

The Life of Labor of Female North Korean Defectors in South Korea: Their Experiences and Perspectives toward South Koreans*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the life of labor of female 'Saetermins' (new settlers) North Korean defectors who are living in South Korea; especially their experiences, difficulties compared to South Korean co-workers, and perspectives toward South Koreans. This study specifically endeavors to know their experiences in the job seeking process and working situation which includes salary, promotion, and treatment from South Korean co-workers. While this study focuses on female *Saetermins*, it aims to locate their experiences as job seeker and worker in comparison with male *Saetermins*, in order to know gender difference of their situation. To accomplish the purpose, the method of study uses comprises both statistical data analysis and in-depth interviews with *Saetermins*. The findings on survey are that: (1) *Saetermins* have more difficult experiences during the job seeking process than South Koreans (2) they have fewer job opportunities compared to South Koreans (3) in terms of working situation, they are paid less and have fewer chances for promotion than South Korean co-workers; (4) they have often experienced being ignored or excluded by South Korean co-workers at the workplace; (5) gender differences between female and male *Saetermins* are not found to be statistically significant; (6) but, the result of in-depth interview reveals that female *Saetermins* adapt more easily than male *Saetermins* during the job seeking process and the working life.

Key words

female Saetermin, North Korean defectors living in South Korea, experience on job seeking process and working life, perspective toward South Korean, gender difference on life of labor

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Introduction

After the mid 1990s exacerbated the North Korean economy crisis, defecting from North Korea became a means of survival for North Koreans facing the threats of life. The defecting can be classified by different motives, which are usually food shortages, risks of criminal punishment, and expectations of a better life. The number of North Korean defectors was estimated to be approximately 300,000 between 1997 and 1998, continually increasing the population. As of the early 21st Century, the number maintains over 100,000, though the North Korean regime controls tighter border regions, the food situation has improved a little, and the costs of border crossing are getting higher (Lee, Keum-Soon, 2007, p. 5).

Keeping in step with the increase of the defectors, ‘*Saetermins*’ (new settlers), North Korean defectors who are living in South Korea, also increased. The important points are the *Saetermins* population rising quickly to ten thousand persons in 2007 and more than 70% increase in female population (The Ministry of Unification, 2007). The primary motives for their defecting from the North are the need to feed their families as well as self-survival. Specifically, the majority of the female sacrificed to support their family more than the male and crossed the border for their children in spite of various risks and dangers. Thus for them, the economic situation with the social settlement based on stable life of labor is of great importance.

As the circumstances changed for the North and the defectors, policies of the South Korean government began to change. The government has tried to ease their settlement process through special policies, in accordance with the 1997 law on ‘The Protection and Settlement Assistance of Defecting North Korean Residents’. These included settlement subsidies of US\$ 6,000, priorities for public housing, preferential treatments in university admissions and financial education assistance, monthly welfare allowances, medical services, job trainings, and social adaptation education at the government facility called ‘Hanawon’ (Lee, Keum-soon, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, after 2004 the government drove forward financial incentive policies for job trainings and continuous work, and revised continually the law on ‘The Protection and Settlement Assistance of Defecting North Korean Residents’ until June 2007, expanding with a new policy to encourage

their efforts toward self-support.

Despite the various assistances and the revised law, *Saetermins* claim to have difficulties in adapting to South Korean society as exemplified by the high unemployment rate among this population. Moreover, their social adaptation is becoming increasingly complex as South Korea faces globalization and rapidly becomes cosmopolitan. These situations signify the need for new policies and change of views about *Saetermins*. To find the solutions to their difficulties and needs mentioned above, the real life of a Saetermin has to be checked in detail. So this study looks into the life of labor of a Saetermin at first, because the job seeking and working situations are the most important factors of social adaptation, social standing and sustenance to live. Moreover, the economic stability is their defecting main intention for defecting from the North.

Therefore the purpose of this study is to analyze the labor life of *Saetermins* and their perspectives toward South Koreans. This study specifically endeavors to know their experiences in the job seeking process and job opportunities, working condition and situation which includes salary, promotion, and treatment from South Korean co-workers. While this study focuses on female *Saetermins*, it aims to locate their experiences in comparison with the male to know their gender difference on life of labor. This survey uses both statistical data analysis and in-depth interviews with *Saetermins*.

