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Université de Montréal

North Korean Asylum Seekers in the ROK:  
National Identity and Social Integration

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## Résumé

Dans les dernières années, l'augmentation des demandeurs d'asile nord coréens en Corée du sud, a causé des soucis important au gouvernement sud coréen. Malgré que la présence de ces *saetomins* comprend moins que 1% de la population totale de la Corée du sud, leur taux d'arrivée qui est devenu soudainement élevé. Ceci a eu pour effet de force le gouvernement du sud à révaluer leur programmes d'intégration pour les nord-coréens. Ce mémoire examine la relation entre le processus d'intégration des *saetomins* et l'évolution de l'identité national coréenne, vis-à-vis la Corée du nord. Les indicateurs utilisé pour déterminer cette vue sont : les recueils des textes primaires sud coréens, les journaux et les symboles nationaux comme les monuments et la célébration de la journée de libération coréenne. L'étude démontre que l'image d'hostilité et d'agression des nord coréens s'est transformé pour en devenir une de pitié, qui ont besoin de l'assistance du sud comme guide et protecteur.

Mots clés : Corée du nord, Corée du sud, demandeur d'asile, intégration, nationalisme

Notes sur la transcription : Le système de transcription *Revised Romanisation* pour la langue coréenne est utilisé dans ce mémoire. Les noms les plus utilisés sont écrits dans leur forme la plus connues.

## Abstract

The increasing number of North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea in recent years has created a cause for concern for the Republic of Korea. Although the *saetomin* account for less than 1% of the total South Korean population, the rapid rate of increase in their arrival has prompted the South Korean government to re-evaluate its resettlement policy and support programs for the integration of these asylum seekers. For the purpose of this study, in which the correlation between the changing image of Korean national identity in South Korea is examined in relation to the integration process of *saetomin*, three factors are used to identify the South's views of its North Korean 'Other'. They include the image of North Koreans found in South Korean primary school textbooks, print news media and in national symbols such as memorials and the celebration of Korean Liberation Day. The study revealed that the image of North Koreans has changed from hostile enemies to one of pity and empathy, requiring aid from the South to instruct, nourish and guide them. The South has assumed the role of the wiser, older sibling, whose duty it is to protect the *saetomin* who have sought refuge in the South.

Key words: North Korea, South Korea, asylum seeker, integration, nationalism

Notes on Romanisation: The Revised Romanisation system of Korean romanisation is used. However, well-known Korean names are given in their best known forms.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother for all her love and support.  
It is also dedicated to my aunt, Sister Anna Maria, o.c.d.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude to those who helped me complete this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Dominique Caouette for his great dedication and words of encouragement. I would also like to thank Professor Dennis Hart of Kent State University for all the South Korean primary school textbooks he sent me; to Dr. Park Jung-Ran at the Seoul University Institute for Unification Studies, in Korea for welcoming me at the Institute and her generosity in providing me with numerous sources for my thesis. A special thanks also goes to the professors of Korean Studies I have met during the course of my studies who have provided me with valuable advice and encouragement for my thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank Université de Montréal for giving me the opportunity for this experience.

Map of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea



Source: United Nations – Map No. 4163 Rev. 2

## Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea<sup>1</sup> has been in a continuous state of social and economic deterioration. The death of thousands of its citizens caused by the onset of chronic famine, extreme flooding and economic implosion, has compelled this isolationist state into opening its tightly controlled borders to foreign aid (Williams 2002, 114). Despite contributions of food and supplies from various international organisations, inadequate provisions persist. Consequently, regardless of the risk of political persecution, the rising fear of starvation and malnutrition has, in recent years, led to an increasing exodus from North Korea. The sensitive nature in dealing with North Korean asylum seekers and the lack of openness regarding the issue results in a large margin of error in the estimation of their numbers. While the governments of China, Russia and South Korea, which are directly affected by the exodus, try to show that the issue of North Korean asylum seekers is not a serious one by giving lower estimates of the North Korean exodus; non-governmental organisations working closely with the asylum seekers have much higher figures. The Chinese and South Korean governments have estimated 10 000 – 30 000 North Korean refugees in China, whereas various international organisations estimate between 100 000 to 300 000 (Koh and Oh 2004, 68). These North Koreans aspire to reach South Korea as their final destination, where they dream of establishing their new home. Despite their awareness of the need to adjust to the South's capitalist lifestyle, North Koreans assume that a shared language and culture with the South Koreans, will make integration less difficult. However, North Korean asylum seekers interviewed by Koh and Baek have felt discouraged upon realising that they would not be as welcomed and accepted in South

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<sup>1</sup> The two Koreas are referred to as the Republic of Korea (ROK), South Korea and the South; and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea or the North.

Korea, contrary to their beliefs. As with many others in their situation, they felt that adjustment to South Korean society was surprisingly difficult (Koh and Baek 2002, 205). Their challenges include: the managing of personal finances, access to adequate employment, and social prejudices and depression.

Due to the lingering pain caused by the Korean War<sup>2</sup> and the image of North Koreans, which they have created through information from the media and education in school, many South Koreans have developed a prejudice towards North Koreans. While the dream of a united Korea remains, in reality, South Koreans have a fear and mistrust of North Koreans. How the South Korean people's desire for unification interacts with their prejudice towards North Korean asylum seekers is a conflicting phenomenon, which hinders the integration of the North Koreans in the ROK. It is this process that this thesis seeks to understand.

### Research Question and Hypothesis

For over half a century, Koreans on both sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel have been hoping for reunification, based on the belief that it is inevitable. Governments of both Koreas have produced advanced doctrine that the division of Korea is merely an artificial barrier that does not affect the sense of fraternity between North and South Koreans. Despite this dream of a united Korea, government policies on either side of the demarcation line have until recently fostered antagonistic sentiments towards one another and in some cases have shown outright hostility. Following the end of the Cold War era, tensions between North and South Korea have eased and efforts have been made towards

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<sup>2</sup> The Korean War officially began on June 25, 1950. Active battle ended on July 27, 1953, with the signing of an armistice requiring both North and South Korea to retreat 2km from the line of division (38<sup>th</sup> parallel), creating the Demilitarised Zone (Eckert et al. 1990, 344-345 and Oberdorfer 1997, 10).

more amicable relations between the two Koreas. This is particularly true since 1997, when South Korean President Kim Dae Jung inaugurated his “Sunshine Policy”, a platform that calls for increased cooperation with North Korea in preparation for eventual peaceful unification. This policy was different from past South Korean policies since it focussed on cultural and economic exchanges rather than on ideological differences between the two nations, while at the same time instilling a sense of Korean solidarity.

This research examines the process of integration of North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea through the ROK government’s construction of the image of North Korea and its people. Such image influences how South Koreans perceive North Koreans. The analysis is conducted within the context of South Korea’s definition of its own national identity, which, since division, has been defined in relation to its North Korean counterpart. Although the Korean peninsula is said to be one of the most ethnically homogeneous regions in the world, this uniformity appears to be lacking in its national sentiment, which is indicative in its absence of receptiveness towards recent North Korean migrants in South Korea. This thesis seeks to address the following question: Does the South Korean government’s imagined Korean nation have an influence on the North Korean asylum seekers’ integration process into the ROK society?

While officials and scholars studying the unification prospects of the Korean peninsula have traditionally stated that the only factor dividing it is that of political ideology, this theory no longer holds true today. Although both North and South Koreans share a common heritage, over five decades of separation and isolation have led to the evolution of “new” Korean societies that go beyond political division. As a result, North Korean asylum seekers experience great difficulty adapting to South Korean mainstream society.

The indicators used for measuring South Korean nationalism are: education, the South Korean media and national symbols. The government has had much influence with these three elements, and in some instances, has had control over its delivery to the general population. In South Korea, the national government is responsible for devising school curricula. The texts used in classrooms are generally printed and published by state-run establishments and its contents approved by the government that exercises considerable control over what is taught in schools. Consequently, a reflection of the state's ideology may more often than not be found in the texts. The ROK government's reasoning is that in, "[r]ealizing that young children may grow up to be old patriots, [the] state has chosen a particular nationalist education for its young Koreans" (Hart 2000, 142). Since children spend most of their time in school, it can be assumed that values, beliefs and norms are largely acquired during this time. It can also be assumed that these values will influence their behaviour in society.

As with its control over education, the South Korean government has an influence over the stories told in their newspapers and news broadcasts. Although government control subsided in 1987, 'suggestions' and comments made by political leaders still have much influence. The portrayal of the North Korean 'Other' by the South Korean media is largely an illustration of its government's policy, which is most often in relation to national security concerns. Previously, this generally entailed the North's threat of using nuclear weapons against the South; however, in recent years, the large numbers of North Korean asylum seekers have raised much concern.

National symbols such as monuments and holidays are elements in which the government has some authority, as well. Monuments are often used to commemorate historic events. The way in which these events are remembered by the general population

is, in part, influenced by the monuments attributed to them. Since the Korean War has had a significant impact on how the ROK government has chosen to redefine Korean national identity, the monuments used to remember the Korean War in South Korea, such as the display of the section on the War in Seoul's War Memorial, are also examined.

These indicators are the source for defining the inclusion or exclusion of North Koreans in the South Korean government's conception of Korean national identity, which in turn has an effect on the integration process of North Korean asylum seekers. This process consists of social, economic and psychological factors of integration. Our content analysis examines the period beginning from the 1990s to show whether this integration process is affected by the development of separate North and South Korean national identities. Parts of these differences include the widening gap between both countries' social and economic structures.

In addition to these more visible indicators, the psychological element is another determinant of the integration of North Korean asylum seekers in the South, as well as the receptiveness of South Koreans to these newcomers. The assumption that adaptation would be easier in the ROK because of a shared Korean ethnicity, and thus a common national identity, is often the reason why North Koreans have chosen to seek asylum in South Korea. However, the hypothesis to be tested here is that over the decades, Korea has remained divided not only politically but increasingly with regards to their national identity. As a result, the growing absence of a united Korean sentiment leads to difficulties for North Koreans in the integration to South Korean society.

The significance of this thesis is twofold: it questions the homogeneity of Korean nationalism in South Korea, and it examines the integration of North Korean asylum seekers. The section on Korean nationalism in South Korea analyses its "myth" after

over fifty years of separation and isolation. For South Korean policymakers, the issue of North Korean asylum seekers' adaptation to South Korean society is particularly important for the development of a unified Korean society. In anticipation of Korean reunification and under the assumption that North Koreans will be adapting to the South Korean way of life, understanding the problems of integration encountered by North Korean asylum seekers will provide strong indicators of what to expect when the border between the North and South ceases to exist. The South Korean government wishes to avoid a re-enactment of Germany's sudden unification, where a problem in integration of Germans from the East in the West is still present after almost two decades of unification. The integration process of North Koreans provides an index of the adjustments and resources needed for the South Korean government to ensure the success of future unification. In its assumed role as 'big brother' to the DPRK, the ROK government has developed policies specific to North Korean refugees based on the principle of a single Korean nation, while providing services and incentives for the *saetomin*'s<sup>3</sup> successful integration.

By demonstrating that a separate North and South Korean national identity exists, based on cultural, sociological, and political factors, a step is taken to challenge this "myth" that there has been no evolution in Korean culture on either side of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and that it has remained static for over half a century. This recognition of distinct national identities is important for the ROK government to consider when developing policies for North Korean integration, so that measures may be taken to accommodate the specific needs of North Koreans to adjust to mainstream South Korean society.

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<sup>3</sup> *Saetomin* is the most recent term created by the ROK government in referring to North Korean asylum seekers. It is generally used to refer to the more recent arrivals (i.e.: post-1990s). It literally means 'new arrivals'.

## Definition of Terms

### ***National Identity and Korean Nationalism***

For the purpose of this study, the definition of nationalism used is based on Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation that, "it is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991, 6). More specifically, the Korean nation is a historical construct that reflects the consciousness of the people and has been imagined on the basis of blood relationships, regional ties, common language and culture.

Korean history has constructed its nationalist philosophy based on the importance of kinship and blood ties, which are reinforced by the strong presence of Confucian values both within the government and society as a whole. However, over the course of history where changes in society have occurred, so have the forms of nationalism used to best describe Korean identity. Although each phase may be supported by a different underlying approach of nationalism, Korean nationalism does not fail to emphasize the importance of a common historical lineage in support of its argument.

### ***Social Integration***

The concept of social integration in this thesis refers to the asylum seekers' ability to participate in the social, economic, educational and civil elements of the host society at a level that is comparable to the receiving country's general population (Brindelli 2003, 710). Social integration is considered a process rather than the result of a final outcome and is mainly referred to as "the desirable way by which newcomers should become members of the receiving society" (Li 2003, 315). In the case of North Korean asylum seekers, the desirable outcome for South Korean policymakers is their eventual

assimilation into mainstream society and their peaceful co-existence with the general population.

### ***North Korean Asylum Seeker***

Although North Koreans who have left their country of origin have often been referred to as defectors and refugees, the use of such concepts shall be avoided, except when discussing them in a specific context. The South Korean government has recently chosen to abandon the term *talbukja*, literally meaning ‘a person who’s fled the North’ to *saetomin*, having the literal translation of ‘new arrivals’. While today, the term *talbukja* is still used when referring to North Korean asylum seekers, it is gradually being replaced with the *saetomin*. It is a term conceived by the South Korean government as an act of good faith towards North Korean asylum seekers, so as to help in their integration process by eliminating names such as *talbukja*, which North Koreans feel have negative connotations. In this thesis, the term *saetomin* is used to refer to the North Korean asylum seekers.

### **Methodology**

The method used for this research is a content analysis. The proximity analysis approach to content analysis is used in Chapter 3. In the section on South Korean textbooks and the South Korean press, a search was made for any references to North Koreans. The affect extraction of content analysis is used in Chapter 5, which considers the integration of North Korean asylum seekers residing in South Korea. The research relies on secondary sources and wherever possible, primary sources. Evidence demonstrating that separate North Korean and South Korean national identities is

examined. Although the presence of two Korean nations with opposing ideologies may be an obvious indication that two forms of Korean national identities do exist, the national sentiment studied here will be observed through an examination of the presence of such division using indicators of nationalism such as the media, education and national symbols.

Other sources consist of interviews of North Korean asylum seekers already conducted by other researchers and NGOs. Although interview questions vary, analysis of the interview will be carried out according to elements of national identity. These interviews are examined to provide insight on the thoughts and sentiments of asylum seekers with regard to life in South Korea, and in particular, their experiences of integration to mainstream South Korean society. Due to limited time and lack of sufficient resources, it was not possible for the researcher to conduct her own interviews. Some other primary sources are included, such as proceedings of official meetings between North and South Korea, literary sources and works written by South Korean politicians themselves. These latter sources shall be used mainly in the comparative component of this research, to illustrate the changes in government policy in relation to the arrival of North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea and of the portrayal of the Korean nation. Secondary sources will consist of: commentaries, newspaper and journal articles, reports and monographs addressing the issue of Korean nationalism, as well as discussing the challenges of integration of North Korean asylum seekers.

#### Limitations of the Research

Due to its sensitive nature, it is difficult to access complete and comprehensive documents on the issue of North Korean refugees in terms of exact numbers and their

situation. Most of the information comes from human rights and religious groups, as well as other international organisations dealing with the issue. Much valued information comes from those who have experienced life in North Korea themselves and are courageous enough to tell their story. NGOs are reluctant to divulge too much information for fear that this will compromise their mission and endanger the lives of those they seek to protect.

Although research on North Korean asylum seekers has increased, many of the published works are in Korean, with some in English. Much of the information focuses on one area of interest, such as the integration process and the human rights issue. When reading the texts, more often than not, evidence of a cultural bias is eminent. In American texts, there is still much of the anti-sentiment and texts supporting North Korea are more anti-imperialist in nature. The outlook in South Korean texts tends to vary. Particular attention is given here to the reasons for the biases that may exist.

### Thesis Organisation

The thesis has two components: one examining the changing definition of Korean national identity as a process over time, between the Cold War and post-Cold War periods and the other considering the integration of North Korean asylum seekers during the same time frame. During the Cold War, the main reasons for North Koreans seeking refuge was politically motivated and their numbers were quite low, ranging from nine to fifty-two per year from 1991 to 1995 (Koh et al. 2004, 68). Following the death of Kim Il Sung, North Korea's leader and 'founder', in 1994, torrential floods resulted in food shortages and widespread famine. The motivation for leaving North Korea was no longer only political, but became socio-economical, and the result was an exponential increase in

the number of North Korean asylum seekers. In 1994, it led to "...food shortages, [which] drove most refugees to flee without premeditation to escape starvation" (Park 2003, 738).

The second part of the thesis is a comparison of the integration process of North Koreans in South Korea for the two periods mentioned above. In South Korea, the government has had an influence in shaping its citizens' national identity. This is particularly true during the 1960s and 1970s when the country was under a dictatorial leadership. The government's goal to assert South Korean identity has often been through anti-North Korean doctrine, which was prevalent in the period from the end of the Korean War (1953) until 1993. In the latter period, the ROK government sent humanitarian aid to North Korea to relieve the effects of drought and famine in the country. There was also a shift in the South's policy towards North Korea from outright anti-communism and adversity to cooperation and negotiation.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this thesis consists of four chapters to be divided as follows:

The first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. It discusses the theories of nationalism used to support the arguments of this research. A social constructivist approach of cultural nationalism is used as the theoretical base throughout this thesis. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is the main reference used for supporting the idea that separate North and South Korean nationalisms have developed within South Korea. In addition to the theories of nationalism, theories of social integration are examined. As part of the research, the integration process of North Korean asylum seekers, a literature review of government refugee and immigration policies, (with particular focus on immigrant integration) is also included.

The second chapter provides the historical background of Korean nationalism. It is divided into three main periods. These divisions are made in order to demonstrate that throughout history the Korean nation and nationalism have undergone periods of significant change. The main references used for these periods of Korean nationalism are, among others, Sun Chul Yang's *The North and South Korean Political Systems* and Carter J. Eckert et al.'s *Korea Old and New: A History*. The period after the division of the Korean peninsula, with a focus on South Korean nationalism, is examined with reference to works by Gi-Wook Shin and James Palais, in addition to the above-mentioned texts. These texts are used to illustrate that preconditions for a divergence in Korean national identity were present prior to the formal political division of the Korean peninsula.

Chapter three seeks to demonstrate the presence of distinct Korean nationalisms which extend beyond political division. This chapter illustrates that there are indicators other than that of political division which add to the emergence of a separate North and South Korean national identity. While politics will always be an integral factor in the division of Korean nations, cultural and social indicators are used to illustrate this fact, more specifically education, the media and national symbols are the indicators used for this purpose.

Both the media and education have a large influence on citizens' opinions of particular matters. In South Korea, the media, such as newspapers and news broadcasts, has had an impact in forming Koreans' opinions about North Korea; often in accordance with the government's desires.

To demonstrate the influence of education on Korean citizens, an analysis of textbooks used during the Park Chung Hee era and 2005 are conducted to examine

whether or not the image of North Korea and its citizens has changed over the years. In addition, references are made to the comparative studies conducted by Dennis Hart and to essays and analyses found on the Korean Ministry of Education's online source. In the case of media influence, secondary sources on the influence of Korean media are examined. Korean newspaper articles are also consulted. Publications of Korea Focus are examined from its first issue in 1993 to its latest one in 2006, focusing on articles about North Korean refugees and defectors. The image of North Korea that the South Korean government wishes to portray to its citizens is often reflected in the media. Textbooks chosen for this study are those used for Social Studies and those for Moral Education. Excerpts from each book, which specifically address North Korea, are analysed for their content and vocabulary. The content is studied for the type of information meant to be taught to the children. An analysis of the vocabulary used is important, since the Korean language has many adjectives, and the slightest nuances can produce a completely different image. This is divided into three main themes: how the texts present the Korean War, the views on unification and on the images used to describe North Korea and its people. The texts used are: Social Studies and Moral Education books published between 1979 and 2004. All sources are from primary school textbooks used in South Korean schools.

National symbols, such as flags and a country's anthem, are tangible elements of national identity. They are particularly present in the celebration of national holidays. The holidays which the government chooses to celebrate and the manner in which they do also has an influence on citizen identity. The trends in the celebration of Korean Liberation Day and the Korean War Memorial Day, which are the national holidays celebrated in South Korea, are also examined. In addition to these national holidays,

Korean War Monuments from each of the periods are also studied; one of which is the Korean War Memorial Museum that opened in Seoul, Korea, in 1994. Liberation Day is an important holiday for both North and South Korea, as it marks the end to their long struggle from Japanese colonisation. Particular focus is put on the joint North-South celebrations of this holiday. Since it has been agreed by both parties to emphasize cultural and social exchange rather than political sentiment, by studying the celebrations, it is possible for one to depict differences between the North and South, as an indication that the Korean nation is not as homogenous as it is imagined to be.

In chapter four, we investigate the reasons for the significant changes in North Korean migration trends. In this chapter, background information on North Korean asylum seekers is extracted from reports made by NGOs such as Refugees International and Human Rights Watch. The main source for the South Korean government's policies and programs for North Koreans are the White Paper on Unification, as well as other reports found on the Ministry of Unification online resource. In addition, references are made to Won Jae Chun's, *A New Phase of North Korean Issues* and Changdong Choi's *The Legal Status of North-Korean Refugees and Program for Supporting Them*.

The final chapter examines the reasons why North Korean asylum seekers are having such difficulty in integrating into South Korean mainstream society. In this process, the psychological and socio-economic elements of migrant integration are used. References on the integration of North Korean asylum seekers consist of interviews conducted by other researchers, namely, Taek Jeon Woo and Jae Chun Won, in addition to relevant studies conducted by NGOs and other scholars on this issue.

## **Chapter I – Theories of Nationalism, National Identity and Social Integration**

### Theories of Nationalism and National Identity

There is much debate with regards to the theories and concepts of nationalism, one of which is defining nations and nationalism. The definition of a nation may be categorized into two groups: objective and subjective. The most common definition of a nation with objective factors is that given by Joseph Stalin, who states, “a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in common culture” (Smith 2001, 11). Definitions highlighting more ‘subjective’ factors, such as memory and attitude, are those of the constructivist thinkers of nationalism, such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson. Gellner remarks that nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness - it invents nations where they do not exist; while Benedict Anderson refers to nationalism as, “an imagined political community”.

The general concept shared by these scholars of nationalism suggests that the nation is a phenomenon created primarily as a result of social interaction. In this respect, Elie Kedourie characterises national self-determination to be based on an individual’s will and autonomy (Kedourie 54 in Hutchison and Smith, 1994). The emphasis here is placed on the individual that plays a pivotal role in deciding whether or not a nation shall exist. Importance is placed on history and traditions, which Kedourie sees as key elements for building a nation; in the sense that individuals sharing a common identity should come together and create a nation. This suggests that while nations are created by autonomous individuals, historical similarities determined by the examination of the past are essential in establishing favourable conditions for creating a separate nation. Kedourie states that

the nation is a social force that can be eroded. It is eroded in the idea that foreign influence on the customary social practices of a nation such as politics and religion, results in the breakdown of its traditional values which changes with each subsequent generation. Thus, the metamorphosis of a nation is implied by the idea that its changes are continuous and in a direction leading away from its original traditions and structure.

