

# The Making of Post-Socialist Citizens in South Korea?: The Case of Border Crossers from North Korea

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to capture the complex process through which former socialist North Koreans are remade as South Koreans. I argue that the process by which border crossers from North Korea are remade into post-socialist subjects is complex and multi-dimensional. I address the interlocked nature of institutions and subjectivities in citizen-making processes. On the one hand, it involves the institutionalizations of border crossers with the purpose of screening out “dangerous socialist subjects” for security reasons, followed by “post-socialist” education at Hanawon. On the other hand, it also entails the cultural dynamics of the citizen-making processes. Border crossers are taught not only about political democracy and the economic market, but the cultural learning of resilience to cope with hardship and uncertainty in South Korea. This paper finds two distinctive responses to the cultural learning of resilience—fear and rejection. In this sense, the institutionalizations and the cultural teaching of resilience have unintended consequences. These citizen-making processes raise the question of what characterizes normal subjectivity in a modern, marketized economy. Rather than accepting these normal assumptions as given and natural, this paper tries to uncover hidden assumptions and to problematize the arbitrariness of these normative assumptions. What appears normal, rational, free, and democratic can be actually accidental, temporary, absurd, and socially constructed. This paper attempts to challenge and demystify the meaning of rational, free, democratic, resilient, and normative citizenships that tend to be taken for granted.

**Keywords:** citizenship, border crossers, North Korea, post-socialism, Hanawon

**DOI:** 10.5509/2020933519

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Acknowledgement: I am deeply grateful to the editor Hyung Gu Lynn for his thoughtful comments, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions. Special thanks to Gil Eyal, Bill Hayes, and Marty Whyte for their comments on earlier drafts.

## **Introduction**

This study confronts the puzzle presented by the remaking of former North Koreans into South Koreans. The post-socialist transformation that border crossers from North Korea go through is a very complex process, involving the simultaneous process of unmaking socialist subjectivity and making post-socialist subjectivity. This paper attempts to deal with two different dimensions of making post-socialist citizens. Becoming South Korean means not only obtaining legal status but also learning the cultural skills to survive in South Korea. Understanding the institutional aspect of citizenship is necessary, but not sufficient to capture the complex nature of post-socialist citizenship. The cultural dynamics of citizen-making processes need to be explored as well. This complex nature of post-socialist citizenship for border crossers entails (re)socialization through institutionalizations and the cultural learning of resilience in order to survive in an uncertain market economy.

To describe this complex process of acclimation, which remakes their personhood, former North Koreans use the cultural metaphor of “changing clothes.” In other words, they must remove their socialist Northern clothes and begin to wear post-socialist Southern clothes. The metaphor of wearing Southern clothes entails a binary opposition between good and evil, liberal democracy and autocratic tyranny, South and North, black and white, and with us or against us. Wearing Southern clothes means one can no longer wear Northern clothes. One cannot be simultaneously anti-communist and communist. The cultural metaphor of clothing also entails the notion of “being normal,” and the “struggle to be ordinary,”<sup>1</sup> which can also be applied to the case of border crossers in South Korea. Discarding Northern clothes and wearing Southern clothes can also be interpreted as the cultural struggle to become ordinary in South Korea. Only after wearing Southern clothes can former North Koreans live a livable life and perform as normal citizens to avoid marginalization and exclusion in the new society in the South. Clothing is not just a metaphor, but also a material marker of normal citizenship. Although the end-goal of the process is for former North Koreans to become free citizen-subjects, I argue that this process itself does not entail freedom or independence. Instead, it involves disciplinary practices designed by the state to instill new post-socialist ethics, with a particular emphasis on the cultural learning of resilience.

The changing of clothes thus describes a complex process of both unmaking socialist subjects and remaking new capitalist citizens. This discussion proceeds as follows. First, I examine the existing literature on

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<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of clothing as “a way of being” is elaborated and academically articulated in the sociology of material culture. For more, see Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward, *Blue Jeans: The Art of the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007).

border crossers. Second, I explain the methodology used to study border crossers and their unique characteristics. Then, two different dimensions of post-socialist citizenship are discussed: 1) the institutionalizations of border crossers, and 2) the cultural dynamics of citizen-making processes. For institutional citizenship, I discuss the post-socialist transformation of border crossers taking place at two state institutions. This involves the institutionalizations of border crossers with the purpose of screening out “dangerous socialist subjects” for security reason at the National Intelligence Agency, followed by “post-socialist” education at Hanawon. For the cultural aspect of citizenship, border crossers are taught not just about political democracy and the economic market, but also about the cultural learning of resilience in order to cope with hardship and uncertainty in South Korea. These two parts aim to capture the interlocked nature of institutional arrangements and subjectivities regarding citizenship. Finally, I conclude with two distinctive responses to the cultural learning of resilience: fear and rejection.

## **Literature Review**

The meaning of the term “(re)making” is based upon the definition by Michel Foucault, who argues that human beings are made into subjects. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,<sup>2</sup> Foucault argues that modern discipline “makes” individuals. That is, disciplinary power is the specific technique of a power that sees individuals as objects and as instruments of its exercise. Thus, “making” entails the disciplinary process of subjectification, which is the detailed practice and activity of corrective training to make subjects proper, lawful, rational, and responsible citizens of the modern state. This study examines the social and cultural formation of post-socialist individuals; in so doing, I also describe the making of modern citizens, the fabrication of post-socialist subjects, and the inscription of normal and normative individuals in South Korea. In this sense, citizenship is defined as a set of concrete practices undertaken by the government to reinvent its subjects, which involves the institutional aspects and cultural dynamics of citizen-making. The case of North Korean border crossers in South Korea is one that defines, challenges, and redefines the meaning of “Korean-ness” and the notion of normative citizenship in South Korea.

Existing studies of North Korean border crossers have employed diverse concepts and theoretical orientations. Often, Western media focus mostly on North Korean atrocities and Chinese human rights abuses, ending with the border crossers’ arrival in a land of capitalism and democracy such as South Korea, the United States, or the United Kingdom. In such accounts,

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

border crossers are presented as witnesses or victims of violence perpetrated by evil socialist states and, therefore, as empirical evidence for human rights problems in North Korea. Cultural anthropologist Chung Byung-Ho classifies reports using this approach as “political defector studies.”<sup>3</sup> This perspective is dominant in North American studies of border crossers, which present North Korea as part of an “axis of evil.” One of the main aims of this perspective is to further understand and perhaps criticize North Korea through border crossers’ testimonies and experiences.

