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**The Geopolitics of Post-Cold War Alpha Girls: North Korean Female
Entrepreneurs in South Korea Turning Challenges Into Business Assets Through
Informality**

Abstract

This study examines how the post-Cold War geopolitical context penetrated through the struggles and empowerment of North Korean female defector entrepreneurs in South Korea. Reconceptualising the notion of intersectionality, the study focuses on a grey area of informality and the resilience of these women. Based on in-depth interviews and participant observations, the findings indicate that these women leveraged geopolitical limits to develop their entrepreneurial assets. Informality developed through their involvement in *Jangmadang* and cross-border mobilities via informal brokerage. Through human-trafficked marriages, they stayed in China, learning the Chinese language and working in South Korean companies. The disadvantages of the job market and gender roles motivated them to start their businesses. The research emphasises the complex ways in which agency, mobility, and geopolitics intersect.

Keywords: post-Cold War geopolitics, North Korean women, refugees, migrant entrepreneurship, South Korea, informality, empowerment, agency, mobilities, gender, resilience

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The paper under consideration is undoubtedly intriguing and timely. However, to enhance the overall quality of the paper, several aspects warrant attention. Firstly, the introduction would benefit from acknowledging the wealth of research on North Korean women's agency in gender and migration studies over the last decade. By neglecting this, the author misses an opportunity to contextualize the paper's contribution within the existing scholarly landscape. A brief overview of these prior works would strengthen the paper's foundation and highlight its unique strengths. The use of the term "alpha girls" is captivating, but a more nuanced and inclusive terminology could better encapsulate the North Korean women who run small businesses. The paper seems to disproportionately emphasize post-Cold War geopolitics. It is crucial to elucidate how Cold War geopolitics and post-Cold War geopolitics intersect and permeate the daily lives of North Korean female defector entrepreneurs. This clarification would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-political context shaping the subjects' struggles and empowerment. In the section detailing the research design, the author mentions conducting 29 in-depth interviews with North Korean defector businesswomen and South Koreans in various organizations. While this methodology is sound, the paper could benefit from a more detailed exposition of the interviewees' backgrounds and the rationale behind selecting specific 2 individuals, particularly those affiliated with South Korean government organizations and the US organization. Providing such information would enhance the transparency and credibility of the research. Finally, the third paragraph on page 8 is deemed inadequate considering the flow of the paper. In summary, while the paper is engaging and tackles an important subject, addressing the aforementioned points would significantly enhance its quality and contribution to the field. Reviewer 2 This paper delves into the concept of intersectionality as a means of contextualizing the agency of North Korean female entrepreneurs in South Korea. It effectively utilizes various qualitative research data to underpin its central argument and adeptly situates the life trajectories of these entrepreneurs within the geopolitical landscape of the post-Cold War era. While generally suitable for publication, certain revisions could enhance its overall quality. Primarily, the paper would benefit from providing more detailed information about the interviewees. This should encompass aspects such as the scale and income of their

businesses, their origin, and educational background. The current lack of comprehensive information about each interviewee impedes a nuanced understanding of their diverse strategies and limitations in the empowerment process. Enhancing this aspect would strengthen the paper's ability to convey the intricacies of the experiences and challenges faced by North Korean female entrepreneurs in South Korea. Secondly, the paper should expand its section on "Turning Experiences into Entrepreneurial Asset" to provide a more in-depth exploration, potentially contributing original insights compared to existing research. Additionally, the author should consider defining entrepreneurialism within the context of North Korean migrants. Does it refer exclusively to small-scale businesses, or does it encompass larger enterprises? Clarifying this aspect is crucial, as some narratives cited in the paper may appear more aligned with low-paid, selfemployed positions rather than entrepreneurial assets. A more precise definition and 3 exploration of entrepreneurialism in the specific context of North Korean migrants would enhance the clarity and depth of the paper. Lastly, there is some uncertainty regarding the application of the concept of intersectionality. While this concept in feminism adeptly analyzes the dynamic and complex positions of agency, considering factors such as class, race, and sexuality, its application in this paper may require further refinement. While valuable for explaining differences within North Korean migrant women in principle, the concept of intersectionality appears to hold meanings and insights that extend beyond merely elucidating the diverse experiences of these women. To more effectively apply the concept of intersectionality, the author should delve into more nuanced analyses of intersecting differences, taking into account factors such as class, social background, migration trajectories, marriages, and even sexuality (including physical appearances – as observed in the case of the interviewee who participated in a TV show) among North Korean migrant women. This would elevate the paper's analytical depth, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted layers shaping the experiences of North Korean women in the context of migration and entrepreneurship. Reviewer 3 The article under review sheds light on an often-overlooked aspect of North Korean defectors, challenging the prevailing narrative by viewing them not as a monolithic victim group but as individuals with agency and empowerment potential. While the research makes a

significant contribution to the field, some areas warrant attention for improvement.

Strengths A notable strength of the article lies in its departure from the victim portrayal, emphasizing the agency and empowerment potential of North Korean defectors. This shift in perspective is crucial for a nuanced understanding of their experiences, adding depth to the existing discourse.

Weaknesses The title of the article is a notable weakness, being overly lengthy and lacking clarity. A suggested alternative, such as "North Korean Female Entrepreneurs in South Korea: Empowerment through Informality," would enhance accessibility. Additionally, the article lacks references to pertinent literature on defector entrepreneurship, especially those addressing informal networks, such as Jung or Kim (Jung 2022; Kim 2019). References and Editing Errors in referencing are present, with a missing real reference on page 5 (Author, 2022) and a misplacement on page 7 (Author, 2021). Punctuation mistakes are scattered throughout the text, requiring thorough editing for clarity. The term "businesspeople" could be substituted for better variety.

Creativity and Clarity The article's creativity is acknowledged as a valuable contribution to an underexplored research field. However, improvements in clarity are needed to enhance readability.

Structure and Evidence While the number of interviews (29 in-depth interviews) is commendable, the article lacks crucial details on when and how the interviews were conducted. Information on the interview method, a (questionnaire in the appendix), and specific interview dates would enhance intersubjective validation and replicability for other researchers. I suggest reading for how it can be done: Choo 2006)

Contribution and Suggestions The article makes a strong and important contribution to the research field by highlighting the entrepreneurial journeys of North Korean women. The lack of discussing literature on defector entrepreneurship and through and structured evidence on of the methodology is the greatest weakness. Additionally structural, grammatical, and stylistic edits are needed to refine the article further, ensuring its accessibility and facilitating a deeper understanding of the research. Especially, please change the title!

In conclusion, the article is a commendable exploration of North Korean women's entrepreneurship, challenging prevailing narratives and offering a valuable contribution to the field. Addressing the identified weaknesses and implementing the suggested improvements will undoubtedly enhance the article's impact and accessibility.

Recommended reading: Bell, Markus. 2013. "Manufacturing Kinship in a Nation Divided: An Ethnographic Study of North Korean Refugees in South Korea." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 14 (3): 240–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2013.789070>. Choo, Hae Yeon. 2006. "Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship North Korean 5 Settlers in Contemporary South Korea." *Gender & Society - GENDER SOC* 20 (October): 576– 604.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206291412>. Jung, Marianne. 2022. "Church Networks Facilitating Entrepreneurship among North Korean Defectors in South Korea: A Mixed Method Study." *S/N Korean Humanities* 8 (2): 119–46. Kim, Young Ji. 2019. "Pukhanit'aljumin ch'angöpsönggonggwajöng yön'gu [A Study on the Process of North Korean defector Entrepreneurs' Business Success]." PhD diss., Ewha University.
<http://dcollection.ewha.ac.kr/common/orgView/000000154327>.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines how the post-Cold War geopolitical context penetrated the struggles and empowerment of North Korean women who left North Korea, stayed in China for a while, settled down, and proactively ran their businesses or organisations in South Korea. By viewing North Korean defectors not as a monolithic victim group but as located at the intersection of suppression and opportunities, the research reconceptualises the notion of intersectionality in the fluctuating geopolitical context. It also examines how they came to be driven by and utilise informality to cope with their geopolitical limits in their lives and turn their experiences and networks into assets for their entrepreneurship and empowerment. Exploring their victimisation and empowerment, this research contributes to the multifaceted and ambivalent understanding of agency and empowerment.

Previous studies on the geopolitics surrounding the Korean peninsula and North Korean defectors have focused on human rights issues (Kim, 2023; Song, 2021b) and life challenges that those defectors endured (Kim and Jang, 2007; Lee, 2015). In particular, female defectors' human trafficking and victimisation (Song, 2021b) have been discussed in terms of the intersectionality of different discriminations and oppressions as a major paradigm. Focusing on double discrimination, previous discussions have not

paid enough attention to the formation of agency or the effect of empowerment. However, in recent years, North Korean defector groups have become diversified, and proactive groups have emerged (Song, 2021a). Based on empirical observations, this study suggests reconceptualising intersectionality. Informality in economic activities, marriage, and mobilities produced the intersectionality of not only oppression and discrimination but also agency and empowerment among these groups.

The subject group of this study is middle-aged female North Korean entrepreneurs. North Korean defectors¹ are an articulated example of how geopolitics and migrant's daily lives intersect and how individuals are driven by and utilise informality simultaneously. The subject group were women who experienced the 1994 to 1998 famine in North Korea, participated in *Jangmadang*, crossed the border to make money through informal trade, were forced to marry Chinese men by human traffickers, worked in a South Korean company before arriving in South Korea, crossed the border to arrive in South Korea, and started their businesses after trying several jobs.

This study asks: How have these North Korean defector women come to establish their businesses or organisations in South Korea? How have they coped with geopolitical constraints and empowered themselves during their life course?

Based on in-depth interviews, participant observations, and media and government documents, the results of the study demonstrate that these women have leveraged geopolitical limits to turn them into business resources. They faced significant challenges in navigating the shifting geopolitical landscape of the post-Cold War era, including political and economic changes, both within North Korea and in the wider region. While they were driven to involve informal activities, they also utilised

¹ This study uses the term defectors, which refer to those who escaped from their homeland. Refugees refers to their status in the receiving country. As South Korea does not consider North Korea a country but an anti-governmental organisation, those who escaped from North Korea are not considered refugees but as those who escaped from that organisation. Migrants are people free to return to their home countries; North Koreans cannot do so.

informality as a chance to increase their life opportunities in fluctuating situations. This led them to empower themselves by turning those experiences into entrepreneurial assets. These women's struggles and empowerment are not only important in their own right but also have wider geopolitical implications.

To further elaborate on argument, the remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The next section theoretically discusses previous debates on the intersectionality of multiple discriminations and the concept of informality as a product of geopolitical shifts. The research methods and the case are then briefly introduced. The first finding section discusses how North Korean women developed their insights out of their informal economic activities in North Korea and China. It also illustrates how their forced marriages led them to access business experiences and informal mobility in South Korea. The second finding section discusses how the career barrier and discrimination led them to open their businesses in South Korea. The concluding section discusses the academic and practical implications of the results of the study.

SURVIVING GEOPOLITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY THROUGH INFORMALITY

This section discusses how North Korean women's intersectionality is practiced in post-Cold War geopolitics and how ambiguity and deregulation in informality are entangled with the (geo)political context (Mielke, 2023). There have been distinguished approaches to intersectionality and empowerment. On the one hand, previous discussions on migrant women have delved into the concept of intersectionality (Hopkins, 2019), highlighting the compounded discrimination faced by migrants who are also women. This intersectionality manifests further in the convergence of gender inequality and racial/ethnic bias (Hopkins, 2019). On the other hand, the discourse surrounding empowerment, particularly concerning migrant women (Briones, 2017; Krummel, 2012; Pei et al., 2022), has primarily centred around their proactive resistance and organisational endeavours. Central to these discussions is the concept of agency,

which is a pivotal keyword within such contexts.

Nevertheless, tracing female migrants has unveiled a noteworthy phenomenon: their seemingly passive coping mechanisms to difficulties have evolved into sources of empowerment. The lack of a support system does not automatically lead to the defectors' failure to be integrated because the situation is mediated by their self-initiative and resourcefulness (Muhumad and Jaji, 2023). Particularly in highly precarious circumstances, such as geopolitical turbulence, intersectionality provides not only constraints but also new opportunities. The informal avenues they navigate, along with their mobility, can engender both upward and downward social mobility, providing female migrants with opportunities for advancement (Ho and Ting, 2021; Srivastava, 2022).

It is essential to note that these post-Cold War geopolitical shifts provide particular limits and opportunities in complicated ways (Author, 2022). The trajectory from precarity to empowerment is also not strictly linear; these women might engage in acts of resistance or simply exhibit resilience in survival (Sung, 2023). However, these very experiences contribute to their eventual empowerment, signifying that their coping strategies within constricting circumstances can metamorphose into sources of strength (Author, 2022). The dynamics of these barrier–opportunity transitions are marked by their dramatic and context-sensitive nature.

An illustrative case of empowerment within the realm of geopolitics is exemplified by East German women's experiences of post-German reunification (Choi, 2022). After reunification, young East German women actively sought opportunities in West Germany, a move that initially attracted criticism due to the perceived disparities in feminist advancement between the two regions. However, over the span of 30 years, these women began to outshine their West German counterparts, claiming around 70% high-ranking roles in the economic, legal, academic, administrative, and political domains. The myth surrounding East German women was examined, highlighting their self-assuredness, work passion, autonomy, and career-focused orientation, bolstered by state-supported childcare services (Born, 2019; Corbin, 2020).

This study suggests the expansion of the concept of intersectionality in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics, as it brings forth new prospects. Rather than simplifying the North Korean women group as a homogeneous group of victims of human rights, this study focuses on a particular group of active actors who implement their own strategies of action in the context of intersecting oppression and opportunity. In the current ideological terrain, the complex contexts in which North Korean defectors live and the diverse strategies and agency they generate are obscured. The discourse can ultimately reinforce hierarchies of power between South Koreans and North Korean defectors. Although discrimination inherently obstructs individual empowerment, instances arise in which proactive individuals showcase their resilience and capacity to wield power amidst adversity. As Nietzsche (1974, 'Twilight of the Idols') posited, challenges that do not prove fatal often contribute to inner strength.

The acknowledgement of informality as an integral facet of daily life has garnered increasing attention (Kudva, 2009), with a particular focus on transnational migrants and refugees who have devised alternative modes of existence outside traditional institutional frameworks. Undocumented migrants have carved out sustainable lives through the creation of informal settlements (Samers, 2003; Jones et al., 2010; Porter et al., 2011; Pisani et al., 2008) and the establishment of informal support networks and economic endeavours. Within migrants' lives, the boundary between formal and informal domains is blurred, and the domains are shaped by negotiation and transformation. Furthermore, informality serves as a strategic means of governance to cater to people's needs within the constraints of geopolitics and limited urban infrastructure (Inness et al., 2007). The post-war geopolitical climate still exerts control over the movement of people between North Korea and China, as well as between South Korea and North Korea, concurrently giving rise to legal and illegal grey areas. Previous studies focused on informal settlements and informal mobility, but the mechanism have not received enough attention (Degli Uberti, 2021) in terms of empowerment. Without political resistance, migration has the capacity to develop its own logics, its own motivation, and its own trajectories (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013: 184). In this vein, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 188) examined social

transformations ‘sustained and nurtured silently through the everyday and seemingly non-political experiences and actions of people’ (Darling, 2017). For example, although North Koreans’ defection was not based on their political intention but made in particular circumstances, their informality in mobility and settlement exerts the effects of empowerment

Migrants and refugees grapple with structural challenges through informality (Ruhs and Anderson, 2010; Srivastava, 2022), guided by existing informal channels such as intermediaries, navigating the complexities of human-trafficked marriages, and both utilising and innovating informal approaches. The type of informality that displays heightened flexibility and resilience in confronting the obstacles presented by worldwide uncertainties and (post-)Cold War politics underlines both necessity and risk inherent within informal practices.

The geopolitics of the Cold War continue to shape Korean migration both within and around the Korean Peninsula. North Korea’s approach to border control differs from that of Western countries. Placing the geopolitics of migration within the Korean context enhances our understanding of the connection between the Cold War and the post-Cold War international order, as well as how these factors influence the lives of defectors (Choi, 2014; Song, 2013). This perspective involves examining communication networks such as mobile phones, economic networks such as remittances and smuggling (Kim, 2018; Author, 2021), and the mobility of broadcasting and media to analyse perceived permeability and revised transnationalism (Tsagarousianou and Retis, 2019) across borders that may appear tightly regulated.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, a qualitative approach was employed, utilising personal narratives obtained through interviews and participant observations to delve into the lived experiences of individuals. Research data were collected through in-depth interviews,

participant observations, and documents. I conducted 29 in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors businesswomen and South Koreans who worked in governmental organisations, the Hana Foundation, the Ministry of Unification, business consultancy, and a US organisation that supports North Korean defectors. The North Korean defectors ran businesses, including restaurants, trade, manufacturing, matchmaking of North Korean women and South Korean men, online shopping, coffee shops, beauty salons, flower shops, kids' cafés, medical facilities, and brokerages. Each interview lasted for 1.5–2 hours, and a few went on for longer, up to four hours.

I also conducted participant observations in a two-day workshop with 24 North Korean defector businesspeople and 3 South Koreans, a year-end party, a business consulting meeting, their informal gatherings, a wedding reception, and an online community of these businesspeople. These participant observations provided their daily activities related to their businesses and concerns. In particular, 27 workshop participants shared their experiences of developing their businesses.

When the post-Cold War began, characterised by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the diplomatic relations of South Korea with Russia and China, the North Korean economy became problematic (Joo, 1996). As the food distribution system stopped working, and these changes cracked the rigid system in North Korea, people started participating in the black market, *Jangmadang*, which was active all over the country. People's mobility to buy food increased (Kim, 2020). The black-market system developed and later, in 2002, became legitimised. The border control between North Korea and China became loose during this time of confusion. In South Korea, the reduction of the political tension between South Korea and North Korea led the government, the Kim Yong Sam regime, to reduce financial support for North Korean defectors (Kim, 2016).