The definitions of nations mentioned gives light to the second debate on nationalism which is based on the question of its origins. These may be divided into three main ideas; the first being that of primordialism, as is supported by Kedourie and fits in with the depiction of the South Korean state's definition of a nation. South Koreans are taught at an early age that nations and blood ties are in direct correlation with one another. Textbooks used in South Korean middle and high schools emphasise the importance of culture and history in the nation. Since it is believed that nations and blood ties are directly related, one can assume that shared cultural traits are present only among those who are part of a common ancestry.

The second approach is by perennialists, such as Anthony Smith, who seek to combine the concept of post-modernist and traditional values, while providing other explanations for the origin of nations. According to Smith, the preconditions for the creation of a nation are composed of several cultural markers such as language, religion and customs, as well as physical factors such as a fixed territory and a common history, whether it is "real" or constructed. For Smith, the formation of a nation occurs through the participation of not only the ruling class, but of the whole population, that not only acknowledges membership of a nation but also shares its ideology. The important element for Smith is not whether an individual has similar physical or cultural characteristics as other members, but that an emotional attachment is made with the nation. Although

Smith's view of a nation is based on the pre-existing cultural factors: kinship, religious and belief systems, the emphasis is placed on the sentimental connection with the nation.

A third explanation for the nation is that of the constructivists, who perceive the nation as something that is modern and constructed. As previously mentioned, Gellner's idea of a nation is one that is invented. As explained by Hutchison and Smith, Gellner defines nationalism as "...the consequence of a new form of social organisation, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state" (Hutchison and Smith 1994, 63). Gellner sees the construction of a nation as one that is derived out of necessity, rather than of sentiment. It is considered to be a conscious act made by its members. In order to make a nation that is strong and lasting, its members must be educated and have some level of technological knowledge. The norm of such education is universal literacy, which is what Gellner believes is the binding force of the citizens.

Benedict Anderson defines nations as an imagined community, due to the fact that although there are commonalities linking a group of people together, because of their large number, it is not possible to meet every one of its members. While it is possible for one to have an image of the similarities shared, the differences are not always so evident and are often forgotten. His definition differs from that of Gellner's in the sense that Anderson sees the nation as something that is created rather than built, like a mechanical structure. This creation is one that is based on historical events which lead to the consciousness of nationalism. The spread of such imaginings was made possible by the emergence of print capitalism, which contributed to the awareness of such national consciousness.

With respect to the question relating to the nation, there is also the notion of ethnicity and ethnic groups. While often used interchangeably by theorists, there is a distinction between nations and the ethnic group. Ethnicity is derived from primordial traits, whereas nationality is something that is “created,” as is defined by Anderson. Ethnicity and nation are a matter of perception based on how individuals view themselves and on how society categorizes them. Sometimes the categories made by the “Others” may shape the perception of the ‘Self’.

This study uses the constructivist approach in defining the ROK government’s concept of the Korean nation. It is used to demonstrate that despite the South Korean government’s declaration that all ethnic Koreans living on the peninsula are members of the South Korean community, that reality states otherwise. Upon the examination of *saetomin* integration in the South, it is evident that the imagined Korean nation no longer exists. The image of the Korean nation has been divided into a South Korean and a North Korean one.

### Social Integration

The study of immigrants and their integration into the host society is a fairly recent one. In the United States, Park and Thomas, members of the Chicago School, began studying the integration of ethnic minorities in the 1920s; while in Europe, integration studies began mostly in the 1960s. However, it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that scholars and policy makers began to seriously consider the study of immigrant integration into their host countries. In the United States, it was the period following a large number of immigrants from non-European countries, as a result of their more open immigration policy for highly skilled people mainly from Asia. In Europe, it was a time

when policy-makers came to realise that the foreign migrant workers they hired were not returning to their home countries, but intended to permanently settle in the host country (Dewitte 1999, 6). In the past, more attention was given to the examination of migration patterns, with particular interest in the relationship between migration and economic matters. However, the increasing number of migrants permanently settling in host countries has sparked a recent concern in the integration process of these immigrants.

One of the most common debates that arise when referring to immigrant integration is the terminology used. The term “integration” has most often, in the past, been synonymously linked with “assimilation” (Dewitte 1999, 7), one that is said to be most accurate when referring to the tradition theories of integration (such as the U.S. Chicago School). Rainer Bauböck states that “integration is a concept that is ambiguous. It can come to mean the “acceptance” of new members, or to the “the forces of internal cohesion within the wider social unit” (Cohen, 10 in Dewitte 1999). Integration policies will not necessarily create unity within a nation, but may just as well have the opposite effect by creating more awareness of the ‘Other’. This image is best described by the following: “‘integration’ is a term used to indicate different levels of adaptation and participation in various aspects of the host society, in a continuous process ranging from assimilation to coexistence, and in some cases, to segregation of immigrants” (Bonifazi and Strozza 2003, 691). It “is considered as a pathway involving the newcomers and the host society, which can either favour or inhibit the immigrant inclusion, and which requires different processes and levels of adaptation to new situations” (Bonifazi and Strozza 2003, 692). One perspective that scholars agree upon is that problems in the socio-cultural integration of migrants into their host countries do exist. However, the manner in which they discern this process widely varies. Some of the ways in which

migrant integration may be considered are as: "... the complete conformity to the national way of life of the immigration country; the complete self-identification and preservation of the immigrant group in the new society; cultural pluralism, i.e. acceptance of the fundamental values of the host-society and at the same time preservation of the immigrant culture,..." (Baglioni 1964, 125). Rather than using these observations as definitions of migrant social integration, they may be used as markers for measuring the degree to which migrants integrate into their host countries.

The use of assimilation for understanding recent immigration was provided by members of the Chicago School, Robert E. Park and W.I. Thomas, in 1921. "[T]he social science use of assimilation emerged at the highpoint of a previous era of immigration and by means of observations in a city where the first and second generation then constituted the great majority of residents" (Alba and Nee 1997, 828). Literature on immigrant adaptation found mainly in sociology described assimilation as the dominating factor in integration. Portes and Zhou explain that there are "... assumptions that there is a natural process by which diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture and to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society;" (Zhou 1997, 976). This process generally entails abandoning old cultural behaviour and adopting new ones.

Park and Burgess, classical assimilationists, provided an early definition of social assimilation as being "the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence" (Alba and Nee 1997, 828). They see assimilation as a process of three stages: the first one of competition, where the newly arrived immigrants go through a period of instability during their initial struggles of familiarising themselves with their new surroundings and of

trying to establish a mode of living equal to the nationals of their country of immigration. The second stage is accommodation; where the immigrants have a better understanding of their position in the host society and have some involvement in its institutions. The final stage is assimilation, a process deemed as “progressive and irreversible”. This theory implies that assimilation is inevitable and that it is always the end goal for migrants, even in multicultural societies.

Milton Gordon believes that integration begins with cultural assimilation (also referred to as acculturation), but does not automatically lead to other forms of assimilation such as structural assimilation, which consists of involvement in local institutions, intermarriage with the ‘locals’. He found that most migrants would fall somewhere between acculturation and ‘structural’ assimilation, “the entry of members of an ethnic minority into primary-group relationships with the majority group” (Alba and Nee 1997, 829).

Gordon defines acculturation as “the minority group’s adoption of “cultural patterns” of the host society, [which] typically comes first and is inevitable” (Alba and Nee 1997, 829). He also notes that while extrinsic traits such as language acquisition, the way of dress, involvement in the host society’s social and economic structure, are indicators that the migrants are more readily willing to assimilate by ‘surrendering’ those of their native culture; the intrinsic traits of migrants, which are the “vital ingredients of the group’s cultural heritage” (Alba and Nee 1997, 829), are less evident in determining the degree to which they have been ‘absorbed’ by those of the host culture.

Structural assimilation is viewed as the “entrance of the minority group into the social cliques, clubs and institutions of the core society at the primary group level” (Alba and Nee 1997, 830). Gordon believed that “once structural assimilation occurs...all of

the other types of assimilation will naturally follow” (Alba and Nee 1997, 830) and that there will be a decline in prejudice and discrimination of the host country towards the migrants, resulting in the increase of intermarriages and a decrease in separate identities between the migrants and the locals.

Gordon’s classical theory of assimilation has been seen as faulty for use in immigrant- based nations such as the United States and Canada, since there is an assumption that there are only two groups to consider in the integration process – the dominant host country and the newly arrived immigrants. However, in multi-ethnic societies, one must consider not only the dynamic with the dominant culture, but the dynamic between the various sub-cultures and ethnic groups, as well. This model is seen as one that would be better suited for use in more homogeneous countries, where immigration has not been the basis for the nation’s existence, such as Germany, France, South Korea, and Japan.

Tomatsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan’s ethnic stratification theory suggests that “how a person is treated in society depends ‘not on what he is,’ but on the ‘manner in which he is defined’” (Alba and Nee 1997, 838). This implies that full assimilation is dependent upon the degree to which migrants are accepted by the dominant population and that it is dependent upon the reception and predisposition of natives towards immigrants. They believe that people are categorised in association with expected behaviour and treatment in accordance to their physical characteristics. In this regard, those of ethnic origins differing from that of the host society are seen as more distinctive on the basis of their physical features and are, thus, more often expected to be less assimilated than those with similar ethnic backgrounds.

A migrant's degree of interaction with the host society is also a determinant of assimilation. When there is a reduction of social distance between the host and the migrant, a form of structural assimilation occurs, where there is a sense of closeness between the groups and differences are less distinctive. Shibutani and Kwan see social mobility and economic parity as an exception for individual minority groups and that in the ethnic stratification order, assimilation is the final step. In compliance with the natural selection of competition where those who are more assimilated with the host society have a better chance of success, migrants will 'blend in' in order to exploit resources of the environment, so that social and economic success may be achieved.

### Host Society Reception

Much of the studies about immigrant integration have focussed on the immigrants themselves. However, an examination of host-societies is also important in understanding immigrant incorporation. Immigrant experiences vary according to destination countries – from traditional immigrant nations to newer immigrant nations, such as Europe and Asia. Jeffrey Reitz outlines four features of host societies as determinants for successful immigrant incorporation. While each has its distinctive characteristics, they are all interconnected. The first of Reitz' indicators for integration are the pre-existing ethnic or race relations within the host population. The reception of immigrants is affected by inter-group influence from the receiving country. The ethnic composition of the host society has an effect on how well immigrants are accepted. Preconceived attitudes towards ethnic groups and inter-group boundaries and hierarchies are the basis of social framework for integration. These attitudes may be shaped in the form of formal and informal institutions "...including laws, organisational policies and

practices, interest groups, and popular culture, all of which may affect the opportunities available to newcomers and the constraints they face” (Reitz 2002, 1006).

A second characteristic, one of the most traditional elements used in the study of immigrant integration, is related to the labour market in the host country, since in the past, people displaced mainly for labour purposes. The differences in labour markets and related institutions are, thus, a second feature of the host societies’ influence on social integration. The studies conducted focussed on mainly immigrants in a particular labour market; they showed that the number of immigrants increased in countries where there is a demand for workers that cannot be met by the local population. This shortage may influence changes in government immigration policies to become less restrictive, so that local labour markets can be filled. An example of such a case is the U.S. government’s lift on restricting immigrants from non-European countries in 1965, so that labour demands in the health sector could be met.

This leads to the third element of receiving nations, which is the impact of government policies and programs. The impact of government policies includes immigration policy, policies for immigrant integration, and policies for the regulation of social institutions. Immigration policies influence the selection process and the composition of immigrant populations in the government’s attempt to have a desired outcome. However, this has proven to have very limited influence, resulting in the impotence of immigration policy. Some scholars believe that the nation-state has much control over the arrival of “undesired” immigrants and refugees, while others say that many of the labour-importing countries are failing to do so (Cornelius and Tsuda, 5 in Cornelius et al. 2004). The Gap Hypothesis is the term used to describe this phenomenon where a discrepancy lies between the intended outcome of government policy and the

actual result. It has been found that when industrialised countries sought to recruit highly skilled workers, attempts were unsuccessful, whereas when low-skilled labourers were recruited, they were “too successful”. Policy gaps are said to be of two kinds: “those caused by the unintended consequences of policy, and those caused by inadequate implementation or enforcement of policy” (Reitz 2002, 1006).

Immigrant reception is affected by other government policies, such as language training, programs for immigrant integration and settlement, training, counselling, employment, housing and ‘multicultural’ policies (Reitz 2002, 1013). A government’s social policies do not always affect immigrant reception. It may seem like a particular immigrant group is targeted due to the effect that it has on a social group where there is a higher concentration of immigrants.

### Immigration and Refugee Policies

As with social integration theories, refugee and immigration policies are often generalised into one category. One cannot talk about immigration policies without discussing integration policies. The increasing flow of migrants and refugees are seen as having a toll on the welfare state, particularly when the receiving country experiences an economic recession. For governments, the development of immigration policies calls for concern as to how immigrants will influence state identity, national security and political stability. These factors are taken into consideration when deciding what types of immigration control policies should be implemented, so as not to disrupt the peace and stability of the receiving country. The most common means of control of migrants are visa restrictions and mandatory permits in order to legally stay in a country. As citizenship is the most common approach used to examine the relationship between

migrants and their host countries, it is also a good basis for examining a government's immigration policies.

Scholars in migration and ethnic relations, such as Castles and Miller, define three types of citizenship. 'Ethnic' or 'exclusive', which exists in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, makes it difficult for migrants and their descendants to attain citizenship by creating cultural and institutional barriers. 'Assimilationist'/'republican' is evident in France, where *jus soli* is a form of citizenship, but on the condition that migrants are highly assimilated and there is little or no recognition of cultural difference. 'Multicultural'/'pluralist', present in the United States, Canada, and Britain, provides easier access and recognises ethnic minorities (Koopmans and Statham 2000, 19).

These definitions coincide with the three 'traditional' typologies used to study European integration policies shared by both Castles and Hollifield. The first of these is the guest worker model, when temporary residents of another state go to a different country to meet the needs of a shortage in the labour market. These workers often do not have the same protection as the state's own citizens. Most often, these 'guests' continue to stay in the host country long after their work mandate has expired. This differs from the permanent immigration model where immigration is a part of government policy and is 'welcomed'. However, a gap has been observed in this policy. More often than not, labour migration becomes permanent.

The assimilation model, which is practiced in France, consists of a government policy that welcomes permanent immigration. Immigrants are given legal status in the country upon condition that they are willing to assimilate into the dominant culture; that is, to adopt its language, ideologies and way of life. Minority groups are generally not recognised in these states. In nations where assimilation policies are adopted, the *jus soli*

system applies, where citizenship is given to those who are born in the nation's territory. The *jus sanguinis* system is one where citizenship is awarded based on blood ties and is acquired by birth. As a result, a form of hierarchy in citizenship prevails, and not all residents are treated equally. This system is most often found in countries, such as Germany and South Korea, where national and ethnic pride results in the government's reluctance to give residential status or citizenship to 'foreigners' and preference is given to those of the same ethnic origin.

The third model, the ethnic minorities' model, used in the United Kingdom, recognises the immigrants' ethnic origins. Unlike in France, minority groups are recognised and are encouraged to maintain their cultural heritage as long as they are willing to adapt to the host country's main ideologies and social structure, so as not to disrupt its equilibrium. Immigrants are permanent and defined in terms of their ethnic origin, and communities are formed either by ethnic origin or religion. In this model, regardless of the fact that one was born in the country, complete assimilation into mainstream society is not expected.

### Refugee Policies

The assumption that countries are organized as nation-states is said to be the basis for understanding refugee policies and the global norm for political organizations. Nation-states have the right to self-determination, "the right to demand the means to preserve, protect, and foster their peoplehood, their culture, their way of life, and their homeland" (Keely 1996, 1046). States may produce refugees due to the presence of more than one nation, the population may disagree with the economic structure of the nation, or there may be an implosion of the state due to a lack of resources (Keely 1996, 1046). In

addition, people forced to leave their own country due to racial, ethnic, religious, or political reasons may be under the protection of international treaties.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) produced the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and extended Protocol (1967), to which many nations are signatory. It defines refugees as “individuals who, owing to ‘well founded fear of persecution’ for reasons of political opinion, race, religion nationality or membership in a particular social group are outside their country of nationality and are unable to return to it” (Gibney 2004, 60). This generally results in broken trust and failed protection between an individual and the government to which citizenship he or she possesses. Asylum seekers are refugees who are already in the country where they seek claim.

Asylum provides protection to those who are escaping desperate economic or life-threatening situations in their own country: “[a]ll Western states have implemented over the last three decades a remarkable array of restrictive measures” (Gibney 2004, 2). Since industrialised Western nations have already spent much money and resources for asylum seekers, the desired outcome is to limit the arrival of refugees into their country and more particularly, to discourage permanent settlement. The UNHCR recommends that in order to maintain a certain international equilibrium, the preferred solution is to repatriate refugees whenever possible. However, in most cases, this is not reality, and international refugees tend to resettle permanently in the countries where they seek asylum.

Although in principle, asylum is supported, in reality, states prefer not to have refugees. A large influx of refugees may be a cause for concern for a nation’s national security and affect the social dynamics in the country, and even possibly call into question its national identity. Re-examination of immigration and other social policies

would be required in order to accommodate or deter refugees, in addition to allocating resources. Nations are limited in their willingness to accommodate ‘non-citizens’, as most nations work towards the protection of the nation and their own citizens.

### South Korean Immigration and Refugee Policy

As a country that has traditionally sent migrant workers to other nations, South Korea’s immigration policies are still in the early stages of development. The country’s economic success and change in status from a developing to an industrial nation has created a demand for migrant workers to fill the shortage of labourers in the low-level jobs in the South. As a result, the ROK has experienced the arrival of a large number of immigrants in the last few decades. In order to understand the country’s immigration policies better, one must also take a look at its emigration policies and, particularly, the evolution of the South Korean government’s policies towards the overseas Koreans, since all are connected to its emigration policy. Thus, Korean migration issues may be divided into “overseas Korean issues” (emigration) and foreign immigration to Korea.

### *Korean Overseas Issues*

South Korea has had a policy of sending its citizens abroad as migrant workers that dates as far back as 150 years. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, Koreans were sent to work as labourers on plantations in the US, Mexico and Cuba. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> C, South Koreans were sent abroad through overseas adoptions to Europe and the US. More recently, affluent South Koreans sent their children to English-speaking countries for advanced education and to improve their language skills. There is an estimate of over 6 million overseas South Koreans (Lee 2005, 1). About 2.1 million reside in the United

States, the second largest Korean population after China, which has about 2.5 million overseas Koreans. The Korean population in China is not the result of Korea's emigration policy, but of a 'natural' form of migration; in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, large numbers settled in Manchuria, the north-eastern part of China, bordering the northern part of the Korean peninsula. This migrant population sought to escape Korean political instability of the *Joseon* Dynasty and later to escape Japanese occupation. The region was eventually the base for national independence movements against Japan (Lee 2003, 3). The majority of Koreans can be found in the Korean Autonomous Prefecture of *Yanbian*, in the Chinese province of *Jilin*, which borders North Korea and Russia.

From the establishment of the ROK in 1945, to the mid-1990s, immigration policy has been put on the back burner in Korea. This was mainly because the government had more 'pressing' matters to tend to, such as nation-building. Between 1945 and 1960, there was a preoccupation to rebuild a nation, which had been divided and destroyed by war. Social, economic and political stability were the government's main concern, as well as national security matters, which concerned threats from North Korea; resources were limited, and social stability was of primary concern.

As part of a globalisation policy to recognise the contributions of overseas Koreans to the country, the South Korean government passed the "Overseas Korean Foundation Bill" in March 1997 (Lee 2005, 9). The definition of an overseas Korean in this bill changed from "a person that is of ethnic Korean origin, regardless of his or her nationality, who is currently living in a foreign country" (Lee 2005, 12), to "a person of ethnic Korean origin who has obtained the citizenship of a country other than South Korean" (Lee 2005, 11). However, the final definition was later modified to exclude some ethnic Korean groups, such as the descendants of migrants to the USSR, China and

Japan who had left over 50 years ago and who make up 11% of the population (Lee 2005, 12). Presently, the Ministry of Justice defines overseas Koreans as, “a person who either had Korean citizenship in the past or who was the direct relative of a foreign national that had been designated by the president” (including adopted Koreans) (Lee 2005, 12). Other policies adopted to protect the interests of Koreans abroad have been criticised for excluding the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Koreans of whom many have assimilated into their local environment, which are used for the purpose of promoting assimilation into Korean culture rather than the acculturation of overseas Koreans.

#### *Foreign Migration in South Korea*

As a newly receiving country, South Korea’s immigration policies are still in the early developmental stages, which are under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Justice (Seol and Skrentny 2004, 494 in Cornelius et al.). International exposure as a result of a number of international events held in South Korea, such as the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul and the World Cup Soccer Games in 2002, as well as its reputation as one of the four rising economic dragons, has made the country an attractive destination for migrant workers. In 2004, there was an estimated 751 000 foreigners in South Korea, among whom 210 000 were illegal (Lee 2003, 10). Foreigners in South Korea may be categorised as migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, and tourists and other foreigners.

#### *Migrant Workers*

In the early 1990s, foreign workers entered South Korea to meet labour demands in the manufacturing, textiles, and agriculture sectors. These workers arrived under the

auspices of the industrial training program established by the South Korean government in 1993, allowing for the entrance of up to 20 000 foreign unskilled labourers into the country to partake in the trainee program. This program provides one year of training and a 2-year work permit (Lee 2003, 6). Conditions to partake in this program require that one must be 18-35, have no criminal record and come from one of the 14 countries with which the government has an agreement. The majority of migrant workers are nationals from China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. Although they arrive in South Korea as “trainees”, these migrants are not given any particular training. In reality, they are used to fill the labour demands in the dull, dangerous and dirty jobs that the skilled South Korean nationals refuse to do. Similar to Germany’s guest worker laws, the South Korean government does not provide any long-term permits. This is based on the principle that the purpose of migrant workers is to complement the economy and not to settle in the country.

Foreign workers in South Korea have a history of having been stigmatised by discrimination and social prejudices. They are found to work much longer hours than the average South Korean citizens in poor working conditions (Lee 2005, 19). Many labourers choose to become illegal workers to double the earnings they would receive under the trainee program. However, illegal workers’ conditions are subject to violations of human rights and labour laws. Due to their illegal status, workers are not entitled to health benefits, nor are they likely to receive much government protection. Many employees do not honour the 1994 bill initiated by the Citizens’ Coalition for Economic Justice, which requires employers to provide financial compensation to illegal workers for on- the- job injuries (Lee 2005, 20).