In South Korea, there is much empirical research on border crossers as well. The existing literature in South Korea starts where political defector studies end, with border crossers’ arrival in capitalist South Korea. Thus, the issue of border crossers here is focused more on their experiences in South Korea than their past in North Korea. Quite a few policy-oriented research pieces, such as government reports, focus on improving the level of social integration and individual adaptation to South Korea, while more academically oriented research mostly employs grounded theory for interviewing border crossers and analyzing their personal experiences.<sup>4</sup> Though informative and rich in data, the main problem with this approach, however, is that it emphasizes how border crossers assimilate to life in South Korea by focusing on the issue of social integration and individual adjustment, rather than problematizing the discrimination, prejudice, and even hostility border crossers face. For example, the sociologist In-Jin Yoon<sup>5</sup> uses the migration studies approach to investigate the adaptation and assimilation of border crossers to life in South Korea.

This paper aims to contribute to scholarship by using a new approach of “ironic analysis,” in addition to providing empirically grounded qualitative data. The ironic analysis demystifies what we tend to take for granted in the

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<sup>3</sup> Byung-Ho Chung, “Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea,” *Korean Studies* 32 (2009): 1–27. There are several books in this tradition. For instance, Cheol-Hwan Kang and Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World’s Most Repressive Country* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); Blaine Harden, *Escape from Camp 14: One Man’s Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2012). However, some of the stories in *Escape from Camp 14* have been proven false and fabricated, so there are questions of credibility and reliability in these stories.

<sup>4</sup> In-Mook Cho and Young-Hua Key, “Bukhan italjumin-ui minju simin gyoeyuk gyeongheom-eul tonghan sam-ui gwanjeom byeonhwa yeongu [Study on the perspective change on life through democratic civil education of North Korean settlers],” *Hanguk bigyo jeongbu hakbo* 19, no. 1 (2015): 271–293; Seomok Hwang and Hyo Heon Won, “Bukhan italjumin-i insikhan Hanawon gyoeyuk-gwa namhan-ui pyeonsaeng gyoeyuk-e daehan inteobyu naeyong bunseok [Analysis of interviews on Hanawon education and South Korea’s lifelong education recognized by North Korean defectors],” *Susan haeyang gyoeyuk yeongu* 29, no. 4 (2017): 1277–1288.

<sup>5</sup> There are many articles and books in South Korea about border crossers from North Korea. Notable are the publications of In-Jin Yoon. See his book, *Bukhan ijumin : saenghwal-gwa uisik geurigo jeongchak jiwon jeongchaek* [North Korean migrants: life and minds, and policies for settlement] (Seoul: Jipmundang, 2009), as well as In-Jin Yoon, “North Korean Diaspora: North Korean Defectors Abroad and in South Korea,” *Development and Society* 30, no. 1 (2001): 1–26.

academic tradition of post-socialist transformation.<sup>6</sup> What appears normal, rational, free, democratic, and natural can actually be accidental, temporary, and absurd. This approach seeks to expose the arbitrariness of the existing order, questioning its hidden assumptions and accidental origins. The approach of “ironic analysis” is the kind of originality<sup>7</sup> that I attempt to contribute to the existing scholarship of border crossers. In this sense, this study belongs to the tradition of “critical citizenship studies,”<sup>8</sup> as this tradition does not assume any fixed image of South Korea; rather, it problematizes the notion of Korean-ness and carefully investigates the citizen-making process in South Korea.

As stated above, most of the qualitative research on border crossers belongs to the tradition of grounded theory which focuses on micro-level personal experiences. However, this study attempts to understand how macro-level social changes in the modes of production and micro-level cultural experiences intersect. Alternatively, the extended case method would be useful in tracing the institutional changes of people’s daily lives by connecting a cultural, micro-level analysis with its macro-level changes from socialism to post-socialism.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the type of research found in grounded theory, the extended case method in sociology deploys ethnography to understand people’s everyday lives in socially and historically specific contexts, and to locate them in larger macro structures of the world.<sup>10</sup> In this vein, macro-level concepts such as socialism and post-socialism are essential in making sense of the transformations that border crossers are going through in South Korea, and this method is also part of the tradition of (re)interpretive research which critically reexamines the institutionalization process and meaning of resocialization in South Korea. For this, the cultural notion of resilience for normal, upstanding citizens will be critically re-examined and challenged.

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<sup>6</sup> R. N. Jacobs and R. Smith, “Romance, Irony, and Solidarity,” *Sociological Theory* 15, no. 1 (1997): 60–80; Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi, and Eleanor Townsley, “On Irony: An Invitation to Neoclassical Sociology,” *Thesis Eleven* 73 (2003): 5–41.

<sup>7</sup> There are many forms of originality in academic scholarship—a new approach, theory, method, or data, studying a new topic, etc. This study attempts to contribute to the field by providing not only new qualitative data, but also by using a new approach of “ironic analysis.” For more discussion of originality, see Michele Lamont, *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Ji Yeon Lee, “Talbuk yeoseong-ui gyeongge neomgi-wa juche hyeongseong” [Transnationality and subject-making of North Korean women in South Korea] (PhD dissertation, Yonsei University, 2017); Byung Ho Chung, ed., *Welkom tu Koria: Bukjoseon saramdeul-ui namhan sari* [Welcome to Korea: lives of North Koreans in South Korea ] (Seoul: Hanyang University Press, 2006); Hae Yeon Choo, “Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship: North Korean Settlers in Contemporary South Korea,” *Gender and Society* 20, no. 5 (2006): 576–604; J. Lee, “Disciplinary Citizenship in South Korean NGOs’ Narratives of Resettlement for North Korean Refugees,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 15 (2015): 2688–2704; S.Y. Park, “Street-Level Bureaucracy and Depoliticized North Korean Subjectivity in the Service Provision of Hana Center,” *Asian Ethnicity* 17, no. 2 (2016): 199–213.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Burawoy, “The Extended Case Method,” *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (1998): 4–33.

<sup>10</sup> Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans, “Two Cases of Ethnography: Grounded Theory and the Extended Case Method,” *Ethnography* 10, no. 3 (2009): 243–263.

This is essential to address the interlocked nature of institutional arrangements and micro subjectivities in citizenship.

### **Methodology**

I do not intend to prove or test any universal theory, but to borrow sociological concepts such as post-socialist transformation to make sense of and interpret particular citizen-making processes. My description of the process of remaking former North Koreans into citizen-subjects is based on qualitative fieldwork which includes in-depth interviews with 55 informants, a year-long participant-observation at a local NGO, and archival data gathered in South Korea and China from 2005 to 2019. The information presented here is based upon interview data from border crossers as well as former teachers, counselors, and volunteers in Hanawon, along with analyses of course materials such as textbooks. The qualitative data are helpful in disclosing the detailed actions, frustrations, angers, and struggles taking place in the process of post-socialist transformation in South Korea. It should be noted that it is not easy to conduct research on this topic because of its sensitive nature, since some border crossers still have family members in North Korea who could be put at risk, while some fear of discrimination and prejudices in South Korea.