FINDING 1: THE INFORMALITY OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND MOBILITY

This section discusses how these women's economic activity and mobility collide with the post-Cold War geopolitical context, how informality is produced in the geopolitical context, and what niches it embodies. The transition geopolitics emerged during the post-Cold War era, primarily driven by North Korea and China. It challenged the existing system and provided opportunities, especially for women, to have income from informal activities. This shift witnessed the involvement of various state actors, enabling North Korean defectors to achieve greater mobility. The normalisation of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea further promoted informal routes to South Korea.

During these women's chronological life trajectories, different aspects of post-Cold War geopolitics provided particular limits and opportunities. These include (1) the transition economy of North Korea, (2) porous border control between North Korea and China, (3) rapid urbanisation of China, (4) strengthened relations between North Korea and China in the 2000s, and (5) the beginning diplomatic relations between South Korea and China.

First, when the North Korean economy was severely challenged by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and natural disasters, the shaking up of the national distribution system, especially for food, drove the women to explore alternative possibilities to survive. As these women survived post-war geopolitics through the informality of their economic activities and mobilities, informality became a natural part of their lives during the turbulent era. Going through severe hunger during the Arduous March, the majority of these women became involved in informal entrepreneurship in *Jangmadang*.

Notably, these women's inferior positions allowed them to access informal ways to survive relatively easily. While men had to work and were paid officially as household heads, women were free to choose to work or not, and they could survive better.

Regarding this irony, one interviewee, who used to be an art teacher and was running a restaurant in South Korea at the time of the interview, said that she survived the North

Korean famine because she was ordinary and a woman. She said that women were often mobilised to work for the community for free, while men were paid. She meant that women became familiar with various types of work rather than going to a particular workplace. She explained her positioning in the crisis.

During the hardship march, the people who were most loyal to the [communist] party were the first to starve to death, and the reason for that was that they couldn't do that [informal activities] because of their conscience and reputation. It was a big loss. Ordinary people like me would go to the market and sneakily sell whatever business we were doing, and even if it were taken away from us, we would put an iron plate in our faces.

She meant that such informal activities developed among non-elite ordinary people. The *Jangmadang* businesses were considered illegal and informal, so elites and those conservative people who cared about their reputation did not participate. This also means that by participating in the capitalist market, these women had more opportunities to make money and develop their skills. She moved on to describe her business in the informal market.

I was a teacher, but I did hairdressing as a side job at home. I did it at home, and if they asked me, I travelled and did their hair. The job went well. Even *Kkotjebi*, homeless kids would get their hair cut...I also made liquor and sold it, and made and sold tofu. I think I have some sense of business. (15 July 2022)

This interviewee described her innovative approaches with excitement. It was clear that she took pride that she was good at those businesses for her confidence. A number of other interviewees spent much time enthusiastically talking about their successful achievements as business people during the time, while they described the general economic situation and starvation with frustration. A few resented that they were not able to participate in the market because their conservative parents stopped them.

Second, as the border control between North Korea and China loosened, the informal economic activities in *Jangmadang* drove the women to move to China to make money. Doing a business involved selling items that were smuggled from China. *Milsu*

[smuggling] was one of the most often and comfortably spoken words during interviews with North Korean female defectors. The mobilities expanded as new escape routes and informal brokerage networks were developed in combination with globalisation and the weakened economy of North Korea. The available routes enabled these women to think about leaving North Korea for a while to make money. They found a method of crossing the border and exchanged North Korean vegetables, such as Schisandra, with Chinese items to sell in *Jangmadang*.

One interviewee, who used to be a prestigious soldier, said that her desire to make money led her to defection against her intention. She said:

I went to China because I heard that I could make 10,000 won in North Korean money in a week. The first place where defections started was in North Hamgyeong Province, because there was no food, and it's right across the Tumen River from China. (3 July 2022)

This interviewee, a North Korean organiser, was even a member of the Communist Party. She has tried to get a machine of soy meat from China so that she can produce soy meat, which was popular in *Jangmadang*. The stories highlighted instances in which individuals actively sought opportunities for financial independence, leading them to engage in informal migration to neighbouring countries, such as China. The allure of substantial earnings in China may have been exaggerated and potentially perpetuated by brokers seeking to profit from such migration. This was the starting point for how the majority of the interviewees eventually ran from Chinese control to arrest North Korean defectors.

She stayed with her cousin, a *Joseonjok*, ethnic Koreans who were born and raised in China, who said that he could give her a stable life in China and forced her to get married to a *Joseonjok* man. She did not want the marriage, but she could not go back to North Korea because the border control was strengthened, and she had lost her mobility pass. Eventually, she ended up permanently leaving North Korea against her intentions. Similarly, moving to China led many women into informal marriages. Most interviewees heard that if they engaged in informal trade or worked in a field for a week

in China, they could make a lot of money. Smuggling and human trafficking are interrelated in this context. The women went to China through brokerage and faced human trafficking. As a result, human trafficking and marriages emerged due to the strong demand for women from the Chinese countryside.

Third, during the rapid urbanisation of China since the 1990s, human trafficking was developed for Chinese men who lived in a deep countryside and therefore had difficulty finding a woman to marry, brides who could have a child for them. North Korean women who visited China temporarily were easy targets. The interview subjects voluntarily brought up their experiences, although they were not considered to be within the scope of the study. They explained that these experiences were part of their answers to my question of how they came to establish their businesses. Marriages formulated through human trafficking articulate the intersectionality of suffering and opportunities.

Their experiences and the effects they had on their businesses can be discussed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, such unethical and human rights-violating marriages were the structured violence and patriarchy of trafficking based on the underlying assumption that women could be bought and sold. The prevailing understanding of human trafficking often revolves around the portrayal of victims being forcefully trafficked by malevolent perpetrators, enduring unimaginable suffering, and coerced into involuntary marriages, only to eventually escape their captors. Many interviewees described their human trafficking experiences in China as painful. The combination of shifting post-Cold War geopolitics brought about the mechanisms through which trafficking is a survival strategy for women, and they reproduced more subtle structures of sexualised violence and gendered oppression.

On the other hand, the enforced marriages protected these women from arrest by the Chinese police. As they sought safety from the police control of defectors, these women were forced to agree on arranged marriages that involved money. Focusing on consequences rather than the meaning of human-trafficked marriage, the interviewees explained that human-trafficked marriage was the only way to be safe from being sent

back to North Korea. In fact, every one of the interviewees who brought the issue of those experiences made statements similar to the following:

Human trafficking indeed helped us. Although it was a difficult experience, it ultimately helped me in my career path. (13 July 2022)

By this, the women meant that the marriages were helpful in avoiding Chinese anti-defecting policy.

Some of the interviewees acknowledged the potential risks inherent in their chosen paths, such as becoming victims of human trafficking. Trafficked marriage was considered a matter of luck because it was made randomly, and it decided the success of their future: staying in China or being sent back to North Korea. In light of the particular position of North Korean migrant women, including their illegal statuses and the possible extreme violence and human rights abuses they might experience if they were sent back, the interviews revealed that trafficking did not simply translate to “violence” or “crime”.

The narratives demonstrate the intricate and multifaceted realities faced by individuals involved in human trafficking. Criticising a monolithic approach to human trafficking, a North Korean who worked in a governmental agency said that his mother was a so-called human trafficking victim, but he observed that her marriage life was not very different from his marriage with a South Korean woman based on romance. As such, the lives of women in trafficked marriages varied.

Unlike the typical image of human trafficking, some of these women were given some time to think about their choices and make the choice of such marriages after rejecting some men. One interview subject, who ran a trade business and a North Korean organisation in South Korea, used to be a nurse in North Korea. She ran away to China and was forced to marry a Chinese man. She ran away from her three arranged marriages and settled down with her fourth husband because the former three men were old. Although her husband remained in China, she kept in touch with him and called him “my boyfriend”, revealing their intimate but marriage-free relationship. Some of

these women still maintained their marriages, bringing their husbands, who were either *Joseonjok* or Han Chinese, to South Korea. It is possible that these successful interview subjects likely had more positive experiences than many others.

Fourth, China and South Korea developed diplomatic relationships, promoting formal and informal trades that increased the entry of South Korean companies and various actors (churches and NGOs) into China. The shift enabled North Korean defectors to be exposed to South Koreans in China so they could learn about South Korean society. A notable finding was the presence of agency among survivors, as they exhibited resilience and resourcefulness in navigating their circumstances within geoeconomic and geopolitical shifts. One opportunity that the human-trafficked marriage provided was networking with South Korean businesspeople. One interviewee said:

After having a baby, my parents-in-law told me to go out to work in the city and that they would take care of the baby. So, I got a job in the city. I worked for a South Korean company. Because I worked very hard, everyone acknowledged me and introduced me to others. I learned how to run a business in Korean ways at that time.

This kind of experience was common among most of the interviewees. In Qingdao and Shimchun of China, for example, a number of Korean companies emerged that needed staff who could speak both Korean and Chinese. Some of the interviewees were protected and hired by South Korean bosses, while others pretended to be a *Joseonjok* who have a similar accent with a North Korean one. Working in South Korean companies, they learned how to manage a company. As their businesses went well, they said that they had the most successful achievements in China.

The skills of doing business and speaking the language were essential in the women's achievements. These women took advantage of their Chinese language proficiency and the encounters with South Korean businesspeople that they gained while staying in China. One interviewee and her brother had a difficult time with a Chinese family who bought them and their mother. This interviewee, who ran her own restaurant in South Korea, had lived in North Korea for her first 14 or 15 years of her life, in China for 14

years, and in South Korea for 10 years. Since her education stopped when she was a teenager, she worked in household work and restaurants for a long time. Her traumatic memory of discrimination and child labour was so severe that she and her brother never brought up their lives in China. She said:

I didn't want to even think about the hardship. Even now, I cannot sleep without pills. But I didn't know that learning Chinese was so helpful.

She never went to school in China, but she gradually learned Chinese, working in restaurants and watching TV. Although her time in China was very harsh, she discovered her passion and talents. When she worked in a Korean restaurant in China, she was asked to interpret Chinese into Korean. She said that she felt like running away. She was so scared of being discovered to be a North Korean because, at the time, she pretended to be a *Joseonjok*. Ironically, she said that she wanted to do such a job. She said that running a restaurant and interpreting were common service jobs for helping people; she was still passionate about interpreting Chinese.

Another interviewee became a partner of her former boss mainly because her Chinese was fluent. She went on a business trip to Hong Kong with her boss, and her fluent Chinese was very helpful. Her boss was impressed, and he offered that she become independent and that they collaborate.

FINDING 2: TURNING EXPERIENCES INTO ENTREPRENEURIAL ASSET

Continuing the discussion on the interactions between geopolitical contexts and those North Korean defector businesswomen, this section focuses on their settlement and economic activities in South Korea. Post-war geopolitics between North Korea and China and between North Korea and South Korea continued to control people's mobility across controlled borders while creating a grey area of informality and inviting their resilience. In the process, the women's experiences of limits were turned into

entrepreneurial assets.

As the collaboration between China and North Korea was strengthened in the 2000s, not only were the police committed to arrest but residents also looked out for illegal North Korean migrants (Charny, 2004). Most of the interviewees stayed in China with informal IDs, usually the IDs of the unreported dead. As most of their economic activities went well, they could have continued to stay in China. However, as many interviewees agreed, the biggest fear during their stay in China was the constant vigilance required to evade detection by Chinese authorities. Some interviewees said that they always slept with their shoes beside their pillows so that they could run away if the police arrived in the middle of the night. In addition, there was suspicion and surveillance from their husbands and village neighbours, who knew that a number of North Korean women ran away from their husbands in China. The recurring theme of escape highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by these women and the precarious nature of their lives.

The fear of being caught and suspected worked as a factor that pushed these women away from China. The factor pulling them to South Korea was not strong at that moment because these middle-aged North Korean women did not know much about South Korea, so they did not intend to go to South Korea. However, their solution for their informal stay in China was informal mobility for South Korea. A pull factor was a brokerage developed for going to South Korea, as massive migration was made from China to South Korea, and the brokerage made North Korean defectors' further mobility possible. The majority of the interviewees said that they chose living with housing and welfare over living illegally. This made North Korean women's stay in China a middle route towards South Korea. An interviewee who ran a matchmaking company mentioned that her relatively short stay in China, compared to others, posed greater difficulties in adapting to South Korean society. Others had the advantage of learning about South Korean products available in Chinese markets during their time in China.

Many of the interviewees agreed that their ability to move across borders led to significant changes. They recognised that their mobility could put their families left

behind at risk. However, as time passed, they began to value new opportunities, although there were moments when they even regretted their decision to come to South Korea. Interpreting the grey area of her mobility, one interviewee said:

I am actually the one who may have ruined my family in North Korea because I defected. But my father said, “Watch famous movies about our nation and destiny. Even though you seem to be betraying the country now, if you bring back money later, you can be buried in the Revolutionary Martyrs’ Cemetery.

This interviewee felt conflicted about openly expressing their desire to go to South Korea due to the political climate in North Korea. When this interviewee subtly mentioned that she was considering going even farther away, her father immediately grasped her intentions and expressed his approval, deeming it a good idea. He enquired whether contemplating the future would not be safer and wiser, as opposed to enduring the risks of remaining in China and facing potential capture. She noted that his response greatly empowered her.

Mobility to South Korea empowered the women’s decision-making as well as in facing the consequences of the move. They emphasised that they did not want to come to South Korea, correcting people’s misunderstandings as if they would be guilty if they had. However, it was clear that their mobility dramatically changed their lives and opened up new opportunities. In response to my question about the factors distinguishing successful North Korean businesswomen from those leading difficult lives, an interviewed broker summed it up in one word: mobility. She was a defector, and in helping her family and friends, she became a broker. Through networking with other brokers, she assisted numerous North Koreans in China to relocate to South Korea.

As post-Cold War geopolitics resulted in less tension between North Korea and South Korea, paradoxically, North Korean defectors faced less support from the South Korean government. They were no longer considered ‘brave defectors [*gwi-sun-yong-sa*]’ but ‘defectors [*bug-han-i-tal-ju-min* or *sae-teo-min*]’. The administration of Kim Young Sam dramatically reduced financial support for North Korean defectors. The change

motivated these defectors to find an income source. Upon their arrival, they spent the first three months at Hanawon, a settlement education centre. They referred to this place as their ‘school’, where they learned how to live and behave in South Korea. Hanawon also offered start-up training tailored to North Korean defectors, with a focus on specific types of work, such as art or service roles in restaurants.

In the South Korean job market, lower-income service jobs were more accessible than professional roles; they demanded polished communication, and differing accents were seen as potential sources of discomfort. Their assimilation was especially complicated by their North Korean accent, which proved to be a significant barrier to their initial jobs. Many of the people I interviewed talked about being treated badly and unfairly because of how they spoke. These experiences actually made many of them quit their jobs and start working for themselves. In a meeting I observed as a participant, a group of North Korean businesspeople talked about the difficulties they faced because of their accents and how they were treated. Some said they did not mention that they were from North Korea because they were scared of being treated badly.

One interviewee who arrived in South Korea through a broker after residing in China for six months displayed ambition by actively applying for positions at supermarkets, hospitals, telemarketing firms, and marriage agencies. While at a telemarketing company, she faced criticism due to her North Korean accent, which was similar to that of Joseonjok individuals, leading customers to suspect that her calls were voice phishing attempts. She made earnest efforts to adjust her accent to blend into South Korean society. She expressed, “I just wish I could be ‘ordinary’ in South Korea” (November 8, 2022). With the social skills that she learned at the telemarketing company, she ran a matchmaking company successfully. The limitations they faced turned into more opportunities for these women to pursue their own careers. There was also an increasing start-up support atmosphere in the 2000s, as the job market was reduced.

A big barrier was that, as entrepreneurs, these women needed to apply for governmental funding for small businesses and North Korean defectors’ businesses by filling in an

application form. The form requested written statements regarding business status and start-up items, technology suggestions, business model, marketability, investment status, distribution strategy, growth possibility, and others. The Hana Foundation supports defectors' applications by supporting business consultants. A South Korean business consultant said:

They don't understand why they need to do "market research" and therefore why they need "a strategy". I thought that maybe these terms were not defined in their minds in the first place. (10 May 2023)

Thus, the so-called support for North Korean businesspeople did not work well due to their lack of knowledge needed for an application.

Their gender roles as mothers also challenged their employment, as many of them raised children in South Korea. An interviewee, who used to be an engineer from Pyongyang, had two children while running a business. Regarding her motivation, she said:

I started my own business because it was really tough to find a job with my North Korean accent, and taking care of my child made it hard to work full time.

Discussing her work with great passion and detail, she let out a sigh about her role as a woman, and with a desperation-filled expression, she said:

Every day, I receive many calls about my children and often need to go home. It's quite unfortunate. Just imagine how much better I could do if I could work like a male entrepreneur who can concentrate on their work without having to worry about their children. (14 April, 2022)

Although their journey to their current positions might have been somewhat accidental, these accomplished women were truly dedicated to the success of their businesses. Simultaneously, their identities as women and North Koreans became valuable resources for their businesses. Their marriages to South Korean men and traditional gender roles sometimes led them to start their own businesses. Some began by assisting their husbands' businesses, and, surprisingly, they achieved much higher profits than their husbands. Gradually, their roles expanded, while the husbands often took on more

passive roles, focusing on childcare.

Their characteristics influenced their responses to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their businesses, which was relatively less severe than for South Koreans. This was attributed to North Koreans' tendency to avoid relying heavily on bank loans and instead run family-oriented businesses. They downsized their operations during the pandemic. However, a positive outcome was the adoption of online training and meetings, which enabled easier participation in education and gatherings, even for those residing outside Seoul.