In 2003, the South Korean government passed a work permit law allowing for 227 000 illegal workers to receive legal status. However, in order to be eligible for such ‘luxury’, one must have lived in South Korea for no more than four years as of March 2003 and be currently working in one of the six areas of manufacturing: construction, service, agriculture, livestock, farming and fishery (Lee 2003, 4). This law was passed in response to protests from migrant workers in Seoul and as a means to rectify the number of illegal workers in South Korea which has risen from 68 000 in 1992 to over 300 000 in 2003 (Lee 2005, 21).

### *Refugees and Asylum Seekers*

South Korea has been a signatory of the United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees and its protocol since December 1992 (UNHCR 2006), but has no internal or national refugee law, and little public awareness or support is given to refugees and is restrictive towards ‘foreign’ asylum seekers (those who are not from North Korea<sup>1</sup>). Asylum seekers without proper papers are not recognised by the government and are sent to the UNHCR office for temporary papers. Requests for asylum are subsequently considered on a case by case basis, which is processed through the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The UNHCR declared that South Korea ranks among the lowest in the world in admitting asylum seekers (Lee 2003, 23).

In 1994, the ROK amended its laws, allowing individuals to file for asylum for reasons of political or religious grounds once they have arrived in South Korea. Among the 50 requests received between 1994 and 1999, all were rejected (Lee 2003, 23). In February 2002, in accordance to the UNHCR, the South Korean government granted

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<sup>1</sup> Since the South Korean constitution recognises North Koreans as its own citizens, they are not considered as asylum seekers, according to the South Korean government.

status to its first refugee - an Eritrean man. The South Korean government argues that one of the problems in granting asylum is that during the interview process, many have expressed the intention to settle in another country once they have been accepted. One reason for refugee settlement in a third country is due to the lack of programs that accommodate refugees. The Eritrean man later settled in Italy because he could not obtain health insurance coverage for his pregnant wife in South Korea (Lee 2005, 8). Since then, of the 181 requests made in 2003, 14 were granted refugee status (Lee 2003, 24). However, even if the laws permit refugees to enter, they do not necessarily offer additional assistance with settling into their new environment.

Because the South Korean Constitution underlines the fact that North Koreans are citizens of the Republic of Korea, North Korean asylum seekers are not required to go through the formal application procedures that refugees of other ethnic origins must follow. They are, in principle, entitled to the same legal protection as South Koreans (Son 1999, 8). Once the North Korean asylum seekers arrive in South Korea, they are “interviewed” by the South Korean government to determine whether they are indeed North Koreans<sup>2</sup> and are genuine refugees, as opposed to North Korean government spies. Then, they are escorted to *Hanawon*, the isolated government education facility where they are required to stay for three months for “social and cultural adjustment” (MOU 2005a, 5). During their stay, North Koreans are given lessons on food, culture, and the South Korean dialect, and must stay for the duration of their “training”. Once they “graduate” from the program, the North Koreans are “released” into mainstream South

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<sup>2</sup> There have been reported cases where Chinese-Koreans pose as North Korean asylum seekers, so that they can live in South Korea (in addition to benefitting from government subsidies which are given to North Koreans). This occurrence has developed mainly because Chinese-Koreans are considered ‘foreigners’ and are ineligible for applying for work and student visas the South Korean government offers to ‘Overseas’ Koreans, which gives them access to much of the same benefits as Korean citizens living in the ROK.

Korean society. These programs are designed for the purpose of facilitating the integration process of North Korean asylum seekers; however, many asylum seekers have said that because “[t]he programs in *Hanawon* focus more on South Korean culture and capitalist systems rather than teaching practical skills such as how to make a living in South Korea” (Na 2004), they experience much hardship in integrating into South Korean society. These policies are examined in more detail in chapter 5.

### *Tourists and Other Foreigners*

Many of the illegal workers found in Korea have arrived with tourist visas or visiting permits and have stayed beyond the expiration of their visa. A number of them eventually marry local South Koreans and try to settle in the country. Past laws have granted residency and citizenship only to foreign women who married South Korean men. Foreign men who married South Korean women were granted a two-year permit to stay in South Korea, after which they could apply for citizenship (Lee 2003, 20). Often the children of these unions were considered foreigners, as their father was not South Korean. This policy stems from South Korea’s patriarchal society structure, which believes that a woman marries into her husband’s family.

South Korea’s underdeveloped immigration and refugee policies have been based on its government’s primordial belief that the Korean nation has been created by a homogeneous ethnic community of Koreans from either side of the DMZ and supported by a shared history and culture. This importance is further highlighted in its programs and policies developed specifically for *saetomin* integration, who are often referred to as ‘long-lost siblings’ and have privileges which are not offered to any other immigrant or

refugee in South Korea. While these programs for integration are based on the idea that the *saetomin* are no different from regular South Koreans, as mentioned by Bonifazi and Strozzi, it may also create more awareness of the ‘Other’, thus establishing an invisible barrier between the *saetomin* and its host society. The pre-existing ethnic ties are insufficient in meriting successful integration.

With reference to Anderson’s concept of the nation, one may apply it to the continued belief of traditional South Korean nationalists. They maintain strong convictions that there exists only one Korean nation on the peninsula, regardless of political division. Korean nationalists pushing for unification who believe that there is only one Korean nation that embraces both North and South Korea, are holding onto, upon escape from the North, the “imagined” Korean nation. As the years go by and as it becomes more evident that the differences of Korean culture are widening, one must examine the indicators for such faction. Evidence of this is demonstrated through the various accounts of North Korean asylum seekers who have sought refuge in South Korea.

## Chapter II- History, Division, Identity - Korean Nationalism

In order to obtain a clear idea of Korean nationalism, it is essential to understand the origins and conditions under which it developed. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a background on the formation of Korean nationalism. It also proposes to show that despite being a continuously changing process, the fundamental belief of Korean ethnic homogeneity has remained even after the division of the Korean peninsula and is a conviction shared by both North and South Korea. Although the main focus of this thesis is to examine the changing views of the Korean nation within South Korea, it would not be complete without examining the myth of *Dangun*; both Korean governments often refer to this when they speak about the Korean nation, and it is the symbol on which unification is based. This chapter introduces the emergence of the South Korean ‘Self’ in terms of the North Korean ‘Other’ and considers how the former has adopted the role of the older sibling who takes care of the younger, weaker one. Historically, Korean national identity has been used as a form of self-preservation and a means of protection from external threats of colonisation and Western imperialism.

The origins of the imagined Korean<sup>1</sup> nation is said to date back to the year of *Dangun*’s birth in 2333 BC, the mythical figure who is often referred to as the founder of the Korean nation<sup>2</sup>. Throughout history, Korea’s national consciousness has been defined based on the belief of its foundations of a “pure Korean race”, a unified state and a unique indigenous culture that sets it apart from those of Japan and China (Pai 2000, 2). Korean history has directed its nationalist philosophy with great importance placed on kinship

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<sup>1</sup> Until specified otherwise, the term “Korea” and “Korean” shall refer to the Korean peninsula as a whole, since references are made to a period prior to the creation of a North and South Korea and the general history of the Korean nation is accepted by both Koreas.

<sup>2</sup> The myth of *Dangun*, the progenitor of the Korean people, is an important one for Koreans, as it has often been used by both the North and South Korean governments in supporting their arguments for reunification.

and blood ties, which have been reinforced with the strong presence of Confucian values both within the Korean government and society as a whole. However, over the course of history, when changes in Korean society have emerged, so have the forms of nationalism used to best describe Korean identity.

Scholars of Korean Studies have varying views on the origins of Korean nationalism. Some believe that it began in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> C, while others mark the time from Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 as the moment of modern Korean nationalism. Despite these differences in analyses, there are however, some general observations of Korean nationalism upon which scholars agree: the Korean resistance against foreign invasion gave rise to modern nationalism, leading it to become a Hermit Kingdom and to adopt a policy against all things foreign; its realization of the need for rapid modernization and a national consciousness and identity, as well as Japanese annexation was the catalyst for a full-fledged Korean nationalist movement (Yang 1999, 131).

#### The late *Joseon* Dynasty (1392-1910)

The late *Joseon* Dynasty was the last Korean kingdom before it was annexed by the Japanese. In the latter years of the period, one can see the emergence of modern Korean nationalism. It is described as a period consisting of a high level of negativism: one that is anti-foreign, anti-Western, anti-Japanese, anti-Christian, and anti-colonial (Yang 1987, 465), of which its goal was to maintain Korean traditional order and to expel foreigners from Korean soil. The development of a Korean national consciousness was hindered by the strong influence of the Chinese Sung dynasty's neo-Confucian teachings on the Korean ruling elite. These teachings included the study of Confucian classics,

Chinese poetry and writing, literature, philosophy, politics and social thought. It also required maintaining a strict hierarchy within society and in all other aspects of the peoples' daily lives, such as family, government and, in general, social interaction. Ethnic solidarity was the only real connection that the elite had with the masses during this period, characterized by a strict hierarchical structure and difference in lifestyle created an artificial barrier between the peoples.

A division among the elites was present in the interpretation of Korean nationalism. They were separated between those who wished to preserve Korean traditions and those who wished to encompass liberal ideas of the West. This division was more evident between the elite and the masses rather than between the elites themselves, where it was the elite class with desires to adopt more foreign ideas and the masses who wished to maintain tradition. The masses continued to wear traditional Korean clothes, used Hangeul rather than other foreign languages, such as Chinese, observed Shaman practices with Buddhist, Confucian, Christian ceremonies and enjoyed Korean sports, plays and music. It is said that “[t]he [*Joseon*] Dynasty’s ruling elites and literati often despised, ridiculed and even suppressed the “ignorant” masses for such preferences and practices. In the end, however, the masses’ unflinching nativistic resilience preserved the Korean national and ethnic identity” (Yang 1999, 94). One of the reasons for this is that the elite may have felt threatened by an increasingly educated and assertive population, thus reducing their control and power over the people.

#### Japanese Annexation (1910-1945)

The fall of the *Joseon* Dynasty and Japanese colonization were the two factors that led to an active Korean independence movement and nationalist consciousness.

The absence of a Korean autonomous state and the threat to their identity and culture led to the collaboration of Koreans "...regardless of their social backgrounds... The forcible loss of the Korean statehood reawakened a new sense of identity and solidarity among the people about the notion of nationhood and nationality" (Yang 1987, 466).

There was a division between radical and moderate nationalists, who debated how Korean identity should be defined and how independence should be achieved. Moderate nationalists were known as the cultural movement, who believed in the gradual process of independence through education and economic development (Robinson 1988, 6). The "radicals" were intrigued by socialist revolutionary thought, followed the works of Marxist-Leninist ideology and applied it to Korea.

According to Robinson, intellectuals are said to assume the responsibility of defining the nation and attaching symbolic value to it. They are at the heart of spreading national consciousness through education and literacy movements. They define the political agenda and create programs for achieving their goals (Robinson 1988, 10). Korean intellectuals wished to revive Korean traditions and historic symbols to validate their national identity and believed that Koreans would be ready for independence, once the masses had acquired a modern identity and values. This was based on the notion of a full understanding of history and culture and on the idea that changing values could adjust behaviour. Despite these divisions, Koreans put aside their ideological differences to unite in their goal of developing a collective sentiment for independence.

Japan's annexation of Korea ended on August 15, 1945, as a consequence of its defeat in the Second World War. Although nationalist movements did bring together Koreans in a form of solidarity, the cause was not strong enough to create a unified

Korean identity. While the concept of nation and national identity are most commonly found in post-colonial countries, where social groups seeking power use their mission to “preserve” traditional national identity, “[t]he end of colonial rule did not lessen but rather intensified contention over nation and national identity, this time between North and the South, both of which claimed to be the legitimate Korean nation” (Shin 1999, 149).

### Nationalism after Division

On August 15, 1945, the day that Korea was liberated from Japanese rule, Koreans believed that they had regained control over their own destiny. However, Koreans had politically and ideologically contrasting visions about the development of the nation, as during the years of colonialism. This faction among the Korean people was further deepened by the presence of American and Soviet armed forces on the peninsula, each respectively supporting Democratisation and Communism.

The United States felt it necessary to fight Communism on the Korean peninsula, while the Soviet Union sought Korea for strategic interest. However, the latter’s role was more as a guide for the northern Koreans in land distribution, labour reform and social equality. In the South, the United States distrustful of the Korean People’s Republic, an administration that the Koreans had organised themselves, helped form the Korean Democratic Party, on September 16, 1945. This group consisted of a group of wealthy landlords and businessmen (Eckert et al. 1990, 338). In 1948, at the request of the American government, the United Nations granted permission for supervised general elections in the southern part of Korea. Regardless of protests by the Korean people, the elections proceeded as scheduled. On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea was

established, with Rhee Syngman, an American-educated conservative with full support of the U.S. government, as its first president. In response to the events in the South, the North held elections 10 days later, electing Kim Il Sung as premier and establishing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, declaring itself as the only legitimate government on the peninsula. Under the auspices of foreign powers, Korea established two separate interim governments which were to be a temporary presence until a more permanent solution could be agreed upon.

On June 25, 1950, in an attempt to resolve the 'Korean problem,' the North invaded the South, offsetting a three-year civil war. Events in the ROK had set favourable conditions for war. In June 1950, southern leftist guerrillas on *Jeju* Island and in the South *Jeolla* province (Eckert et al. 1990, 344) led protests, which resulted in bloodshed. In addition, Rhee expressed his desire for reunification by force. The Korean War resulted in an estimated total of \$2 billion in property loss, 5 million refugees and 3 million people dead or missing (Oberdorfer 1997, 10). The War ended with an Armistice Agreement in 1953. It left a legacy of fear and insecurity (Eckert et al. 1990, 346) and hardened antipathy for one another, shattering a 1300 year-old history of unity.

### North Korean Nationalism

North Korea's national identity is based on the *Juche* ideology, which translates into "self-reliance" or "self-sufficiency", and constitutes a Korean adaptation of Marxist-Leninism. As with all forms of national identity, it is flexible and changes in accordance with historical events. The term *Juche* was first used in the 1920s to express anti-Japanese sentiment and protest against Korean politicians who failed to maintain Korean sovereignty. It is based on the principle of rejecting foreign dependence and of supporting

the creation of a truly independent Korean nation. Kim Il Sung, the founder of *Juche* ideology and North Korea's leader, believed that the weakness of Korean nationalism was caused by Confucianism. Consequently, he eliminated the use of all Chinese characters and foreign words from the Korean language. He also rewrote history to glorify the nationalistic endeavours of the Korean forefathers. His goal was to create a "pure" Korean culture based on strong anti-foreign sentiment. "*Juche* helped the regime gain emotional support from the masses, since the doctrine not only rejected foreign domination but upheld whatever was considered to be 'Korean'" (Eckert et al. 1990, 506-507). Kim's definition of a nation is a derivative of one given by Stalin: "a nation is a stable human group historically constituted on the basis of community of blood-lineage, language, territory, culture,... Our nation is a unitary nation [which has] so long a history of five thousand years" (Eckert et al. 1990, 517). In North Korea, in an attempt to preserve the purity of his idea of Korean national identity, Kim Il Sung recreated the "Hermit Kingdom" of the late *Joseon* period – the era prior to Korean annexation. South Korea's economic growth in the 1970s was criticized for its collaboration with American imperialists, whom he declared "...saturated the people with decadence and stripped off the soul and national character from the southern half of the fatherland" (Eckert et al. 1990, 557).

In the 1960s, *Juche* was used as a geo-political strategy. By limiting its dependence on China and the Soviet Union for economic assistance, North Korea avoided involvement in the Sino-Soviet conflict, maintaining peaceful relations with its neighbours. It was in the 1960s and 1970s that *Juche* officially became a source of North Korean nationalism. At this point, it had achieved a certain amount of stability, and Kim Il Sung's charismatic leadership was steadily rising. *Juche* was used as a tool to show that

the North was ideologically superior to the South. By convincing North Koreans of their superiority over the South, Kim Il Sung was also able to legitimize his power. *Juche* began as a support for anti-foreignism. It later developed its national objectives into three main elements: political sovereignty, economic self-sufficiency, and military defence (Park 1998, 36). Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism was the key for support of *Juche* by the guerrillas in Manchuria, who belonged to the North Korean elite. Its ultimate goal is freedom from outside pressure achieved through unconditional state loyalty by the people.

### South Korean Nationalism

#### *Rhee Syngman (1948-1960)*

Rhee was a big contributor to the Korean independence movement during the Japanese occupation. His book, *The Spirit of Independence*, written while imprisoned, has been referred to as the “political Bible of the Korean people” (Rhee 2001, 13). It was intended to encourage the people to work to preserve the nation and its independence. However, since it was published in the U.S., it did not reach the Korean masses. Instead, the overseas Koreans followed his call for a Korean independence movement. Rhee believed in peaceful means of nation-building. Unfortunately, he did not follow his own doctrine while in office. As a president, he is known for his autocratic and anti-Communist administration which, under his orders, included many deaths and acts of violence.

In 1948, under supervised elections by the United Nations forces, Rhee Syngman was elected as the first president of the ROK. Rhee’s leadership is comparable to the late *Joseon* monarch (Eckert et al. 1990, 348) and “seems to have shared with all Korean

kings a conception of sovereignty as something more properly invested in a head of state than in a popular electorate or its representative” (Eckert et al. 1990, 348).

The National Security Law (NSL), otherwise known as the “anti-Communist law,” was passed by the National Assembly in 1948 as a measure to suppress opposition. It is vague, yet powerful. It can be used at one’s own discretion for the prohibition of any restriction of freedom of speech, press, assembly, association “except as specified by law” (Eckert et al. 1990, 349). This set of laws, which allows the South Korean government to arrest anyone believed to be a part of Communist activity or to be a North Korean sympathizer, is in effect to this day.

Countless arrests and abuse of the NSL were made in order to pass the amendment to allow Rhee a third term. It was during his third term in office and following the April Revolution in 1960, that Syngman Rhee resigned as president to live in exile in Hawaii. His resignation was offset by the April Revolution, when on April 19, 1960, 30 000 university and high school students protested at the presidential palace during Rhee’s leadership (Eckert et al. 1990, 355). The country was under martial law, and there were arrests and shootings of peaceful protesters. On April 25, there was support from the urban elite of 300 university professors. In addition, the U.S. call for democratization and condemnation of repression, and General Song Yo-ch’an’s refusal to shoot demonstrators by decree of martial law (Eckert et al. 1990, 355), all contributed to Rhee’s resignation.

#### *Park Chung Hee (1961-1979)*

Regardless of their differences in ideology, North Korea’s Kim Il Sung and

South Korea's Park Chung Hee possess similar views about Korean nationalism. In recognition of their shared history and ethnicity divided by ideology, North and South Korea have become each other's antithesis of their desires for a unified Korean peninsula.

As Kim had denounced South Korea in defiance of the true Korean identity, Park reciprocated. However, Park underlined the differences in political ideology to emphasize his point. He stated that as a political community, North Koreans were not part of the same nation: "the legitimate national identity belongs to us in the Republic of Korea..." we have a historic mission of preserving and enhancing this legitimate national identity" (Shin 1999, 152). Park continued, in his declaration, that the North were "subjected to a fanatic personality cult" and "forced to call their own fathers 'comrades', which went against Korean tradition of filial piety" (Shin 1999, 152) Park Chung Hee, South Korea's leader from 1961 until his assassination in 1979, justified his illegally prolonged authority as South Korea's president in the name of "national renaissance" and for the "modernization of the fatherland" (Shin 1999, 152). Emphasis was put on national consciousness based on Park's *yusin* reform, which emphasized anti-Communism.

#### Contemporary Korean nationalism – 'Sunshine Policy', globalisation and anti-Americanism

Following Park Chung Hee's regime, his successors continued to govern the country following his anti-Communist Cold War policies towards North Korea, until 1993, when changes towards democratization began in South Korea. That year, President Kim Young Sam, the first civilian president elected after 30 years of military rule, was determined to have a more 'liberal' policy towards North Korea. It was one of

cooperation and reconciliation. His successor, Kim Dae Jung followed with the implementation of his Sunshine Policy.

After his inauguration as president in 1998, Kim Dae Jung expressed his intentions to “actively pursue reconciliation and cooperation” (Cumings 2005, 510), and rejected the notion of “unification by absorption”. He increased food aid to North Korea, reduced restrictions of ROK investments in the North and called for the US to lift its economic embargo on the DPRK. This was a new approach to ROK policy with regards to the North. Instead of the call for reunification, priority was put on the peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas, in preparation for eventual reunification through democratic means. He saw the importance of recognizing North Korea’s unique form of regionalism. The second phase of reunification would involve the creation of a Korean federal government with two autonomous regional governments, followed by centralization.

There are three main principles to be followed under the Sunshine Policy: no tolerance of armed provocations by the North, South Korea should not try to absorb the North and the ROK should actively seek for cooperation and reconciliation with the DPRK. The activities planned for inter-Korean cooperation are: economic expansion between the North and South, by allowing for more investments, tourism, and humanitarian exchange by way of family reunions, humanitarian assistance and the encouragement of international cooperation with North Korea.

Korean pan-nationalism is seen as the ROK’s vision of nationalism which includes both North and South Korea. This is part of Korea’s changing view of the nation and follows Kim Dae Jung’s Sunshine Policy. In addition, it accompanies an increasing anti-American sentiment. However, this new development in South Korean nationalism is

not without opposition. It has created a form of South-South conflict. Jiyul Kim describes it as a separation between the younger generation of South Koreans who favour 'open' northern policies such as the 'Sunshine', who have no memory or experiences of the Korean War, and the older generation, who have had some direct effect of the War, many of whom harbour great anti-communist and anti-North Korean feelings. While these divisions are present within the ROK population, there is also conflict within the Korean government – particularly between the Conservatives and the Progressives. The Conservatives believe that democratisation of North Korea is the only way to achieve reunification. The Progressives, which are composed of labour groups, intellectuals, student groups, are said to give priority to peace and *minjok* (Korean nationalism) as a means for reunification. They see nationalism as more important than ideology. A new phase in Korean nationalism has arrived. Although Korean nationalism has always been solidified as a reaction to outside forces, Koreans are gradually becoming more conscious of asserting their national pride in the absence of an external catalyst.