Prior studies and Trends

The recent important prior studies connected with this one were achieved by Chung, Jean-Kyung and Cho, Jung-A (2008), Lee, Ok-Ja and Kim, Hyun-Kyoung (2007), Kim, Yeun-Hee (2007), Chin, Mee-Jung and Lee, Soon-Hyung (2006), Lee, Keum-Soon (2006). Their articles inspired this study with various ideas. The essential contents of the articles can be summarized as:

Firstly, 'Issues in the Integration Education for North Korean Refugees and South Korean Hosts' by Chung, Jean-Kyung and Cho, Jung-A (2008) identified the major themes for an integration education program which enhances the relationship between *Saetermins* and their South Korean hosts. The themes were selected based on qualitative analysis of the socio-cultural conflicts experienced by *Saetermins* and the hosts in the

acculturation process. Their study viewed the acculturation issue as the two-sided integration task for both the *Saetermins* and the South Korean rather than as the one-sided acceptance and assimilation task of the *Saetermins* (Chung, Jean-Kyung & Cho, Jung-A, 2008, pp. 487-518).

Secondly, 'Lived Experience of Considering Tomorrow among North Korean Refugees' by Lee, Ok-Ja and Kim, Hyun-Kyoung (2007) tried to discover the structure of universal actual experiences "Considering tomorrow" of health and quality of life among the *Saetermins* in the socio-cultural context of South Korea. The structures found in the study were that: hope for future life by taking responsibility and having harmony with South Koreans, by forming an integrated identification; having a chance for positive engagement, by attaining human freedom and hope; feeling respected, by assimilating self to the new world; getting freedom back, by facing a new challenge and preparing self for a new social role; and overcoming cultural differences with fortified hardiness for survival, by making a decision for a life course with individual growth. The conclusion of their study is that: health professionals need to know *Saetermins*' psychological difficulties, expectations of treatment, help seeking behavior, and expectations from the mainstream culture. Moreover, understanding *Saetermins*' needs for reality, health education and a multi-disciplinary team approach are necessary to improve their health (Lee, Ok-Ja & Kim, Hyun-Kyoung, 2007, pp. 1212-1222).

Thirdly, 'Diversification in Korea and cultural competence in social welfare' by Kim, Yeun-Hee (2007) studied the diversification of the Korea society with a large influx of migrant laborers, international marriages, and *Saetermins*, because the situations called for attention to the importance of cultural competence of Korean human service sector in order to respond effectively to emerging needs of those recently arrived. According to her study, the majority of the new groups fit characteristics of 'high risk group' in terms of high rate of poverty, poor health and mental health status, low educational attainment, and minority status in the host society, in addition to acculturation stresses commonly experienced among immigrants and *Saetermins*. She claimed that it is imperative for the Korean human service professionals, service organizations, the social work professionals and the service system as a whole to adopt cultural competence as an integral element of professional

competence to attain the goals of social justice for the oppressed and underprivileged, and service effectiveness (Kim, Yeun-Hee, 2007, pp. 117-144).

Fourthly, ‘Social-Cultural Adjustment of North Korean Defectors by Self-Esteem and Internal Attribution’ by Chin, Mee-Jung and Lee, Soon-Hyung (2006) studied the social cultural adjustments of *Saetermins* with respect to their self-esteem and internal attribution. The data was obtained from a survey of 195 *Saetermins*. From the result of the survey, they argued that the *Saetermins* had moderate difficulties in their social-cultural adjustment consisting of social activity restrictions, discriminations, and social exclusions. According to the main findings of their study, psychological resources play a role in enhancing the social-cultural adjustments of the *Saetermins* (Chin, Mee-Jung & Lee, Soon-Hyung, 2006, pp. 141-152).

Finally, ‘A Study on the Social Adaptation Process of Women Migrants: focusing on Defecting North Korean Residents in South Korea’ by Lee, Keum-Soon (2006) considered importantly ‘gender approach’, because the considerable size of female *Saetermins* had stayed in China for a long period and had different experiences compared to the male. She claimed that the gender approach needs to be incorporated into the study of social adaptation process of female *Saetermins*. She also studied the similarities and differences in the settlement process between the male and the female. Her study utilized prior surveys such as the 2003 Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) survey, and 2004 Hanawon survey, 2005 Ministry of Unification survey, and also made a comparative analysis of the female *Saetermins* with a reference to general settlement pattern of female migrants in other regions (Lee, Keum-Soon, 2006, pp. 191-234).