In other instances, their identity as North Koreans, their origin, and their unique experiences became the foundation for their work. Some interviewees worked as freelance speakers on national security matters, sharing their personal stories with students and organisations. Gaining attention from the media also played a positive role in boosting their businesses. One interviewee, for instance, mentioned that because she had a background in performing on stages in North Korea, she took the opportunity to talk about North Korea on television. She believed it was a way to inform people about her home country. The show she appeared on, called 'Eemangab', was well-received, and as her fame grew, she received suggestions to open a restaurant. She skilfully utilised a government programme designed to support the happiness and success of North Korean defectors. By utilising funds and her own capabilities, she transitioned from that support to running her own restaurant.

The interviewees who led North Korean organisations were notably dedicated. Grateful for what they received from South Korean society, they felt a sense of responsibility to give back. They organised voluntary initiatives, such as visiting nursing homes. Some actively collaborated with fellow North Korean businesses, hiring fellow North Koreans. To them, their North Korean identity held an important sense of responsibility. Many emphasised their desire to be contributors rather than recipients of services, aware of criticism regarding South Koreans providing free housing and other benefits to North Koreans. Certain North Korean organisations were established to contribute to their local communities, consistently engaging in voluntary work to assist the elderly and the

less fortunate. They also took the initiative to learn about accounting and management, recognising the need for business management knowledge in a capitalist society, especially in South Korea.

Their experiences, shaped by the social environment and education in North Korea, along with their involvement in informal economic activities and mobility, provided them with a remarkable level of resilience and empowerment. One interviewee, particularly passionate about organising voluntary work, was asked why she did it. Her response was straightforward:

As human beings, it's what we're meant to do. Being involved with people's needs is ingrained in me. This was the same in North Korea, where even the tasks given by the Communist Party were related to serving the people. This principle holds true both in South Korea and North Korea". (July 3, 2022)

This interviewee had a history of active participation in various types of organisational activities. She compared the seriousness of such activities in North and South Korea, noting that those who experienced organisational tasks in North Korea tended to approach them more earnestly.

Across the interviewees, a common sentiment emerged: if South Korea and North Korea were to slightly open up, they would eagerly conduct business in their hometowns. The following statement by one interviewee was common among all the North Korean defector businesswomen:

I would undoubtedly return to my hometown if my safety were guaranteed. North Korea is an emerging market. I understand the demands and supply within North Korean society.

This statement indicates that they see new opportunities as businesspeople. They also expressed a sense of guilt for leaving their hometowns and yearned to be reunited with friends and family.

CONCLUSION

By highlighting the agency of North Korean female elites, the study emphasises the complex ways in which gender, mobility, and geopolitics intersect to shape their experiences and opportunities. The findings demonstrate that geopolitical shifts constantly gave these women a chance of adaptability and survival through informal economic activities and mobilities. Their adaptability and resilience have enabled them not only to survive uncertain situations but also to flourish. Locating the women's agency in the process requires an understanding of multifaceted aspects and circular effects. They leveraged the informal mechanism for their survival. There was a desensitisation to trafficking as a survival resource or survival strategy for women in the most disadvantaged situations.

The theoretical implications from these findings encompass the strength of a relational approach, which enabled the exploration of these women's rich and multifaceted experiences and achievements. This study contributes to the multifaceted and ambivalent understanding of agency and empowerment. Without actively resisting or engaging in political activities, the women ended up inadvertently empowering themselves. Therefore, agency possesses a double-edged nature, encompassing traps and opportunities, victimisation and empowerment. The narratives highlight survivors' agency and the intricate dynamics they navigate within their circumstances.

This study does not argue that all North Korean female defectors survived as these businesswomen did. The subject group of the research exhibited considerable agency, but it is also important to recognise that their experiences represent a small part of the multi-layered experiences of North Korean women. A significant number have struggled with their complicated marriages, the education of their children in transnational families, and other difficulties caused by their Chinese husbands, and some have been caught up in the sex industry in South Korean society. These North Korean female defectors are less accessible and thus more invisible in empirical studies. However, by investigating these interviewees, the study challenges the dominant narrative of North Korean defectors as monolithic and repressed victims, shedding light on how women's experiences and perspectives can enhance our understanding of

geopolitical processes. The politicisation of the single human rights paradigm of being a victim of trafficking should be questioned. The actual realities of human trafficking are much more intricate and diverse than these initial assumptions suggest.

The findings also underscore the necessity for comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to effectively combat human trafficking and provide support for survivors in rebuilding their lives. Further, within South Korea, it would be necessary to analyse whether the post-Cold War geopolitics of the South Korean government, NGOs, and human rights organisations, as well as the media, constitute the context of their lives.

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탈북여성 유튜브를 통해 본 사회적 송금과 북한이탈주민의 초국가적 정체성 형성
천경효 (이화여대 한국학과)

1년차 연구에서는 북한 출신 여성 유튜버의 개인방송 콘텐츠를 분석하여 이들의 젠더 정체성이 어떻게 재현되고 구성되는지를 살펴보았다. 사례 수집에 초점을 맞추어 개인의 정체성이 구현되는 방식에 관심을 기울였던 1년차 연구의 경험에 기반하여, 2년차에서는 해당 개인방송 콘텐츠에서 파악한 내용들을 보다 확장된 이론틀로 접근해보고자 하였다.

1년차 연구에서 지적하였던 바와 같이, 북한 출신 이른바 탈북 여성의 개인 방송에서 구성되고 제시되는 정체성은 전략적이면서도 양가적인 모습을 지닌다. 케이블 방송채널과 주류 미디어에서 종종 다루어진 북한이탈주민에 대한 재현방식의 대척점에 서는 것이 아니라, 오히려 대중에게 익숙한 이미지와 담론을 적극적으로 활용함으로써 소비와 관심에 있어서의 효용가치를 높이는 모습이 드러났다. 하지만 사례로 삼은 탈북 여성 유튜버들이 “북한 여성,” “북한 여자,” “북한 사람”이라는 범주화를 자신들의 콘텐츠 구성과 제작에 사용한다고 하여 그들이 자신들의 정체성을 “북한 사람”으로 환원시킨다고 볼 수는 없다. 그들이 “북한 여자”임을 드러내는 것은 어디까지나 남한 사회에서 그리고 유튜브라는 특정한 미디어 플랫폼에서 차별성을 구현하고 효용가치를 높이려는 전략적 표현에 가깝기 때문이다.

또한 그들의 언설에서 자주 등장하는 “북한 여자” 혹은 “북한 사회,” “북한 문화” 라는 것은 남한 사회에서 대중적으로 투사되는 방식을 충실하게 따른다는 점에서 실제로 내재적으로 구성되는 정체성의 수준이 아닌, 현재 남한사회에 거주하는 구성원의 입지를 오히려 공고히 하는 방식으로 활용된다는 의미를 지닌다. 사례로 삼은 채널을 운영하는 탈북여성 유튜버들이 자신들을 스스로 “북한 여자”라고 언급하는데 스스로 없이는 동시에 남한 사회의 중산층 정체성을 드러내는 데에도 아무런 정체성의 간극을 보이지 않는다는 점이 이를 잘 보여준다. 이들이 방송할 때의 장소, 배경과 같은 물리적 세팅뿐 아니라 콘텐츠를 구성하는 해외여행, 쇼핑 등과 같은 행위, 그리고 유튜버 개인의 옷차림, 화장법, 표정, 어투, 몸

것과 같은 paralanguage를 통해 남한사회의 여유있는 중산층의 삶이 분명하게 전달된다. 북한이탈주민이라는 사회적 소수자, 여성이라는 젠더, 그리고 남한의 중산층이라는 계급성이 충돌을 일으키기보다는 오히려 중첩되면서 독특한 젠더 정체성을 만들어내는 것이다. 남한과 북한, 혹은 북한이탈주민이라는 in-between 상태 중 어느 한 쪽에 경도된 정체성이 아닌 것에 더해, 탈북과정에서 겪은 중국 및 동남아시아 국가에서의 경험 과 정착 이후 해외여행의 경험 등까지 더해지면서 탈북 여성 유튜버들이 재현하는 정체성은 국가의 경계를 넘어서는 transnationality까지 포함하여 확장된다. 아직도 남한 사회에서 북한이탈주민, 혹은 조선족으로 흔히 통칭되는 중국동포들이 어떠한 국가 정체성을 가지고 있는가에 대한 해묵은 논쟁과 비난이 사라지지 않는 상황을 생각해 볼 때, 탈북 여성 유튜버들이 보여주는 초국가적 정체성은 남한, 북한, 북한이탈주민, 다문화, 외국인으로 범주화되는 남한 사회의 정체성에 대한 경직된 인식과 사고가 현실을 충분히 담아내지 못하고 있음을 드러낸다.

1년차 연구에서 탈북 여성 유튜버들의 콘텐츠와 방송활동이 초국가적이고 복합적인 개인의 정체성을 구현하고 재현하는 것을 확인하는 것에 주안점을 두었다면, 2차 연도에서는 개인을 넘어선 함의를 사회적 송금이라는 개념으로 파악하고자 했다. 좁은 의미에서의 송금은 지리적으로 분리되어 있는 이들 사이에 일어나는 화폐로 귀결되는 직접적 경제적 지원을 말하며, 북한이탈주민에 관한 연구에서 그들이 북한의 가족과 친지에게 보내는 송금은 최근 들어 상당한 관심을 모으고 있다. 극도로 접촉이 제한되고 은폐된 것으로 여겨지는 북한사회로 지속적, 정기적인 송금이 이루어지고 있다는 사실은 그 자체로 흥미로울 뿐 아니라, 송금의 여파로 일어날 수 있는 직간접적 결과들 역시 북한이탈주민의 생활과 정체성, 문화를 이해하는데 중요한 관점을 제공해준다. 브로커를 통한 경제적 송금의 경험은 많은 북한이탈주민들이 지니고 있으며, 최근의 북한이탈주민 관련 연구에서는 송금의 사회적 영향, 특히 북한사회에서의 함의를 읽어내고자 하는 시도들이 눈에 띈다.

경제적 송금에 대한 연구가 화폐가치의 이양을 통해 일어나는 직접적이고 때로는 즉각적이며 종종 물리적인 효과를 다룬다면, 사회적 송금이라는 개념은 보

다 장기적인 관점에서 이념과 가치체계의 변화를 초래할 수 있는 정보와 지식, 사고, 행위, 정체성, 네트워크의 이동 및 그 효과를 읽어내고자 한다. 노동, 교육, 종교 등의 이유로 전세계적인 이주와 이동이 일어나면서 이주민들이 본국의 가족 및 친지에게 단지 자금만을 보내는 것이 아니라는 점이 주목을 받게 되었다. 유무선 기기를 통한 전화통화, 편지, 메모, 전언 등을 통해 이주민은 자신이 떠난 본국의 가족과 친지들에게 다른 지역에 대한 정보와 지식, 가치체계를 전송하게 되고, 이것이 정서적, 이념적, 그리고 나아가 행동에서의 반응과 변화를 불러일으키게 되는 것에 대한 관심이 사회적 송금에 주목하게 된 맥락이라 볼 수 있다. 사회적 송금은 경제적 송금과 마찬가지로 이주(migration)와 이동성(mobility)의 맥락에서 송금인(sender)과 수취인(receiver) 커뮤니티의 관계성에 초점을 맞추지만, 사회적 송금의 경우 송금의 영향으로 인한 문화적 생산(cultural production)에 주목한다. 경제적 송금과 마찬가지로 사회적 송금의 강도, 빈도, 규모, 다양성 등의 측면은 지속적으로 증가하고 있다.

북한이탈주민 관련 연구에서 사회적 송금이라는 개념을 적용시키는 것은 경제적 송금의 논의보다 훨씬 제한적이고 간접적이다. 사회적 송금이라는 개념 자체가 물리적이고 가시적인 교환이 아닌 정보, 지식, 가치의 영역을 포함한다는 점에서 대상에 관계없이 그 연구는 간접적이고 추론적인 방향으로 흐르기 쉽지만, 북한이탈주민의 경우, 남북간의 접촉 및 교류가 원칙적으로 차단된 상태이며 이동성과 지향성이 대개의 경우 일방으로 제한된다는 점에서 일반적인 사회적 송금의 사례와 구분되는 특수성을 지닌다. 또한 사회적 송금이 일어나는 방식 역시 직접적인 방문 및 교류가 차단된 남북의 상황에서는 매우 제한적이다. 일반적인 사회적 송금에서는 인적 교류, 편지 왕래, 전화통화, 이메일, SNS 등을 통해 사고와 가치, 행동양식이 전달되고 받아들여지는 경로를 추적해볼 수 있으나, 남한 내 북한이탈주민의 경우 북한에 남아있는 가족이나 친지와 의 정보교환이 브로커에 의해 매개되거나 혹은 아예 차단되기 때문에 위에서 언급된 경로를 분석하는 것도 현실성이 떨어진다. 이러한 상황에서, 북한이탈주민들이 제작하고 운영하는 개인방송 콘텐츠에 담겨있는 가치, 사고, 정체성, 행동양식, 네트워크 등이 직접 가족은 아니더라도 다른 북한주민에게 전달하거나 전해질 수 있다는 점에서 사회적 송금의 가능한 경로로 상정해 보았다. 사회적 송금을 통한 반응과 변화는 수취인

개인에서 종결되는 것이 아니라 궁극적으로 그 지역 커뮤니티에서 발생하는 것이기 때문에 직접 일대일 대응방식의 송금이 아니더라도 특정되지 않는 다수의 북한주민을 수취인으로 생각해 볼 수 있을 것이다. 또한 많은 북한이탈주민들의 인터뷰와 수기에서 드러나듯이 남한의 드라마나 대중문화들이 북한사회에 일으킨 반항이나 야기한 집단적 행동의 수준을 고려한다면 (예를 들어 탈북에 대한 관심 증가 및 실제 탈북의지 강화, 중국에서의 취업과 국경을 넘나드는 장사의 유행, 남한식의 패션이나 생활방식에 대한 선호 등), 북한이탈주민들이 지속적으로 생산하고 유포하고 있는 개인방송의 콘텐츠들도 중요한 사회적 송금의 장으로의 가능성을 충분히 지니고 있다. 더구나 남한의 드라마나 영화들이 극화(dramatize)된 픽션임에도 도시 배경, 거주 환경, 사회상 등을 전달하는 데 효과적이었다는 점을 생각하면, 실제 북한에 있다가 남한에 거주하게 된 북한이탈주민의 말과 행동을 통해 전해지는 가치, 사고, 행동양식의 강도와 파장은 더욱 클 것으로 예측된다. 이러한 맥락에서 앞선 1년차 연구에서 분석된 개인의 복합적 정체성이 담긴 개인방송 콘텐츠가 사회적 송금의 효과를 배태한 것으로 파악해보는 것이 가능하다.

또다른 탈북여성 유튜브 방송의 수취인은 남한에 거주하는 시청자들일 수 있다. 북한이탈주민 커뮤니티가 남한주민과 구분되는 중층적이고 초국가적인 정체성을 지닌 집단이라면, 이들이 개인방송을 통해 남한의 사회에 대한 생각, 가치판단, 남한에서의 생활 등을 콘텐츠의 주요 줄기로 삼으면서 남한주민들로 구성된 시청자 커뮤니티에 북한 및 북한이탈주민과 관계된 사고와 행동에 영향을 끼칠 수 있기 때문이다. 이때 사회적 송금의 맥락에서 중요한 한가지 측면은, 송금을 통해 받는 쪽에서만 반응과 변화가 일어나는 것이 아니라 사회적 송금의 행위를 통해 보내는 쪽에서도 정체성, 네트워크, 사고, 행동양식 등에 변화와 재구성이 일어난다는 점이다. 탈북여성 유튜버들의 사례에서, 이들이 콘텐츠를 구성하여 방송하며 시청자들과 댓글과 구독수, 좋아요 등을 통해 상호작용을 하면서 자신들의 정체성과 행동방식을 재정의하고 구현해내는 점을 이러한 맥락에서 분석할 수 있다.

탈북 여성 유튜버들과 시청자들의 상호작용에 대한 분석을 확장하여 public

sphere로서 유튜브 공간의 성격을 진단하고 방향성을 가늠해보는 것도 이번 연구주제 중의 하나이다. Public sphere는 개인과 집단에게 중요하게 여겨지는 공통의 이슈들에 대한 논의가 이루어지는 공개된 담론의 장을 말한다. Public sphere의 개념에서 중요한 점은 단순히 발화되는 말이 오가는 곳이 아니라, 특정 콘텐츠들을 통해 집단의 의견들이 매개되고 차이와 합의 속에서 사회를 조직하는 대중의견이 형성되는 공간이라는 점이다. 탈북여성 유튜브의 경우, 남한 사회에서 북한의 사회문화와 북한이탈주민에 대한 몇 안되는 공론의 장을 형성하고 있으며 뚜렷한 목적과 방향성을 지니고 조직적으로 운영되는 케이블 방송의 북한관련 프로그램들과 달리 자유로운 접근과 의견개진이 가능하다는 특징을 지닌다. 실제 북한이탈주민과의 직접 대면경험이 활발하지 않은 남한 주민들에게 탈북여성 유튜브 방송은 서로를 직간접으로 대면하고 공통의 이슈에 관심을 가지며 의견을 교환하는 과정을 통해 통합된 공공의견을 향해 다가갈 수 있는 중요한 장이 될 수 있다. 앞으로 3년차 연구에서는 정체성, 사회적 송금, public sphere의 교차성에 관한 심도있는 접근과 분석을 진행할 예정이다.