Korean nationalism is a changing process constructed in response to the threat of the "Other". During the *Joseon* Period, Western Imperialism and Japanese colonisation were the catalyst for asserting Korean nationalism. The common goal of preserving Korean language, culture and history were the basis for defending it against external threats. Today, the idea of an imagined Korean nation constructed prior to the Division still remains, as do the reasons for unification. Both North and South Korea perceive each other's political ideologies as a threat to the Korean nation. North Korea views the presence of American troops in the peninsula as a menace, while the South feels that Kim Il Sung's doctrine is a threat to Korean nationalism. The arrival of *saetomin* in South Korea gives evidence to the presence of the Korean "Self" and "Other," which has

emerged as a result of prolonged separation and isolation between the two Koreas. The construction of a *saetomin* nation in the ROK calls for the re-examination of a newly imagined Korean nation.

### **Chapter III – Contending Korean Identities**

On the Korean peninsula, there are conflicting views between the North and South about what constitutes the Korean ‘Self’. It is also assumed that the citizens of each nation share their respective governments’ created image of “Koreanness”. Over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, increasing numbers of North Korean asylum seekers have made their way to the South. Based on the primordialist idea “...that every person carries with him through life ‘attachments’ derived from place of birth, kinship relationships, religion, language, and social practices that are “natural” for him, peoples from the same background” (Hutchison & Smith 2001, 83), these asylum seekers often presume that they will easily adjust to life in South Korea. However, many suffer difficulties in adjusting to their new lives. They often feel that they are outsiders amongst their own and that that they shall always have this sense of “otherness”.

Even for those people, particularly in modern societies, who have been removed from their origins or have rejected their childhood identification, such as attachments may remain available in the unconscious to be revived by some appeal that strikes a sympathetic psychic chord (Hutchison & Smith 2001, 83).

As a result, there has been an emergence of a divided Korean nation between North Korean asylum seekers and South Korean ‘nationals’ present within South Korea.

Since its establishment in 1948, the South Korean government has created an identity of ‘Self’ in contrast to the North Korean ‘Other’. In fact, both North and South Korean governments have sought to develop separate national identities based on the same Korean traditions. While ideological differences between the North and South have always existed, the sociological distinctions have come to be established after the Korean War. They were first evident in the 1960s and 1970s during the Park Chung Hee era.

Since then, a growing ideological and sociological divergence between the DPRK and the ROK has occurred resulting from South Korea's rapidly developing open economy and North Korea's lack of basic supplies to sustain its population. Despite the contrast between the two nations and the fact that both governing parties on either side of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel claim that there is no real difference between them, there are several indicators that suggest otherwise.

In this chapter, the construction of South Korean national identity is studied through three elements: the news media, elementary school textbooks and national symbols, in which the latter includes the study of national exhibits and the celebration of Korean Liberation Day<sup>1</sup>. The reason for choosing these particular indicators is that the media are often used by the South Korean government (Grinker 1998, xii) to control or at least influence the thoughts and actions of its citizens based on the type of society it wishes to create. School curriculum, which is developed under the guidelines of the government, has been viewed by the South Korean government as a medium to influence young minds for creating 'good citizens', which includes sharing its views on North Korea and its people. The manner in which a government chooses to present a particular national symbol, as well as its selection, provides an underlying message of how the state wishes its citizens to identify themselves, and this manifests itself in school textbooks.

In this chapter, we examine the way in which South Koreans identify themselves through national symbols, as influenced by their perception of North Koreans. The purpose here is to demonstrate that the South Korean government has been developing a national identity in reaction to its North Korean 'Other'. In doing so, it seeks to influence its citizens' opinion of North Korea and its people through the media, education and

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<sup>1</sup> Liberation Day is sometimes referred to as Independence Day, since it is the celebration of Korea's Independence from Japanese colonial rule.

national symbols. Since national identity is said to be dependent on the existence of its opposition (Grinker 1998, 24), South Korean national identity is constructed through difference (Hall in Chung 2004, 108). Significant changes in government often result in efforts for societal changes. On the social level, the media, education and national symbols have generally been a representation of the official national identity in South Korea (Chung 2004, 105). It is through these elements that South Korean identity is examined, beginning with a look at the ROK news media.

### The South Korean News Media

The South Korean press has had a long history of government control and repression (Chang 2004, 117). The South Korean government believed that it had a duty to filter the news that was reaching its citizens in the name of social responsibility and as a measure for national security. Since newspapers have had a profound influence on the consciousness of a society over its decades of authoritarian and military rule, the ROK government has prohibited the printing of stories criticizing it and of any articles supporting the opposition. Censorship was also placed on stories about North Korea until 1993, when South Korea's first civilian government relaxed its control over the news media, thus allowing for a certain degree of freedom of the press in the country.

The South Korean press is said to have two main characteristics: one that is anti-Communist and another that is nationalistic. As a more "progressive" government is in place in South Korea, while the anti-Communist tone of the Korean press may not be as strong, the nationalistic<sup>2</sup> character is still apparent. Although the conservative government censored news that did not conform to their ideology, Roh Mun Hyun's liberal

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<sup>2</sup> The term nationalistic character in this context is meant to be one that is in support of the government's vision of the South Korean nation.

government's efforts restricted the circulation of Korea's major conservative newspapers for criticizing the government of its "lax" policy towards North Korea in implementing of the "Sunshine Policy" and of its lack of effective economic policies.

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the general image of North Korean asylum seekers, as portrayed in the South Korean press. The articles studied are those found in the bi-monthly publications of Korea Focus, a periodical published by the Korea Foundation<sup>3</sup>, for the purpose of providing information to the international community on Korean current events. These publications consist of English translations of articles found in major South Korean daily newspapers and monthly and quarterly journals. Despite the fact that Korea Focus is meant for foreign readers, the articles are, nonetheless, widely available to South Koreans in its original language.

### The South Korean Press

Intellectuals and the government have always been involved in the Korean press. It has been subject to censorship either by the ruling elite or by foreign forces. In the early years of its inception, the Korean press served as a revolutionary tool for resistance against foreign forces from the West, then from its Japanese colonizers. During the formative years of the South Korean government, the United States had a significant influence in determining the content of Korean newspapers until Park Chung Hee became president. Although there have been changes for a freer press in Korea, critics state that "the change in the Korean media scene has not been a fundamental change" (Kim 1994, 9).

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<sup>3</sup> The Korea Foundation was established by the South Korean government in 1997, under the 'Korea Foundation Law'. The Foundations central purpose is to create an interest in Korean Studies amongst foreigners through various programs and international exchanges.

Between 1945 and 1993, free press was virtually non-existent. It was believed that the nation had to rebuild itself above all else even at the cost of freedom of the press, which was perceived as a threat to the fragile South Korean nation. The most significant figure in regulating news media was Park Chung Hee, who expressed his vision for the Korean press in his speech on Newspaper Day in 1966, emphasising the importance of responsible journalism; and declaring that since journalists had an influence on the masses, they should carefully consider the effects their stories would have on Korean society. As a fragile nation, Park declared the need for Koreans to unite to achieve their goal of modernisation and reunification:

In seeking freedom and equality, progress and prosperity, the press should sacrifice its own interests and destiny for those of the nation and, through radical self-criticism of its basic posture, seek a new course of action in order to cope with the historic reality (Park 1966, 100 in Shin, 1970).

In 1987, the Korean press was 'liberalised' when President Roh Tae Woo abolished the Basic Press Law<sup>4</sup> and announced that, "[N]o restriction should be imposed on the press except when national security is at risk" (Lee 1999, 435). This included permission to report about North Korean artists and musicians and increased reporting on political-military relations and activities of dissident organisations.

Since the establishment of the ROK's first civilian government in 1993, the press has enjoyed relative freedom in its reporting of sensitive nature concerning North Korea. Following a liberal government marked by Kim Dae Jung, his successor, Roh Tae Woo,

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<sup>4</sup> The Basic Press Act, 1980: "one of the most restrictive and comprehensive laws in capitalistic societies." Article: 3.2: The press shall perform its public duties by contributing to the formation of democratic public opinions concerning matters of public interest by means of news reports, commentary, and other methods; 3.4: "The press shall not encourage or praise violence and other illegal actions which disrupt public order. (Lee 1999, 435).

has allowed for the emergence of numerous independent dailies and left-leaning news sources. While the South Korean press is more diverse, it is not without restrictions.

The inter-Korean summit that took place in Pyongyang in 2000 highlighted several issues of concern to the South Korean press. While in the past, it was not seen favourably to write about North Korea in a positive light, this meeting raised opposite concerns. In order to honour the principles of the Sunshine Policy, there was concern about being too critical of North Korea in their policies and human rights violations. The North Korean government also exercised its influence over the South Korean media when it ordered a reporter from the *Joong-Ang Ilbo* to be relieved from his coverage of the North-South family reunification for having used offensive language towards the DPRK government. He had described one of the North Koreans partaking in the reunion as a man who had been abducted the word “abducted” was seen as offensive by the North.

The structure of the Korean press today remains the same, but the contents have changed. The media still reflects the government’s stand on certain issues – particularly on North Korea. However, the difference is that opposition to the liberal government is permitted. When the three largest newspapers in Korea do so, the government does not seem to have much support. The present government of Kim Dae Jung, whose policy towards North Korea is a more cooperative approach, was criticized by the press for being a Communist sympathizer and, thus, detrimental to the national security of South Korea. Kim Dae Jung’s visit to North Korea in 2000 was said to be illegal under the National Security Law, which still remains in place.

*The South Korean Media and North Korea*

As with its control over education, the South Korean government has had influence over the stories told in its newspapers and news broadcasts. Although government control subsided in 1987, 'suggestions' and comments made by political leaders still have much influence. Consequently, the North Korean 'Other' portrayed by the South Korean media remains an illustration of the government's policy, which is most often preoccupied with national security concerns. While in the past, this generally meant the North's threat of using nuclear weapons against the South, in recent years, the large numbers of North Korean asylum seekers arriving in South Korea have raised much anxiety.

The North Korean 'Other' is perceived as irrational and underdeveloped, in imminent danger of sudden implosion (Chung 2000, 107-108). They are often reported to use military threat as a bargaining tool for international aid. "The media see North Korea as an essentially 'defunct' nation that is 'unlikely' to survive for very long" (Chung 2000, 108). The newspapers tend to use the tactic of alienation in order to draw attention to the contrast between the abundantly wealthy South and the impoverished North. Images of the South Korean 'Self' emphasise the fact that "South Korea is an 'economically rich' and 'well-developed' country" (Chung 2000, 110), that has the role of 'rescue' through financial assistance and food relief programmes.

While efforts such as Kim Dae Jung's 'Sunshine Policy' have been adopted to encourage a more peaceful approach towards the North, forty years of anti-Communist 'indoctrination' is difficult to expunge. As a result, it is believed that even progressive South Korean leaders must "claim an anti-Communist position in order to win trust from the South Korean public. [Kim Dae Jung's Sunshine] policy has been criticised for its

supposedly opening up of South Korean society to ideas of communism” (Chung 2000, 113). As a result, the media reports South Korea’s national identity based on anti-Communist ideology and the repudiation of the ‘Other’, which are similar to Park Chung Hee’s policies, rather than focussing on creating an identity independent of its North Korean counterpart.

In recent years, articles in the more conservative newspapers such as the *Chosun Ilbo* have developed a softer tone when referring to North Korean refugees. The articles seem to be more factual than emotional. More sympathy towards the refugees may be perceived as another way of expressing disdain for the North Korean government. The ever-increasing number of refugees from the North represents a failure in the North Korean system, for the fact that North Koreans are no longer leaving for simply ideological reasons, but in search of food and other basic human necessities. However, the same openness does not necessarily apply when reporting on the Northern government. Following the 2000 inter-Korean summit, there was some mixed reaction about the issue. The more liberal press were optimistic about the meeting, while the *Chosun Ilbo* stated: “[r]ather than improving North-South relations, the government’s policy has served only to increase the number of provocations by the North, and if the government fails to make a decisive move, the vicious cycle of incursions will continue” (Snyder 2002, 26). This reaction was shared by the more conservative and sceptical Korean population.

Over the years, South Koreans’ perception of North Korea and reunification has changed. Although part of this is due to the changes in Korean society, there are conflicting views on the issue, which is most evident between the older and younger Korean population. While the older generation, who have experienced first-hand the

atrocities of the Korean War, still carries feelings of distrust and animosity towards North, the younger generation, to whom the Korean War is a distant memory in their nation's history, is more receptive to the idea of cooperation with the North. However, the latter tend to see North Koreans as people from another country, rather than a people belonging to the same group as they. The difference, at present, is that there are sometimes opposing views on the way things should be dealt with although the desired end result is the same. This difference of opinion represents, not only a freer press in South Korea, but the presence of opposition government parties in South Korea.

#### *South Korean Newspapers and North Korean Defectors*

There are two main images of North Korea that these articles highlight: one of South Korea's strength over the North as their duty to help by providing humanitarian assistance, and one of suspicion, where the public is warned to be careful of North Korean defectors, lest they be spies.

The articles on North Korean refugees appear to send the message that while the South Korean government recognizes it as their duty to their northern brethren to provide assistance in their time of need, their arrival in the southern half of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel is not encouraged. As it is shown in the other sections of this chapter, South Korea has a dilemma with regards to North Koreans.

From 1993 to 2006, there were only 9 articles found in the Korea Focus which directly addressed the issue of North Korean refugees or defectors. The first article, originally published on May 24, 1996 in the *Seoul Shinmun*<sup>5</sup>, a traditionally government-funded newspaper, is about the defection of an officer in the North Korean Air Force. The

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<sup>5</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all references made to newspaper articles in this section are those found in *Korea Focus*.

article suggests that since a member of the North Korean elite has defected<sup>6</sup>, it is a sure sign that the North is in a severe state of deterioration and that its collapse is fast approaching. This is suggestive of the idea that South Korea is indeed stronger than the North and the fact that one of their high-ranking Party members chose to defect, in a way, legitimizes South Korea as the true Korean nation<sup>7</sup>.

Legitimacy of the South Korean state is further highlighted in the news coverage of the defection of a member of North Korea's core elite. In 1997, Hwang Jang-yop, number 21 on North Korea's government hierarchy, sought asylum at the South Korean Embassy in Beijing. As one of the architects of North Korea's *Juche* Ideology (Kim 1997, 37), Hwang's defection suggests that the *Juche*, North Korea's guiding ideology of self-reliance, is nothing more than an illusion. In the March 1997 issue of the *Monthly Donghwa*, an article written by then Professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, states that Hwang's defection is an affirmation that North Korea is politically and economically weak and that loyalty is no longer imminent in the DPRK ruling class. It is also further validation of the ROK as the legitimate Korean state, for Hwang Jang-yop expressed that his motivation for seeking asylum in South Korea was to "...devote the rest of his life to preventing war and promoting reconciliation and unification" (Kim 1997, 37-38). The fact that the creator of the basis of North Korea's legitimacy no longer believes in it, nor the government that implements it, was perceived as a symbol of the strength of the ROK over the DPRK— an image that has been promoted by the southern government since its establishment.

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<sup>6</sup> Fighter pilots are considered members of the elite in North Korea, who have access to special privileges that the general population does not.

<sup>7</sup> Since 1948, when the DPRK and the ROK were established, both countries have had a rivalry about which is the legitimate Korean state. The question of legitimacy is one of the main driving forces of the competition between North and South Korea. This issue is also mentioned in Social Studies primary school textbooks.

The articles from the late 1990s focussed on the need to send humanitarian aid to North Korea. In an editorial from the *Chosun Ilbo*, dated May 7, 1996 (Korea Focus 1996 125), citizens and civil society are encouraged to provide assistance to the DPRK and to speak out against the Human Rights violations in the North. Since the ROK government must “keep silent on certain matters for the sake of diplomacy” (Korea Focus 1996, 125), it calls upon the duty of South Korean citizens to help their northern brethren. The desire for helping North Koreans is encouraged. In another editorial found in the June 12, 1996 issue of the *Dong-a Ilbo*, on the announcement of South Korea’s participation in the United Nations World Food Program to help the starving DPRK citizens, there is a sense of reluctance for the ROK’s involvement. It stipulates that South Korea’s contribution is more ‘symbolic’ than anything and that it is unavoidable for them to get involved, as not helping their brethren would be ‘sinful’ and go against their moral obligation to provide aid (Korea Focus 1996, 119). The sense of obligation originates from the belief that Korea will be unified one day and that providing humanitarian assistance is a contribution to the cause. In the latter article, aid is given more out of duty rather than true desire. One of the reasons for this is that security matters are still of great concern when dealing with North Korea.

While North Koreans are recognized by the ROK as ‘brothers’ in need and, thus, feel the duty to provide basic aid, politically, the rationale advocates exercising caution when dealing with North Korean refugees; as the war is still not over, there is still a high probability of espionage. In 1997, Hwang, the defector who had once been a member of North Korea’s elite, confirmed that since the mid-1980s, there have been 50 000 spies and collaborators working in South Korea (Korea Focus 1996, 119). In an article from the *Dong-a Ilbo* from December 2004, written by the former Ambassador from the South

Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it states, “[t]he possibility that North Korean defectors in the South may be conducting espionage for the Pyongyang regime, which most people do not want to believe, seems to be a reality that we must face up to” (Kim 1996, 6). In August of the same year, the *Chosun Ilbo* printed an article, which noted the South Korean government’s concern for organizations dealing with North Korean defectors. They called the attention of NGOs to exercise caution in their activities, since there is a possibility that some North Koreans may be spies. This scenario illustrates the dilemma faced by the South Korean government’s identification with the North. NGOs are encouraged to help North Korean defectors, since they are considered to be members of the South Korean ‘Self’, yet at the same time, precautions are in order in case the belligerent North Korean ‘Other’ makes its presence known.

#### *Synthesis of North Korean Defectors in the South Korean Press*

There are few articles in the Korea Focus about North Korea - in particular, North Korean refugees. Since the periodical is a government-influenced publication, the presence or lack of articles on the subject can be used as an indicator of the ROK government’s stance on the issue. The results suggest that although the South Korean government acknowledges the dilemmas surrounding North Korean refugees, it is reluctant to place too much emphasis on the issue due to its sensitive nature in relation to national security and diplomatic concerns.

Recent reporting of North Korean issues has replaced the Cold War hard-line approach of ardent anti-Communism and suspicion of North Koreans, to a softer one that calls attention to the human side of the matter. While the method of presentation has differed, in both the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, the underlying image of North

Korea has remained same. The Communist regime in the DPRK is still seen as unpleasant. Evidence of this are the defectors of the North's elite, who lived in luxury in Kim Il Sung's Korea; however, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the asylum seekers' arrival from the North is perceived as proof that life in the DPRK has become even more difficult. The message, with respect to the Korean nation, has not changed. North Korea is still a part of the whole Korean nation and must be 'rescued' from Communism. The increasing presence of *saetomin* has reinforced South Korean hegemony, and South Korea sees itself as a 'big brother' and caretaker for the North.

Identification with North Koreans and North Korea, as demonstrated in the South Korean press, is twofold: there is a sentimental connection in which North Koreans are included as part of the South Korean 'Self', and the realpolitik approach, which identifies North Koreans as the untrustworthy 'Other'. Although the ideal scenario would be to have unity among North and South Koreans, it is the label of the 'Other' that most often prevails, reminding people that Korea is still officially at war, and North Korea is its enemy. These conflicting views are present in South Korean textbooks, which are explored in the next section.

### Education

The previous section presented an analysis of how the South Korean government controlled its written news media to influence its citizens' perceptions of North Korea and its people. Regardless of the sentimental argument that North and South Koreans are one in the same due to their common lineage, the construction of the image of the North Korean 'Other' attests to the notion that Koreans living on either side of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel have become alienated from one another.

The purpose of this section is to examine how North Korea and North Koreans are portrayed in South Korean textbooks and to determine any differences there may be in their representation between the texts published over an evolution of time from 1979 to 2006 and to also study how this imagery of North Korea and its habitants transcends in defining South Korean national identity. The South Korean governments' portrayal of the North Korean 'Other' is analyzed through the study of elementary school textbooks. Textbooks used in South Korean public schools are carefully chosen by the Ministry of Education and are closely examined to ensure that the government's desired message is present. Any changes made are considered 'official,' since "all school textbooks are sponsored, edited, selected, and standardized by the Ministry of Education, [and] the views represented in the textbook are sanctioned by the government" (Grinker 1998, 135). The books are generally produced by the Ministry's office of curriculum development (Hyde 1988, 55)<sup>8</sup> or by a publisher approved by the government.

Since education is a most valued element in Korean society and is believed to be a major source of a child's morals, values and beliefs, the Korean government uses education to 'create' their ideal citizens and members of society. Consequently, textbooks and school curricula are often the product of guidelines given by politicians. According to Kwan Chun Lee's research and to the beliefs of some educators, it has often been concluded that what children learn in the classroom in school will most certainly stay with them throughout their adult lives and influence their thoughts and actions as members of society (Hart 2000, 143). What children are taught about North Korea and its

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<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Education is divided into two main offices: the office for planning and management and the office for supervision and curriculum development. In each of the provinces in South Korea and in the major cities of Seoul and Pusan, there is a Board of Education that oversees local school administration. Each Board is under the supervision of the Education Superintendent, who is recommended by the Minister of Education and appointed by the President (Hyde 1988, 55).

people will influence how the former identifies themselves as South Koreans and their sentiments towards North Koreans. These sentiments are most likely to emerge when they encounter North Korean asylum seekers in their own section of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

### Education and Government in South Korea

South Korean education has a highly political history. This is particularly true following the division of the Korean peninsula, when the teaching of anti-Communism could be found in the textbooks of almost every subject taught in schools. Korean presidents have used the education system as a way to strengthen their power and to exercise their control over Korean society. Since it is believed that the education system has a crucial role in maintaining political systems, it is not surprising that politicians would use it to create state loyalty and as a medium to diffuse messages.

In 1948, Rhee Syngman used the education system to suppress the pro-Communist and North Korean sympathizer groups present in the South. In the interest of national security, a form of patriot education was developed, using middle school and high school children to spread “national consciousness”. South Korean youth were taught the essence of Confucian values, with an emphasis on loyalty and patriotism. These teachings were a way for the government to convince its people of the legitimacy of its authority. The central theme of moral education was anti-Communism, which was also found in Social Studies and history texts. Social Studies and Moral Education textbooks “explained democracy as involving a consciousness of order; thus, the duty of citizens of democratic societies was to obey the national laws and rules...” (Seth 2002, 207).

The most prominent example of the use of education to promote government policy is that of the Park Chung Hee era (1961-1979). During this time, the government

used education to “indoctrinate citizens against communism, with an emphasis in North-South axis of political antagonism...” (Seth 2002, 72). This was done through a state established curriculum and textbooks written and published by the state, through which the idea of the North Korean ‘Other’ became more ingrained amongst young South Korean citizens.

Park’s archetype and successor, Chun Doo Hwan, continued the anti-Communist education policy during his presidency in his vigilance against North Korean Communism and his goal to “free young people from ideological contamination” (Seth 2002, 222). It was only in 1987, with the election of South Korea’s first civilian president, that schools were given more autonomy in curriculum modification, as long as it conformed to the ideology of a democratic society. Although anti-Communism was still taught, its teaching methodology was less authoritative. South Korean political indoctrination was carried out with the screening of clips from North Korean films and programs, with added commentary and facts given by the instructor.

