North Korea. Despite efforts to fake their place of origin, they had to deal with the stigma of being North Koreans in South Korea once their identities were revealed. The interviewees’ stories show that accent and tone are not about cultural difference despite often being packaged as such to hide the real issue. Rather, accent and tone are powerful indicators of North Koreanness, which invokes negative responses that include discrimination, marginalization, and alienation. In contrast, Jung, Dalton and Willis (2017) argue that in Australia where North Korean defectors find opportunities to build cosmopolitan habitus with a global mindset and skills, their identities are no longer tied to a particular ethnic belonging and/or geographical location. With the case of North Korean defectors in Australia, it becomes clearer that what is called cultural difference of North Korean defectors is a product of South Korean habitus, which is constituted as the polar-opposite of South Korean life and marks a line of division between them.

The case of overseas North Korean defectors shows that cultural difference is not a quality based on preset and agreed-on characteristics or a given category, but rather a socially constructed frame that links certain selected features to social hierarchies, which facilitates the othering process of a particular marginalized group. In the case of talnam North Korean defectors and their relationship with South Korean community, cultural similarity rather than cultural difference with South Koreans is acknowledged. The widespread discourse of cultural difference then needs to be examined from the perspective of social hierarchy and stratification, power relations, and group boundaries within socio-environmental settings. The majority of North Korean defectors who participated in the above-mentioned survey thought they were discriminated against because they are culturally different. In fact, however, they were differentiated because of discrimination and prejudice, which had already been established in public discourse and reflected in the survey questions. The moment we start to look for cultural difference as a possible cause of inequality, we participate in reproducing difference, which forms the basis for marginalization and othering. In other words, it is not so much difference that is engendering inequality than it is inequality necessitating differentiation.

Conclusion

Not so long ago, North Korean defectors were much applauded as “a fortunate precursor of unification” (*mönjŏ on t’ongil*). However, when it comes to South Korean society’s acceptance and perception of them, the case of North Korean defectors is an unfortunate tale of premature arrival. They expect to be accepted as fellow Koreans in South Korea, but they are received as a cultural other. North Korean defectors are indeed an odd category in South Korea. They exist, but they are unwilling to reveal their identities. They speak, but their voices are heard only in extreme forms. They share life with South Koreans, but the latter seldom meet the former. Their numbers are relatively small, but discourse about them is inflated with opinions.

In *Read the Cultural Other: Forms of Otherness in the Discourses of Hong Kong’s Decolonization*, Shi-xu and Maier (2005, 38) illuminate how discourses are embedded in culture, which “is characterized by social division and asymmetry of power.” Reminding the reader that culture is never an objectively given category but that it is constructed, they argue that “where cultural differences are perceived, they are not understood in the cultural-other’s perspective, but often from one’s own and often as deviations, deficiencies, and so, sources of trouble” (Shi-xu et al. 2005, 38). In the case of North Korean defectors, the discourse on cultural difference not only highlights the different characteristics of North Korean defectors, but also establishes the cultural order between South Koreans and North Korean defectors as that between the subject and the object, the norm and the deviation, the mainstream and the subjugated. Such discursive processes show “the way that powerful groups construct less powerful ones” as cultural other (ibid., 41).

The discourse of the cultural difference of North Korean defectors successfully creates a safe and convenient niche to accommodate North Korean defectors within South Korea—people with the same ethnicity, but with eminent difference in the area of culture. This happens by decontextualizing certain factors shaped by specific socio-politico-economic conditions and naturalizing these as an innate group personality. In South Korean discourse on North Korean defectors, cultural difference is mobilized as the very authoritative basis for differentiating, excluding, and alienating. The problem gets aggravated as North Koreans internalize this cultural identity that is externally imposed on them. As pointed out above, the majority of North Korean defectors turn to this so-called cultural difference in order to identify the source of their hardships in South Korea. They follow the flawed logic of cultural difference, which tries to locate the source of the discrimination that North Korean defectors face within cultural difference.