‘동독 여성 Ostfrauen’, 신화인가? 현실인가?*

— MDR 3부작 <동독 여성>과 『동독 여성이 독일을 바꾼다』
분석을 중심으로

최 윤 영 (서울대)

I. 서론

1990년 서독과 동독이 ‘독일연방공화국 Bundesrepublik Deutschland’으로 통일된 이후 새로운 사회 상황에 대한 분석들이 많이 나왔다. 처음에는 통일 이전과 이후, 동과 서를 여러 관점에서 비교 분석하는 논문들이 많았지만, 통일된 지 30여 년이 지나자 독일 사회가 그간 어떻게 역동적으로 변화했는가를 다룬 분석들이 많이 나오고 있다. 또한 통일이 지난 30여 년간 사회의 구성원들 혹은 사회의 각 그룹에게 어떻게 다르게 영향을 미쳤는지도 초미의 관심사이다. 젠더, 계층, 이주 배경, 민족, 문화, 인종, 성적 지향, 장애, 세대 등과 같은 사회적 세부 범주들로 나누어 권력과 지배 관계, 상호적 연관 및 영향 관계들을 살펴볼 수 있지만, 이 글은 성별 및 동서 차이를 가장 크게 고려한다. 그 가운데 독일 통일 당시와 현재의 상황을 비교해볼 때 가장 많이 변모한 그룹에 대한 고찰이 행해지는데, 이 글에서는 특히 소위 ‘동독 여성들 Ostfrauen’의 부상에 대한 분석에 집중한다. 2017년 공영 방송의 하나인 독일 MDR(중부독일방송)이 내보낸 <동독 여성들 Ostfrauen> 3부작은 큰 화제를 불러 모았으며, 그 외에 T. 브란데스와 M. 데커 공저인 『동독 여성이 독일을 바꾼다 Ostfrauen

* 2023
(2023S1A5A2A03083366)/

verändern die Republik」이 큰 주목을 받았다(Brandes/Decker, 2019). 현재 논의되는 ‘동독 여성’이란 항구 불변하거나 영속적인 개념이 아니며 뚜렷하게 그 정체성을 규정할 수 있는 개념도 아니다. 사실상 우리 시대의 문화적 구성물로 볼 수 있는데 어떤 사회적, 문화적, 역사적 상황에서 이러한 구성물이 생겨났는지를 살펴보는 것이 중요하다. 이 글에서는 위의 두 텍스트를 중심으로 실제 ‘동독 여성들’이란 용어가 어떤 현상을 지칭하며, 통일 이후에 이 그룹은 어떠한 변화를 겪었으며, 그 변화의 원인이 어디에 있고 이들이 통일 독일을 어떻게 바꾸었는지를 살펴보고자 한다. 이러한 분석은 궁극적으로 한국의 미래 통일 사회를 구상할 때에도 시사점을 줄 수 있을 것이다.

II. ‘동독 여성들’

II.1. 통일 직후의 ‘동독 여성들’

‘동독 여성들 Ostfrauen’이란 주로 통일 이전의 동독이나 통일 이후 구동독에 속하는 지방에서 사회화 과정을 겪고 여기에서 삶의 대부분을 보낸 여성들을 지칭하며 최근 성공의 아이콘으로 부상된 개념으로서,¹⁾ 구 동독 출신의 여성을 뜻하는 일반적이고 단순한 호칭인 “동독 (출신) 여성들 ostdeutsche Frauen”과 구별된다.²⁾ ‘동독 여성들 Ostfrauen’은 ‘동독 출신의 남성들 Ostmänner’이나 ‘서독 출신의 여성들 Westfrauen’과 자주 비교 대상이 되는 상대적인 개념이기도 하다. 동독 여성들은 내부적으로 보다 상세하게 분류를 할 수 있는데, 즉 1990년 독일 통일 당시 이미 성인이었던 여성들도 있고 또한 통일 이후에 태어난 여성도 있기에 이 여성 그룹들 간에는 세대 차이도 존재

1) <https://taz.de/Mythos-Ostfrauen/!5757365/>

2)

하며 대체로 전자 그룹을 지칭한다. 또한 이들 여성들은 통일 직후 서독이나 해외로 이주한 여성들도 있고 동독 지역에 계속 머무르거나 아니면 동독 지역에서 내부 이주를 한 여성들 그룹도 있다.

1990년대의 통일 직후에 나온 이들 그룹에 대한 분석들은 주로 이들을 “통일의 패배자”(Brandes/Decker 2019, 19), “통일 과정의 최대 희생자”(도기숙 2005, 267)로 불렀다. 통일 이후 동독인을 가장 고통스럽게 한 ‘실업률’은 실제로 90년대 말에 남성의 경우 15.2%, 여성의 경우는 20.7%까지 증가했는데, 동독 시절의 세계사에 유래가 없던, 거의 완전 고용에 근접했던 시절과 비교해 보면 당사자들에게는 이 실업은 더욱 고통스러웠다(휘르티겐 2010, 69). 다음의 지적은 독일 동독에서 남녀평등을 가능하게 해주었던 체제나 제도들이 통일과 더불어 사라졌음을 보여준다.

노동에 대한 권리는 탁아소나 유치원 자리에 대한 권리만큼이나 유지되지 않았다. 또한 [이전 동독 시절에는 가능했던] 형벌 처벌을 받지 않는 낙태는 과도기에만 임시적으로 가능하였고 제제는 더 강화될 것이라 예고되었다. 동독 정부의 양성평등 담당관이었던 마리나 바이어는 1990년 10월 3일 통일의 날에 해고되었다. 이 시기를 보여주는 가장 강력한 지표는 바로 통계였다. 직업을 가진 여성의 비율은 1989년의 92.4%에서 1990년 44.3%로 떨어졌다. 그들은 드물지 않게 감독관 위치에 있었고 새로운 고위직은 대부분 서독의 남성들이었기 때문에 그래서 거의 모두 자신의 직업을 잃었다.”(Brandes/Decker 2019, 19)

그러나 정치, 경제, 사회, 교육 뿐 아니라 언론 등의 담론적 권력 등 각 분야에서 전반적으로 동독인들이 주변화되고 정체성이 거부되고 부인되는 상황 속에서 사회 그룹 중 동독 여성들이 유일하게 가시적인 사회 집단으로 두각을 나타내고 있다. 더 나아가 이들은 성공의 원인이 자신들이 바로 ‘동독 여성들’이기 때문이라고 설명하며 동독 여성들의 가치관과 세계관, 인생관이 자신들을 성장시켜주었다고 주장한다. 이미 『물론 저는 동독 여성이에요 Klar bin ich eine Ostfrau』라고 제목에서부터 자신의 성공의 요체를 동독 여성이라는 정체성으로 돌리는 분석이 있는가 하면(Rellin 2004, 9), 최근의 관련 논문들도 이

현상에 주목한다.

동독 여성들이 가시화되고 있다. 그들은 많은 지점에서 동독 출신의 남성들만 앞지르는 것이 아니라 서독의 여성들도 앞지른다. 동독 여성들은 상대적으로 자주 연방 정부의 리더 위치에 올라간다.³⁾

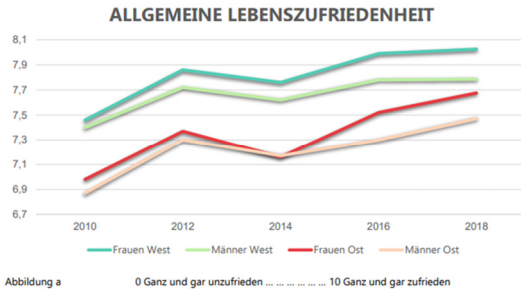
이들 동독 여성들은 통일 독일의 사회문화에 변화를 가져와 ‘독일이 동독화된다 Deutschland wird ostiger’라는 주장이 나오고 있으며(Rennefanz 2014, 259), 무엇보다도 동독 여성들의 직업관과 육아관이 사회문화적 변화를 가져오고 있으며, 과거의 서독 시절과 달리 여성이 일하러 가거나 아동을 일찍 보육 시설에 보내는 것이 당연시되는 등의 변화는 바로 이 동독 여성들이 이루어낸 변화이다. 심지어 통일 독일에서는 해당 아동 인구의 30%의 보육시설을 확보해야 하는 법령(KiföG)이 2008년에 통과되었다. 이러한 통일 독일과 젠더 지형 변화의 관계는 이제까지 독일뿐 아니라 한국에서도 많지는 않으나 주제화 되곤 하였으나 대체로 서독 여성, 동독 여성 등으로 구분하여, 통일 이후의 시간적 공간적 사회적 변화를 고려하지 않은, 고정된 정주의 개념으로 연구되어 왔다. 지금은 동독 여성들의 그간의 변화 및 동독 여성들의 부상과 성공에 대한 연구가 필요한 시점이다.

II.2. 통일 30년 후 ‘동독 여성들’

다음에서는 통일 이후, 특히 최근의 동독 출신 남성과 여성, 그리고 서독 출신 남성과 여성의 사회적 상황의 변화를 통계로 살펴보자. 우선 삶의 만족도를 살펴보자.

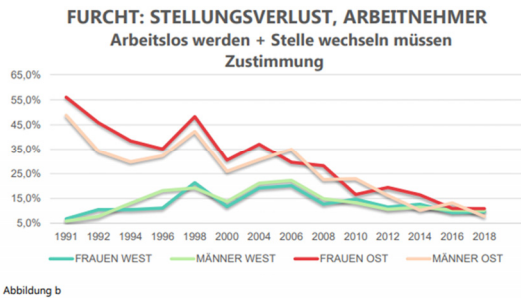
<표 1>(Allbus 2018, 7)은 2010년부터 2018년까지의 일반적인 삶의 만족도를 보여주고 있다. 0은 완전한 불만족이고 10은 완전한 만족을 나타내며, 2010

3) <https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte-gegenwart/politik-gesellschaft/ostfrauen-beruf-karriere-familie-100.html>



<표 1> 일반적 삶의 만족도

도가 상승하는 가운데 그룹별로 차이가 커지고 있다. 일반적으로 서독 출신의 그룹들이 처음부터 끝까지 상대적으로 높은 만족도를 보여주고 있고 동독 출신들은 만족도가 낮다고 할 수 있다. 그중에서 동서독 지역 모두에서 여성들의 만족도가 남성들의 만족도보다 높으며 특히 동독 여성들의 만족도는 2014년 이후 많이 상승하여 동독 남성들과 격차를 벌리며 거의 서독 남성들에 근접하고 있음을 볼 수 있다.



<표 2> 두려움: 실직, 노동자

년에서 2018년까지 서독 출신 여성, 서독 출신 남성, 동독 출신 여성, 동독 출신 남성 이 네 그룹의 차이는 점차 눈에 띄게 줄어들고 있고, 2018년에는 거의 모두 유사한 정도를 보여준다. 통일 직후에는 서독의 남성과 여성 그룹은 일자리에 대해 느끼는 불안이 5% 정도였으나 2018년에는 10% 정도로 높아진 반면에, 통일

년에서 2018년까지 서독 출신 여성, 서독 출신 남성, 동독 출신 여성, 동독 출신 남성 이 네 그룹은 모두 상승과 하강에 있어 정도나 폭은 다르지만 유사한 유형을 보여주고 있다. 그렇지만 2014년 이후 삶의 만족

<표 2>(Allbus 2018, 7)는 구직과 관련되어 있는데, 노동자의 입장에서 직장을 상실하고 다른 일터를 찾아야 하는 상황에 대한 불안을 보여주고 있다. 통일 직후인 1991년부터 2018년까지(동독의 경우 1994년부터 2018

직후 거의 55%, 50%에 육박하던 동독 출신 여성과 남성의 불안은 2018년에는 15% 이하로 매우 낮아져 있다. 특히 통일 직후 동독 출신 여성의 불안이 가장 컸는데 현재에는 모든 그룹이 거의 같은 정도라고 말할 수 있다. 이는 동독 출신 여성과 남성의 삶의 환경이 뚜렷하게 개선되고 있음을 의미하고 동서

독 차이가 점차 줄어들고 있음을 보여준다.

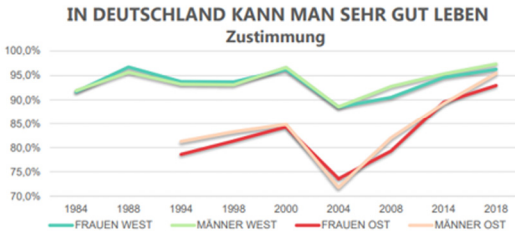
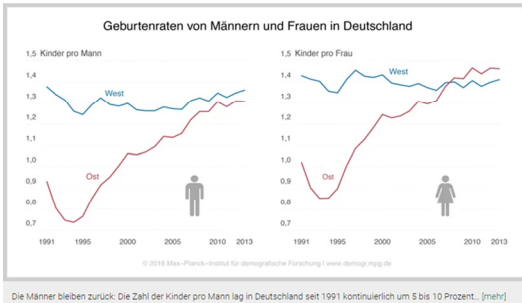


표 3(Allbus 2018, 13)은 각 출신별, 젠더 그룹들의 삶의 평가 기대치를 물어보고 있다. <표 3>은 “독일에서는 아주 잘 살 수 있다”라는 명제에 대

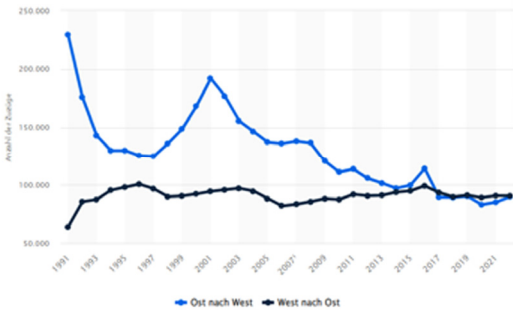
<표 3> ‘독일에서는 아주 잘 살 수 있다.’

해 물어보고 있는데 서독의 남녀그룹과 동독의 남녀그룹은 각각 거의 비슷한 정도를 보여주고 있다. 서독의 남녀그룹이 2004년을 기점으로 모두 한 차례 낮아지고는 있지만 그 이후 동독 그룹은 급격히 수치가 상승하고 있다. 동독의 남녀그룹은 통일 이후부터 측정이 시작되고 전반적으로 낮은 80% 정도에서 시작하였고 서독과 마찬가지로 2004년에는 낮아져 70%대를 기록하기도 했지만 최근에 눈에 띄게 상승폭이 커져 최근에는 격차가 거의 없다고 할 수 있다.

또한 중요하게 살펴보아야 할 지표가 바로 출산율이다. <표 4>(MPI 2016)가 보여주듯 서독의 남성들이나 여성들의 1인당 출산율은 통일 이후 2013년까지 다소 변화는 있으나 전체적으로 1.2명에서 1.4명 사이에서 움직이고 있으나 동독의 경우는 그 변화가 매우 극적이다. 통일 직후에는 남성의 경우 0.9에서 0.7로 떨어졌으나 2013년 현재 1.3까지 가파르게 상승하고 있으며 여성의 경우에도 통일 직후에는 1.0에서 0.8로 떨어졌으나 2013년 현재에는 1.4 이상으로 가파르게 상승하고 있으며 더욱 고무적인 것은 서독 여성을 앞지르고 있다는 점이다. 이는 동독 여성들이 앞으로의 미래 삶의 계획, 특히 자녀 출산 계획에 있어 안정감을 되찾고 있으며 현 상황에서 출산과 육아를 기획해도 된다고 생각함을 의미한다.



<표 4> 독일 남성과 여성의 출산율



<표 5> 인구 이동: 동에서 서로, 서에서 동으로

또한 인구의 ‘이동’을 살펴보는 것도 중요하다. 통일 이후 해외 이주나 국내 이주 등의 이동은 본인 삶의 변화를 이끌려는 자기주도성과 적극성을 보여주기 때문이다. <표 5>(Statista 2023)는 동서독이 통일된 다음 인구의 국내 이동이 강하게 일어났는데 그 방향은 서쪽에서 동쪽보다는 동쪽에서 서쪽으로 이동한 비율이 눈에 띄게 높다. 더 나은 일자리, 더 나은 교육 기회, 더 나은 삶의 가능성이 있는 서쪽으로 이동이 많이 일어났는데(김창권

2010, 38), 특히 젊은 층에서 자발적으로, 개인적으로 그리고 대규모로 일어났다. 또한 동에서 서로의 이러한 이동을 감행한 사회그룹은 남성보다는 단신의 여성이 훨씬 많았고 이 여성들은 대부분 구동독 사회로 돌아오지 않았고 구 서독 사회에 흡수되었다. 이러한 젊은 여성들의 서쪽으로의 이동은 본인들에게도 사회적으로도 많은 변화를 가져왔다. 이주를 통해 동독 여성으로서의 어려움을 극복하고 고등교육이나 직업 훈련과 구직을 통해 통일의 피해자가 아니라 통일을 통한 성취를 이루려는 적극적 노력이 이루어졌고 상당수 성공했으나 이 구동독 지역 출신의 젊은 여성들에 대한 체계적 조직적 학술적 추적 연구는 이제 겨우 시작되었다. 이러한 연구의 공백은 많은 이주 여성들이 새로운 사회에 완전히 적응하여 흡수되었기 때문에 ‘가시적 사회 그룹’으로 분류

되지 않아서라고 추측된다. 젊은 여성들이 대거 이동을 하면서 구동독 주들에게는 젊은 층의 인구가 줄어들었고 특히 젊은 여성 인구가 줄어들어서 인하여 이에 따른 사회적 변화가 나타나고 있다. 청년층 인구가 줄어들고 노년층 인구가 늘어나면서 출산율이 낮아지고 당뇨병 등 성인병 발병률이 눈에 띄게 높아지는 변화들이다. 최근에 나온 많은 사회 통계들은 설문 대상자들의 출신을 물어봄으로써 이러한 변화를 반영하고 있는 경우도 있지만, 지도로 보여주는 동서 차이 등의 통계는 현재 거주지를 중심으로 다름으로써 특정 그룹의 이동 상황은 반영하지 못하고 있다.