Subsequent South Korean governments have gradually reduced the amount of anti-Communist themes in textbooks, with increasing explanations of Liberal Democracy. As the ROK experienced democratization in the 1980s, there was no need for rigorous anti-Communist indoctrination, since it was no longer such a threat. Although one may still find some anti-Communist sentiment in South Korean textbooks, harsh anti-Communist texts from schools were removed in 1997 in accordance with President Kim Dae Jung’s policy to democratize education in South Korea.

South Korea has had a history of using education as a political instrument. Evidence of this is clear during the authoritarian governments of Rhee, Park and Chun, who used education to legitimise their own regime and to increase the influence and

control of the South Korean government over its own society (Seth 2002, 192). In addition, education was established in attempt to maintain state security in Korea. In its recent efforts to promote peaceful unification, the South Korean government has reformed its curriculum by promoting the spirit of a united Korea and by minimising anti-Communist teaching. The following sections on textbook analysis reveal that there is less hostility towards North Korea in the more recent readers, where emphasis is placed on unification based on democratic ideals.

### South Korea Primary School Textbooks

In order to affirm South Korean government legitimacy, its school textbooks included negative images of the North Korean ‘Other’ in order to highlight this claim. The North Korean government is “painted as evil, deceitful, and threatening to children’s well-being...” (Hart 1999, 4), while the South Korean government is described as positive, trustworthy and comforting. Stories in Moral Education texts describe North Koreans who terrorise South Koreans. Images of violence and fear are often linked to North Korean spies. Due to the fact that one does not know if one is dealing with a spy, as a precautionary measure, the message in the school texts is: North Koreans should not be trusted, for they are trained to be deceitful.

Moral Education in South Korea was introduced in 1954 as a subject in primary and middle schools. Its goal was to promote nationalism, anti-Communism and general ethical norms for daily life (Helgesen 1998, 155), and it continues to be taught to the present day. It is an important source of information, since it “reveals the distilled image of the norms and values that the political authorities wish to inculcate in the younger generation” (Helgesen 1998, 158). Social Studies are similar to Moral Education in terms

of the values taught, but focus more on the physical aspects of society such as economy, geography and technology. Both subjects are essential guides to the government's interpretation of North Korea, as they are used by the government to teach the "correct" political attitudes (Helgesen 1998, 174).

### *South Korean Textbooks and the Korean War*

The official outbreak of the Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when North Korean military tanks rumbled down the streets of Seoul, south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel (*Mun Gyo Bu* 1979, 145). This division between the North and South had been made in 1948, when each side established its respective governments. While North Korea states that the War was one of unification and the liberation of South Korea from foreign control, the ROK sees it as an invasion and a tactic to spread communism throughout the peninsula. There is a slight change in explanation for the causes of the Korean War in the textbooks. The less aggressive tone found in the books published in 2004 suggests the South Korean government's modified approach towards North Korea.

The War was a pivotal moment in history when both Korean governments began to openly identify itself in terms of the 'Other'. In South Korea, the Korean War, driven by Communist forces, is described as the evil that caused separation. This is particularly true of the images of North Korea found in South Korean textbooks published in the 1970s. When it mentions the Korean War, the Social Studies book from 1979 refers to it as the 6.25 invasion (i.e. June 25, when the Korean War began). In this section, the Communist Party is mentioned as a reference to the North, but North Koreans are repeatedly referred to as 'them'. This is the first sign of 'humanising' North Koreans instead of just referring to something more abstract like the government, as was done

previously in the text. This mention of ‘them’ begins a pretext for describing the War. It highlights the fact that South Koreans did not expect the beginning of a war. They were completing daily tasks when they heard the sound of military tanks from North Korea in the streets. Following this image of peace, the section ends with a less ‘peaceful’ thought: the fact that it is now clear how evil ‘they’ really are (*Mun Gyo Bu* 1979, 151). Here, the word, ‘evil,’ is actually used to describe North Koreans. It implies that they are deceitful for having begun a war during a time of peace that was agreed to by both Korean governments<sup>9</sup>. This portrayal of deceitful North Koreans is found in the Moral Education text that is examined in the following section.

The 2004 Social Studies textbook uses a more neutral term in referring to the incident of June 25, 1950 by describing it as the Korean War, instead of an ‘invasion’. Credit is given to the United Nations and American military for their assistance in forcing the North Korean troops back above the demarcation line. It explains the destruction caused by war and how after 50 years, the emotional wounds caused by the War have yet to be healed. On this note, the text emphasizes the need for peaceful unification, so that the healing process may begin. This image of North Koreans in relation to unification seems to imply a ‘oneness’ between the two Koreas, and for a moment, it overlooks the fact that North Korea is its ‘Other’.

### *South Korean Textbooks and North Korea and North Koreans*

There have been some significant changes with reference to North Korea in the textbooks. The aggressive anti-Communist sentiments found in the earlier readers are replaced in the more recent period by a more sympathetic approach and emphasis on

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<sup>9</sup> Prior to the Korean War, there had been guerrilla warfare in South Korea. From May to December of 1949, there was heavy fighting at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, costing the lives of hundreds of Korean soldiers on either side.

efforts towards reunification. In the 1979 Social Studies textbook, there is no direct attack on North Koreans, but on the Communist government that rules them. North Koreans are described in the school reader as people who project the illusion of freedom and who are led to believe that they are working for the good of the nation, while in reality, it is for the good of one person – their leader, Kim Il Sung. Newspapers, magazines and broadcasts are all used to promote the Communist Party, as are all cultural events, literature and plays, which are said to be used to praise Kim Il Sung. Vivid images are given of North Koreans who live in poor and starving conditions. This is immediately followed by the statement that the North Korean government is continuously increasing its expenditure to prepare for invasion of peaceful South Korea:

We all come from the same bloodline and share a common ancestor and culture; we are inherently part of the same nation. However, our ideology is different; the land is divided and suffers from the Communist invasion of June 25. Following the ceasefire, in North Korea, a large number of our [Communist] brethren have been deprived of their freedom and are used as instruments for a Communist form of unification (i.e. unification by force).

...[North Koreans] send spies, and during time of peace, dig a tunnel for a southern invasion; what is worse, an attempt to shoot and kill the [South Korean] President was made – it will be difficult to achieve peaceful unification [as a result of these events] (*Mun Gyo Bu* 1979, 154).

This section of the Social Studies textbook describes what the future holds for North-South relations. It begins by highlighting the fact that Koreans on the peninsula all come from the same bloodline and share a common history and culture. This is the reason given to legitimise the need for reunification: once unification is achieved, Koreans can once again live peacefully.

A negative picture of North Koreans is illustrated to show that they do not wish for peaceful unification. The South Korean government has made efforts to reach out, but the offer has not been accepted. The word, brethren, is used to describe North Koreans, who together, suffer under the Communist party. It also mentions that the former are innocent victims who have been forced to comply with the latter. However, later on in the text, the term, 'they' is used in front of negative descriptions of the actions of the North Koreans. Despite this, the text is hopeful for a reunified Korea in the future, although it may be a difficult task to accomplish. It calls for the need for solidarity among Koreans, but it does not fail to mention that North Korea may once again invade South Korea.

While the Social Studies textbook concentrated more on the negative aspects of North Korean communism, the Moral Education reader provided more explicit examples of the nature of the North Korean people:

Thinking that it was their mother, the young mother answered the door. However, a wolf came through the door, eating up all the little rabbits. As soon as the play was over, Sunam said..."What a wretched person. The wolf is exactly like the Communists." The mother goes on to tell a story: "...It was during the time of the Korean Invasion. One day, the Communist leader approached your grandfather, offering him a job that would give him a lot of money and rice. ...but it was all a lie. He was locked up and a few days later, he was brought to the battlefield." The text goes on to say that "to this day, Communists still tell those kinds of lies." Following the story, Sunam drew something on a piece of paper. It was a picture of a young rabbit being eaten by a wolf. Underneath, it was clearly written, "Let us not believe the lies told by the Communists" (Moral Education, 1979 in Kim 2001, 38).

The term 'wretched being' is used to describe the wolf, which the reader sees is a metaphor for North Koreans. The image of the 'Other' is used in two ways here: the vilifying of North Koreans by describing them as violent beings and the use of derogatory

language to describe them. This language, which would be unacceptable for children to use, implies a sense of superiority of South Koreans over the North Koreans.

In the 2004 text, it is interesting to note that, when referring to unification, it states that as a result of 50 years' separation, that North Korea has become like another country (*Daehan Gyogwaseo* 2004c, 128), implying that North Korea had been a part of the South Korean nation. It mentions that immediately following division, North and South Korea regarded each other as hostile enemies and developed its military and foreign policy vis-à-vis the 'Other'.

It also explicitly states that as a result of prolonged separation, that North and South Koreans have become different from one another in speech, ideology, music, dance, and lifestyle. As a result of these changes, there is urgency for unification before the differences become even larger. Contrary to the 1979 texts, the emphasis is placed on cultural rather than political elements for unification. Despite the cultural differences between North and South Korea, the book states, "...because from the beginning (of history) our country was one nation, we must be unified" (*Daehan Gyogwaseo* 2004c, 132).

In the Moral Education textbooks from 1989-1996, South Korean children are instilled with the message that unification is essential for the success and well-being of all Koreans and the Korean nation, which inevitably includes those living in the North. As an introduction to the lesson on North Koreans, the children are asked to list the similarities between North and South Koreans. While a list including language, appearance, customs and food are provided, the differences, while they are mentioned, are not discussed in great detail. The texts in 1990 encourage the school children to include their North Korean 'Other' as a part of the South Korean 'Self'. In the fifth and sixth grade Moral

Education books, children are taught to forget about all the misgivings and hatred of the past and to begin loving North Koreans because they are part of their family. It is stated that in preparation for unification, they must work hard to understand North Koreans and to learn to trust one another. These images of North Koreans are a stark contrast to the ones taught during the Cold War. It reflects the South Korean government's change from a hard-line policy towards North Korea to a more soft-line one.

### *Synthesis of South Korean Textbooks and National Identity*

In the textbooks published in both periods, the image of the North Korean 'Other' is still present. However, the manner in which information is presented has changed. The Social Studies text from 1979 refers to North Koreans as brethren to be saved from the evil Communists, portraying an image that differentiates between the North Korean Communists and the general North Korean population who are presented as having no freedom of thought under Kim Il Sung's dictatorship. In the Moral Education textbook published in 1979, this distinction is not made. All North Koreans are referred to using derogatory terms, thus alienating North and South Koreans from each other. In the texts published after 1994, North Koreans are presented more sympathetically. There is a softer tone, but there is still an anti-sentiment. Greater focus is placed on democratisation and the urgency for peaceful unification.

There have been considerable changes in the textbooks, which reflect official changes and government views. In both periods, there seems to be a paradox in defining Korean identity. Both identify with the concept of the North Korean 'Other,' but at the same time, they include the 'Other' as a part of the South Korean 'Self', which is evident in the sections on unification. Unification is desired because of the common history and

blood ties shared between the two nations, but on the other hand, the differences between the two are thoroughly highlighted, since anti-Communism is still present in the more recent textbook. This is the difference between the two periods: the 1979 textbooks portray the 'Other' in terms of political and economic differences and with great hostility, while in the later period, it is defined in terms of culture. Children are being taught the cultural and linguistic differences between North and South Koreans. North Koreans are more 'humanised', unlike in the past when they were 'demonised'. Despite a more 'amicable' official policy towards North Koreans, the effect of rigorous anti-Communist teachings of those educated in South Korea during the 1970s and 1980s, who are now in their 30s and 40s, would most likely have had some influence on their views towards North Koreans, subsequently affecting their encounters with North Korean asylum seekers living in South Korea.

The textbook analysis does not explain the source of all South Koreans' beliefs and national identity. However, it provides a general idea of the shared nationalism that exists – one that the ROK government wishes for them to have. Although they are supposed to constitute a part of the Korean 'Self', the textbook analysis shows that North Koreans continue to be considered as the South Korean 'Other'. In all its efforts to create a negative image of the North Korean 'Other', South Korea has yet to fully develop its own national identity. This identity is dependent on its opposition of the 'Other'. Since its establishment, the ROK has been concerned with protecting itself from North Korea; it has devised policies and taken action based on what the North did, eventually defining its existence in opposition to the DPRK. This may be seen as a negative nationalism, where fear and threat are the reasons for government legitimacy and offer safety from a worse

alternative. Although the more recent textbooks have abandoned anti- messages, the message of a distinctive South Korean ‘Self’ still remains.

### National Symbols

National symbols are important elements used to define the identity of a particular group. In relation to nation states, they are often regarded as sacred representations, which unify its people. The most common state symbols are the flag and the national anthem. In South Korea, the national flag is considered sacred. Flags can be found in almost every classroom. Students begin the school day by saluting the flag and singing the national anthem. State rituals such as the celebration of certain national holidays and the construction of memorial sites are other forms of national symbols, which are often used by the state to transmit a collective historical memory to the present population.

The purpose of this section is to explain how selected national symbols in South Korea have been established to reflect the nation’s identity. The symbols chosen are three types of memorials found in the ROK. The first is the presentation of the Korean War Memorial, the second, a museum dedicated to commemorating Korea’s war history and the third is the celebration of August 15, which commemorates Korean Liberation.

The first national symbol examined here is the Korean War Memorial, where the focus is on the area concerning the display of the “Statue of Two Brothers”. The second, a study of the exhibit on North Korean Daily Life, held in June and July 1993, is a form of memorial also to be studied. Organised by the Korean Ministry of Education, the purpose of this display was to show South Koreans that North Koreans are not alien beings, but are very much like them, in efforts to promote Korean unification in South Korea. The

ROK government, by showing everyday objects used in North Korea, hoped to erase the evil image of North Koreans that many were taught to believe as school children.

The third symbol examined is the celebration of Korea's liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945. This is the only national holiday that both North and South Korea celebrate. While traditionally, both states had celebrated this occasion independently from one another, in recent years, in order to promote Korean unity, efforts have been made to hold joint celebrations. These festivities not only represent the affirmation of both Koreas to a shared historical event, but are evidence of a progression in the changes of the ROK government's changing views on the commemoration of certain unpleasant parts of history and in the necessity of its recognition to move forward in the process of Korean unification.

### *The Korean War Memorial*

Until recently, images of the Korean War were not easily found in South Korea. People rarely saw pictures of the destruction of the War, with the exception of the limited images found in museums. In general, there are not many monuments or memorials in South Korea, which commemorate the Korean War. One reason for this is that the War is technically not over, since no peace treaty was ever signed. It is also an event that Koreans are not proud of. Memorializing the War would be an acknowledgement of division as the final state of the peninsula, shattering the hopes for reunification of the Korean peninsula (Grinker 1998, 30). In addition, public sentiment was that a memorial "would demean the Korean heritage by glorifying war and the military" (Grinker 1998, 30). South Koreans have yet to mourn the effects of the Korean War. Grinker states that in order for this process to begin, either unification must take place, or it must be accepted

that Korea's destiny is one of permanent division. The commemoration of the War materialises the past and compartmentalises it, since

[m]onuments about loss also package the past concretely- one can, quite literally, walk away from them- and thus provide the possibility to break with the past even as their monumental form is sacred; they simultaneously mark both a merger of the present and future (Grinker 1998, 31).

Located in Seoul, South Korea, the War Memorial was completed and opened to the public in 1994. Roh Tae Woo<sup>10</sup>, the ROK president who envisioned the project, had originally dreamed of building one large museum dedicated to the Korean War. The final product is the commemoration of Korea's war legacy dating back to the period of the Three Kingdoms<sup>11</sup>, with a section on the Korean War. This project was met with some opposition from the South Korean public – more specifically, the dissident intellectuals who saw it as nothing more than the authoritarian government's tactic for establishing legitimacy. It was even described as “an illegitimate child that should never have seen the light of day” (Lee as in Jager 2002, 393). The War Memorial was, in fact, built to link family and nation, blood lineage and state legitimacy, as well as to create a patriotic and unanimous image of Korean military history.

Outside the War Memorial, there is a statue called “The Statue of Brothers”, a monument of two Korean soldiers embracing each other (See Appendix 1a & 1b). Slight differences in the stature of the men can be seen. One is bigger than the other, and the smaller one is looking up at the bigger one. This statue is a representation of South

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<sup>10</sup> Roh Tae Woo was a former general hand-picked by his predecessor and friend, General Chun Doo Hwan, as President of the ROK. He was president from 1988-1993.

<sup>11</sup> The period of the Three Kingdoms marks the beginning of ‘modern’ Korean history. The three kingdoms were *Goguryeo*, *Baekje* and *Silla*, which were in continuous rivalry until 668, when the peninsula was unified.

Korean identity in terms of the 'Self' and 'Other', as it depicts several opposing images symbolising how the ROK government identifies the nation and its people. The bigger soldier is the older brother who has finally been united with his brother and has accepted the responsibility of guiding and protecting the younger sibling, under the auspices of Democracy. The older sibling represents the South Korean 'Self' who has finally been reconnected with its North Korean 'Other'. This is the message about North Koreans that children are taught in school – that unification must be achieved, so that the South Koreans can 'save' and 'protect' their northern brethren.

In an interview between Sheila Jager and the statue's sculptor, Choi Young-jeep, it is remarked that the older (South Korean) has a weapon, while the younger (North Korean) does not. This symbolises the defenceless younger soldier and the "defeat of Communism and the victory of Democracy" (Jager 2002, 406). Mr. Choi highlights another reason for this symbol, which can also be found in some school children's textbooks. He sees it as a message that the "South is prepared for war, should the nation be provoked again" (Jager 2002, 406).

The War Memorial conceptualises the image of the Korean War and North Koreans that is represented by the government that commissioned its inception. It is a form of reconstructed memory, and it refers back to the perception and knowledge at the time of its construction (Assman as in Wierling 1997, 174). It is consistent with the image of North Korea that is taught in schools, an image which is controlled by the same government. In the next memorial studied, the ambivalence of Korean identity is revealed through the reactions of the South Koreans who attended the exhibit on North Korean Every Day Life.

*The Exhibit on North Korean Every Day Life*

In general, many South Koreans say that they don't really know much about the North Korean people beyond the *Juche* politics. Some even say that they have difficulty imagining their appearance. North Koreans are generally viewed as people who have no freedom of thought and behaviour and as people who live in an uncivilized, backward manner, those caught in a time warp. However, they are sometimes seen as an example of the primordial Korean, with no signs of having been tainted by the effects of globalisation. Many South Koreans entered the exhibit on North Korean Everyday Life with these images of the Northerners in mind.

Anthropologist Roy Grinker conducted a study on the display of North Korean artefacts in Seoul, South Korea. He observed people who attended the exhibit in addition to surveying them on their thoughts of the display. Many were intrigued, for this was a rare opportunity that the South Korean government had presented to its citizens. Displayed in a department store in Seoul in June and July 1993, the exhibit, which moved to a more permanent location in Daejeon, was organized with the help of North Korean defectors who lived in South Korea. It was part of the Korean Ministry of Unification's, "let's get to know the true picture of North Korean movement". The purpose was to promote a sense of common humanity between North and South Koreans in preparation for unification.

There was a display of a model apartment, posters, books, canned goods, batteries and about 2000 everyday objects, which was the main attraction. The objects included: a toothbrush, knives, chopsticks, dishes, a telephone... (Grinker 1998, 57). People thought that the objects were different from the ones found in South Korea, even though this was not the case. The perception was that North Koreans lived parallel lives which were

replicas of South Korea's past. This idea that South Korea is the more advanced nation, whose strength is measured according to the resources that one possesses, is comparable to the image of the Statue of Brothers from the War Memorial, where the bigger, stronger sibling is to take care of the weaker one. However, in addition to these daily artefacts, at the end of the exhibit, there was a screening of a film on the lives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Emphasis was placed on the North's numerous human rights violations and acts of international terrorism. It seems that while the ROK government wanted to generate a sense of kinship with the Koreans in order to promote unification, it wanted to ensure that people realised it should be done under a democratic government. As with other symbols of Korean identity, contradictions can be found - while there was a sense of pride in homogeneity, there was also an acknowledgement of difference between North and South Koreans. The display of Korean lineage and shared history is exemplified in the recent joint Liberation Day celebrations discussed in the next section.

### *Korean Liberation Day*

On August 15, 2005, North and South Korea jointly celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Korean Liberation from Japanese occupation. It was the fourth occasion in which both states had celebrated this occasion together. Although both North and South Korea share the Liberation and Restoration holiday, this is also the day in 1948, (three years following the end of Japanese occupation in Korea), that the government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was established. August 15 is not only a symbol of 'liberation,' but also of separation. As with other elements of Korean identity, this day is one that bears the meaning of two opposing images.

There is no definitive answer as to why August 15 was chosen as ROK foundation day; one may assume that the intention was to symbolise the South Korean government as the legitimate heir to Korean liberation. Over several years, on the occasion that was intended to show renewed freedom and Koreans' reclamation of control over their own destiny, it has become a day for remembering the past and for competing against political supremacy between the two Korean governments (Jung 2005, 6).

During his presidency in the 1970s, Park Chung Hee used the symbolic occasion of Liberation Day to initiate open dialogue for reconciliation with North Korea. While there was no substantial progress made, both governments sent messages for unification and acknowledgement to one another, on the Liberation Day holiday. As a result of President Kim Dae Jung's visit to Pyongyang in 2000, an agreement was made between the two states to hold joint Liberation Day celebrations. Political differences are supposed to be set aside for the event and emphasis is supposed to be placed on the homogeneity between North and South Koreans, through cultural performances from both members of both states and in the organisation of various sports tournaments. As was the purpose of the display on North Korean Daily Life, the ROK government wished to show its citizens that North Koreans are not different from them. In the promotion of unity and solidarity, this event is used as an opportunity to create inter-Korean dialogue with South Korean civil groups, to hold discussion groups with their counterparts in addition to updating progress on joint cultural projects such as the "Large Korean Dictionary", which is an effort to standardise the Korean language in North and South Korea (MOU 2005b). North Korea has supported South Korea's discontentment with Japan's distortion of historical events in Japanese school textbooks and on Japan's claim to the Dokdo islands, which it has expressed in the Liberation Day celebrations.

The Liberation Day celebrations of 2005 were symbolic, since the passing of 60 in Korean culture signifies the completion of one life cycle and the start of a new one. For this reason, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary slogan was, “A New Beginning”. It was presented as the start of a new chapter in Korean history, based on a deep commitment to peaceful unification, the pursuit of a Korean identity based on values of humanism, which were influenced by Korean tradition and to preserve the spirit of the pioneers of Korea’s *Gwangbok* Movement<sup>12</sup>. The joint August 15 celebrations demonstrate a sense of convergence from both Korean governments towards unity. In South Korea, the day is dedicated to festivities that honour Korean Independence. For a brief moment, this occasion allows for the temporary merging of the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ as one.