Research informants for this study were recruited primarily using the snowball technique. I had befriended several border crossers before this study, and met more during my participant-observation period at a local NGO in Seoul. In addition, I attended numerous conferences and public events where border crossers were speakers. After the events, I introduced myself and asked for interviews, and from there, more informants were also introduced to me by these initial contacts. They then suggested other possible informants, who in turn suggested more people. The interviews were held in diverse locations that were accessible and comfortable for the participants, such as NGO offices, restaurants, private homes, cafés, and alternative schools.

The interviews were semi-structured with guided questions, yet typically developed into informal conversations; in most cases, casual conversation with food and drink proved most beneficial for learning in-depth information. The interviews themselves were always exciting adventures and wonderful learning experiences. Interviews lasted from one hour to five or six hours, and, if necessary, follow-up interviews were conducted for clarification and additional information. I do not intend or claim to provide the best way to document the lives of border crossers in South Korea nor to represent their voices or to speak for them; rather, I hope my limited data can pave the way for efforts to better understand the lives of border crossers in South Korea.

Conducting interviews is like building a relationship or friendship. One needs to manage, value, and respect the relationship, as well as any

information shared. I made efforts to build a close rapport with the informants. In fact, I maintain family-like relationships with some border crossers, meeting them during holidays and on weekends for meals, attending their weddings, and being called their “Southern brother” or “Southern uncle.”

From my Seoul accent and middle-class presentation, many of my informants initially thought that it would be interesting to get to know me. During the interviews, communication was typically based on shared feelings, emotions, and mutual respect; thus, sensitivity and sympathy to their anger, frustration, outrage, and discomfort were indispensable. Unless I shared this kind of affinity with my informants, it was not easy to build a rapport with them. Interviews were much easier and went more smoothly when they felt comfortable with the setting and with me, and when they were able to lead the conversations. When an interview flowed smoothly, each of us sensed mutual respect, and maybe the possibility of friendship, but this took time, effort, and patience. Of course, meeting more frequently was also helpful. This process truly required the art of relationships, and thus needed to be managed, developed, cultivated, and nurtured.

### **The Case: Border Crossers from Socialist North Korea**

I employ the term “border crosser” to discuss displaced North Koreans residing outside of North Korea. Other terms, such as defectors, refugees, or migrants, are used to describe these individuals, but each is very limited in scope and does not encompass the diverse group of North Koreans residing outside of North Korea. Some may be aptly called “defectors,” while others may behave more like “migrants.” The term “refugees” makes sense for those North Koreans who seek asylum in China or elsewhere, but given the heterogeneous and diverse nature of North Koreans, this concept is also limited. Displaced North Koreans do not form a homogenous or monolithic group. Each term has its own value in emphasizing particular characteristics of North Koreans but also risks excluding a significant number of people that do not belong to each limited category. In some cases, a single North Korean border crosser goes through different stages—from a defector escaping from North Korea to a refugee in China to a migrant in South Korea or elsewhere. The term border crosser is a more inclusive concept that illuminates the fluidity of identity; it is employed as a heuristic device to include these heterogeneous, diverse, and changing aspects of North Koreans living outside of North Korea. However, all terms—not only defectors, migrants, and refugees, but also border crossers—are limited and restricting. In the interviews, some border crossers confessed a dislike for all terms referring to their status as former North Koreans because they serve to stigmatize the population they label. For example, one of the informants stated:

We are all Koreans. Plus, I received my national ID number just like any South Korean. Why should there be separate and special terms for me or any other person from North Korea? These names and terms imply that we don't get equal treatment in South Korea. We don't need these names. Just treat me like other regular Koreans.<sup>11</sup>

This study sees border crossers from North Korea as post-socialist subjects who are experiencing the reconfiguration of their subjectivity in South Korea. In this sense, they are different from other migrants in South Korea, many of whom are from non-socialist countries. Further, in comparison to other migrants, border crossers are regarded as socialist subjects from the South Korean state, unlike capitalist individuals born and raised in South Korea.

By law, North Koreans are given automatic legal citizenship; however, they still are required to participate in a cultural orientation program purported to help them live in South Korea. According to the South Korean Constitution,<sup>12</sup> the nation's territory includes the entire Korean peninsula and surrounding islands. This implies that the South Korean government holds legitimate sovereignty over all of Korea, and that North Korea's occupation of the northern part of the peninsula is illegal. As such, North Korean border crossers are considered dislocated citizens of South Korea.

Once border crossers arrive, they are initially viewed as dangerous subjects who might be potential spies, so they are screened and classified at the National Intelligence Agency. Once they are deemed safe, they are placed in the facility Hanawon to learn how to become South Koreans. This process of citizen-making employs dual institutions: the National Intelligence Agency for national security and Hanawon for civil education.<sup>13</sup> In other words, this dual process screens out potential spies and teaches border crossers how to culturally become South Koreans, which is what I call "post-socialist transformation." They are the only group of people in South Korea who have to go through these two stages of institutionalization, unlike other migrants from socialist countries like China and Vietnam. That is, unlike other migrants to South Korea, border crossers must transform themselves

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<sup>11</sup> Informant 11, 15 May 2009, Seoul. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, all interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. Border crossers in South Korea currently number slightly over 33,000, and it is possible to trace their identities with information regarding age, occupation, gender, and place of residence given their limited numbers.

<sup>12</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Why Some North Korean Defectors Choose Not to Live in the South," *NK News*, 20 February 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Will Kymlicka's distinction between "external protection" and "internal restriction" is applicable when thinking about the case of border crossers. It is not the exact same concept, but the institutionalization of border crossers also has two different sites for each goal: national security at the National Intelligence Agency and civil education at Hanawon. One might call this a distinction between "external security" and "internal education." External security screens out dangerous socialist subjects, and internal education provides post-socialist education. For more, see Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

from socialist subjects into post-socialist citizens through these two stages of institutionalization. In the next section, I examine the processes and experiences of border crossers at the two institutions in South Korea as they shed their Northern “clothes” to begin wearing Southern “clothes.”