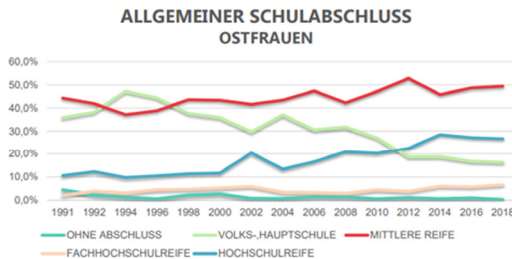


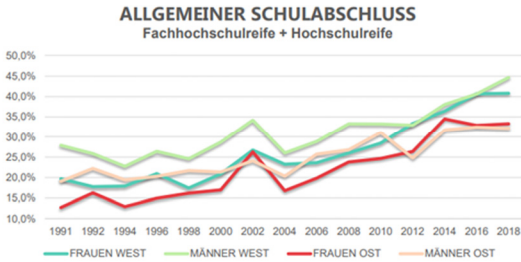
Abbildung 11

<표 6> 동독 여성들의 일반적 학력

<표 6>과 <표 7> (Allbus 2018, 17)은 학력의 정도 차를 보여주고 있다. <표 6>은 동독 여성들의 졸업 학력을 보여주고 있는데 직업학교(Hauptschulreife), 실업학교(Mittlere Reife, 서독의 Realschule), 전문대학(Fachhochschulreife), 대학(Hochschulreife)로 나누어 살펴보고 있다. 통일 당시 실업학교와 직업학교가 가장 많고 이 둘을 합치면 거의 80%에 육박하는데, 이는 직업 교육을 선호했었다는 것을 보여준다. 다음으로 대학 졸업이 10% 정도이며 전문대학과 무학력은 매우 적었다. 즉 다시 말해서 동독 여성들은 고등교육을 받은 비율은 낮지만 거의 모두 국가에 의해 직업 교육을 받았음을 의미한다. 이에 반하여 2018년 현재의 상황은 직업학교 졸업이 50%로 여전히 가장 높지만, 실업학교와 대학 졸업의 순위가 바뀌어 실업학교는 20% 이하로 낮아진 반면 대학 졸업은 30%대로 급격히 증가하였다. 무학은 거의 사라지고 있으며 전문대학 졸업도 역시 마찬가지로 높아지고 있다. 이러한 변화는 동독 여성들이 졸업 후 직업이 상대적으로 확실하게 보장되는 직업학교를 여전히 선호하지만 고등교육기관인 대학 졸업을 통하여 점차 자신의 직업 커리어를 높여

<표 6>과 <표 7> (Allbus 2018, 17)은 학력의 정도 차를 보여주고 있다. <표 6>은 동독 여성들의 졸업 학력을 보여주고 있는데 직업학교(Hauptschulreife), 실업학교(Mittlere Reife, 서독의 Realschule), 전문대학(Fachhochschulreife), 대학(Hochschulreife)로 나누어 살펴보고 있다. 통일 당시 실업학교와 직업학교가 가장 많고 이 둘을 합치면 거의 80%에 육박하는데, 이는 직업 교육을 선호했었다는 것을 보여준다. 다음으로 대학 졸업이 10% 정도이며 전문대학과 무학력은 매우 적었다. 즉 다시 말해서 동독 여성들은 고등교육을 받은 비율은 낮지만 거의 모두 국가에 의해 직업 교육을 받았음을 의미한다. 이에 반하여 2018년 현재의 상황은 직업학교 졸업이 50%로 여전히 가장 높지만, 실업학교와 대학 졸업의 순위가 바뀌어 실업학교는 20% 이하로 낮아진 반면 대학 졸업은 30%대로 급격히 증가하였다. 무학은 거의 사라지고 있으며 전문대학 졸업도 역시 마찬가지로 높아지고 있다. 이러한 변화는 동독 여성들이 졸업 후 직업이 상대적으로 확실하게 보장되는 직업학교를 여전히 선호하지만 고등교육기관인 대학 졸업을 통하여 점차 자신의 직업 커리어를 높여

가고 있음을 뚜렷하게 보여준다.



<표 7> 일반적 학력(전문대와 대학 졸업)

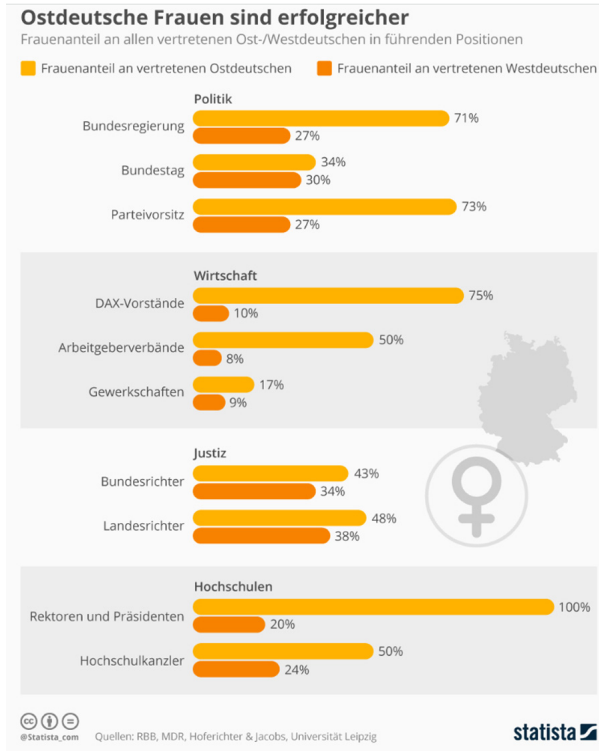
<표 7>은 전문대학과 대학 졸업자들을 지역과 사회 그룹별로 비교를 하고 있다. 통일 직후 동독 여성들이 가장 낮은 수치로 15% 이하를 보여 주었다면 2018년 현재에는 거의 35%에 육박하며 동독 남성들을 앞서

고 있다. 통일 당시에 동독 여성과 서독 남성 사이의 격차가 가장 커서 거의 15% 이상의 차이, 즉 거의 두 배 이상의 차이를 보여주었는데, 2018년에는 10%의 차이로 거의 1/4로 차이가 줄어들었다.

또한 ‘동독 여성들’이라는 신화를 불러일으킨 이 그룹 여성들의 사회 지도층으로의 진출 정도를 살펴보면 최근의 통계들은 동독 여성들이 실제적으로 사회의 각계각층에서 성공적임을 보여준다.

<표 8>(Statista 2019)은 “동독 여성들이 더 성공을 거두고 있다”라는 제목으로 정치(연방정부, 국회, 정당), 경제(경제단체, 회사, 조합), 사법(연방판사, 지방판사), 대학(총장, 사무국장)에서 모두 동독 여성들이 약진을 하고 있음을 보여준다. 옅은 오렌지색은 동독 여성들이며 진한 오렌지색은 서독 여성들이다. 모든 분야에서 동독 여성들은 동독 남성들을 앞지르고 있으며 또한 서독 여성들보다도 훨씬 더 많이 지도층에 진출했음을 보여준다.

과연 무엇이 이러한 사회적 변화를 가능하게 했을까? 통일 이후 동독 여성들은 자신들의 가치관과 역량을 포기하지 않고 어떻게 계속 강화하고 다음 세대뿐 아니라 통일 후 전체 사회에 확산시킬 수 있었을까? 이주와 사회변화를 살펴볼 때 ‘송금’은 중요한 위치를 차지한다. 송금의 양상은 다양하다. 예를 들어 탈북민이 북한의 가족들에게 보내는 송금처럼 ‘재정적 송금’도 있지만, 정보나 가치관 등을 계속적으로 전파시키고 확산시키는, 소위 ‘사회적 송금’도



<표 8> “동독 여성들이 더 성공을 거두고 있다”

있다. 동독 여성들은 사회적 송금을 한 것은 아닌가?4) 다음에서는 구체적으로 동독 여성들이 어떤 분야에서 어떻게 자신들의 정체성을 강화하고 확산시켰는지를 살펴본다.

4)

가 ‘ ’ .
가
가 가

가
가 ‘ ’ ‘ ’ , , 가 ‘ ’ .

Ⅲ. <동독 여성들>과 『동독 여성들이 독일을 변화시킨다』

Ⅲ.1. 화제의 두 미디어

<동독 여성들>은 2018년 중부독일방송(MDR)에서 3부작으로 기획되어 방송된 다큐멘터리 영화로서 큰 호응을 얻었으며 현재 인터넷에서 제공되고 있고 많은 후속 방송과 보도를 낳았다.⁵⁾ 방송의 주제는 ‘동독 여성’이라는 신화를 다룬 것이었으며 홍보영상에서 “자의식이 강하며 *selbstbewusst*, 독립적이며 *unabhängig*, 성공적이다 *erfolgreich*”라고 간략하게 세 가지 특징을 들어 설명된다. 홍찬숙 역시 높은 직업의식, 전일제 일자리, 일/사생활 병행, 반가부장적 여성 의식의 부족을 동독 여성들의 특징으로 들고 있다(한정숙/홍찬숙/이재원 2012, 352). 동독 여성 신화의 내용과 근거는 다음의 3부작을 중심으로 구성되어 있다.

- 1부: 동독 여성들 - 행복으로 가는 길들 Ostfrauen - Wege zum Glück
- 2부: 동독 여성들 - 권력으로 가는 길들 Ostfrauen - Wege zur Macht
- 3부: 동독 여성들 - 부엌을 나와서 Ostfrauen - weg vom Herd

방송에서는 구동독 출신의 다양한 분야의 다채로운 경력을 가진 여성들이 나와 자신 삶의 경력을 이야기하며 이때 중요한 것은 개인의 실제적 체험과 경험을 다루고 있다는 점이다. 이들은 동독 시절에 자신들도 재미있고 아름다운 삶을 살았으며 통일 이후에도 자신들이 받은 교육에 따라 계속 살고 있고 성공을 거두고 있다는 것이다. 이러한 개인들의 체험과 경험의 공통점에 근거하여 방송은 ‘동독 여성’을 다음과 같이 특징짓고 있다.

동독 여성들은 정치에서 성공 이력을 쌓아가고 직업과 가사 일을 완벽하게 해내는

5) 1 : 2 : 3 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIFWhRMdA20>

데 그들은 다르게 할 줄 모르기 때문이다. 이들은 이미 자신들은 해방이 되었다고 생각하기 때문에 여성 해방 서사에 대해서는 냉소적이다.⁶⁾

동독 시절에는 생각하기 어려웠던 정치 분야에서의 고위직 진출은 통일 독일 총리 앙겔라 메르켈뿐 아니라 다수의 여성 정치가가 두각을 나타내면서 실현되고 있으나, 동독 여성들은 구 동독 시절처럼 여전히 직업, 가사, 육아와 여성해방을 모두 여성이 하는 일로 생각하여 담당하고 있으며 서독식의 여성 해방 운동에 대해서는 거리를 두고 있다는 것이 그 핵심 내용이다.

이와 더불어 화제의 서적 『동독 여성이 독일을 변화시킨다』(Brandes/Decker 2019)을 살펴보면 이 책도 주로 개인들의 삶의 인터뷰로 구성이 되어 있다. ‘동독 여성이 권력을 쥐다’라는 서문과 ‘독일이 동독화된다’라는 결론 사이에 총 21편의 인터뷰를 실고 있다. 동독 여성들 개인들의 실제 삶에 대한 인터뷰나 대답을 바탕으로 하고 있으며 방송보다 훨씬 다양한 영역의 주제들을 다룬다. 앙겔라 메르켈이라는 최장기간 독일 총리를 지낸 상징적 인물에 대한 생애 분석과 더불어 사회의 다각적 평가를 다루기도 하고, 구 동독 시절의 과거를 회고하기도 하며, 동서독의 페미니즘, 노동관, 육아관, 세계관, 동서독에 대한 관점들, 세대 차이를 다루고 있다. 또한 통일 독일의 현실에서 언론, 정치, 경제, 페미니즘 등 다양한 분야에서 성공한 동독 여성들을 등장시키고 있고 개인 인터뷰뿐 아니라 대답이나 대화를 통해 서로 다른 시각을 조명하도록 하고 있다. 이 글은 이 두 텍스트가 다루는 ‘동독 여성들’이라는 신화와 실제 현실에 대하여 다음 세 가지 관점(노동, 육아, 남녀평등)에 집중해서 살펴보도록 하겠다. 이는 동시에 ‘동독 여성들’이라는 우리 시대의 문화적 구성물의 형성과 그 구체적 내용을 가장 많이 언급되는 세 가지 특성을 통해 규명하는 시도이기도 하다.

6) <https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte-gegenwart/politik-gesellschaft/ostfrauen-karriere-beruf-familie-emanzipation-100.html>

III.2. 노동

MDR 방송에서는 여성들이 동독에서 적극적으로 노동 현장에 뛰어든 역사적 배경을 설명한다.⁷⁾ 2차 세계대전 시 남성들이 전쟁에 동원되어 노동력이 부족해지면서 남녀 간의 직업 차이가 없어지고 이전에 남성들만이 일하던 중화학 공장, 기계 공장 등에 여성들이 투입되게 되었다. 이러한 현상은 전체 독일의 현실이었고 동서독으로 나누어진 전후, 폐허에서의 복구 시에도 마찬가지였다. 그러나 60, 70, 80년대의 동독과 서독에서는 각기 다른 방향으로 사회의 이상적 여성상이 형성되었고 다른 현실이 전개되었다. 서독은 사회 전체적으로 볼 때 보수화되어 직업에서의 성별 분리가 강화된다. 동독에서는 사정이 다르게 전개되었는데, 그 주된 이유는 50년대부터 300여만 명이 서독으로 이주했는데 대부분이 젊은 남성이어서 젊은 여성들이 이 노동력의 공백을 메꾸어야 했던 현실에 있다. 휘르트겐은 동독 사회에서 여성들이 1960년대 이후로 재편된 산업사회에서 중요한 역할을 했고 화학산업, 전기산업 같은 신흥 산업의 현장에도 적극 투입되었음을 지적한다(휘르트겐 2010, 77) 또한 동독의 전반적인 저임금으로 인하여 많은 여성들이 일을 해야만 했었고 임금은 남성들보다 상대적으로 1/4 정도 적었다. 동독 공산당은 초기부터 독립적이고 직업을 가진 여성을 적극적이고 전략적으로 내세우고 홍보했으며, 실제로도 ‘일하는 여성’, ‘일하는 엄마’는 동독에서 자연스러운 풍경이었고 “누구도 집에 남아 있지 않았다”. MDR의 인터뷰에 나온 동독 여성들은 모두 항상 어머니가 일하는 것을 보아왔으며 일하러 나간 사이 친구들과 놀던 추억이 있고 여성이 일한다는 것은 마치 “머리 속에 하드디스크처럼 박혀 있었다”고 증언한다.⁸⁾ 통일 이전 동독 지방의 여성 취업률은 견습생까지 포함할 경우 전 세계에서 거의 유래가 없을 정도인 90%에 육박하였는데 이러한 과정에서 동독의 이상적 여성상이

7) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIFWhRMdA20> 4:50.

8) https://www.google.de/search?q=ostfrauen+mdr&sca_esv=590053957&tbm=vid&source=lnms&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj198y2vomDaxW7b_UHHUN7A08Q_AUoAnoECAIQBA&bw=1825&bih=958&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:8900cc1f,vid:CIFWhRMdA20,st:0 (4:24),

점차 바뀌게 된다. 이는 타자상뿐 아니라 자아상에서도 마찬가지였다. 많은 젊은 여성들은 노동 현장을 자아실현의 장으로 생각했고 적극적으로 노동 현장에 뛰어들어 독립심과 자부심, 직업관을 키워나갔다. 예를 들어 모니카 나우만은 화학에 관심이 있어 실업학교 졸업 후 공장에 취직했는데 동독 시절에 많은 다른 젊은 여성들처럼 기술직을 택한 것이었고 본인은 실제로 “화학이 빵과 부유함과 아름다움을 가져다준다”고 믿었다고 인터뷰한다(Brandes/Decker 2019, 218). MDR의 다큐멘터리 방송도 특히 3부에서 이러한 사례들을 많이 보여준다. 이러한 노동과 관련된 자부심과 가치관 형성은 여성에게서 여성에게로 세대를 넘어 형성되고 전수되었다. 많은 여성들은 가정에서 어머니를 통해 자신이 어떤 일이든 반드시 직업을 가져야 하고 경제적으로 종속된 삶은 “호러”로 간주되었고 이러한 여성상에 자부심을 가졌음을 토로한다(3부, 8:54). 여성들은 자신의 생계를 남성에게 의존하지 않았고 사랑과 결혼을 이와 결부시키지 않았으며 그렇게 해야 한다면 이를 수치스럽게 생각했다. 실제 동독의 이혼율이 38%에 달하는데도, 삶이 이에 구애받지 않을 정도로 독립심과 자립심이 강했다(휘르트겐 2010, 63).

통일 직후에는 많은 동독 출신의 근로자, 노동자들이 실업을 경험하였는데 특히 동독 출신 여성들의 실업률이 매우 높았다고 할 수 있다. 이러한 직업관과 자부심, 과거의 높은 취업률을 고려해보면 이러한 현실은 보다 불안정하고 두렵고 고통스러웠을 수 있다. 그러나 최근의 연구 결과들은 시간이 지나면서 동독 여성들은 실업에 대해 적극적인 동시에 유연하게 대처했고 새로운 직업 교육을 적극적으로 받았고 새로운 산업구조의 요구에 부응하여 고등교육을 받는 비율도 점차 높아졌음을 지적한다(휘르트겐 2010, 80). 그래서 새로운 직장을 찾는 비율이 높아질 뿐만 아니라 동시에 성공을 거두어 사회 지도층으로 올라가는 비율도 높아지고 있다고 보고된다. 실제로 통일 독일의 높은 실업수당과 보상금은 거의 완전 고용 상태를 누렸던 동독 시절과 비교해볼 때, 많은 경우 재정적으로는 더 나은 상황을 제공하였으며, 통일 이후 산업구조 재편으로 3차산업인 서비스업이 늘어났다는 사실은 여성 취업에 보다 유리하게 작용했다. 관련하여 야나 헨젤 같은 작가는 『동쪽 지역 아이들 Zonenkinder』(2012)

이라는 소설에서 서독의 청소년보다 어려움을 겪고 이겨낸 동독의 청소년들이 보다 진취적이고 위기관리 능력이 뛰어나 미래의 삶을 더욱 적극적으로 살아 나갈 수 있다고 주장하여 화제를 불러일으키기도 하였다(김용민 2007, 234).