### *Synthesis of National Symbols and National Identity*

National symbols are ‘invented’ traditions; they enhance national pride and unity. They are government-sponsored modern notions that have been disseminated through the educational system and the mass media to create and to promote a modern national community and are crucial in the nation-building process of Korea.

Each of the three memorials chosen reveals the portrayal of the Korean ‘Self’ in relation to the ‘Other’. As in the previous sections, it demonstrates the paradox of Korean national identity. These national symbols all exemplify the South Korean government’s interpretation of Korean identity. It is done through the promotion of unification based on the argument that homogeneity with North Koreans is not only based on a shared history, but on a shared humanity.

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<sup>12</sup> *Gwangbok* is the Korean term for ‘Liberation Day’. Literally translated, it means “great restoration”, similar to a “Korean renaissance”.

In recent years, through its influence over the media, school textbooks and national memorials, the South Korean government has decreased the presence of anti-Communism and has placed more stress on cultural aspects of identity. However, it is clear that the ROK's desire for unification is based on democratic ideals in which it takes on the role as the older sibling responsible for the guidance and well-being of its North Korean family. The inference of this type of contention, transmitted to South Koreans, while done with good intentions, tends to have negative effects. In its assumed role as the caretaker of North Koreans, the South Korean government sends a message that North Koreans do not have the capacity to be self-sufficient and independent, thus requiring 'older brother's' help. The result is a shift in the Korean hierarchy, whereby all North Koreans, regardless of their education and the skills they possess, are not on equal ground with South Koreans. As it will be shown, North Korean asylum seekers often feel that South Koreans look down on them, thus leading the former to experience anger and frustration. These effects are explored in the following chapters.

## Chapter IV – North Korean Migrants

Chapter III illustrated the paradoxes of Korean national identity to show how the Korean ‘Other’ is presented through the South Korean media, education and national symbols. This chapter takes a closer look at the state of North Korean migrants before their arrival in the ROK. As it is stated in the South Korean Constitution, “[t]he territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands” (Yang 1999, 964). This description, thus, includes North Koreans as citizens of the ROK. However, regardless of what the official documents may indicate, *saetomin* often feel alien to life in South Korea.

The majority of the *saetomin* who arrive in South Korea have spent some time in a third country, where they faced many hardships. The refugees’ experiences in these countries, as well as their experiences during their journey to their final destination, often affect their integration into their country of settlement. With this regard, a study of the life of *saetomin* before their arrival in South Korea is important for understanding the reasons attributed to their success or failure of their integration into South Korean society. The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information about North Korean migrants by taking a look at their life once they leave the North Korean borders and by considering the circumstances under which they choose to leave. While there are some who seek asylum through Siberia and third countries in Southeast Asia and Mongolia, the focus here is on the *saetomin* in China, where tens of thousands of them are believed to still reside. It is during their time in China that they stay anywhere from a few days up to a few years, that the decision is made to either move on and to embark on the dangerous journey to South Korea, or to live a life of exile in China, in hope that the living conditions in North Korea improve, so that they can return home.

The exact number of North Koreans who live in China is unknown since they live in hiding, trying very hard to blend into their surroundings, for fear of being repatriated. The numbers also fluctuate, with many returning either voluntarily or forcefully, and a small number going to third countries and South Korea. The Chinese government says that there are about 10 000, while the South Korean government estimates about 30 000, and various NGOs claim that there are anywhere between 100 000-300 000 *saetomin* in China (Seymour 2005, 16).

### North Korea

In the year following Kim II Sung's death (1994), a series of unfortunate events in North Korea curtailed the stability and *Juche* self-sufficiency that it prided itself of. As early as 1987, the DPRK's food production, which once surpassed the yield in South Korea, began to show signs of decline. The Public Distribution System (PDS), which distributed daily grain rations, was reduced by 10 percent in 1987 and by another 10 percent in 1992. The previous year, the North Korean government had launched its "let's eat two meals a day" campaign as a strategy for rationing food. The reduction in rations applied to all citizens, except for the social elite, military personnel and heavy industry labourers (Noland 2003, 9-10).

In 1995, severe floods caused widespread famine in the DPRK, said to be the longest and the worst of all such phenomenon of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Goodkind and West 2001, 219). The famine was caused by a combination of natural and artificial factors, marking a significant moment in North Korea, not only because of its devastating effects, but because of the changing relations of that country with the international community. As a result of this devastation, the DPRK officially requested international food aid

through its UN Permanent Mission, to the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA), in 1995 (Choi 2004, 87-88). The famine in North Korea prevailed, subsequently, with another severe flood in the summer of 1996, followed by a drought in 1997, said to be the “worst drought in the century” - it has been correlated with El Niño (Ahn 2005, 3), destroying reservoirs and drying up irrigation systems. The loss of employment, as a consequence of the closing of state enterprises, food deprivation, health problems and deaths of family members due to famine, dispelled North Koreans from their ‘workers’ paradise’.

As the living conditions in North Korea began to deteriorate and basic rations of food were no longer available, an increasing number of North Koreans began to go to China in search of food and basic supplies. This increase was particularly evident following the famine in 1995, when the DPRK distribution system ceased to exist, which left its citizens in a desperate state of starvation and caused its citizens to suffer from disease due to malnutrition. A study conducted by Johns Hopkins University reported that, at the peak of the famine in 1997, numbers reached 50 deaths per 100 000 people, a death rate caused by starvation that is said to be eight times more than the average rate. Rough estimates of famine-related deaths from the mid to late 1990s are at 2-3.5 million (Seymour 2005, 7).

### Leaving North Korea

Since the famine and floods in North Korea in the 1990s, access to public goods, such as food, shelter, education and employment have become extremely difficult for the average citizen. In addition to the lack of essential goods, the North Korean government has a system that categorises its citizens into three hierarchical categories, indicating their

status in the eyes of the DPRK government: “core”, “wavering” and “hostile,” which are further divided into 51 levels. Those in the “core” class consist of government officials and those who are deemed to have a total devotion to the country and its regime. They are among the elite in North Korea and are given privileges such as food, housing and employment and consist of 25% of the population (U.S. State Department, 2002). The “wavering” class includes people who have a history of suspicious behaviour and whose complete loyalty is under question, which may go as far back as three generations. They make up 55% of the population and often hold low-level positions served to support the DPRK regime. Those who are found to be in the “hostile” group are the last to receive goods distributed by the government and have limited access to food and economic means of survival. People considered to be “hostile” are constantly monitored and discriminated against and are most susceptible to severe punishment and deprivation. North Koreans demoted to the “hostile” class are subject to a sentence in one of the labour camps in the remote areas of the country and have little hope for improving their fate, should they remain in North Korea. People in this group include relatives of those who fled to Japan or South Korea during the Korean War (Chang, Haggard & Noland 2006, 16).

The North Korean government urges the governments of neighbouring countries to return any of its citizens found without proper documentation to support their departure from the DPRK. In Article 47 of North Korea’s criminal code, it “stipulates that a citizen who commits acts against the country like defecting to a foreign country with a view to overthrowing the Republic is to be given penalties” (Amnesty International 1996, 14). It also states that “one who escapes to another country or to the enemy in betrayal of his motherland and people will receive a punishment of a minimum of seven years labour-re-

education, and for serious violations the mandated sentence is execution and forfeiture of all property (Amnesty International 1996, 14). Serious offences include being caught meeting with foreigners and being caught in the possession of Bibles.

### The Border

The most direct route to South Korea is crossing the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) that divides the Korean peninsula. 248 km long and 4km wide, it is guarded by a total of 2 million military personnel from both sides of the border and is the most heavily armed border in the world.

A second option for border crossing is to the East, where the DPRK borders Siberia, Russia's eastern maritime province, and is separated by 17km of the Tumen Delta. In addition to it being difficult to cross due to the delta's strong currents, its location in the far northeast region and its small border, make it inaccessible for most. Many Koreans in the former USSR who seek refugee status are those who have gone to work in the lumber yards in the former USSR and have decided to abandon their post, while some have crossed illegally. In 1998, there was an estimated 200-300 North Korean refugees in Russia. By 2004, it increased to about 2000 (International Crisis Group 2006, 20). Those who reach the UNHCR office in Moscow are permitted to apply for refugee status. The reasons for fewer North Koreans in Russia are numerous: one is that the border is harder to reach; many don't know if they will have better protection by the government and the border is highly secured. Moreover, local officials don't follow federal laws and are easily swayed by North Korean officials.

From the Russian government's point of view, in order to maintain "good relations" with North Korea, they must immediately return illegal North Koreans found

on Russian territory. Migrant workers must also be monitored with rigor and punished, should they try to “abandon” their working responsibilities. As a result, regular inspections of churches and other religious institutions, where escapees know that they can get help, are conducted. While some North Koreans try to make their way to South Korea, there are still many who wish to remain anonymous and live a life of exile in Russia or other former Soviet states for fear that, should they be identified, the families they left behind would be subject to further hardships inflicted by the DPRK regime, for the mere fact of being associated with a family member who has committed the grievous crime of having left the country without official permission.

#### *North Koreans in China*

The majority of North Koreans who leave home go to China. Of the 1416 km shared border with China, the route most travelled is by crossing the Tumen River. Until the early 1990s, the North Korea-China border had been rather porous. It was common for people from both sides of the border to exchange and engage in commercial activities. In order to travel legally (either within the country or beyond its borders), all North Koreans were required to request a travel visa from the government. The government generally granted visas to those who went to China for trade or to visit relatives; however, since obtaining this document is quite time consuming and cumbersome, many simply went to China illegally. In the past, the North Korean government, aware of this activity, would permit it to a certain degree, as it was a source of hard currency and necessary goods for North Korea. In the early 1990s, when the living conditions in the DPRK further deteriorated and larger numbers of North Koreans began to seek refuge abroad, the North Korean government enforced its policy on the illegal migration of its citizens. It

tightened its borders and urged the Chinese government to help them enforce this law by repatriating any illegal North Koreans found in China. According to the North Korean Criminal Code, all migrants who leave the country without permission are criminals, thus committing acts of treason against the DPRK. Those found guilty of this crime are subject to a sentence in a labour camp and, in extreme cases, to death.

Despite these risks, the majority of North Korean refugees interviewed by NGOs and Christian groups have said that crossing the border is relatively easy. In the winter, they walk across the frozen Yalu and Tumen Rivers and in the summer, they either swim or walk across the shallow part of the river. There are some who, after having studied the guards' schedule, wait until nightfall to cross. Others bribe the border guards or engage in the services of 'brokers' who control the trafficking of North Koreans at the border region. Over the years, reinforced security at the borders requires North Koreans going to China to have some type of monetary exchange. The average rate is 3 months' salary of a North Korean (Seymour 2005, 9).

While the motivations for leaving North Korea are mainly economic, there are still a small number who have political motivations for leaving. Human Rights Watch interviews reveal that "[a] young woman decided to go to China with her uncle in 1998 in order to aid her father, who had fallen into serious debt after having taken a loan to buy medicine for her dying mother. One young man and his family left in 1999 because he could not enter medical school or a teaching college because of family background" (Baik et al. 2002, 9).

Those interviewed expressed their concern for the possible hardships they would face, should they get caught crossing into China, but decided to cross because they felt that they had no other choice for survival. "Many found it a terrifying, near-death

experience, and to all it represented a decisive moment of separation when they crossed not only a national border, but the border between being a citizen and a criminal, or even a traitor". (Baik et al. 2002, 10). Those who crossed without assistance had a more difficult time. A young man whose family spent time in a North Korean prison camp describes his traumatic experience crossing into China alone:

I had seen almost four hundred North Koreans repatriated from China during my stay [in the labour camp]... It was so dangerous to cross the border, but I decided to cross anyway...I just wagered my life and went forward without knowing where the hidden checkpoint lay. I came across a checkpoint on my way to the river, but two of the guards were asleep, snoring.

Whenever I think of that moment, I sweat. ...[Because of my family background] the [North Korean] National Security Agency would regard me as a spy or a traitor and might kill me by gunshot or imprison me for life without any court procedure. I would be sent to an administrative labour camp or a secret mine, or perhaps my body would be used as an object for chemical experimentation. Anyhow, I would have wound up like a dead body, though I might be breathing" (Human Rights Watch interview with Mr. Lee H, Seoul, July 16, 2001 in Baik et al. 2002, 10).

#### Who are the "smugglers"?

The group assisting the *saetomin* in leaving North Korea and, through third countries, to the ROK, is comprised of a variety of people. With the onset of famine and the large number of North Koreans leaving the country in 1994, humanitarian aid groups and Christian missionaries and Buddhist groups were the main source of aid for the *saetomin* in China. Christian missionaries and advocacy groups sponsored by Koreans living in the United States, Japan and South Korea, who set up orphanages and safe houses in China, provided much assistance. Some of these organisations were involved in helping North Koreans reach South Korea. However, when the Chinese government began their crackdown on organisations involved in helping North Koreans escape to third countries and South Korea in the late 1990s, the numbers of such groups decreased;

instead, they changed their focus towards improving the living conditions of North Koreans in China and in the DPRK through economic development and aid. In the case of those in China, Christian groups also provided moral support.

There are still a small number of NGOs and religious groups involved in the “Underground Railroad”<sup>1</sup>. While the sensitive nature of the operation prevents disclosure of all those involved, Reverend Tim Peters, an evangelical pastor based in Seoul, is known to be the open representative of the organised movement of North Koreans. This American missionary is the founder and director of Helping Hands Korea, which he established in 1996 to provide famine relief to North Korea, which then began operations for providing refugees assistance in China and for helping to coordinate their passage to third countries. Other organisations known to be involved in such operations are *Durihana*, a South Korean Christian group, and Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, a non-partisan NGO that focuses on international advocacy and on improving living conditions in North Korea. In addition to these groups, Norbert Vollersten, a German medical doctor and outspoken advocate who was expelled from North Korea in 2000 for speaking out against the regime, has been involved in organised assistance of the *saetomin* (Won 2003, 301).

NGOs involved in the “Underground Railroad” often seek the assistance of “brokers” who are on ‘friendly’ terms with border guards and who have a network of people to assist them on the route. The brokers consist of North Koreans, ethnic Koreans in China and North Koreans who have already settled in South Korea. The latter are those who have already taken the route and have contacts in China and North Korea. They often become ‘brokers’ because they see it as a lucrative source of income and a better option

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<sup>1</sup> Often referred to as the ‘Seoul Train’, it is similar to the Underground Railroad in North America that smuggled black slaves from the United States to Canada in the 19<sup>th</sup> C.

compared to their struggling life in South Korea (International Crisis Group 2006, 14). However, many of them work on an ad hoc basis to help their friends and family members reach South Korea. The number of *saetomin* “brokers” has gradually diminished since the ROK government reduced the cash settlements given to North Korean asylum seekers by two thirds in 2004, as those smuggled generally pay with the settlement money that they receive.

### Passage to South Korea through Third Countries

Many North Koreans prefer to live a quiet life in China because they feel that it is the option with the least risk of deportation and trafficking. However, due to the increasing threat of their repatriation, a growing number have decided to seek refuge in third countries. While there are a number of North Koreans who do not wish to settle in South Korea and simply choose to stay in the other surrounding countries, the focus of this study, with respect to North Koreans travelling to these countries, is on those whose final destination is South Korea and who simply use these countries for passage.

The costs of sending a *saetomin* from China to South Korea through Southeast Asia can vary from \$2000-\$3000 and \$5000-\$6000 (International Crisis Group 2006, 17). The North Koreans are told that they should repay this fee once they arrive in South Korea with the settlement money that they will receive from the South Korean government. Throughout their journey, they are passed onto various guides at certain points. The journey is physically draining, and money is needed to bribe various officials and to pay for the various forms of passage.

Since the Chinese government began systematic repatriation of North Korean refugees in the mid 1990s, it has been more difficult for the *saetomin* to seek asylum at

the various consulates and embassies in China. Increased security and guards have been placed at these diplomatic offices, ready to apprehend any North Korean asylum seekers they find. Media footage has shown North Koreans being dragged from the boundaries of diplomatic missions by local Chinese authorities who detain them, then send them back to North Korea, where they must meet their fate as traitors of the state. The increased watchful eye of Chinese authorities has prompted NGOs and relief workers to find alternatives for sending *saetomin* to South Korea. While the number of NGOs specialising in moving people through the underground railroad has diminished, there are still quite a few that exist with the help of brokers – many of whom are North Koreans who also took the “Underground Railroad” to South Korea.

In recent years, the “Northeast Asian Underground Railroad” (the Seoul Train) has increasingly used the route through Southeast Asia as a passage to South Korea. The Seoul Train is organised by a mix of Christian and humanitarian activists. Those caught helping are in just as much danger of being detained as those who are seeking such services. The operation requires money, meticulous planning and trustworthy people. The amount of money required or the route travelled depends on the circumstances at the time of the journey.

As with other countries experiencing an increasing flow of North Korean refugees, while they are sympathetic to the refugees, these countries do not wish to attract too many *saetomin*. Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand have diplomatic relations with both North and South Korea and do not wish to create offence to either country by the way in which they handle the presence of North Korean asylum seekers found within their borders. Of the countries mentioned, Vietnam, Laos and Burma are not welcoming of *saetomin* and have the policy to repatriate them whenever possible.

As an increasing number of North Koreans leave their home, the Chinese government and officials from various Southeast Asian countries have become less sympathetic to their cause. Gradually, the presence of North Koreans in these countries is creating a stigma towards them. Their increasing numbers are no longer commiserated as in the past, and the locals are less open to offering aid and support. This phenomenon seems to be becoming a reality in South Korea, as well, and is examined in the following chapter.

## Chapter V - North Korean Asylum Seekers in South Korea

The increasing number of North Korean asylum seekers is a cause for concern, not only for the Chinese authorities, but also for the South Korean government. Although the number of *saetomin* living in South Korea represents only a small fraction of the number in China and in third countries, it is the South Korean government that provides financial settlement and support to those living in the ROK. It is also the ROK government that absorbs most of the costs of processing the *saetomin*'s requests for asylum and the costs of their transport from the third countries to South Korea. In addition to the financial costs involved in supporting the increasing numbers of *saetomin* in South Korea, there is concern for the effect that their presence and the ROK's acceptance of them will have, not only on the diplomatic relations with North Korea, but also with the other countries affected by this issue (namely, China and Southeast Asian countries).

Since the end of the Korean War, there has been a change in the nature of North Korean asylum seekers. Until 1990, an average of 5-10 North Korean asylum seekers arrived in the ROK each year, comprised of mainly male members of the DPRK elite. Among the elite were diplomats who sought asylum while stationed abroad, pilots who flew their planes to the South, soldiers from special units with privileged information on the functioning of the DMZ cross over. These North Koreans were referred to as defectors, since their social status in North Korea gave them access to privileges available only to a select few. It has been determined that political motivation, rather than the lack of material goods, was the reason for seeking asylum. Over the years, as the characteristics and the circumstances of the North Korean arrivals have changed, so has the South Korean government's approach and policies towards addressing the *saetomin* issues. The ROK has shifted its policies from the repatriation approach to an integration

approach, in which the latter aims to help the asylum seekers to become independent by creating programs to support their integration into South Korean society.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: the first is the examination of the ‘evolution’ of South Korea’s policies on North Korean asylum seekers, including the support and settlement payments provided for them; the second is to identify the problems and causes of the *saetomins*’ integration into South Korean society. As part of the discussion on the elements affecting integration, an analysis is made of whether these factors are common problems or whether they are specific to the North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea.

#### The Nature of North Korean Asylum Seekers

As of 2005, the South Korean Ministry of Unification’s official sources indicate that since the end of the Korean War, there has been an estimated 7 688 North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea, of whom 245 have either died or moved to another country (mainly the United States) (Lankov 2006, 53). More than half of these arrived in South Korea from 1994, when the number of arrivals in the double digits began. The number of Koreans who moved to the South was largest following the 1945 Liberation and during the Korean War. Foley’s study indicates that from 1945-1953, 19% of the North’s population moved to the South for various reasons, totalling an estimated 900 000 migrants (Lankov 2006, 54). Detailed information on the migration of North Koreans to South Korea is found in Table 1 and Table 2.

Following this period, there were virtually no migrants crossing the DMZ. The sharp decrease in the number of migrants from the North to the South is explained by the strict border patrols in the DPRK, which prevented its citizens from leaving without

permission. Along the 40 km stretch of the DMZ that separates the North from the South, electric fences and landmines fortify the area, in addition to the total 2 million soldiers who stand guard on either side of the border. The beaches in the DPRK, to which regular access is forbidden to North Koreans, are also riddled with electric fences and landmines to prevent unauthorised entry and departure. Another explanation is the North's economic strength relative to the South. In the 1960s, North Korea's estimated GNP per capita was \$172 (USD), exceeding that of the ROK, which was \$85 (USD) per capita at the time. (Hamm 1999 as in Lankov 2006, 54)<sup>1</sup>. Since the North was more developed and more prosperous, there was little reason to leave the comforts of North Korea during this period. As South Korea surpassed the North in economic strength and its standard of living rose to that of the developed Western countries, life in North Korea was gradually beginning to deteriorate, eventually causing the increasing number of its citizens to seek refuge outside their own country, thus changing the demographics of North Korean asylum seekers from being defectors of the DPRK privileged classes to members of the general population in search of the basic necessities of life.

The North Koreans who arrived from the mid-1990s were mainly victims of the famine in North Korea. The majority of them spent a significant amount of time in third countries before their arrival in South Korea. It has only been in recent years, as their numbers kept increasing, that the ROK government has provided more information about the asylum seekers. Their growing presence has pressed the government to take a more active role in their settlement process. The earlier arrivals were used by the ROK

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<sup>1</sup> Researcher Hamm Taik-Young believes that it was only in 1974 that the ROKs per capita GNP started to exceed the North's (Hamm 1999 as in Lankov 54).

government as valuable sources of information for its intelligence unit and as an asset to its strategic plan against North Korea.