## **Post-Socialist Transformation at the Institutions**

### *Socialist Subjects as Dangerous Security Threats*

Upon arrival in South Korea, North Koreans are placed in an interrogation centre where they are held for a period of up to six months to evaluate their backgrounds and be debriefed. South Korea’s National Intelligence Agency questions border crossers to determine whether they have any sensitive intelligence information or represent a security risk of being spies for the North Korean government. Meanwhile, the border crossers have to prove their authenticity as “North Koreans,” and not ethnic Koreans from China or overseas Chinese from North Korea. The South Korean law of defining a Korean as someone who was born on the Korean Peninsula to Korean parents is strictly applied; thus technically, all inhabitants of North Korea with Korean parentage can become South Korean citizens.<sup>14</sup>

The National Intelligence Agency is the place where the government screens for those who are worthy of remaining in South Korea and those who are not. In short, this is a dividing institution that determines who enters the free world, that is, who is acceptable and who is unacceptable in South Korea. Therefore, the idea of distinguishing between “us” (South Koreans) and “them” (North Koreans) is practiced in this facility. Once border crossers are put in the facility, the very first thing they have to do is to take off their old (Northern) clothes, and to put on new (Southern) uniforms given by the South Korean government. This is the very place where the metaphor of taking off Northern clothes originates.

The longest time the South Korean government can detain border crossers in this facility is up to six months, but in the year 2018, the Moon Jae-In administration in South Korea reduced the maximum time to three months to avoid controversies about human rights abuses and forced confessions.<sup>15</sup> During the interrogation process, border crossers are located in isolated single cells for a week or longer without any outside contact, including lawyers.<sup>16</sup> No television, no telephones, and no internet access are allowed. Border crossers have to write in detail about their lives in North Korea to prove their authenticity as Koreans from North Korea, otherwise they cannot

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<sup>14</sup> Andrei Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise: North Korean Refugees in South Korea,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006): 105–137.

<sup>15</sup> See “From 180 Days to 90 Days?” *Seoul sinmun*, 13 February 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Lee, “Talbuk yeoseong-ui gyeongge neomgi-wa juche hyeongseong.”

be accepted to stay in South Korea. In most cases, the border crossers have to write at least 100 pages of their autobiography, including information about their family, friends, neighbours, classmates, and teachers.<sup>17</sup> The intelligence officers have accumulated knowledge and information from previous border crossers, and thus can inspect individuals' writings and testimonies for accuracy and reliability. If any misinformation, inconsistencies, or falsehoods are found, then border crossers have to rewrite their entire testimony again and again to make it acceptable for the intelligence officers. In some cases, even lie detectors are used, and some border crossers are told to go back to North Korea. There have been reports<sup>18</sup> of physical abuse, suicide, and false accusations of espionage for North Korea in this facility.

Border crossers in this facility are treated as potentially dangerous socialist subjects, such as spies, criminals, and non-Koreans, until proven otherwise. They have to prove their innocence as future South Koreans. To be sure, they are de facto inmates of the National Intelligence Agency without full civil rights or legal protections. However, once their authenticity as North Koreans is confirmed and they are ruled out as spies, they are transferred to Hanawon, where their studies to become citizens in South Korean society begin.

### ***Post-Socialist Education at Hanawon***

Hanawon is a re-education institution for the purpose of teaching border crossers to become “regular” South Korean citizens. After being released from the National Intelligence Agency, the kind of education border crossers receive at Hanawon can be characterized as an alternative to that of communist North Korea. This is supported by the National Security Law, which prohibits anti-state, pro-North, and pro-socialist activities in South Korea. One cannot live in South Korea as a pro-North Korean communist, and under this law, democracy and socialism cannot co-exist.<sup>19</sup>

Hanawon is operated by the Ministry of Unification, which provides “protection and support for the resettlement of residents who escaped North Korea in the belief that they represent a test case for our will and ability to unify.”<sup>20</sup> This is the place where border crossers who are classified as persons worthy of remaining in South Korea are sent.

Hanawon means “House of Unity,” and *hana* in Korean means “one,”—that is, one people, one blood, one language, and one nation—entailing the

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<sup>17</sup> Informant 55, 28 August 2017, Seoul.

<sup>18</sup> See “South Korea’s Guantanamo,” *Newstapa*, 18 March 2014.

<sup>19</sup> During the Korean War, the United States military and South Korean government engaged in psychological warfare and a reeducation program for their socialist prisoners of war. They taught anti-socialist songs and slogans.

<sup>20</sup> Byung-Ho Chung, “Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea,” 10.

unity of the Korean people, while *won* denotes the “house” that hosts the border crossers. Hanawon is an empirical laboratory in which one can investigate so-called normal behaviours in South Korea.

*Normalization*

Every day at Hanawon, students rise at 6:30 a.m. to gather and sing the South Korean national anthem. Classes last from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m.; students are allowed free time in the evening before going to sleep at 9:30 p.m. As part of the curriculum, students are instructed to learn and sing the song “Our Hanawon,” which describes the facility as “our mother, our house, our hope, our cradle, our lighthouse.”<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Hanawon teaches the notion of capitalist individualism using rather conformist and totalizing methods such as these examples.

At Hanawon, student behaviour is governed by a clear system of rules based on a point system; positive behaviour can help students earn points. For example, a student can earn five points for tidiness or active class participation, and for preventing violent activities, a student can earn ten points. Likewise, points are deducted for negative behaviours such as the illegal use of a cellular phone or camera (-5 points), absence without leave from class (-10 points), disrupting class (-10 points), physical fighting (-10 points), disobedience to teachers and staff (-15 points), and messiness (-15 points). If at the end of the instruction period, a student’s point total is less than negative three, that student will not be allowed to live in Seoul.

In addition to the point system, Hanawon uses a system of support payment reduction to punish misbehaviour. For instance, sexual violence, sexual abuse, physical assault, and gambling all result in a 50 percent reduction of the basic support payment of 6 million won that border crossers receive when they finish classes at Hanawon. Violence and threats against teachers or staff, instigation inside Hanawon, and unauthorized absence from Hanawon, result in a 30 percent reduction in the basic support payment. Any intentional destruction of Hanawon property results in a 20 percent reduction. Physical fights and arguments among students are the most common delinquent behaviour at Hanawon. Below are the basic rules for students at Hanawon.

*Table 1*  
*Student Rules at Hanawon*

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- Students cannot leave Hanawon without permission.
- Students cannot use violence against anyone, including teachers, staff, or other students.
- Students should take good care of Hanawon property.
- Students cannot engage in any profitable activities at Hanawon.

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<sup>21</sup> Informant 3, 15 March 2008, Seoul.