North Korean defectors’ place in South Korea has much room for improvement. Possible improvements include sturdier social networks, secure economic

conditions, and more stability in their emotional well-being. Surely, the ultimate uplifting of their lives will come when they are able to freely visit and meet their family and friends left back in North Korea. Before this happens, however, there are things to be done on the part of South Korean society. Reevaluating the widespread discourse on North Korean defectors' cultural difference is a preliminary step to incorporate them into South Korean life based on mutual understanding. Otherizing North Korean defectors on the basis of cultural difference, a set of characteristics ambiguously selected and then naturalized to encompass the entire group of North Korean defectors, might have been a way to temporarily deal with cognitive dissonance and ambivalent attitudes toward North Koreans. However, there is little to gain from this and more to lose, both for North Korean defectors and their South Korean fellow citizens. Especially with the prospect of a unified or open Korea where human mobility is free and safe, culture will find better uses for incorporating rather than excluding certain members of society.

This article also suggests that the widespread discussion on adaption and integration of North Korean defectors would have a far better platform if more room was provided for the North Korean defectors' presence as an actively participating subject rather than a passively responding object. Instead of cultural differences being imposed on them, investigations on North Korean defector's perception of their own cultural identities need to be done with their participation. Furthermore, new research and narratives that incorporate a diverse spectrum of North Korean defectors' experiences are instrumental to go beyond the simplified stereotyping of their homogenous difference from South Koreans.

This article examined the discourse on cultural difference and its implications, but limited space and scope leave ample room for further research. One of the topics that needs to be pursued in relation to the otherization of North Korean defectors is generational differences observed both in North Korean defectors and South Korean residents. Up until the Covid-19 pandemic, the ratio of younger generation North Korean defectors consistently increased among new arrivals. The younger they are when they arrive, the harder it is to distinguish them from South Koreans using cultural difference as an indicator. Younger generations of South Koreans also exhibit a somewhat changed attitude toward North Korean defectors compared to older generations—the belief in one ethnicity and cultural homogeneity has been fading out and has less importance among young people. Further research on this important topic will better illuminate the socio-politically constructedness of cultural difference/sharedness among North and South Koreans.

Notes

1. The division of the Korean peninsula is often understood as a consequence of Cold War tensions between the US and the Soviet Union. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* presents a different view by highlighting how the conflicting interests and aspirations of the US, the Soviet Union, and Japan shaped the end of the Pacific War and also the decision of divided trusteeship of the Korean peninsula (Hasegawa 2006).
2. North Koreans who came to South Korea are called, *t'albukcha* or *puk'ani't'alchumin* in Korean. Both terms put an emphasis on escaping the regime. As for the English translations of these terms, there has been no consensus: while "defector" is widely in use, some scholars prefer to use "refugees" or "migrants." However, these North Koreans are not legally recognized as refugees based on the constitutional interpretation in South Korea (Ha and Jang 2016, 111). Since not all of these North Koreans exhibit characteristics of either political asylum seekers or economic migrants, this article uses "defector" in examining the case. (For further discussion of different terms referring to North Korean settlers, see Chung 2009; Kim Sung Kyung 2012; Lee and Won 2016).
3. Since the survey began in 2011, the number of participants is as follows, year (number of people): 2011(105), 2012(127), 2013(133), 2014(149), 2015(146), 2016(138), 2017(132), 2018(87), 2019(116), and 2020(109) (Kim et al. 2020, 20). The actual number is affected by the year's geopolitical circumstances in Asia, North Korea's domestic situation, border control conditions, and so on.
4. The survey was conducted in Korean. Please see the appendix section of the 2020 *North Korean Residents' Unification Perception Survey* for the entire survey questions in its original form in Korean (Kim et al. 2020, 284-95).
5. Other responses include South Korean people's prejudice against North Korean defectors (16.0%), assumed incompetency (of North Korean defectors) in professional knowledge and skills (12.7%), negative representations of North Korea and North Korean defectors in mass media (4.1%).

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Submitted: June 06, 2021; Revised: January 05, 2022; Accepted: January 10, 2022