III.3. 육아

앞서 말한 것처럼 동독 여성 신화와 실제의 주된 내용 중의 하나는 노동과 육아, 가사의 병행에 있다. 이 점은 서독 여성들과 비교했을 때 보다 뚜렷해진다. 서독의 여성들은 육아는 가정에서 어머니가 담당한다는 사회적 통념 때문에 아이를 낳았을 때 직장을 쉬고 육아에 전념하거나 파트타임 노동으로 노동 유형을 바꾸는 비율이 높았다. 서독에서는 40세까지 아이를 가진 엄마들이 전일제 노동을 하는 비율이 17%였는데 동독은 40%에 달했다(Brandes/Decker 2019, 22). 서독에서는 사회 분위기에 따라 3세 이전 보육시설도 절대적으로 부족했다. 이에 반해 동독 여성들은 대부분 전일제 노동을 하고 있었고 이에 대한 국가와 사회의 제도적 지원이 체계적으로 또한 실질적으로 보장되어 있었다. 동독에서는 70년대부터 3세 이하의 아동 80%에게 보육시설이 보장되는 등 육아 제도가 잘 갖추어져 있었고 심지어 어머니의 직업에 따라 주간 내내 아동의 기숙까지 책임지며 육아를 전담해주는 유아원, 유치원도 마련되어 있었다. MDR 방송에서 후에 정치가가 된 페트라 쾨핑은 모든 것을 다 해야 했던, 할 수 있었던 과거를 다음처럼 회상하며 “여자들은 남자들과 달랐다.”라고 말한다.

나는 아침 일찍 아이를 자전거에 태우고 일하러 가야 하는 시골에 살았어요. 나중에는 기차를 타고 갔지요. 가는 데 한 시간 정도 걸렸어요. 오후 5시나 6시에 돌아왔지요. 우리 애들은 탁아소에서 마지막에 집에 가는 아이들이었어요. 엄청나게 힘든 시절이었지요. 세탁기도 건조기도 없었어요. 나는 자정이나 되어야 잠자리에 들 수 있었지요.9)

9) <https://www.mdr.de/themen/dnadesostens/projekt/frauen-im-osten-gleichberechtigung-100.html>

독일어에만 존재하는 단어 “까마귀 엄마 *Rabenmutter*”도 이러한 동서독의 차이를 보여준다. 통일 후 동독의 전일제 탁아소에 대해 서독의 여성들이 경악을 하고 동독의 엄마를 이 용어로 폄하하여 지칭했지만, 동독 당시 일하는 여성들에게는 사회적 여건상 이는 당연한 선택이었고 이에 대한 광범위한 사회적 용인이 있었다. 임금이 낮아 여성은 전일제로 일을 해야 하는 상황이었으며, 동독 여성들의 멘탈리티와 직업관, 결혼, 육아, 가사에 대한 일반적 통념을 고려하면 자연스럽게 받아들여졌었다.

그러나 통일 이후 이 문제에 대한 세대 차이를 볼 수 있다. 젊은 세대들은 동독과 서독의 직업관, 육아관을 비교해보며 과거의 유산을 그대로 물려받기보다는 이 문제를 협상과 조정의 대상으로 생각한다. 젊은 세대들은 특히 육아 문제에 있어 보다 유연하고 서독식을 일부 쫓아가는 절충식을 택하는 비율이 높아지고 있다. 여성 해방은 꼭 직업 노동에만 있는 것이 아니며 젊은 여성들이 육아를 위한 휴직을 택할 때, 이러한 선택은 “자유 공간의 확장”으로 볼 수 있다(Brandes/Decker 2019, 238). 과거의 기준으로 볼 때 동독 지역의 젊은 여성에게서 보이는 이러한 직업관, 결혼관, 가정관, 육아관의 변화를 “후퇴”라고 해석하는 분석이 있으며, 다른 한편 이를 여러 선택지 간의 유연한 의사결정이라고 보는 시각도 있다(Brandes/Decker 238).

III.4. 남녀평등

남녀평등과 관련하여 동서독 여성들의 태도에서 두 가지 특이한 그러나 전방위적으로 관찰되는 입장을 지적할 수 있다. 비록 동서독 모두 헌법에 남녀평등과 동등권이 명시적으로 보장되어 있었지만 실제 현실은 다른 양상을 보였고 또한 차이가 있었다. 첫째는 통일 이전의 동독 사회가 남녀평등이 더 앞서는 사회라 하더라도 남성 가부장적 공산주의 체제였음에는 의견이 일치한다. 정치계에서 특히 심했는데 당서기 호네커를 비롯하여 고위직은 모두 남성이었고 동독의 15,000여 명의 시장과 군수 자리 중 여성은 12명뿐이었으며 여성이 고위직에 응모하더라도 형식상의 후보일 뿐이었다. 노동 현장에서도 여성들은

능력이 있더라도 중간 관리자급 이상으로 승진하기 힘들었다. 당이나 국가나 모두 남성 위주로 지배되어 “여성은 일하고 남성은 지배한다”라는 자조적 문구도 있었다. 여성운동의 예를 들더라도 국가와 당으로부터 독립된 여성운동이 존재하지 않았고, 80년대 이후 교회 주도의 저항운동에서도 마찬가지였다(휘르트겐 2010, 78). 두 번째는 통일 이후 동독 여성들이 서독 여성들의 페미니즘에 대해 부정적 태도를 취하는 것이다. MDR 방송 3부의 시작 부분에 “동독 여성들은 여성 해방에 대해 이야기하지 않는다. 이미 이들은 해방이 되었기 때문이다.”라는 멘트가 등장한다.¹⁰⁾ 그러나 이러한 문구는 동시에 배경에 통일 이후 동독 여성들과 서독 여성들 사이에 페미니즘에 대한 이해나 노선의 차이가 존재함을 암시한다. 전복희는 독일 통일의 과정에서 민족의 통일이라는 동질성을 강조하며 서로의 차이와 특수성을 부정한 점이 여성운동의 과정에서도 드러나며 이것이 동서독 여성들의 연대를 어렵게 했음을 지적한다(전복희 2017, 307). 잉그리트 미테 역시 “지배문화”라는 개념을 사용하여 이 차이를 존중하지 않았기 때문에 통일 이후 동서독의 여성들이 연대로 나아가지 못하고 전반적 서독 지배의 상황 하에서 상호 경계 짓기라는 결과를 낳았는지를 설명한다(미테 2020, 166). 통일 이후 실제로 서독 여성들이 자아의 실현에 대한 다양한 페미니즘이나 남녀평등을 지향하는 모임을 갖고 토론하는 것에 대해 동독 여성들이 불만과 이의를 제기한 것은 이러한 과거의 차이에 기인한다. 서독이 페미니즘의 국제적인 추세를 따라갔다고 평가된다면 동독에서는 이러한 이론이나 이론의 발전에는 거의 관심이 없었고 참여하지도 않았다. 서독은 제1세대, 제2세대, 제3세대의 국제적인 페미니즘 이론과 실천의 물결을 따라갔고 무엇보다도 68운동에서 적극적으로 다양한 페미니즘 운동을 실천했었다. 그러다가 1990년대에 서독에서 여성운동이 퇴조한 근본적인 원인은 여성을 다시금 남편에게 사회적, 재정적으로 종속되게 만들었던 서독 정부의 보수적인 여성 정책에 주요 원인이 있다고 지적된다. 그러나 일반 사회의 실제적 현실을 고려해볼 때 동독 사회가 남녀평등의 실천에 있어서는 한 발 더 앞서갔다는 것이 중론이다. 서독 사회와 마찬가지로 동독 사회에서도 여성들이 가사일이나 육아

10) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIFWhRMdA20> 00: 35

의 일에서 해방이 되지 못했고 이중 부담을 감내해야 했지만, 직업에서는 보다 진취적이고 독립적이었고 결혼이나 사랑 등에서 훨씬 자립적인 태도를 취했다.

이 문제에 있어서도 현재의 젊은 세대들은 보다 유연한 입장을 취한다. 동과 서의 젊은 여성들이 모여 『우리는 알과겔들. 왜 페미니즘은 삶을 더 아름답게 만드는가』와 같은 페미니즘 서적을 공동으로 집필하는가 하면(Brandes/Decker 2019, 43), 젊은 여성들은 아이를 낳으면 2년의 육아 휴직을 취하고 그 다음에는 파트타임 노동을 하는 것을 당연하게 고려하며, 본인을 동독 여성이라고 생각하는가의 질문은 부인한다(Brandes/Decker 2019, 230).

IV. 결론

통일과 더불어 동독은 사라졌다고 이야기하지만 30여 년이 지난 현재, 각계에서의 동독 여성들의 약진과 부상은 이러한 일반적 통념을 깨뜨리고 있다. 특히 사회의 각 분야에서 동독인들이 전반적으로 “정상적인” 서독인과의 비교 속에서 “표시된” 사회그룹으로 주변부화, 심지어 서벌턴화(미테 2020, 173)되고 있다고 지적되는 상황에서 매우 고무적이다. 이 글은 최근 부상하고 있는 ‘동독 여성’이라는 신화적 담론이 실제 어떤 사실과 현상에 근거를 두고 만들어졌는지를 살펴보았다. 최근 통계를 살펴봄과 동시에 MDR의 다큐멘터리 방송과 서적들을 중심으로 동독 여성들이 자신을 설명하는 서사화 작업을 같이 분석하였다. 아이러니하게도 통일 독일 사회에서의 동독 여성들의 약진은 바로 동독 사회가 길러주었던 직업관과 가치관, 여성상에 근거하며, 이러한 정체성은 통일 독일 사회의 자본주의 체제에 보다 잘 적응하고 성공을 거두며 또한 서독 여성들과 차별화되는 태도를 준비시켜주었다. 즉 동독 여성들은 남성 위주의 가부장적 공산주의 사회에서도 노동과 육아를 중시하였고 결혼과 무관한 독립적인 태도와 자부심을 교육받아왔고 이는 통일 이후에도 여성들 간에 세대를 거쳐 전달이 되었을 뿐 아니라 통일 독일의 여성상을 바꾸고 있다. 통일

이후에도 이들은 여전히 남성들에 종속되지 않고 독립적으로 행동하였고 노동 현장에서는 서독 여성들보다 적극적으로 일하였고 노동과 육아, 그리고 가사를 일치시키는 삶을 택하였다. 독일 자본주의 사회는 이러한 근로자, 노동자를 선호하였고 승진시켜 사회 각계에서 동독 출신의 여성들이 두각을 나타나게 하였다.

물론 이러한 동독 여성에 대한 일의적(一義的) 서사는 한국의 현실에서 그 중요성에도 불구하고 아직까지 거의 논의되지 않는 주제이기에 그 소개와 설명에 방점을 두고 있다. 실제 소위 동독 여성들은 인터뷰에서 볼 때 다양한 삶의 경로를 걸어왔고 동일한 속성을 지니거나 비슷한 유형의 생애사를 지니지 않았다. 때문에 이후의 연구들은 이러한 현상에 대한 보다 상세하고 심층적이며 비판적인 고찰을 해야 할 것이다. 또한 현재 동독 여성들은 전체적으로 볼 때 여전히 서독 여성들에 비해 경제적으로 상대적으로 열악하며 마찬가지로 전일제 직업보다는 파트타임 직업이 늘어나고 있고 세대 간, 계층 간의 차이가 커지고 있다는 현실 역시 간과해서는 안 될 것이다. 또한 통일이 가져온 동독 남성(상)들의 변모의 역사 같이 고찰을 해야 할 것이다.

더 나아가 동독 여성에 대한 분석은 우리 자신에게로, 한반도의 현실로 시선을 돌리게 한다. 북한 사회의 변화도 마찬가지로 최근에는 정치나 경제 등 거시적 시각뿐 아니라 보다 세부적으로 젠더별, 세대별로 분석이 되고 있으며 정주가 아니라 이주나 문화변동이 연구의 초점이 될 필요가 있다. 북한 사회에서도 여성들의 진취성과 적극성이 점차 돋보이고 있다. 탈북자들만 보더라도 최근에는 여성이 대다수를 차지하고 있다(통일부 2018, 138). 통일이 된다면 과연 어떤 그룹이 새로운 통일 한국 현실에서 리더로 부각될 것인가? 어떤 그룹이 새로운 현실에 가장 적응을 잘할 것인가? 가장 큰 사회적 계층 변동을 보여줄까? 혹은 누가 가장 먼저 이동을 할까? 그 변화의 원동력은 무엇일까? ‘북한 여성들도 과연 동독 여성들과 같은 유사한 신화를 쓰게 될까?’라는 질문을 던져볼 수 있을 것이다.

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<https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte-gegenwart/politik-gesellschaft/ostfrauen-beruf-karriere-familie-100.html>

국문요약

“동독 여성은 신화인가? 현실인가?”

— MDR 3부작 <동독 여성>과 『동독 여성이 독일을 바꾼다』
분석을 중심으로

최 윤 영 (서울대)

1990년 독일이 통일된 지 30여 년이 지났다. 독일 통일은 두 독립 국가가 동등한 입장에서 이룬 통일이라기보다는 서독이 동독을 흡수한 통일이었다. 정치, 경제, 사회, 기업, 교육 등 모든 분야에서 서독의 체제와 가치가 우선시 되었고 동독의 유물로는 교통 신호등 ‘신호등 맨 Ampelmann’만 살아남았다는 자조 섞인 한탄이 나왔다. 특히 통일 직후 지역이나 젠더 그룹별로 살펴볼 때 동독 출신의 여성들이 통일의 가장 큰 피해자라는 분석이 많이 나왔었다. 그러나 최근 들어 통일 30년이 지난 상황을 분석해 볼 때 가장 사회적 위상 변화가 큰 그룹이 바로 ‘동독 여성들 Ostfrauen’이라는 분석이 많이 나오고 있다. 이들은 통일 독일에서 동독적 가치를 확장시키고 전체 사회를 변화시키는 그룹으로 주목을 받고 있다. 통일 이후 장기간 독일의 총리를 역임했던 앙겔라 메르켈을 필두로 정치, 경제, 사법, 교육 등 각계각층에서 동독 출신 여성들은 두각을 나타내기 시작했다. 더불어 ‘동독 여성’이라는 신화가 생겨났는데 이것이 단순한 신화인지, 현실이 뒷받침되는지, 만약 그렇다면 그 내용과 양상은 어떠한지 그 원인은 어디에서 찾아볼 수 있는지를 분석하는 데 이 글의 목표가 있다. 이것은 동시에 통일 이후 동독 여성들의 역량 강화가 어떻게 일어났는지를 살펴보는 것이기도 하다. 결론적으로 자부심이 강하고 직업 의식이 높으며 일과 가정을 병행했던 동독 여성들의 삶의 가치가 통일 이후에도 이어져 이러한 성공을 가져온 것으로 분석되었다.

주제어: 독일 통일, 동독 여성들, 역량 강화, 노동과 육아

Zusammenfassung

‘Ostfrauen’ – Mythos oder Realität?

– Analyse der MDR-Triologie *Ostfrauen* und *Ostfrauen verändern Deutschland*

Yun-Young Choi (Seoul National Univ.)

Seit der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands im Jahr 1990 sind etwa 30 Jahren vergangen. Die Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands erfolgte in Form einer westdeutschen Absorption Ostdeutschlands und nicht in Form einer Vereinigung zweier unabhängiger, gleichberechtigter Staaten. Das westdeutsche System und die westdeutschen Werte wurden in allen Bereichen der Politik, der Wirtschaft, der Gesellschaft und des Bildungswesens bevorzugt, und es wurde oft beklagt, dass nur die Ampelmännchen als Relikt der DDR überlebt hätten. Unmittelbar nach der Wiedervereinigung wurde häufig argumentiert, dass die Frauen aus der DDR die größten Opfer der Wiedervereinigung gewesen seien, unter regionalen wie geschlechtsspezifischen Gesichtspunkten betrachtet.