Students cannot reveal anything about Hanawon to people outside.  
Students cannot use cellular phones during their stay.  
Students cannot bring food from outside, and cannot consume alcoholic beverages inside Hanawon.  
Students should behave properly.  
Students cannot visit the room of a member of the opposite sex.  
Students cannot move after evening roll call.  
Students should keep their spaces clean.  
Students cannot smoke in non-smoking areas.  
Student should respect all rules and regulations.

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Source: obtained from Informant 37, December 2012.

The payment reduction and point system and the disciplinary rules at Hanawon resemble Foucault's discussion of normalization.<sup>22</sup> Normalization encompasses the processes of defining what is ordinary and acceptable, and identifies what is prohibited, abnormal, and unacceptable. The fine system disciplines border crossers by punishing misbehaviour. It is a way of distinguishing those who act according to norms from those who do not. This kind of corrective practice treats border crossers as objects to be educated, guided, and purified.

#### *Economic-Political Education*

Hanawon teaches border crossers to engage in various market activities, to say the South Korean oath, to respect the flag, to understand the South Korean version of history, and to speak the South Korean version of the Korean language. Each of these elements constitutes an article of former North Koreans' new South Korean "clothes." One of the crucial aspects of becoming South Korean citizens is learning about the principles of the capitalist market economy. Courses at Hanawon emphasize the notion of capitalist rationality by teaching about opportunity costs and trade-offs. In the capitalist market economy, as teachers tell their classes, money and resources are limited, so people cannot buy everything they want.<sup>23</sup> One must make rational choices about what to purchase and what to give up, and one must record their spending and in an expenditure book. They are taught not to spend their money beyond their capabilities, not to overcharge their credit cards, and not to overuse their cell phone data and minutes. At Hanawon, border crossers are taught these profit-seeking economic behaviours as moral duties and rightful behaviours, what Max Weber<sup>24</sup> discusses as "the spirit of capitalism." However, unlike Weber's idea, the South Korean state acts as an educator of the "spirit of capitalism."

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

<sup>23</sup> Hanawon, *Sahoe saenghwal* [Social Life] (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

The courses at Hanawon provide detailed techniques to practice rational consumption, which requires planning, information, and understanding of opportunity costs. For example, the program teaches border crossers to save 10 percent of their income, keep only one credit card, avoid eating out, reduce alcohol and cigarette consumption by 10 percent, plan a monthly and annual budget, and use greeting cards instead of gifts as a form of celebration.<sup>25</sup> Hanawon promotes entrepreneurial and competitive behaviours of assumedly economically rational individuals in order to reduce potential burdens and dependence on the state, and for the sake of the market economy. This practice of economic education reflects the state's disciplinary power to modernize new comers from the North with the logic of the market and the rule of law. Under the model of post-socialist capitalist citizenship, the prescribed moral duty of border crossers is to be self-reliant, responsible entrepreneurial citizens.

Another important aspect of Hanawon's education system is the state's emphasis on political democracy and freedom in South Korea. Hanawon's main task is to politically re-socialize border crossers.<sup>26</sup> This program is titled the "Democratic Citizenship Program," and the courses teach concepts related to capitalist democracy, including citizens' duties and rights, the rule of law, human rights, the multi-party system, and elections. Border crossers are taught their duties, responsibilities, and legal obligations as democratic citizens of South Korea. During the classes, teachers also emphasize the importance of a free and democratic political system for a future unified Korea.<sup>27</sup> Courses on the practice of freedom and democracy in South Korea cover topics such as "Korean Politics and Democracy," "How to Become Democratic Citizens," "Understanding Elections," and "The Korean War." The last course is designed to change former North Koreans' perception that the Korean War was anti-American and anti-imperialist.<sup>28</sup> These courses are intended to debunk socialist ideology and to heal the ideological wounds incurred in North Korea. Border crossers learn to develop attitudes favorable to South Korea and learn about capitalist democracy as a better alternative to socialism. In classes, border crossers are shown positive images of capitalist democracy and taught to criticize North Korean society and see South Korean democracy in a positive light. Additionally, border crossers are taught the rituals of singing the South Korean national anthem and pledging allegiance to the flag.<sup>29</sup> When discussing the negative aspects

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<sup>25</sup> Hanawon, *Hanguk sahoe ihae : saehwal yeongyeok* [Understanding South Korea: everyday life] (Seoul: Yangdong Publisher, 2001b).

<sup>26</sup> Soo-Jung Lee, "Education for Young North Korean Migrants: South Koreans' Ambivalent 'Others' and the Challenges of Belonging," *The Review of Korean Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 89–112.

<sup>27</sup> Hanawon, *Saeroun sahoe saenghwal* [New social life] (Seoul: Yangdong Publisher, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Hanawon, *Hanguk sahoe ihae : immun sahoe yeongyeok* [Understanding South Korea: human-social science] (Seoul: Yangdong Publisher, 2001a).

<sup>29</sup> Hanawon, *Saeroun sahoe saenghwal*.

of North Korea, teachers discuss blind loyalty to leaders and the party as idol worship and describe collectivism as a lack of individual freedom.<sup>30</sup> Border crossers are induced to change their political orientation, and the courses inevitably lead to the conclusion that North Korea is neither free nor democratic.

### *Hanawon as Total Institution*

Hanawon is the place where former North Koreans learn how to speak, act, and think as South Koreans; it is where border crossers are re-educated to examine their Northern thoughts from the Southern perspective. They learn the “correct” way of thinking and the right, moral behaviour of the South. This is a place for purification, where border crossers break their attachment to North Korea and cleanse their polluted Northern souls.<sup>31</sup>

Hanawon can be described as a short-term, intensive boot-camp focused on fabricating South Korean cultural identity. The term boot-camp is apt because Hanawon is an isolated place, separated from the everyday lives of South Koreans, where border crossers are held behind barbed wire and monitored by security cameras. It is a place of confinement; border crossers talk about their time at Hanawon as “imprisonment” in a free, democratic society. Ironically, to become a free, individual citizen of South Korea first requires imprisonment and separation from that very society. Outsiders must gain permission to visit and must register before entering. At Hanawon, men and women are held separately in different branches, meaning families must endure separations of up to three months after entering South Korea. Thus, some families have described Hanawon as “twelve weeks of prison.”<sup>32</sup> The closed nature of Hanawon has been criticized for perpetuating gender stereotypes and for implying South Korean superiority.<sup>33</sup> For example, some border crossers stated:

Leaders at Hanawon are like party members in North Korea. They told us what to do, and we had no choice but to obey them. It was really hard to endure, but I was just thinking about meeting my family once I got out.<sup>34</sup>

Hanawon is not necessary. It's too abstract and theoretical, but adjustment to South Korea is real and you have to experience it by yourself. How can you learn about lives in a closed environment like Hanawon?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Informant 52, 25 July 2015, Seoul.