Table 1 – North Korean Asylum Seekers in South Korea

Year	Number
1953-1970	485
1970-1979	59
1980-1989	63
1990	9
1991	9
1992	8
1993	8
1994	52
1995	41
1996	56
1997	85
1998	71
1999	148
2000	312
2001	583
2002	1139
2003	1281
2004	1894
2005	1384
Total	7688

Source: MOU 2005a

Table 2: The Number of Migrants from the North to the South – 1945-1953

Pre-War (1945-1950)	456 000
1950-1953	400 000-650 000

Source: Foley 2003

### The Screening Process

Most of the North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea have had to overcome numerous obstacles in reaching their final destination, beginning with the initial risk they took in leaving the DPRK and their constant fear of being repatriated from the authorities in China and the third countries. The Republic of Korea's official policy towards North

Korean asylum seekers is “based on brotherly love toward fellow Koreans and universal humanitarianism, [...] to accommodate all those North Korean refugees who wish to come to the South” (Charney 2005, 16). However, the ROK prefers to provide direct assistance to North Korea, in hopes of addressing the causes of the massive outflow of its citizens by improving the living conditions in the DPRK. Encouraging North Korean migration to the South is seen as a potential risk for destabilising the North, which in turn could result in its collapse, thus putting the responsibility of the ROK to support North Korea. Another cause for concern is the negative impact it would have on South Korea’s relationship with North Korea.

Despite the ROK’s preference in limiting the arrival of asylum seekers, North Koreans are considered South Korean citizens as is outlined in Article 3 of the ROK constitution. In addition, they are given the right to travel to the South under the Republic’s ‘Protection of North Korean Residents and Support of Their Settlement Act,’ Law number 6474, Article 7, which stipulates:

1. Any person who has defected from North Korea and desires to be protected under this Act shall apply for protection to the head of an overseas diplomatic or consular mission...
2. The head of an overseas diplomatic or consular mission...who receives such an application for protection...shall without delay inform the fact to the Minister of National Unification and the Director Agency for National Security Planning...
3. The Director of Agency for National Security Planning notified pursuant to the provision of Paragraph 2 shall take provisional protective measures or other necessary steps and shall without delay inform the Minister of National Unification of the result. (Seymour 2005, 25)

However, with each law, there are exceptions; such is expressed in a statement given by the South’s Unification Minister, Lim Tong-Won, in 1999, who declared:

...the [South Korean] government is ready to accept all North Korean refugees, if they want to emigrate to the South...it is the basic principle of the Seoul government to welcome all North

Korean refugees, [...] it is in line with the Constitution to accommodate North Korean refugees (Baik 2002, 57).

Only a lucky few are fortunate enough to have their claims for asylum accepted by the South Korean diplomatic missions abroad, let alone pass the multiple screening process, of which the most basic is not to fall into the category of those ineligible for asylum; i.e.: serious criminals, those suspected of pretending to defect, those who have lived in a third country for ten or more years, and those recognised by presidential decree to be unfit for protection. The screening process, which is conducted under the administration of the ROK Ministry of Unification and its Intelligence Agency, begins only once an application for asylum has been processed and accepted. These are examined by the ROK diplomatic missions with the UNHCR. This three month process, conducted in the country where the request for asylum is made, may be fast-tracked to as little as two weeks for the ailing, children, or those deemed to have valuable intelligence information, which include high ranking officials and POWs (International Crisis Report 2006, 26). In reality, the North Koreans who have been granted asylum wait an average of 1-2 years before they can enter South Korea, during which time, they must wait in hiding in the safe houses provided by the people who helped them escape. Their status as illegal migrants in the countries where they have applied for asylum limits their mobility and places them in danger of being deported or detained if caught by local authorities.

Despite the fact that the South Korean government has the general policy of accepting North Koreans who seek asylum, the reality is that only a small fraction are accepted, and many are turned away without even having been given the chance to place a claim, nor are they provided with any guidance as to what alternative choices they have. In 1997, the Kim Young Sam government sent out communications to its overseas

missions, stating that the South's basic policy is to accept all North Korean asylum seekers who wish to settle in the ROK; it was further explained that all final decisions regarding this issue are at the discretion of the diplomatic missions in considering the effect that it will have on the relationship with the host country. That is, "[i]f cooperation between the embassy and the host country is smooth, then it is easy. If the country severely opposes our facilitating resettlement in South Korea, the embassy won't accept them. If the country protests severely, we won't accept them" (Ministry of Unification as in Human Rights Watch 2002, 31). Under this policy, requests made in China are usually not accepted and no assistance is offered to North Korean asylum seekers by the South Korean government.

Upon their arrival at the airport in Seoul, the *saetomin* who are granted asylum are escorted by members of the South Korean Intelligence Agency directly to a facility run by the National Intelligence Command for further investigation. Prior to 1998, they underwent a month long period of 'questioning' and five months of 'education' on living in a democratic society. The month long period of 'questioning' was carried out by the 'North Korean Refugee Council', a joint council comprised of members from five different South Korean agencies (Ministry of Unification, National Defence, Health and Social Welfare, Labour and Education), whose purpose was to identify the real North Korean refugees. They filtered out any possible North Korean spies and *joseonjok*<sup>2</sup> posing as North Koreans who hoped to benefit from the South's settlement payments given to *saetomin*<sup>3</sup>, or anyone who may pose a threat to South Korea. This period of investigation was one of the final steps before North Koreans were permitted to interact with the

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<sup>2</sup> *Joseonjok* are ethnic Koreans from China.

<sup>3</sup> Since the *Joseonjok* have Chinese citizenship, they are considered by the ROK government as foreigners and can legally enter the South, as such, and are not eligible for any 'privileges' that may be offered to ethnic Koreans living abroad (Korean diaspora).

general South Korean population. Today, these procedures are conducted during the *saetomin*'s stay at *Hanawon*.

### The South Korean Settlement Policy

The *saetomin* who arrived in the ROK before the collapse of the block were welcomed as national heroes in their opposition to the Kim Il Sung regime. They were guaranteed life-long stipends and a reasonable income, which were enough for them to live comfortably. In addition, they were given ownership of an apartment unit, given the right to study at their university of choice without having to undergo the regular application process<sup>4</sup> and provided with personal bodyguards to help with daily living for a short period, as well as to protect them from any possible threats from locals. Their numbers of arrival were small enough for the South Korean government to support them without difficulty, despite the fact that the stipends provided during this period were much more than any regular South Korean citizen could ever imagine receiving; they were used as a propaganda tool in a campaign to encourage northern defections.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the basic settlement, 'National Merit Rewards' were given to those who provided information which was considered valuable to South Korean national intelligence. In 1983, Yi Ung-pyong, a pilot who defected using a M1G-19 fighter jet, received an award equivalent to \$300 000 USD and was given the choice of payment in cash or gold bars (Grinker 1988, 233) and in 1997, Hwang Chang-yop, the architect of the *Juche* ideology and the highest level DPRK defector, received 250 million won (about

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<sup>4</sup> The process for South Koreans to enter into university is highly competitive. They must take entrance exams for which they may prepare for as early as primary school by studying at 'crams schools' in addition to their regular schooling.

<sup>5</sup> Before the large flow of refugees in South Korea, defectors were an invaluable source of intelligence information on North Korea.

\$250 000 USD - the largest sum permitted under the law in 1997) (Lankov 2006, 61). Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and at the end of the International Cold War, communism was no longer an imminent threat to the ROK, thus giving them a reason to stop their propaganda campaign. It was also around this time that an increasing flow of defectors began to emerge. In its efforts to accommodate the increasing numbers of North Korean asylum seekers, the South Korean government revised its policy for settlement support. The government has, since then, revised its policy several times, with the most significant change being in 1993, when priority was given to the “settlement model”, which encourages the *saetomin* to become independent and self-sufficient South Korean citizens; that is to say, the new settlement’s policy is to facilitate the successful integration of North Korean asylum seekers. In its efforts towards this goal, in 2004, the Ministry of Unification created a new legal term to refer to North Korean asylum seekers: *saetomin* is to replace the term *talbukja* (“refugees”), which, following a public survey, was concluded that the North Koreans in South Korea did not like to be referred to as such, since they felt that it had negative connotations<sup>6</sup>.

The principle adjustment, however, was the reduction of monetary assistance provided. In lieu of giving one lump sum payment of all the settlement money to which they are entitled, the latest policy is to pay their settlement in three instalments and their housing stipend over a period of two years. Reports suggest that in addition to easing the government’s financial burden of providing settlement payments for the hundreds of *saetomin* that have arrived in recent years, it is also used as a tactic to prevent the asylum seekers, who are not used to handling money, from spending all of their settlement money at once and more importantly, to limit the number of asylum seekers who hire brokers to

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<sup>6</sup> By being referred to as a refugee, the North Koreans feel that it creates an image that they are dishonourable people to have abandoned their homes and their families.

enter into South Korea, by controlling the *saetomin*'s immediate access to hard currency. Many asylum seekers spend much of their settlement money repaying brokers who helped them on their quest to enter South Korea in addition to using it to help friends and family members to join them (with the use of brokers). The settlement provided until 2004, which consisted of payments of \$32 000 in 3 instalments and \$6500 for each member of the household (Charney 2005, 17), has since been changed to \$10 000 cash upfront and \$25 000 worth of payment for housing, education, training, job placement and payments made over a two-year period. However, these payments are an average of what may be given. The ROK has categorised its payments into basic, supplementary and incentive settlements for the new arrivals. The basic assistance is about 100 times the minimum wage (~\$568 USD) and is calculated based on the number of family members living together. Supplementary assistance is provided up to 100 times the minimum wage for the elderly and the handicapped; incentives are provided as encouragement for the asylum seekers to become independent (MOU 2005a). In addition to monetary assistance, the South Korean program introduced a job training and job subsidy program under the Ministry of Labour in 2001 (refer to tables 3, 4, and 5). The *saetomin* do not have to pay basic medical fees, nor do they have to pay any tuition fees. As public universities are free in Korea, the government incurs all the expenses for these. For those who wish to attend private universities, the government provides assistance for half the costs, while the individual schools provide support for the remaining fees.

Table 3 – Criteria for Basic Assistance (in USD)

No. of Family Members	Initial Assistance	Assistance in instalments over 2 years	Housing Assistance	Total
1	\$3000	\$7000	\$10 000	\$20 000
2	\$4000	\$10 000	\$15 000	\$29 000
3	\$5000	\$13 000	\$15 000	\$33 000
4	\$6000	\$16 000	\$15 000	\$37 000
5	\$7000	\$19 000	\$15 000	\$41 000
6	\$7000	\$22 000	\$15 000	\$44 000
7 and more	\$7000	\$25 000	\$15 000	\$47 000

Source: MOU 2005b

In addition to the initial settlement payments, asylum seekers who are unable to be self-sufficient or cannot work due to a particular ailment are provided with additional assistance according to the criteria described in Table 4.

Table 4 – Criteria for Supplementary Assistance

Classification	Criteria for Assistance	Amount of Assistance (USD)
Age	Over 60 years old	\$7200
Physically Handicapped	Level of handicap	\$3600-\$15 400
Long-term Medical Care	Hospital stays of over 3 months due to serious illness	\$800/month
Child support for children under 12	Children living with one parent, or with no parents living with grandparent(s)	\$3600

Source: MOU 2005b

As an incentive to encourage asylum seekers to successfully complete job training programs and to gain employment, the South Korean government provides additional funds. It especially encourages the *saetomin* to pursue vocational training in sectors where there is a shortage of employees. Included in the list of 447 job categories for which training courses are provided by the Ministry of Unification are: machinery, metal works, chemical engineering, ceramic engineering, electronics, telecommunications,

environmental sciences, crafts, safety control, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, transportation and education (Choi 2004, 107).

Before the North Korean asylum seekers are given their settlement payments, the *saetomin* must successfully complete their “training” at the “Center for Supporting the Adaptation of North Korean Defectors” (more commonly known as *Hanawon*), where they must remain for a total of four months, during which time they are isolated from society. *Hanawon* is a re-education facility located in the rural farming region of Anseong, about 75 km outside of Seoul, and is run by the Ministry of Unification, with the collaboration of other Ministries and agencies. It is a national security facility where only North Korean asylum seekers are sent upon their arrival in South Korea. Since it opened in August 1998, there have been over 5000 ‘graduates’ at *Hanawon*. It was opened to accommodate the re-education of the increasing numbers of North Korean asylum seekers about capitalism and South Korean society – a role that was previously under the authority of the South Korean intelligence agency.<sup>7</sup> It also serves as a place to provide medical and moral support to facilitate the transition to life in South Korea.

While the MOU states that the facility provides protection and education for 2400 each year, it can only house 400 people at a time (MOU 2005, 107). The minimum length of stay required has been reduced from one year to three months, which has been criticised by some who feel that the length of time spent at *Hanawon* is too short for adequate preparation.<sup>8</sup> The daily schedule, from 9am-5pm, is divided as follows: 246 hours of classes of which 48% are in cultural differences; 30% in employment training and 14% in psychological aid (Choi 2004, 96). Classes are administered on capitalism,

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<sup>7</sup> The South Korean intelligence agency’s main role is to filter out spies and to ensure that the *saetomin* reject communism and the North Korean regime, which is continued at *Hanawon* (although not mentioned as part of their official curriculum).

<sup>8</sup> Those 60 years and older are not required to stay at *Hanawon*.

computer literacy, Korean, English and Chinese languages and Korean pronunciation,<sup>9</sup> while the sessions on cultural differences include contemporary South Korean history, traditional customs and rituals still followed. Other instruction includes field trips to cultural centers, lessons on daily living, such as riding the subway, driving, opening a bank account, cooking, purchasing goods at the market, using cell phones and for those who are interested, religious activity at either of *Hanawon*'s Protestant or Buddhist centers, of which many continue to follow after their stay, because they enjoy the support and companionship it provides. Daily group therapy sessions are also a part of the program; the *saetomin* are encouraged to express any hardships or concerns they may have. However, medical treatment is the most important service that is offered, as many have lived in third countries for an average of three years before their arrival in South Korea and have undergone much physical strain in addition to the malnutrition and other health problems they may have suffered in North Korea. Therefore, most are in need of urgent medical treatment.

Specialised training in baking, health care and beauty are provided for women, and programs for children are also available to help them integrate into the regular South Korean schools. Under the Roh Mun Hyun government, further efforts have been made to facilitate the integration of North Korean asylum seekers, as their success (or failure) is interpreted as a foresight to what to expect, should unification occur. Job fairs are organised in collaboration with employment agencies and the local YMCA introduces the

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<sup>9</sup>South Korea has adopted many foreign words in its vocabulary, especially from the English language. In order to be marketable for a job, one must also have basic English language skills. One must also have a basic knowledge of sino-Korean words and be able to write and recognise its Chinese characters. (In its efforts to 'purify' the Korean language, the DPRK has eliminated the use of foreign words, with the exception of some sino-Korean vocabulary that was considered necessary and made up new terms as a supplement.) North Koreans have a distinctive pronunciation when they speak Korean (dialect), which can be identified quite easily. As South Korean society can be quite harsh in discriminating against those who do not speak in the 'standard' Korean accent, learning the proper pronunciation is an important element in their integration process.

*saetomin* to South Koreans. They are also given the opportunity to experience life in a South Korean home after they have completed their training, upon which they receive the first instalment of their settlement money and the harsh reality of life outside *Hanawon* sets in. Their housing is assigned by the government, and they are provided with a police escort for 6 months (this has been reduced from the previous 12-24 months). These escorts serve a multi-purpose: to ensure that northern agents don't contact them; to provide support in daily routines; to protect them, should they be subject to a hate crime, and to ensure that they don't get into trouble (Choi 2004, 98). It is possible those high level defectors are provided with a longer period of "protection" and that more agents are assigned to them.

Support available outside *Hanawon* is limited. The Council of NGOs for Support for North Korean Defectors, composed of 49 religious and civic organisations, provide only minimal support due to their lack of funds (Choi 2004, 98). Other sources of support are: the Hangeore School, which provides tutoring to help youth to adjust to school life; Sky Dream School and Dari Community, which help children without parents; Good People University, founded by the *Yoido* Full Gospel Church, which offers training in employment skills and helps in starting a business; and the Korean Bar Association, which gives free legal advice.

According to an instructor at *Hanawon*, the *saetomin* are provided with the tools in choosing the professions they would like to enter into: "[w]e neither recommend an occupation nor press them to select one, but we teach them to consider different aspects of different careers" (Limb 2005). Their expectations are lowered after the training period: "[W]e are told that life outside *Hanawon* is going to be harsh" (Ms. Kim, defector as in Limb 2005). There have been criticisms that the stay at *Hanawon* is too short and

incomplete. Part of this problem resides in the difficulty for the *saetomin* to concentrate during the lectures because of physical fatigue from their journey, and many do not understand them, while others still have sentiments of mistrust of South Koreans. In order to rectify the latter problem, graduates of *Hanawon* have been asked to give lectures about their experiences living in South Korea.

The South Korean government's settlement package offered to North Korean asylum seekers is more than what any refugee or new immigrant could expect from their host country. Not only do they receive cash payments, but reduced medical fees, less demanding application requirements for university entrance and even incentives for employment. The changes in policy and the support offered are a reflection of the Seoul government's change in their desired perception of their course of action with regards to North Koreans. The perception of *saetomin* has evolved from being regarded as "national heroes" to a "socially handicapped" minority group requiring long-term special care, to a group of individuals with the capacity to become independent and successful citizens of South Korea (MOU 2005b).

Criticism of the *saetomin* settlement policy seems to come from two main groups: the South Korean taxpayers who are the source of funding for these packages and the North Korean asylum seekers themselves. The general impression of North Korean asylum seekers among South Koreans is that they are given too much money and that they live a life of luxury. This image may have been true during the days when the conservative South Korean government used the new arrivals as tools for propaganda by declaring them as national heroes and providing them with enough money to take care of them for the rest of their life. That was also a period when there was no structured program for the North Koreans, since their numbers were so few. Since the 1990s, the

government has restructured its program and vastly reduced the amount of money provided, which the South Korean public was not made aware of. Thus, many still assumed that the settlement payments were in the amount of a small fortune, which was true for the less wealthy South Koreans, who received less in government aid for the poor than the North Koreans received in settlement payments. The latest amendment, made to the 'Settlement Support for North Korean Defectors' in 2004, adjusted the amount of money provided to \$32 000 (USD) so that the asylum seekers receive the same amount of money as the South Korean poor. Despite the reduction in payments, the financial incentives for North Korean defectors are still more than what is available to regular South Korean citizens (MOU 2005b).

On the other hand, the *saetomin* feel that the settlement payments they receive are inadequate. A number of them who have heard rumours that they would be provided with riches by the ROK government, arrive in South Korea with the expectation of living a life of immediate success and luxury. This impression would, undoubtedly, be influenced by the high-profile media attention and their rewards in the past. Another aspect that the North Koreans have difficulty dealing with is the difference in payments that asylum seekers receive that is usually based on providing invaluable intelligence information to the ROK government. Having lived in a society where the North Korean government ingrained into the minds of its citizens that they are all equal and would be awarded as such, the *saetomin* expect the South Korean government to practise this concept of equality through the settlement payments provided.

Lack of financial support is not the cause of asylum seekers' economic difficulty, seeing as they still receive more money than the poorest South Koreans. It is their lack of experience and knowledge in living in a capitalist society and in understanding the

concept and use of currency, which is what they are taught at *Hanawon*. Despite the improvements made in the efforts to help integrate North Korean asylum seekers, criticism of the facility has been expressed by its ‘students’ and various NGOs that feel that the training received is inadequate. In a period of three months, it is difficult to learn all that is required to live a successful life in South Korea, which, in fact, takes many a lifetime to figure out. One of the common complaints by the *saetomin* is that most of the hours of ‘training’ are spent on theoretical concepts about democracy, capitalism and South Korean society, rather than on more practical elements such as methods of successfully gaining employment and on job training. To some, it seems more like a South Korean ‘re-education’ program, while many others feel that it is a good introduction to what is to come (Choi 2000).

The program at *Hanawon* is still in its developmental stages. It has included many practical lessons on basic living in South Korea. From the time that they enter South Korea, to the moment they are ‘released’ into society, the asylum seekers will have spent four months in isolation from the general public. This isolation from society makes it more difficult for them to get accustomed to their new life. While police escorts are provided for support in their integration process, many officers are assigned up to twenty or more North Koreans to guide, in addition to their regular duties. These escorts are entrusted to help with job placement, as well as to teach the *saetomin* about daily living. The police, who are overworked and underpaid, do not always fulfill their duties to the fullest. If one is fortunate enough to be placed with a kind-hearted officer, the asylum seeker will be able to find a job and will be provided with good moral support. Those who encounter a dishonest worker may be swindled out of their settlement money and left with nothing (Choi 2000).

It has been recommended that the South Korean government work closer with NGOs on developing support and training programs for the successful integration of new arrivals. Although there are training centers and tutorial schools for North Koreans, as well as volunteer “Settlement Helpers”, the resources and manpower are insufficient to meet the demands. While the South Korean government has been restructuring its support for North Korean refugees to accommodate their changing needs, there has been a need to increase their collaboration with NGOs and religious groups to focus on *saetomin* support and integration (Chang 2004).

### Challenges of Integration

One of the main problems in integration into South Korean society is that many have unrealistic expectations of the government, based on past rumours from defectors in the South, who were provided with more money and benefits and treated as national heroes. The *saetomin* expected immediate acceptance from South Koreans, while the South Koreans assumed immediate adaptation from the North Koreans. The issue of *saetomin* integration into South Korean society is discussed in detail in the following section.

### *A Question of Identity*

Is the difficulty of integration attributed to the presence of a separate North and South Korean national identity? This question is what the present section seeks to address. While the issue is examined in three phases; at the South Korean governmental level, from the South Korean viewpoint and at the North Koreans’ perception of their life in the

South, emphasis is placed on the last element, since the first two were already addressed in the previous sections of this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, the South Korean government's settlement policy for North Koreans has been continuously modified in order to adjust to the changing needs of the *saetomin*. First, it was the accommodation of the increasing number of arrivals. More recently, efforts have been made to create programs to meet the specific needs of asylum seekers, as the demographics have diversified to consist mostly of a majority of women and children since the mid-1990s. In accordance to the ROK constitution, the financial and social assistance provided are the southern government's tokens of 'accepting' the Northerners as one of their own (South Korean citizens). While the Defector Settlement, which is offered exclusively to North Koreans, is provided as a means to facilitate the integration process, this is only a limited time offer; eventually, the *saetomin* are expected to live independently in mainstream South Korean society. The settlement can be interpreted as a parent or guardian's initial support given to those in their care until the time comes for them to venture out on their own. It is similar to the image of the stronger one helping its weaker counterpart, as mentioned in Chapter 3. The goal is to achieve happily employed, autonomous *saetomin*. According to the South Korean government, the asylum seekers are members of one Korean nation in a capitalist society.