In den vergangenen Jahren haben jedoch Analysen der Situation aus einigem historischem Abstand gezeigt, dass gerade sogenannte ‚Ostfrauen‘ die größten Veränderungen des sozialen Status erfahren haben. Sie wurden als selbstbewusst, unabhängig und erfolgreich charakterisiert und damit als eine Gruppe hervorgehoben, die die Werte der DDR erweitert und die gesamte Gesellschaft im wiedervereinigten Deutschland verändert hat. Seit der Wiedervereinigung haben viele Ostfrauen es fertiggebracht, Tradition, Arbeit, Familie und Emanzipation unter einen Hut zu bringen, und dabei haben Karriere in allen Bereichen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens gemacht,

einschließlich der Politik, der Wirtschaft, der Justiz und des Bildungswesens. In diesem Aufsatz geht es darum, den Mythos der ‚Ostfrauen‘ zu analysieren, Dabei wird gefragt, inwiefern es sich tatsächlich um einen Mythos handelt und wie weit er durch die Realität gestützt wird.. Zugleich sollen inhaltliche Aspekte und Bedeutungsebenen beschrieben sowie die Ursachen seiner Entstehung und Verbreitung herausgearbeitet werden. Gleichzeitig wird der Frage nachgegangen, auf welche Faktoren dieses potentielle ‚Empowerment‘ der ostdeutschen Frauen nach der Wiedervereinigung zurückzuführen ist.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Deutsche Wiedervereinigung, Ostfrauen, Empowerment, Arbeit und Kinder

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**Feminization and De-feminization of Migration:
Unravelling the Complexities of Gendered North Korean Migration
from Arduous March to Covid-19 Era**

Eunyoung Chrisitna Choi
(Senior Research Fellow, IPUS, SNU)

Introduction

The phenomenon of the *feminization of migration* has emerged as a distinct and significant aspect within North Korean migration. However, the landscape and dynamics of this migration have undergone transformations since its onset in the mid-1990s, resulting in variations across temporal and spatial dimensions. As of June 2022, a cumulative total of 33,834 North Koreans had entered South Korea, of which a notable 72% were women. The point at which women began to outnumber their male counterparts among North Korean defectors entering South Korea was in 2002. This trend persisted, with the proportion of female defectors exceeding the 70% mark since 2006. Remarkably, despite an overall reduction in the annual number of North Korean defectors following the leadership transition to Kim Jong-un in 2011, the gender composition became even more pronounced. The ratio of female migrants reached or nearly reached 80% during the period from 2015 until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but in 2021, the year of the pandemic, women's representation dropped sharply to 36.5%, and in 2022 it recovered somewhat to 47.8%.¹

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that these numerical representations merely scratch the surface of the intricate narrative surrounding the gender composition of North Korean defectors traversing borders. Insights gleaned from conversations with activists working closely with North Korean refugees in China, along with data sourced from the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights(NKDB), highlight that the zenith of female migration, marked by instances of trafficking, was particularly prominent during the 1990s and the early 2000s on North Korean-Chinese border area, followed by a deceleration in the

¹ Ministry of Unification, North Korean Refugees Arrival Status, <https://www.unikorea.go.kr/unikorea/business/NKDefectorsPolicy/status/lately/> (accessed August 15, 2023)

feminization of defection since the mid-2000s on North Korean-Chinese border.²

This phenomenon prompts a series of inquiries that form the crux of this study: What were the reasons which North Koreans' migration on the North Korean-Chinese border became feminized and then defeminized? While considering the deceleration of the feminization of North Korean migration at the North Korea-China border since the mid-2000s, what factors precipitated the continuous rise in the proportion of women among North Korean defectors entering South Korea until the brink of the pandemic? Furthermore, what led to the shift wherein the migration of North Korean men came to overshadow that of women during the pandemic? In response to these questions, this study delves into the shifting topography of North Korean migration, employing a gendered perspective to dissect and comprehend the myriad influences that have shaped these intricate transformations.

Research on North Korean migration has been organized spatially and temporally, often emphasizing specific themes. Spatially, investigations have been categorized into groups such as North Korean defectors in South Korea (Son 2018; Chun 2022), defectors in China (Back 2002; Charny 2004; Choi 2010; 2014), and North Korean refugees residing abroad (Shin 2019; 2021; Jeon 2012; Lee and Lee 2014; Lee 2016). Temporally, the primary focus has been on the 1990s and 2000s, leaving a notable gap in research on the migration of North Korean defectors after Kim Jong-un assumed power. Research on gender and North Korean migration tends to center more on the lives of migrants and defectors than on the migration process itself. Studies on North Korean migrant women have delved into various issues, including human trafficking, gender violence, citizenship, long distance motherhood of migrant women, and their economic activities through transnational networks (Lee 2018; 2020; Lee 2012; Choi 2019; Han 2015). With almost 30 years having elapsed since the onset of mass defection, the migration of North Koreans has extended not only to China and South Korea but also to Southeast Asian countries, Europe, North America. Consequently, there is a need to analyze the evolving gender dynamics in North Korean migration, categorizing them by periods and investigating the gender characteristics revealed in the spatial movements of

² According to the 2020 White Paper on North Korean Human Rights published by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB), 42.7% of the 288 cases of trafficking in North Korean women investigated occurred in the 1990s, 37.5% from 2000 to 2005, and 9.4% from 2006 to 2009. According to interviews with human rights activists in Yanbian, China, trafficking in North Korean defectors was most prevalent in the late 1990s, and has decreased significantly since the mid-2000s due to increased penalties on both the North Korean and Chinese sides.

each era.

Feminist scholars studying migration from a gender perspective primarily focus on the phenomenon of the "feminization of migration," examining it through two main aspects. Firstly, they observe the increasing trend of women not only participating in migration quantitatively but also moving away from traditional roles as mere companions to actively deciding and undertaking migration on their own initiative (Donato et al., 2006; Jung 2008). Secondly, they emphasize the reality of women's migration into the fields traditionally considered the women's work, particularly in the areas of reproductive and sexual labor (Sahraoui 2020; Jung 2008; 2015; Piper 2013). The feminization of migration implies that women, through migration, have a higher potential to enhance their economic and social status. However, the academic and international community has also been attentive to the exploitation and gender-based violence experienced by migrant women during the process of migration and settlement (KC and Hennebry, 2019).

The concept of the feminization of North Korean migration offers limited insight into how migration patterns have acquired gendered characteristics amidst global changes and shifts in the labor market. The reforms and opening up of China in the post-Cold War era, along with alterations in labor and marriage markets in Northeast Asia, as well as each country's border controls and immigration policies, and the international discourse and policies regarding North Korean refugees, have all played pivotal roles in both promoting and controlling the migration of North Korean women. These factors collectively have contributed to altering the overall migration experiences of North Korean women. Consequently, this study aims to integrate the feminist scholars' perspective on gendered migration within the context of both gender and global restructuring, as well as the geopolitical approach to border control and gendered migration.

Through this comprehensive analysis, the study will scrutinize various factors such as national border controls and immigration policies related to North Korean defectors, as well as domestic political, economic, and social conditions, gender regimes, international relations among relevant countries, and supranational activities involving entities like the UN and NGOs. Additionally, it will explore the impact of the development of the migration industry, including broker activities. The study seeks to elucidate how these factors collectively contribute to the production and transformation of gendered North Korean

migration. It will also delve into the connection between the geopolitical changes in Northeast Asia over the past three decades and the gendered dynamics within the stream of North Korean migration. Furthermore, the study will investigate how political and economic shifts around the Korean Peninsula and China during the post-Cold War era have influenced both the feminization and defeminization of North Korean defector migration.

Gender, Migration and Security

The study of gender and migration has developed in two different parts. One is the study of labor migration and marriage migration. The other is the study of informal migration and forced migration including human smuggling, trafficking, displacement and refugee flows. Despite the evident interplay between these two domains, scholarly research has largely upheld their distinctiveness. The realm of gendered labor migration and marriage migration has primarily focused on examining gender-specific migration patterns, emphasizing the division of labor along gender lines and global restructuring. In contrast, the sphere of informal migration and forced migration has primarily directed its attention towards border controls, gender-based violence and migrants' security.

Feminization of migration for reproductive work

Feminist scholars who study global restructuring pay specific attention to gendered migration patterns, and try to understand these patterns in relation to processes of uneven development and the gendered division of labor (Wright 1997; Chang & Ling, 2000; Sassen 2002; Cravey 2003; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Gammage 2019; Nair 2020). They examine the centrality of social constructions of gender to the expansion of global capitalism, and the contribution of these constructions to the increased vulnerability of women migrants. Scholars agree that the feminization of international migration over the recent decades is strongly connected to global care chains that are primarily reliant on women's reproductive and sexual labor, and these often trap women in spaces of social reproduction and care in distant geographic locations (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Lutz 2002; Parrenas 2000). In response to the increasing demand for reproductive work in more economically more developed countries, the caring and loving emotions and activities of women in less

developed countries are quickly commodified and transferred to more developed countries. Many migrant women who move from poor countries to richer countries end up working in homes, hospitals, the entertainment industry, and brothels as domestic workers, nannies, nurses and sex workers. In addition to this labor migration, women also migrate to other countries to form families through international marriages or to care for other family members, especially young children studying overseas. Social and reproductive works, including care-taking and sexual services, are mostly considered traditionally “women’s work,” and has increased with women’s migration (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

Over the last few decades, feminist geographers who work on migration pay special attention to the border enforcement and state-led neo-liberal economic policies though addressing the role of states in regulating and promoting migrations that are implicated in the production of gendered migration (Chang and Ling 2000; Huang & Yeoh, 1996; Kofman and England, 1997; Macklin, 2003; Pratt, 2002; Silvey, 2004). Migrant women’s labor power is considered a vital export commodity for sending states’ own economic strategies in neoliberal globalization (Rosca 1995, 524). Specifically, patriarchal governments in Asia have actively facilitated a “globalized service economy” by exporting women for domestic labor and health care as seen in the case of Philippines (Chang and Ling 2000). While those researches show how state-led neo-liberal economic policies implicated in the production of official gendered migration, the impact of strict border enforcement and severe punishment both in receiving and sending countries on the feminization of undocumented migration has been rarely researched.

Furthermore, even though the feminization of North Korean migration on North Korean Chinese border has been mainly constructed by the need of reproductive work in China, their migration is different from the official marriage migration or labor migration. Their migration is informal and sometimes happened through the form of human trafficking. Within the discourse on migration, the informal movement of women and trafficking of women for reproductive work is often delineated from the formal processes of labor migration and marriage-related migration. However, a deeper examination reveals a profound interconnectedness between these seemingly disparate realms, specifically in the cases of the commercial transnational migration and bride trafficking (Tyldum 2013; Lhomme et al. 2021; McLean 2014). Particularly, the official marriage migration between

Chinese women and South Korean men and the undocumented migration of North Korean women as brides for Chinese men have been closely linked and cascaded, so it is necessary to link these two areas.

Violent Borders, Gendered Security of Undocumented Migrants/ Refugees, and politics of refugees

The majority of North Korean migrants in China are women and they often keep de-facto marriage relations with Chinese men. As their marital status are not authorized by Chinese government, North Korean migrants who stay in China live there with the constant fear of arrests. If they are detected as undocumented North Korean migrants in China, they are forcefully deported their country where they face being denounced as “betrayers of the state (Suh et al. 2002), and tortured, imprisoned, made to do hard labor (Miura 2002). In this circumstance, the situation of women migrants is of particular concern not only because they face severe human rights violations if deported to North Korea, but also because they remain vulnerable to ongoing forms of gender-based violence even after they successfully cross the border to China.

Violent borders became prevalent. Many scholars argue that in neo-liberal globalization, along with heightened border security, undocumented migration flows has been more severely regulated than ever before (Torres et al. 2022; Flui 2023; Cairo 2019; Coleman 2007; Newman 2006; Scarpellino 2007; Mountz 2010; Varsanyi 2008). Nevertheless, irregular migration through the use of unofficial channels of entry and stay in another country has dramatically increased in recent decades reflecting not only intensified uneven development in capitalist globalization but also global political and environmental changes, such as the collapse of communist countries, increasing conflicts and disasters. Nadig(2002. 1) argues that as receiving states have further tightened their immigration procedures, more sophisticated and lucrative forms of irregular migration and, specifically, human smuggling, have developed. She contends that the intricate relationship between the reinforcement of external borders in host nations and the concomitant rise in human smuggling creates a self-reinforcing cycle. As a consequence of this phenomenon, undocumented migrants find themselves exposed to increasingly precarious circumstances (Koser 2005, 2). Furthermore,

the efforts to tighten regulations at the European and North American borders to curb unauthorized migration has even caused the tragic loss of life among individuals embarking on journeys to reach Europe and the U.S.A.. The issue of deaths among migrants and refugees has gained heightened attention. The concept of “border violence”(Gazzotti 2019) and "dying to live" (Nevins 2008; Kim 2016) provides a framework to comprehend the disheartening reality underlying these fatalities.

Feminist scholars have tried to understand the suffering and violence experienced by undocumented migrants and/or asylum seekers through the gender lense. Interestingly, human smuggling to seek refugees are predominantly conducted by young male migrants in many parts of the borders (Marrujo 2022; Choi 2020). As border controls have tightened, the need for physical strength to cross dangerous borders has become more important, which has led to an increase in young male migration. As border controls increase the cost of brokers, families are increasingly sending younger, physically fit males to safer countries and relying on their remittances to support the rest of the family. However, while the overall numbers may be small, feminist scholars have drwan attention to the differential suffering asylum seekers or undoucmented migrants experience based on gender. While there are many vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to sexual and gender-based violence often get the most attention.

More recently, however, there has been an emerging body of work that argues against the notion that women suffer more than men, and that the hardships and violence they experience are gendered differently. In particular, postcolonial feminist approaches have recognized that while risky modes of migration, such as trafficking, can cause women catastrophic harm, there are women who seek to escape their countries of origin even through these means, and that these modes of migration often make poor women who cannot afford brokerage fees more mobile than poor men (Kempadoo & Shih 2022; Choi 2014; 2010). These studies have expanded the debate on women's migration and human security, criticizing existing approaches to migrant women as overly based on a Western, First World feminist perspective.

A demand for social justice for people who transgress borders has emberged in the domains of social activism and a critical understanding of the border and security (Gazzotti 2020; Hyndman 2001; 2021; Bauder 2003; Cravey 2003; Nevins 2007; 2010; Scarpellino

2007; Mountz 2010; 2017). This would require moving away from the national security agenda by focusing on the bodies of international migrants and their daily lives.

Hyndman(2001), specifically, suggests a rethinking of international migrants' security as “a public matter of concern” through the development of a notion of a feminist geopolitics.

Feminist geographers pay attention to the daily lives of migrants who are regulated by politics. Nonetheless, they tend to exclusively focus on the receiving state's immigration policies, and few examine migration at the international and global level of geopolitics.

While it is true that receiving state's policies have direct impacts on the security of undocumented migrants and displaced people, I contend that state policies toward North Korean migrants are always negotiated with and challenged by non-governmental and supra national actors such as the UN, by other states, and by migrants themselves. I argue that the concern with human rights of North Korean refugees among international organizations, policy makers, and even media have affected the spatial and temporal changes in gendered stream of North Korean migration.

The Collapse of Communist Block and Feminized Migration among N.Korea-China-S. Korea (Mid 1990- early 2000)

North Korea became economically isolated and continued to see negative economic growth beginning in the late 1980s, while other communist countries were becoming more integrated into the capitalist global process. In this situation, the severe flood and drought damage of 1995 and 1997, as well as the failed economic reforms, aggravated the food shortage in North Korea. The food crisis resulted in mass starvation but the estimated number of famine-related deaths during the 1990s varies between six hundred thousand and 2.5 million, which is accounted for between 3 and 10 percent of the total population of North Korea at the time (Haggard and Noland 2007; Natsios 2003; KINU 2004). Severe economic difficulty along with political instability of North Korea pushed deprived North Koreans to cross the North Korean-Chinese border.

North Korean borders are strongly controlled, but ironically, if migrants or migration brokers bribe soldiers on the border, North Koreans can safely cross the North Korean-Chinese border. The presence of corruption and emerging risky business in changing

North Korean economy have made that money is playing an important role in unofficial crossing the North Korean-Chinese border (Chnag et al 2006, 20). According to my own interview data, there are North Korean women who were totally deceived, kidnapped and forcefully transported to North Korea by human traffickers and sold into marriages. However, some who do not have money and do not know the safe routes to cross the border decided to come to China even through involving in human trafficking for marriages. Trade in women for marriage was practiced in Chinese history for a long period before the Chinese government's socialist reform for gender equity in the early 1950s (Zhuang, 1998). In conjunction with a new market-driven economy, this trade has revived and rapidly spread to almost all provinces in mainland China since the 1980s (Zhuang, 1998: 1-2). With the emergence of marketization in North Korea and the expansion of organized crime into the North Korea-China border, North Korean women's bodies became commodified and traded.

Changed gender roles and power relations at the North Korean household level during the economic difficulty of North Korea since 1990s have accelerated the streams of gendered migration toward China. Between 1990 and 1996, the North Korean economy shrunk 30 per cent (Bennett 1999, 2). In response to the continued negative economic growth in North Korea, responsibility for family subsistence devolved from the State to the family (Hong 1991). As North Korean women choose to work or not at the government assigned work places after they marry while working in the governmental sector is obligatory for men (Park 2003). With the exception of a few high government officials, most women were dismissed from the formal sector or voluntarily quit their jobs and actively work in informal sector to support the family (Park 2003). They have developed various coping strategies to survive such as growing food in their backyards and exchanging goods in black markets, and migrating to find food (Lee 1999: 93-95). The most common way of making money is to travel through buying and acquiring some goods in some places and then selling those after moving to other places. Some travel short distances and some travel in further distances, even to China.

Economic changes have increased women's mobility and their economic competence, but women's increased geographical mobility has not contributed much to women's social positions at the household level and at the national level. In my interviews, I kept hearing women use the phrase "barking dog" in naming North Korean men who cannot

do anything except watching their houses like a dog, while at the same time shouting all the time to control women. The “barking dog” metaphor is a sarcastic expression that criticizes North Korean men for being immobilized and economically incompetent while refusing to give up male chauvinism.

Chinese gendered migrations and the imbalance in the sex ratio has created a shortage of females in China in general and with more severity in Chinese rural areas. As the sex ratio at birth in China had increased from 108.5 in 1982 to 113.8 in 1990 and 119.9 in 2000, gender ratio imbalance has worsened, and has made a significant impact on the marriage market (Zhao, 2003:87). According to Zhuang (1998), men who are poor and live in rural areas are more likely to become members of the unmarried population. In 1990, among the unmarried Chinese population aged 28 to 49, nearly 24 percent lived in cities while 76 percent lived in rural areas; 97 percent were male (Tang Sheng, 1996, cited from Zhuang, 1998:9). Gendered migration from original residence in the countryside toward cities and foreign countries during the economic liberalization has deepened the shortage of women in rural China. Since 2000 following China’s economic growth, the number of bride trafficking cases from other Asian countries including Myanmar, Vietnam and North Korea to China has become one of the primary forms of cross-border human trafficking in the region (Vu 2018; Robison & Branchini 2018).