<sup>31</sup> Gil Eyal, “Anti-Politics and the Spirits of Capitalism: Dissident, Monetarists, and the Czech Transition to Capitalism,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 49–92.

<sup>32</sup> “Talbukijumin i cheoem mananeun hanguk sahoe ‘12’ juui gamok hanawon” [Twelve Weeks of Prison, the First South Korean Experience], *Hankyoreh*, Version 14 November 2010, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/448622.html>, accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Chung, “Between Defector and Migrant,” 16.

<sup>34</sup> Informant 12, 25 May 2009, Seoul.

<sup>35</sup> Informant 37, 13 April 2013, Seoul.

As a matter of fact, one study points out that 80 percent of border crossers were not satisfied with their education at Hanawon.<sup>36</sup> The pedagogy is rigid and has a totalizing effect on students. Some students refer to the pedagogy at Hanawon as “North Korean-style education” and refer to Hanawon itself as “North Korea within South Korea” as well as “the last concentration camp before starting individual lives.”<sup>37</sup>

## **The Cultural Dynamics of Citizen-Making at the Subjectivity Level**

### *The Learning of Resilience at Hanawon*

The instructions at Hanawon aim to provide a basic understanding of democracy and capitalism and overcome the cultural barriers resulting from societal, linguistic, and lifestyle differences between the North and the South. The education at Hanawon is also about cultural learning to become South Koreans, in addition to learning about capitalism and democracy. What border crossers are experiencing at Hanawon is not just economic or political transformation, but cultural learning of resilience in order to live an unstable and risky market society. In this sense, the post-socialist transformation is not just about making them *Homo Economicus*, but more about getting them ready to live culturally in a new society, and to enhance themselves for that new society. They are exemplars of overcoming oppressions and hardships, and they should do the same in their lives in South Korea.

At Hanawon, border crossers are taught to cultivate their ability to effectively cope with difficulties and hardships, and to successfully assimilate to South Korean society. For example, the linguistic adaptation program at Hanawon is supposed to teach border crossers to sound like “cultured” South Koreans and to be easily understood by local South Koreans. Even in the language courses, border crossers are asked to repeat and exercise what is titled, “positive-message practices” again and again.<sup>38</sup>

- Transcend life and death.
- Overcome oneself.
- Give up one’s ego.
- Believe in oneself.
- Be aggressive and outgoing.
- Always smile and be positive.

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<sup>36</sup> Ji-Kyung Lee, “Bukhanitaljumin jeongchak munjeui gaeseonbangdan [Ways to improve the settlement of North Korean refugees],” *Hanguk minju simin gyoyuk hakhoebo* 13, no. 1, (2012): 101–132.

<sup>37</sup> Informant 13, 12 August 2009, Seoul.

<sup>38</sup> Hanawon, *Hanguk sahoe ihae: eoneo yeongyeok* [Understanding South Korea: language] (Seoul: Yangdong Publisher, 2001): 19–20.

- You can do it, and you will do it.
- You will grow and thrive.
- You will enhance and improve yourself.
- You will accomplish your goals.
- Things will get better.

As found in the above passage from the Korean language textbook, relearning the Korean language is not just about learning new words, but also adapting to the cultural nuances of resilience to survive in the South. The notion of resilience signifies positive emotions for successful adaptations to and acceptance of South Korea. Without resilience, there is no adaptation, only mal adaptation.<sup>39</sup> There seems to be hidden scripts of life-coaching, or mind-coaching, in language learning at Hanawon. Border crossers are asked to adjust to the new environment by being open to challenging new tasks and being committed to success. It is possible to accomplish these tasks in South Korea through resilience, as the virtue of resilience is both desirable and realizable. With resilience, border crossers can endure the pains and hardships. One informant told me:

They teach things like this because we were born and grew up under socialism where fairness and equality are valued, while competition is really fierce here in capitalist South Korea. You would become a loser if you don't know how to survive.<sup>40</sup>

An example of coaching resilience to overcome the difficulties in South Korea comes from advice given by a former student to current students at Hanawon. He left a note advising students to lower their expectations and be prepared for prejudices and discrimination in South Korea. In particular, the last advice was a story from Aesop, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, which symbolizes patient, persistent, and perseverant attitudes as survival strategies in South Korea.

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<sup>39</sup> So-Hee Lim and Sang-Sook Han, "A Predictive Model on North Korean Refugees' Adaptation to South Korean Society: Resilience in Response to Psychological Trauma," *Asian Nursing Research* 10 (2016): 164–172; Marton Lendvai, "Resilience in Post-Socialist Context: The Case of a Watermelon Producing Community in Hungary," *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 65, no. 3 (2016): 255–269; Brad Evans and Julian Reid, "Dangerously Exposed: The Life and Death of the Resilient Subject," *Resilience* 1, no. 2 (2013): 83–98.

<sup>40</sup> Informant 42, 22 September 2014, Seoul.

*Table 2*

*Ten Commandments for living in South Korea by a former Hanawon student*

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- 1) Don't expect to be treated well in South Korea;  
North Koreans occupy a lower stratum in South Korea.
- 2) Be patient. It takes time to adjust to South Korea.  
Your impatience increases the possibility of failure.
- 3) Don't get angry or fight when you are discriminated against, even  
when the reason is just that you are from North Korea.  
North Koreans are weak and only a social minority in South  
Korea.  
A minority cannot change the minds of tens of millions of South  
Koreans.
- 4) Don't judge this society within three years of your arrival.  
What you see and hear is only a small part of this society; your  
way of thinking will keep changing.
- 5) Never expect to make big money in three years, and never  
expect to be rich in five years.
- 6) Your settlement money is not for irresponsible spending.  
Spending a thousand dollars is easy, but making a hundred is  
hard.
- 7) Within three years, think ten times and listen to South Koreans'  
advice at least twice before you spend more than five  
hundred dollars.
- 8) Immerse yourself and mingle with South Koreans.  
Get to know a good South Korean who can give you advice.
- 9) Don't get angry; give up your ego and respect others.
- 10) To be successful in South Korea, be a tortoise, not a hare.

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*Source:* A written note obtained in October 2011.