From a *saetomin*'s perspective, life in South Korea is nothing like the Korea that they expected. Many North Koreans, having the idea that the people living on the Korean peninsula are of one Korean nation, are quite shocked at the vast differences between South Koreans and themselves. Joo Sung II, a former North Korean soldier stationed at the DMZ, who had more knowledge of South Korean society than most

asylum seekers, was still surprised when he arrived in the South. He stated, “I thought of South Korea as being part of the same country as the North, and the people being of the same nationality. ...[T]here were differences between what I thought and what was reality” (Shin, June 2006). It is not uncommon for many *saetomin* to feel overwhelmed in the South, especially in a fast-paced capitalist society. Years of North Korean indoctrination, as with Cho Yeon Ji, still remain as an integral part of one’s behaviour, hindering one’s integration process:

I lived like a virtual robot in North Korea, believing whatever the government told me, and that’s why it’s so difficult for me to adapt to my new life here. I can go anywhere, do anything I want in South Korea, but most of the time I don’t have the creativity to take advantage of this opportunity (Sims 2000).

Many others, like Kim Eun Chol, feel as though they have arrived in a twilight zone: “I am living in a country where the people look like me and speak the same language, but their lifestyle and mentality are so vastly different that I feel like an alien” (Sims 2000).

A common preoccupation of *saetomin* is their tendency to blend into mainstream society, without being identified as North Korean. The women tend to hide behind layers of makeup, which they are not accustomed to do, as it is common for South Korean women to maximise the use of cosmetics. North Korean men, who can often be identified as such due to their smaller stature, colour their hair, as it is common in South Korea (Chang 2004, 21). The most challenging element for the asylum seekers to overcome is the issue of language. They try to hide their North Korean accent, which sounds like a distinctive Korean dialect, and they take precautions to avoid using North Korean words and expressions. As a result, their own identities are in question, since they are compelled to modify their natural behaviour into one that is seen as foreign and confusing.

Although a *saetomin*'s sense of self in relation to South Korean society is most often influenced by their efforts to integrate, those who appear to be successful in the South also face difficulties. While there are instances when asserting oneself as having come from North Korea may be to one's advantage, such as a restaurant owner in Seoul who specialises in North Korean cuisine, or director Jung Sung-San, who, after having been rejected from South Korean society, was made famous for his musical, "*Yoduk Story*," set in a North Korean prison. While Jung experienced consistent discrimination and rejection to the fact that he is from North Korea, he was able to overcome the obstacles.

It is not uncommon for a successful *saetomin* who wishes to marry a South Korean woman to be rejected by the girl's parents because he is from North Korea. It seems as though there is still a sense of the North Korean 'Other' among the South Korean population. While some of the reactions of South Koreans may not be intentional, it is clear that the anti-North Korean and anti- education they received as school children still remains with them. Kim Hyeong-Deok states, "My disappointment was great. First of all, it was difficult to accept an environment in which a person is judged only by his money" (Lankov 2006, 120).

In the end, as with the North Koreans hiding in China, once the situation permits and life improves in the DPRK, they all wish to return to their hometowns in the North. Paterniti observes, "...[T]hey were clearly torn, still loyal, even unconsciously patriotic, to the country they had fled – at the very least, forever shaped by it" (Paterniti 2003, 3). This plan to return 'home' indicates that they feel that they will never really fully integrate into South Korean society, although, as observed by Pastor Chun Ki Won, who works with North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea, "...but with time, defectors just

start looking more South Korean. They start to look like they belong here, not like they're out of place" (Chang 2004, 20).

South Korea has assumed the role of the 'protector' of the North – its older sibling who provides support in a time of need. It began with the humanitarian food aid during the severe drought and flood in the early 1990s and has continued by providing economic support with the establishment of the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the financing of other joint activities. However, there are still remnants of the hard-lined anti-education that school children received, as late as the 1990s, and of the anti-North Korean sentiment that accompanied it.

The media has changed its reporting on North Korean related issues. A shift has been led away from the politics, which always seems to bring out the darkened image of North Korea, to focus rather on the more positive events (which, since the 2000 summit, included agreements not to report negative news about each other). The human side of the North Koreans who live in the South is more accessible as the numbers are increasing and more studies are being conducted on how they are faring in the South; attempts are being made to dispel the myths of North Korean asylum seekers as people who live a life of luxury, an example of government propaganda which was created by the ROK in the 1970s and 1980s.

In a report given by the South Korean Ministry of Unification, it was found that as of September 2004, 70% of North Korean defectors were receiving social assistance for the poor from the government (Na 2004b), suggesting that they are having problems successfully integrating into South Korean society. The problems of integration may be divided into three categories: social, economic and psychological.

Countless interviews have been conducted with North Korean asylum seekers by the South Korean government and researchers for the purpose of gathering information about the political and social life of North Koreans. It was only recently that the issues of adaptation began to be closely examined, for it is the common belief that the manner in which North Koreans adjust to life in South Korea is a reflection of the social concerns which may arise should North and South Korea become unified.

### Social Problems

One of the most difficult aspects of life in South Korea for North Korean asylum seekers is living in solitude. The majority of North Koreans were uncomfortable in social situations, and it generally took about two years to overcome this social phobia. The main reason for their difficulty in adjusting to the South Korean lifestyle comes from the large gap between life in South Korea and the life that the North Koreans were accustomed to in North Korea. They found South Korea to be very individualistic and capitalistic. These elements, which have become an integral characteristic of contemporary Korean society, can make anyone feel isolated in a busy cosmopolitan lifestyle of Seoul. This is particularly true for North Koreans. They find it difficult to relate to the South Koreans who seem to be more interested in the economy and material goods than anything else.

Another barrier is the difficulty in associating with other North Koreans. While asylum seekers may be in close contact with other North Koreans in South Korea with whom they were acquainted prior to their arrival, in general, no real relationship is made between North Korean asylum seekers. One reason for this is that North Koreans tend to compare themselves with others in the same situation as they. If it is found that the other possesses more of something or is living better, a sense of animosity begins to develop

and a form of competition begins. When it is learned that economic success is gained by capital means, some harshly criticise their fellow asylum seekers. There also lies the fear that a close relationship with another North Korean of whom they know little about may result in a series of unfortunate circumstances. The fear is that one of the North Koreans encountered may be a spy sent by the North Korean government.

In order to help in their adaptation process, the South Korean government has developed a foster family service where North Koreans have the option of living with South Korean families who volunteer to host them. This is to provide social support for the North Koreans and is a way to provide guidance in learning how South Koreans live. Most opt to live alone in apartment complexes provided by the government. They do not like the idea of living with strangers and still possess a sense of mistrust. They prefer to live a quiet life where no one risks impeding on their privacy (Woo 2000, 368).

### Economic Factors

Many North Koreans have little or no concept of money. They have come to the understanding that money is necessary in order to live in South Korea. Although they have been taught at *Hanawon*, the South Korean training facility for North Koreans, how to use currency, many still have trouble with its use. They are often overwhelmed with the variety of products available for purchase and have difficulty in figuring out the prices. There have also been several reported cases where only five days after having received their monthly salary, all has been spent. In North Korea, where goods were obtained through government-issued food rations or by barter trade, currency was not needed. According to a defector: “[t]he units of money here are too large. I cannot comprehend how much money there is, and I don’t need money. When I have had a lot of money, I’ll

just because I don't understand how to use it" (Grinker 1998, 243).

Besides adjusting to the use of money, North Koreans must also change their attitude towards it and realize that it is a necessity for their livelihood. They were taught in North Korea that money is the root of capitalist slavery and that it represents evil and selfishness. One defector states: "I do not want to be a slave to money. But at the same time, I desperately need money to live in this society" (Woo 2000, 3). Another change is the freedom of choice that the *saetomin* have. In South Korea, where there is an abundance of goods and food to purchase, making simple decisions may be overwhelming, especially for one whose whole life had been regimented.

The South Korean government provides job placement services for North Koreans. Those who are employed often have difficulty keeping their jobs. Many of the jobs in North Korea do not exist in South Korea; therefore, new skills have to be learned to adapt to the South Korean work force. Those who are hired often work in unfamiliar environments with insufficient training to successfully accomplish their tasks. Those who work in clerical jobs often lack the necessary language skills to communicate effectively. Over the years, South Koreans have adopted some English terms into their vocabulary as well as kept some of the words of Chinese origin; whereas in North Korea, Kim Il Sung "purified" the Korean language by eliminating most foreign vocabulary and created Korean substitutions for some terms. As a result, in addition to familiarizing themselves with their work environment, North Koreans must learn the local language.

Asylum seekers have trouble adjusting to the competitive nature of the South Korean work force and are often looked down upon by their South Korean colleagues for not working with enough efficiency. In the South Korean working custom, colleagues

often socialize after work as a form of bonding experience. Many of the North Koreans have said that they felt uncomfortable in these situations.

### Psychological Factors

The long and dangerous journey to South Korea has had many psychological effects on North Koreans. According to a study published in the April 2005 issue of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, a significant number of North Koreans living in South Korea suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). It has been found that a higher percentage of North Korean women suffer from PTSD than men. Since most of the asylum seekers spend time in a third country prior to their arrival in South Korea, many of the women have been subject to sexual abuse or human trafficking (International Crisis Group 2006, 13). Because of the desire to forget about their traumatic experiences, many do not seek treatment for their psychological ailments. The result is the presence of anxiety, depression, alcoholism, nightmares and attempted suicides. Among the 456 *saetomin* surveyed in 1998 by the National Intelligence Service, 96% said that they feared being attacked by a South Korean and 65% stated that they have been threatened by a South Korean they knew (Baek and Koh 2002, 218). While treatment is provided at *Hanawon* through compulsory therapy sessions, many who require further treatment do not seek it once they are on their own; either because they are unaware of the ailment that they have or they are suspicious of the psychiatrist's true intentions for treatment.

One other problem that many North Koreans suffer from is guilt. They feel the constant guilt of having left their loved ones behind in North Korea, whose family members are most likely punished by the DPRK government for being related to someone who has left the country without authorization. In North Korea, it is common practice to

punish the family members of those who have committed a criminal act by reason of association, or if the individual in question cannot be found. As a result of this fear, many North Koreans prefer to live in anonymity and when giving interviews, often use pseudonyms and ask that particular details of their lives not be published.

A number of North Koreans who attend religious services and activities in South Korea are not necessarily interested in the spiritual aspect of the congregation with which they are associated. There are some who have had contact with South Korean missionaries in China and have received help from these groups in their journey to South Korea and have felt readily converted to Christianity. There are some North Koreans who, although they may not harbour any spiritual feelings, participate in religious services more out of social obligation. They join the congregation as a form of respect and to express their appreciation for all the help that they received from the religious group.

Many North Koreans have high expectations of life in South Korea. When they realize that they must overcome even more obstacles than expected, some fall into a deep depression. It appears that psychological trauma is the main cause of the failure of *saetomin* integration. Those who enter South Korea with their families or who are married were found to have a happier life and to have more success in integrating. It is a process that may take up to five years before the asylum seeker begins to feel at home. While the majority of asylum seekers remain in South Korea, there are an increasing number of them who have plans to move either to Europe or to the United States once they receive their South Korean passport. They believe that moving to a different country will help them to adjust to their new life with more ease and comfort, out of the constant watch of the South Korean government.

Some of the difficulties faced by *saetomin* in South Korea are those commonly experienced by other refugees and immigrants. However, the underlying difference is the high expectation of immediate integration from both the host society and the new arrivals. The ROK has embraced the *saetomin* as members of the Korean nation in the South. As suggested in their North Korean refugee policies, a ‘successfully’ integrated *saetomin* is one who has fully accepted to become part of the South Korean ‘Self’, (i.e.: to accept as their own, the South’s way of life, language, culture and history – all that is taught at *Hanawon* as their own).

While the *saetomin* wish to feel as if they belong in South Korean society by adapting to a new lifestyle, they are not so readily willing to completely let go of their North Korean ‘Other’ that has been such an integral part of their life and of their identity. They are split between the desire to become a ‘good South Korean citizen’ and the wish to be able to return to their hometown. Difficulties of *saetomin* integration are due to unfulfilled expectations and on the diverging views of what it means to be Korean for South Koreans and for the *saetomin*. The constructed image of the Korean nation - namely in South Korea- by the *saetomin* does not fit into the idea of the Korean ‘Self’, which is based on the lectures at *Hanawon*. As a result, the *saetomin* is a modified version of the South Korean ‘Self’, thus still remaining as the Korean other in their new home.

## Conclusion

A united and homogeneous Korean national identity is an imagined entity constructed by those who long for a sense of peace and solidarity on the peninsula. Following the physical division of the Korean peninsula, which made the ideological differences more visible, efforts on the South Korean side of the DMZ have been made to construct a unified Korean identity, based on their respective images of what and how Koreans should be.

The quest for defining a unified conception of Korean nationalism is an ongoing process that will remain long after unification. This paper examined two complex and interrelated issues in Korean Studies: the question of Korean national identity and the integration process of North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea. Both questions are pivotal in the development process of Korean society – not only in South Korea but for the peninsula as a whole.

The main purpose was to examine the integration of the increasing numbers of *saetomin* arriving in the ROK since the 1990s, when devastating natural disasters and economic implosion in the DPRK had caused an exponential increase in the number of North Koreans to embark on the journey to the South. An analysis was made, keeping the thesis in mind: that the reason for the more recently arrived *saetomin*'s difficulties in integration is due to the changing idea of Korean national identity in South Korea. More precisely, the differences between North and South Koreans are so great that South Koreans consider the Northerners to belong to a completely different group of Koreans, thus creating the image of separate North and South Korean nations in the Republic of Korea. The results show: despite an apparent divergence in South and North Korean societies, a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity still remains – particularly at the

government policy level. This belief in ‘oneness’ is the reason for which the South Korean government has developed policies for asylum seekers in the South which give preference to those from the DPRK. Based on the clause in the ROK’s constitution, which comprises a definition of a South Korean citizen that includes North Koreans, the South’s policies may even be said to favour the idea of assimilation rather than integration. In the accounts of the *saetomin* interviewed, it seems that those who appeared more ‘South Korean’ experienced little or no discrimination for having come from North Korea. It is as though the desired *saetomin* is one who abandons their North Koreanness and blends into South Korean society.

North Korean asylum seekers have existed since the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945. The number of North Koreans who make their way into South Korea has increased over the years and this trend is expected to continue. While the main reason for leaving the North is in search of a better, more comfortable life, the nature and catalyst for the increasing number of *saetomin* have also changed from political motivation to a situation of life and death. The North Korean asylum seekers receive a generous benefit package that other refugees and immigrants are not offered. The ROK government views the North Koreans as ‘family’ and, thus, feels that it’s their duty to provide and to take care of them. As mentioned in Chapter I, immigration and refugee policies are a relatively recent phenomenon in South Korea, for which the issue had not been seriously addressed until the past few years, under the Roh Mun Hyun administration. It still has much to do in terms of establishing basic laws and policies for immigration. The ROK has only recently acknowledged and accepted the presence of the Korean diaspora and has thereby been coping with the idea of many different forms of Korean ‘nations’, but which are still regarded as being members of one ‘community’ of

Korean people. This change is evident in South Korea's amended immigration and citizenship policy.

As defined in Chapter II, Koreans' idea of the nation is based on a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity - one that is shared by both the North and South Korean governments. Despite the ideological differences, both the DPRK and the ROK maintain the firm belief in ethnic unity as the basis for unification. The definition of Korean national identity is always changing and never has been very clearly defined. It has always been defined in response to external threats. Shin refers to the formation of a collective consciousness for the purpose of self-preservation (Shin 2006, 225).

Since the first inter-Korean summit in 2000, initiated by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, the two Koreas have agreed to work towards an effort for peaceful co-existence rather than for plans for immediate unification. Regardless of the political differences, this historical summit concluded with benefits of cultural and economic exchange between the two nations. It also recognized the social and cultural differences that have developed over the years, but maintained that these divergences are only a minor setback to the long history and that North and South Koreans are still members of one Korean nation. According to Shin, the South Korean government is keen on preserving its native culture and values. As the disruption in social lives leads to affirmation of cultural and native heritage, Shin states that, “[c]hains of memory, myth, and symbol connect nations to their ethnic heritage, and national identity satisfies the people's need for cultural fulfillment, rootedness, security, and fraternity in the face of tumult.” (Shin 2006, 214).

As the threat of communism has decreased over the years and the Republic of Korea has become economically competitive on the world market to become more

politically stable, the government's 'unyielding' anti-communist and anti-North Korean policies have also softened. These changes are reflected in the indicators of South Korean national identity, found in Chapter Three, in which the news media, primary school textbooks and national symbols were used to examine the image of the South Korean 'Self' in relation to the North Korean 'Other'.

The ROK government has had great influence (and in the past, control) over what and how its citizens felt about certain issues, particularly on their sentiments towards the DPRK and its people. To examine this influence, the following criteria were used: the print news media; school textbooks and national symbols, such as the Korean War Memorial and the joint Liberation Day celebrations with North and South Korea. The image portrayed had changed from one that demonized North Koreans to one of pity because of their extreme poverty and lack of basic supplies, such as food and medicines.

In keeping with the government's role in Confucian society, which is to serve as a 'father figure', to teach and to protect its citizens from possible danger, the South Korean government has taken upon itself to assume this responsibility on behalf of all Koreans on the peninsula. Initially, by depicting the image of the evils of communism as having infiltrated the North Koreans, the South Korean government instilled an image of fear and, even, hatred. Today, while they are still regarded as a threat, North Koreans are portrayed as victims of communism who, thus, must be 'saved'. They are pitied for their difficult life, which is limited by restriction and poverty. In recent years, they are no longer given the image of 'subhuman', but are viewed as the poor brethren requiring its southern counterpart to care for and to support them; this is particularly evident since the devastating flood and famine of the 1990s, which led to a large exodus from the DPRK, as described in Chapter IV.

The North Korean asylum seekers assume that life in the South will not be difficult to adapt to because they have this idea of shared ethnicity. However, as it was shown in Chapter IV, ethnic homogeneity, based on a common bloodline, does not automatically imply easy integration. The difference in lifestyles and beliefs, which has increased a prolonged separation and isolation of the two states from each other, also has an effect.

In Chapter V, it was noted that the problem of integration is not necessarily caused by the change in Korean national identity; instead, it is a result of the effect of lifestyle that comes with capitalism and globalisation. Since the ROK has become a member of the developing world, it has adapted to many of the ways of life and 'culture' common in capitalist nations. Today, North Koreans who desire to leave South Korea claim that it is too difficult to live in the South; they do not realise that moving to another country will not necessarily be any better. For many, the greatest barrier for *saetomin* is the psychological trauma experienced during their journey South and their unfulfilled expectations of adapting easily once they arrive. They are discouraged when their expectation of immediate success and integration are not fulfilled. They do not realise that this is a process that may take several years.

### Final Remarks

Differences between North and South Korean societies are inevitable. These differences are acknowledged by both Korean governments; through cultural and economic exchange, they have made efforts to prevent further divergence, in accordance with their belief in a homogeneous Korean nation. The signs of divergence between the Koreas are directly experienced by the *saetomin* who live in the South. However, these

differences are not so vast that a completely separate imagined North Korean nation within South Korea is present.

In terms of the South Korean 'self' and the North Korean 'other', the ROK's official policy is to embrace the North Korean asylum seekers as 'one of their own' (i.e.: South Korean citizens), as is stated in the country's constitution. As mentioned earlier, South Korea's government has taken the role of 'big brother', which is most prevalent in the changes made in school textbooks. There has been a movement from a sense of fear of North Koreans, to a feeling of pity and a belief in the importance of unification, so that North Koreans can live as well as the South Koreans. The image has changed from the image of the 'evil' twin to one of the South Korean 'big brother' who comes to the rescue. This is evident in the food and medical supplies that the South has sent to the North and more importantly, in projects such as the *Kaesong* Industrial Complex and the Mount *Geumgang* tours, which are investments made by the South in order to help lessen the economic gap with the North. The goal, therefore, is to stimulate the DPRK economy.

The policy goal of the ROK, with respect to the *saetomin*, is for integration and for eventual assimilation. However, some may argue that this may be difficult, not only because of the psychological and social problems encountered by the asylum seekers, but by the mere fact that the South Korean government continues to label them and to put them into a category that is separate from the general population. One may argue that the creation of the terms *talbukja* and *saetomin*, terms used when referring to North Korean asylum seekers, is an obstacle in the integration process. It may also be the reason why *saetomin* seem to have a strong separation from their 'self' and the South Korean 'other'. Grinker describes South Korean policy as one that fails to "accommodate a changed and heterogeneous Korea" (Grinker 158, 1998 as in Shin 187).

Since the idea of Korean identity and the issues concerning the *saetomin* are always changing, more in depth studies are required in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the subject, so that more effective programs can be developed. The research for this paper was conducted mainly through the study of the South Korean government's policies, rather than through interviews and surveys, which would have provided a richer and deeper perspective on the situation of the *saetomin* in South Korea. Due to several factors, such as limitations in time and resources and, more importantly, the sensitive nature of the research, this was not possible. Interviewing *saetomin* is a process that takes time and careful planning, since the interviewer must first build trust with the North Koreans and be able to make them feel at ease.

The study of identity and *saetomin* integration, as presented in this paper, is a relatively recent issue and is of much interest to researchers and the governments involved. More detailed studies have begun only in the past ten years on the situation. National identity is a continuously changing phenomenon and is no different in Korea. However, the feelings of the Korean ethnic community, with respect to the North-South relations and Korean unification, are still strong (Shin 2006, 234). It is this sense of the 'imagined Korean community' that seeks to close the cultural and economic gaps between the DPRK and the ROK on the Korean peninsula and, especially, within South Korea and which, now, seems to account for the various policies set and implemented by the South Korean government.

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## Appendix Ia

“Statue of Brothers”  
War Memorial – Seoul, Republic of Korea



Photo taken by: Regina Lee  
Seoul, Republic of Korea.  
July 2007

**Appendix 1b**

“Statue of Brothers”  
War Memorial – Seoul, Republic of Korea



Photo taken by: Regina Lee  
Seoul, Republic of Korea.  
July 2007

## Appendix 2

### Glossary of Terms

38 <sup>th</sup> parallel	The longitude at which the Korean peninsula is divided. Also referred to as the DMZ.
<i>Durihana</i>	“two becomes one” – religious group based in South Korea with various programs to help North Korean asylum seekers.
<i>Gwangbok</i>	“great restoration”- term used to refer to Korean Liberation Day (August 15).
<i>Hanawon</i>	“longing for one” – a facility run by the South Korean government required for North Korean asylum seekers in South Korea to attend as a part of their settlement training.
<i>Hangeul</i>	The name of the Korean written language.
<i>Josonjok</i>	Term used to refer to ethnic Koreans living in China.
<i>Juche</i>	“self reliance” – the official ideology of North Korea created by Kim Il Sung, based on the principles of Marxist-Leninism.
<i>Minjok</i>	“race”, “nation” – term used by Koreans to refer to Korean nationalism
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
POW	Prisoner of war
<i>Saetomin</i>	“new arrival”- the most recent term used to refer to North Korean asylum seekers.
<i>Talbukja</i>	“those who fled the North” – the term used to refer to North Korean asylum seekers before the term <i>saetomin</i> was created.