Three Northeastern provinces (Liaoning-sheng, Jilin-sheng, and Heilongjian-sheng), and particularly the Yanbian Korean autonomous district in Jilin-sheng, have had an extremely gendered form of migration after China built formal diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992. The two nation-states became increasingly connected economically and socially. As a result, increased interactions with South Korea on an everyday basis have had significant impact on Korean-Chinese society (Freeman, 2006; Kwon, 2005; Park 1998). An increase in migrations of Korean-Chinese toward big cities in China is occurring, mostly for the purpose of acquiring jobs in South Korean companies in industrialized zones. Similar to gendered forms of migration associated with the export-oriented development in other parts of the world (Elmhirst 2007; Wright 1997), China also experienced labor migrants toward the industrialized zones. In this process, the Chinese government has played a major role. As China has opened its market, the Chinese government has advocated an export-oriented industrialization, and it has been actively involved in extracting rural labor from the peasant

households into the industrialized cities in a gendered way (Fan 2004). This migrant labor regime of developmentalist Chinese state entails the movement of a large ‘docile’ and ‘submissive’ female labor force into assembly-line productions in the industrial cities of China (Fan 2004). Korean- Chinese women also moved to industrialized cities as South Korean companies draw on their labor in expanding into the Chinese market.

The feminization of international migration flows between China and South Korea as well as the gendered patterns of internal migration has intensified the shortage of women in Yanbian. After formal diplomatic ties were established between China and South Korea, a large number of Korean-Chinese migrated to South Korea for various purposes including work, study, marriage or to visit relatives. “*Hankug yol* (Korea Fever)” is the term that is commonly used among Korean-Chinese to describe an excessive yearning to go to South Korea to earn higher wages (Freeman 2006). While the South Korean government strictly regulated labor migration and was anxious to impose limits, it promoted international marriages between South Korean bachelors and Korean-Chinese women. In the 1990s, there was a social movement called “promoting the marriage of single men in rural areas” in South Korea. The South Korean government endorsed the program that sent farmer bachelors on marriage tours to China, and sponsored this marriage project by reducing the legal barriers to international marriage (Freeman 2005, 95). The nationalities of foreign wives of South Korean men became diverse and foreign brides from Vietnam, Philippine, Cambodia, and Mongolia have been dramatically increased since late 2000 ((Ministry of Gender Equity and Family, http://www.mogef.go.kr/korea/view/policyGuide/policyGuide04_03_01.jsp). However, Korean-Chinese women who came into South Korea for marriages with South Korean men numbered about 100,000 between 1990 and 2005 (Lee, 2008:107), and of all the international marriages in South Korea reported in 2004, 72.4 percent were marriages between Chinese-Koreans and South Koreans (Statistics Korea 2009).

Korean-Chinese women’s internal labor migration to cities and the export-oriented, labor-intensive industrialization zones on the eastern coast under Chinese economic liberalization, as well as international labor and marriage migration to South Korea after the establishment of formal diplomatic ties, has produced an increasing demand for women’s reproductive and sexual labor in Yanbian region of North Korea-China borderland. Park (1998, 189) argues that the ratio between marriageable young men and women has even

reached 7 to 1 in some remote rural villages in Yanbian. North Korean women who unofficially cross the North Korea-China border in order to escape from life-threatening food shortage and dictatorship in North Korea or trafficked involuntarily have filled the gaps left by these Chinese women since the mid-1990s.

Even though most North Korean migrant women are trafficked and sold into marriages, North Korean women consider their de-facto marriage relations as survival strategies. Even in the situation that some Chinese men are violent and exploit North Korean women, most undocumented North Korean women told me that building families in China and receiving support from their Chinese partner is the most common way of receiving protection. Having a de-facto marriage relation is a personal way of acquiring a certain level of security, in a situation where they cannot expect any public protection and legal support. Despite their seemingly disadvantaged social and legal positioning, North Korean women make strategic use of the limited opportunities available to them.

Militarized border, Human Rights Politics, and Spatial differences in gendered North Korean migration (Mid 2000 – 2011)

Since the early 2000s, the human rights situation of North Korean defectors began to attract international attention. The catalyst for this was the entry of the family of defector Jang Gil-soo into the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Beijing, China, on June 26, 2001. Although their refugee application in China failed, they managed to enter South Korea via the Philippines. The process of their entry into the UNHCR office in China was orchestrated to raise awareness of the human rights issues faced by North Korean defectors in the international community. Their entry process was captured on video and broadcasted on major international channels, successfully drawing international attention to the human rights issues of North Korean defectors. This orchestrated defection continued until the mid-2000s.

As a result, both North Korea and China began to perceive the issue of defection as a matter of national security. To prevent defections, they deployed military forces and erected barriers along the China-North Korea border. China also actively apprehended and forcibly repatriated North Korean defectors, aiming to reduce international criticism regarding the

issue. The international community exerted continuous pressure on China and North Korea to improve human rights conditions, especially for North Korean defectors. In April 2004, the UN Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution on the violations of human rights in North Korea. Additionally, the United States enacted the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, providing financial support to private, nonprofit organizations that promote human rights, democracy, rule of law, and the development of a market economy in North Korea. With the passage of the U.S. North Korean Human Rights Act, financial support for NGOs supporting North Korean defectors in China increased. The focus was particularly on aiding the defection and resettlement of North Korean defectors to South Korea and other safe countries.

In the early 2000s, intensified crackdowns and forced repatriations of North Korean defectors along the China-North Korea border led them to move from the border areas to major cities such as Qingdao and Beijing within China. Moreover, instances of forced marriage through human trafficking from North Korea to China occurred, not only in the border areas but also in inland ethnic Korean villages. While initially, during the mass defections, regions near the border with easier access to contacts in North Korea played a role as enclaves for North Korean defectors with the help of ethnic Koreans, the strengthened border controls and increased crackdowns led to a shift in the preferred locations for defection from the border regions to inland areas of China.

China recognized the issue of North Korean defectors as a matter of national security. Particularly, in the lead-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the international pressure surrounding North Korean defectors intensified. Consequently, China actively conducted arrests and forced repatriations of North Korean defectors, particularly right before the Olympics. This served as a stimulus for those who had settled in China to migrate to South Korea. From 2006 until Kim Jong-un's rise to power, the number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea exceeded 2,000 annually, with women comprising over 75% of this demographic. Since 2006, studies have increasingly recognized China not as the final settlement destination but as a transit country.

Migration to South Korea from China with the assistance of religious and human rights organizations receives concentrated media and international attention. However, this pertains to only a small portion of the overall migration of defectors in China. Most

migrations occur with the assistance of brokers. The significant increase in the number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea since 2006, approximately doubling compared to the previous year, was attributed to the extensive crackdowns that took place from that time, leading up to the Beijing Olympics. Additionally, the support provided through settlement funds in South Korea, according to the North Korean Defectors Support Act, played a significant role in enabling this increase. After entering South Korea, receiving settlement support funds became a condition for defectors to cover migration costs, resulting in a substantial expansion of the refugee industry where brokers recruited and facilitated the migration of North Korean defectors.

As the number of migration brokers surged, a refugee industry targeting North Korean defectors became active. This led to not only migrations from China to South Korea but also never-ending wanderings to Europe, the United States, Canada, and other destinations for those North Korean defectors who had already settled in South Korea. According to research by Lee Hee-young (2016, 224), those who acquired citizenship and financial stability after entering South Korea became international refugees through repeated migrations. This highlights the mediating role played by South Korea's support system for North Korean defectors in the formation of "international North Korean refugees." As migration brokers proliferated and the refugee industry targeting North Korean defectors intensified, re-migration of defectors occurred not only from China to South Korea but also to Europe and the United States for those who had already settled in South Korea.

When the door for refugee applications in South Korea closed for those who had already entered, brokers played a leading role in directing the flow of re-migration by taking North Korean defectors to other countries to apply for refugee status. The explosive increase in North Korean defectors seeking asylum in the UK occurred between 2007 and 2008, with 223 out of 602 applicants receiving recognition as refugees or receiving protective measures in just one year. In Canada, hundreds of defectors began applying for refugee status in 2010, and Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany saw a concentration of refugee applications from North Korean defectors from 2010 to 2013. The high probability of North Korean defectors being recognized as refugees in North America and Europe was significantly influenced by the political significance attached to North Korean human rights in the international community. However, after 2010, the likelihood of refugee recognition sharply

declined. As the European refugee crisis unfolded, with a influx of refugees from the Middle East and Africa, refugee assessments became more stringent. The scrutiny of overseas disguised defections conducted by brokers was intensified, especially after it was revealed that many who applied for refugee status had already acquired citizenship in South Korea. Brokers, who used the names of North Korean defectors to secure credit loans for migration costs, faced a situation where overseas asylum for North Korean defectors who had already entered South Korea practically came to a halt when it became apparent that their refugee applications were not being accepted. (Jo 2019)

During this period, Undocumented migrations on the North-China border region continued steadily despite enhanced border controls, thanks to the activities of migration brokers. However, the gendered features decreased as defections in this region shifted from the traditional forms of human trafficking and marriage migration to broker-facilitated migration. On the other hand, the proportion of women in North Korean defections between China and South Korea sharply increased, particularly among North Korean women who were already residing in China, as active movement to South Korea intensified due to the Chinese government's crackdown, especially before the Beijing Olympics. International attention to North Korean defectors, especially the human rights violations experienced by North Korean women in China, created a paradoxical situation. On one hand, it increased opportunities for North Korean women to receive international support or be recognized as refugees. On the other hand, it contributed to the public perception of North Korean women as morally compromised or sexually tainted. Moreover, the gendered rush to South Korea created a different kind of insecurities compared to the past. The limited capacity for acceptance in South Korea led to an accumulation of North Korean defectors waiting in refugee camps in countries like Thailand and Cambodia. This situation, coupled with the insecurities experienced during the journey and the dire conditions in refugee camps, highlights the challenges faced during the feminization of asylum in protracted situations.

De-feminization (2012 – COVID-19)

After 2017, there is no publicly available data that can shed light on the detailed demographic characteristics of North Korean defectors. The statistics provided by the Ministry of Unification regarding North Korean defectors are based on the year of entry into

South Korea, not the year of escape from North Korea, and include individuals who entered after long-term residence in a third country, including China. However, with the publication of the "2023 North Korean Human Rights Report" by the Ministry of Unification's North Korean Human Rights Records Center in 2023, it became possible to roughly grasp the composition of North Korean defectors since 2017. Out of the total 3,670 people who entered Hana One from 2017 to 2022, a survey on the human rights situation in North Korea was conducted on 3,412 individuals (93%).

The gender distribution of the surveyed individuals is 53% female and 47% male. Considering that females make up about 80% of the overall North Korean defector population, it can be inferred that the gender gap has significantly decreased among those who defected since 2017. The continued high proportion of females among North Korean defectors entering South Korea is speculated to be due to the significant presence of women who have resided long-term in third countries such as China. Through this data, it is also evident that at the time of defection, those in their 20s comprised the highest percentage at 31%, followed by those in their 30s at 19.15%. Those in their 30s and below, including teenagers, make up 67% of the total, indicating that defection is predominantly led by the younger demographic.

Since Kim Jong-un came to power, border control has been strengthened, leading to changes not only in the gender composition of North Korean defectors but also in their reasons for defection and forms of defection. If defection during times of food shortages was a means of survival for economically challenged North Korean residents, recent trends indicate a shift towards migration by those who can afford the cost or have access to networks such as immigration brokers. The number of defections due to economic hardship is decreasing, while there is an increase in chain migration facilitated by family invitations.

According to a survey on the motives for defection conducted by the Seoul National University's Institute for Unification and Peace Studies in 2022, targeting 312 North Korean defectors who fled between 2017 and 2019, the highest percentage (30.13% or 94 individuals) cited dissatisfaction with the North Korean regime and political oppression as their reason for defection. Other motives included family encouragement (20.19%), aspiring for a free regime (17.95%), economic difficulties (15.71%), and providing better opportunities for their children (11.54%). In contrast, a survey conducted by the North

Korean Defectors Support Foundation in 2012, involving 9,493 defectors, found that the primary motive for defection was "food shortages and economic difficulties" (52.8%). In 2020, a survey by HaNa Foundation, targeting 3,000 defectors, still showed "due to food shortages" (22.8%) as the most common reason for defection. Other reasons included a dislike of the surveillance and control of the North Korean regime (20.5%), a desire to provide a better living environment for their families (13.1%), and finding or living together with family members who defected first (10.0%). The difference between the 2020 survey results of the HaNa Foundation and this study can be attributed to the fact that 43.1% of the subjects in the 2020 survey had been residing in South Korea for over 10 years, while only 11.1% had been there for less than 3 years. This suggests that while economic difficulties, including food shortages, were the main reasons for defection during the challenging migration period, the recent motives of those leaving North Korea are primarily dissatisfaction and oppression by the regime, as well as family influence.

Since Kim Jong-un came to power, there has been a strong control over informal emigration, while the official overseas labor emigration has expanded, and visits to relatives in China have been encouraged. As a result, there has been an increase in individuals who, after obtaining passports through official channels, legally visit China, work temporarily to earn money, and then return to North Korea. The significant proportion (over 80%) of Korean women entering South Korea during Kim Jong-un's reign is attributed not to an increase in newly defecting women but rather to the intensified control over the North-China border, leading to active entry of women who were already in China.

The noticeable low proportion of women's emigration during the Kim Jong-un era in North Korean defections is influenced not only by the reduction in human trafficking but also by the weakened gendered mobility within North Korea. Before the Kim Jong-un era, women who married in North Korea played a central role in market activities without having to work outside, resulting in higher mobility for women than men. However, during Kim Jong-un's era, there was a significant increase in the population of men who, while not working formally, engaged in informal economic activities, supporting part of their income to the workplace. This expanded the possibility of men's emigration beyond the surveillance network, enabling both men and women to secure migration funds and migrate through brokers, unlike the previous scenario where women were often trafficked.

The flow of remittances and defection from South to North, which used to follow the same direction before Kim Jong-un's rule, is now perceived to operate in reverse after the intensification of border control and social control. Families in North Korea receiving remittances from the South are now more likely to choose to live safely within North Korea rather than attempting migration, feeling the threat to their lives. An interesting aspect is the gendered perception of defection among North Korean defectors in South Korea. North Korean men, coming from a patriarchal society, often find it challenging to adapt in South Korea. In contrast, North Korean women, upon coming to South Korea, often express a preference for bringing their daughters rather than sons, as they believe that daughters can lead a more comfortable life.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and strict control between North Korea and China, defection and emigration of North Koreans within China have been severely restricted. The number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea sharply declined. In 2021, the proportion of male defectors among all South-bound defectors was higher than female defectors, with 40 males and 23 females. In 2022, the number of South-bound defectors was still higher for males, with 35 males and 32 females. The strict control over China's borders has led to a significant decrease in the number of defectors who pass through China, with most of them being overseas residents (foreign workers). There were also direct defections from North to South without passing through China. Whether swimming from Gangwon Province or taking a boat, these cases involved physically healthy young men. With the impossibility of brokers' activities during times of enhanced border control, individual migration became possible based on personal physical abilities, resulting in a masculinization of defections during the COVID-19 period. Even after COVID-19, the number of North Korean defectors has not recovered due to strengthened border controls in China, and some who were residing in China have chosen to go to South Korea.

Conclusion

The interrelationship among the need of reproductive works in Chinese households, severe economic difficulty in North Korea and the intensified border enforcement has produced insecure forms of feminized North Korean migration and their vulnerable marital status.

Furthermore, the need of reproductive works in Chinese households provides the private places of hiding for undocumented North Korean women, not to be detected from Chinese officials, and it has caused further influx of undocumented North Korean migrant women in China. The undocumented North Korean women find social protection from a constructed family in China in the situation that they cannot expect any public protection and legal support. Rather than powerless victims, North Korean women try to mobilize their agency within limited physical and social spaces in order to secure their own safety and survival, specifically through continuous migration processes.

Since 2001, international attention on North Korean human rights has led to the facilitation of emigration, including to South Korea and other third countries, especially for North Korean women residing in China. However, defections from the North, particularly in border areas, have become more challenging due to heightened border controls following increased international interest in the human rights of North Korean defectors. Until just before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2017, the proportion of women among North Korean defectors entering South Korea exceeded 80%. However, many of these women were already long-term residents in China, and direct defections to South Korea by new defectors have seen a relaxation in gender balance.

During times of food scarcity, defection served as a means of survival for economically challenged North Korean residents, with a significant portion of women resorting to human trafficking for their emigration. However, since Kim Jong-un came to power and enforced stricter border controls, emigration has become more defeminized and stratified, primarily limited to those who can afford the costs of migration or have access to networks such as brokers. Nevertheless, in the case of consecutive family defections to South Korea among resident defectors, it has been observed that female family members' emigration is preferred over male family members. This preference is linked to the perception that North Korean men, largely influenced by patriarchal norms, find it challenging to adapt to South Korean society. In most cases, North Korean mothers, during interviews, expressed a desire for their daughters to defect and adapt to South Korean society, while sons were expected to stay in North Korea and receive remittances.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has changed the border conditions all over the world and has increased the immobility (Hydnman 2021). After COVID-19, the difficulty of emigration

for North Korean women within China increased, leading to a rise in the proportion of males among North Korean defectors entering South Korea. This shift can be attributed to the significant presence of overseas laborers, mainly engaged in construction work in North Korea, contributing to the gendered nature of defection. Additionally, a new trend emerged where defections occurred directly to South Korea without passing through other countries, mostly undertaken by physically healthy young men crossing the sea. However, the peculiar circumstances of defections during the COVID-19 period may result in a sustained feminization of defectors, particularly as more North Korean women who were residing in China are expected to make up a larger proportion of those entering South Korea once again after the pandemic.

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