From the interviews, one can also sense the notion of resilience instilled at the individual level. As part of this process, one informant confessed their experiences of “being reborn” as a new person in South Korea:

I had to change my mind. I had to be positive. I should not complain, period. Also, I should not complain too much about this society.<sup>41</sup>

The ethic of resilience is celebrated, taught, and instilled at Hanawon. One can say that the concept of individual resilience is instilled to border crossers through the curriculum and teaching. Resilience is a strategy to cope with stigma and discrimination in South Korea. Resilience at an individual level is a key concept for survival in South Korea, while collectivism and political loyalties are the features and ethics of North Korea. At Hanawon, border crossers are taught to criticize North Korea as a whole, and for the North’s lack of democracy, human rights, and individual freedom. At the same time, personal responsibilities—an ethic of self-reliance and resilience—are strongly emphasized at the individual level. These courses strive to impart the correct way of thinking and correct moral behaviour in South Korea. Unlike North Korea, this does not mean that students have to follow a direct order from the state, the ruling party, or government leaders; rather, they have to be responsible for their own lives and be resilient in South Korea.

At Hanawon, border crossers are not only developed into *Homo Economicus*—rational, self-reliant, law-abiding, interest-maximizing beings—but also into resilient cultural beings who can adjust, adapt, and accommodate themselves into the post-socialist environment. The notion of resilience is taught as a marker of a good, responsible model citizen in a post-socialist environment. Resilience in this case is not about resistance or revolution, but about adaptation to the existing order of society in the South. In other words, this notion of resilience is not about teaching radical political actions, but about teaching seemingly apolitical, individual survival strategies. Border crossers have to settle in the South with risks and uncertainties, so they must develop and enhance their individual capacities for survival in South Korean society.

Once released from Hanawon, border crossers have become citizens of South Korea with official identifications;<sup>42</sup> that is, in theory, they have become legal citizens of South Korea. And yet, culturally, almost everything in South Korea is a challenge. Despite their education about resilience at Hanawon,

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<sup>41</sup> Informant 45, 28 October 2014, Seoul.

<sup>42</sup> Until the year 2007, resident registration numbers for North Korean border crossers were issued at Hanawon. In a South Korean ID number, the eighth to tenth digits indicate a person’s birthplace. Most border crossers were registered as having the same birthplace digits—that of the Hanawon address. This became a visible stigma because it revealed their origins as North Koreans. Now they receive ID numbers indicating their first residential address instead.

they become desperate and begin to hide their identity as border crossers. They are not free even in a free, democratic society. It is very difficult to learn how to become South Korean after their stay at Hanawon, as one border crosser confessed:

North Korea was scary because I was starving. China was scary because I always feared being arrested. Now South Korea is scary because I don't know much about this society.<sup>43</sup>

Although it is not quite the same, the emotional hardship for border crossers does not end when they come to the South; rather, it is the beginning of something new. Border crossers discuss fears of state violence, hunger, punishment, and possible imprisonment in the North, but they talk about the fear of uncertainty, discrimination, and prejudice in the South. They talk about the shortage of material goods—money, food, and clothing in the North—but they feel that something is missing in the South where material goods are plentiful.

In the following section, I discuss two distinctive responses to the teaching of resilience in South Korea: fear and rejection. These are by no means exhaustive examples to represent the experience of every border crosser; rather, they are two emotional responses<sup>44</sup> to the notion of resilience that are expected to be cultivated and developed at Hanawon. These responses make sense out of living life in a post-socialist environment while trying to avoid direct confrontation and discrimination.

### *Living with Fear: Passing in South Korea*

Some border crossers choose not to reveal their identities out of fear of discrimination and hostility; instead, they tell people that their Northern accents developed from their upbringing in a southern province of South Korea like Gangwon. Some students told their parents not to come to school, fearing their parents' presence would reveal their backgrounds. Such children try very hard to hide their backgrounds in schools, often not telling even their closest friends. Some teachers even advised border-crosser students to disguise their identity as being from China or other provinces in South Korea. They want to pass as other regular South Koreans. As a couple of border crossers who usually do not come out to others as such, explained:

Why do we hide our background? It is because we face so much discrimination. South Koreans think North Korea is poor, which might

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<sup>43</sup> Informant 10, 7 May 2009, Seoul. This statement is often repeated by other border crossers who stayed in China before coming to South Korea.

<sup>44</sup> Sara Ahmed argues that emotions are not psychological states, but social and cultural practices. They are also dependent upon relations of power. See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

be true, but they also think they are superior to us and believe we are really stupid. Maybe this society is not quite ready to accept us as we are. It is hard to live with those strange stares and suspicious looks.<sup>45</sup>

When people say I sound just like South Koreans, that's the very best compliment I can get here. It makes me so happy. However, I always feel very nervous and uneasy when people ask me where I'm from.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the stereotypes and prejudices in South Korea regarding border crossers are that they are inferior and lacking in sophistication. However, from the perspectives of border crossers, South Koreans are neither honest nor straightforward, even though they look kind and gentle on the surface with their fake smiles. For example, border crossers learned not to believe the true meaning of such niceties as, "I'll call you later" or "I'll see you later." Some of them believed in the literal meaning of these greetings, but ended up waiting for a long time in vain.

Another border crosser confessed that he was able to secure a job only after he did not reveal his background as a border crosser on his application. A stereotype about border crossers in South Korea is that they are traitors or criminals. This view sees border crossers as untrustworthy, selfish runaways who fled their country and family. There was even a newspaper article with the headline, "More defectors rely on crimes for living,"<sup>47</sup> and border crossers are often told, "Go back to your country" or "What's wrong with your country, North Korea?" Some examples from informants are as follows:

There's no place I can get a job. They don't hire any (North Korean) border crossers. On my ID, it clearly states that I am a South Korean citizen. However, I wrote down Korean-Chinese when I applied. That is, they hire Korean-Chinese people, but not us, border crossers from North Korea.<sup>48</sup>

I'm just trying to hide my identity here, and I'm not going to tell my own child about my background as a border crosser. My (Southern) husband told me never to tell anybody about my background.<sup>49</sup>

Border crossers face various kinds of discrimination and prejudices. One talked about such experiences:

There have been so many times when they turned down my job application because I'm from the North. They just ask, "Why did you

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<sup>45</sup> Informant 6, 2 April 2009, Seoul.

<sup>46</sup> Informant 36, 18 November 2019, Seoul (follow-up interview).

<sup>47</sup> "More Defectors Rely on Crimes for Living," *The Korea Times*, 26 March 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Informant 24, 26 October 2010, Seoul.

<sup>49</sup> Informant 36, 10 November 2012, Seoul.

come? Is it because you committed a crime there?” Then they give me a very suspicious look. They look down on us. No matter how hard we try, this society is not ready to receive us.<sup>50</sup>

This kind of view has placed the burden on border crossers to prove their worth to South Koreans. One border crosser, Ju Seung-Hyeon, recently published a book titled *Jonanjadeul* [Survivors],<sup>51</sup> and argues that border crossers from North Korea are treated like untouchable outcasts in South Korea as the bottom of the social hierarchy, while Korean-Chinese are treated as second-class citizens. According to Ju, border crossers are not even considered second-class citizens, and therein lies the fear of being discriminated against. As a result, whenever possible, border crossers want to live quietly and anonymously, unnoticed by strangers, without having to come out about their backgrounds. Living a normal life in South Korea entails disguising and hiding their identities.

### ***Rejection: Departing from South Korea***

According to a 2018 report by Andrei Lankov,<sup>52</sup> many border crossers would willingly live in other foreign countries if circumstances would allow. Some actually take the option to “exit” or “opt-out”—leaving for other countries because of the discrimination in South Korea. This is what I call “rejection,” and this notion of rejection means the non-acceptance of South Korea as the one and only viable choice of residence, as well as looking for a way out of South Korea. As stated, choosing to stay in South Korea means that border crossers are never able to return to North Korea and that they are settling for the other side of the Korean peninsula where their background becomes a stigma and target for discrimination, despite the various welfare benefits. Rejection means rejection of resilient living within South Korea, and acceptance of living outside South Korea.

It is estimated that about 15 percent of border crossers who came to South Korea chose this option,<sup>53</sup> and more than 20 border crossers even chose to return to North Korea.<sup>54</sup> A highly publicized case was that of Lim Ji-Hyun, who returned to North Korea in 2017 and criticized South Korea after making several appearances on South Korean television shows. A few such as Kim Ryon-hui and Kwon Chol-nam, wish to return to North Korea but remain in the South, as reported by British media.<sup>55</sup> This sentiment of rejection can be also found in the following statements:

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<sup>50</sup> Informant 26, 27 February 2011, Seoul.

<sup>51</sup> Seung-Hyeon Ju, *Jonanjadeul* [Survivors] (Seoul: Saegakui Him, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> Lankov, “Why Some North Korean Defectors Choose Not to Live in the South.”

<sup>53</sup> Seung-Hyeon Ju, *Jonanjadeul*, 188.

<sup>54</sup> Lankov, “Why Some North Korean Defectors Choose Not to Live in the South.”

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Haas, “Forever Strangers: the North Korean Defectors Who Want to Go Back.” *The Guardian*, 26 April 2018.

I get this kind of second-class citizen treatment and discrimination here in South Korea, a country of the same blood, the same ethnic group. If things are like this here, I would rather face discrimination in the US, a country of strangers and imperialists.<sup>56</sup>

We are North Koreans, and we can never become South Koreans. Plus, we cannot go back to North Korea. Also, it is impossible to say “Chosun” here in South Korea, nor can we fly the North Korean flag. This is why I’ll leave for Europe, and I’m not coming back to South Korea.<sup>57</sup>

If I remain in South Korea, there is no way that I can meet my family in North Korea ever again. However, if I go to Europe, I may be able to visit North Korea someday with my new identity. Plus, I don’t have to choose one Korea over the other there. Being in South Korea actually limits my chances of meeting my family again.<sup>58</sup>

For them, staying in South Korea limits their life opportunities, and countries like the United States, Britain, and Canada would be their preferred destinations. Canada and the countries in Europe are interesting choices for border crossers since they were taught in North Korea that these countries were not enemies, and are supposedly more open and welcoming to refugees and have generous welfare benefits.

At Hanawon, border crossers are taught to reinvent their subjectivity in a new society. They are encouraged to become active agents of changing themselves—people who can cope with hardships and even discrimination, thus becoming resilient in South Korea. Despite their learning of resilience at Hanawon, some border crossers choose options of rejection and leave the South. The citizen-making processes entail not just institutionalization and teachings, but also validation processes outside such institutions through lived experiences. The institutionalizations are only the beginning of the processes, not the end. Sometimes this process can include the notion of rejection, meaning not enduring long, painful validation processes<sup>59</sup> inside South Korea, and seeking outside alternatives. They are willing to cross yet more borders for new opportunities, and in this sense, they are indeed dislocated border crossers ontologically. Therefore, for some border crossers, their direct experiences in South Korea and their exposure to discrimination and hostility lead to their eventual rejection and departure.

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<sup>56</sup> Informant 7, 9 April 2009, Seoul.

<sup>57</sup> Informant 55, 14 August 2017, Seoul.

<sup>58</sup> Informant 47, 25 January 2015, Seoul.

<sup>59</sup> Katherine Nicoll, et al., “Opening Discourses of Citizenship Education,” *Journal of Education Policy* 28, no. 6 (2013): 828–846; Maria Olso, et al., “Citizenship Discourses: Production and Curriculum,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36, no. 7 (2015): 1036–1053.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the detailed process of removing socialist Northern clothes and replacing them with capitalist Southern clothes, and discussed the notion of post-socialist citizens who have to live a livable life and perform as normal citizens in the post-socialist environment of South Korea. A livable life here means a normal, ordinary, and acceptable life in South Korea, which is taught at Hanawon as something desirable and feasible; this socialization requires resilience at the individual level to cope with hardship and uncertainty in South Korean society. A radical change in ethics, behaviours, and attitudes is required for a formerly “polluted” socialist person to adapt to a new logic of individual resilience as well as freedom and democracy.

Normal North Koreans become abnormal once they arrive in South Korea—where South Korean culture is considered universal, normative, rational, and even superior. Rather than accept these normative assumptions as given and natural, this paper attempts to uncover hidden assumptions and problematize the arbitrariness of such assumptions as the notion of resilience. This study has attempted to challenge and demystify the meaning of rational, free, democratic, resilient, and normative behaviours that tend to be taken for granted.

Hanawon is a facility which supposedly helps border crossers realize the dream of living in the promised land after escaping from oppressions in North Korea. They are taught not only the political notion of democracy and the economic notion of a market economy, but also the cultural logic of resilience, as a desirable attitude for surviving in society. Yet, instead of being resilient in South Korean society, some border crossers live in fear, disguising their identities, while others reject South Korea as a permanent home, departing for other countries. As the process of citizen-making is something that must be learnt, invented, and socially constructed, there is space for unintended consequences.

*Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea, June 2020*

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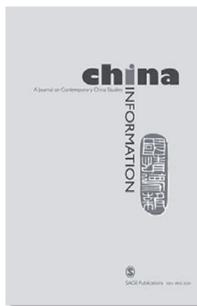
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