The current study lays weight on the *Saetermins*’ characters as common immigrants in their life of labor as well as the results of prior studies. *Saetermins* form a minority group similar to other immigrants such as Korean Chinese, Chinese, and Southeast Asians in South Korea. Therefore the study on *Saetermins* has to develop toward their social adaptation as migrants, taking into account the global status quo like the frequent moving of population, their adaptation to the new country and discrimination against the *Saetermins* similar to other immigrants.

Furthermore, the gender difference among the *Saetermins* is worth focusing on. The study bases upon certain assumptions on gender and

political economy. According to the work of many feminist scholars, the immigrant social adaptation is a gendered arena (Buijs, 1993; Franz, 2004; Boyd, 1989; Foner, 1986; Simon & Brettell, 1986; Davis & Sherman, 1986; Moallem, 1991). This means that in the process of immigrant social adaptation “women and men are positioned differently upon it, have varied resources available to them, which allows them to articulate and mobilize in common interests as well as diverse ones, in different ways” (Rai, 2002, p. 1).

Survey Method and Sample

As of May 2007, the total number of *Saetermins* was reported to be 10,705. Table 1 shows their state of entry reported by the Ministry of Unification in South Korea. As shown in Table 1, after 2001 the percentage of the female has been growing at a fast pace, and the female rate was over 75% in 2006-2007.

Table 1. State of Entry of *Saetermins* until May 2007

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Sex \ Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	May 2007	Total*
Male	564	514	468	625	422	510	221	4,155
Female	479	625	813	1,269	961	1,509	778	6,550
Total	1,043	1,139	1,281	1,894	1,383	2,019	999	10,705
% of female	46%	55%	63%	67%	69%	75%	78%	61%

* The total, as of May 2007, includes all *Saetermins* entering in South Korea before 2001.

Source: The Ministry of Unification in the Republic of Korea, 2007.

Their main characteristics are border area residency, lower-class occupations, and being females; most of them originate from Hamgyung province in the North, workers and small traders in the North, of which the female population accounts for over 70% (The Ministry of Unification). And about half of them entered South Korea with the help

of their family members who had already entered. Table 2 shows the status of the *Saetermins* at entrance time in 2006; including age, job in the North, and gender.

Table 2. Status of *Saetermins* at Entrance Time in 2006

							N (%)
Age	Under 10	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	Over 60
	84 (4.2)	259 (12.8)	527 (26.1)	688 (34.1)	258 (12.8)	73 (3.6)	130 (6.4)
Job	Management	Professional	Art/Physical education	Worker	Service	Soldier	Self-support/ traders
	34 (1.7)	32 (1.6)	8 (0.4)	726 (36)	72 (3.6)	9 (0.4)	1,138 (56.4)
Gender	Male: 510 (25)			Female: 1,509 (75)			

Source: White Paper on Unification 2006, Ministry of Unification in the Republic of Korea.

As seen in Table 2, 75% of defectors are females, with diverse ages and occupations. Thus the gender approach is very important in this study, and this study uses both statistical data analysis and in-depth interviews with the *Saetermins*, regarding their experiences on the life of labor and perspectives towards South Koreans.

For statistical data analysis, this study used the dataset gathered through questionnaires from May to August 2007. Initially, there were 302 randomly selected *Saetermins* in the survey sample, but only 272 gave effective responses, thereby the answering results of 272 *Saetermins* were used as the final respondents. In addition, in-depth interviews were also conducted with certain key informants identified from the survey sample. The sample of in-depth interview was based on purposive sampling because most *Saetermins* are reluctant to share their life to strangers.

Moreover, for future analyses, the respondents were chosen according to several variables like gender, working status, age and education status. To test the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. For data processing, the statistical program SPSS version 12.0 was used, exercising the univariate analysis and bivariate analysis with the Pearson's Chi-square test. Also, to substantiate the results of statistical data analysis, the findings from the in-depth interviews were used. Table 3

shows the status of this statistical survey sample including age, working state, gender distribution.

Table 3. Status of the Statistical Survey Sample

Age	Under twenty	Thirty	Forty	Over fifty
		70 (25.9)	99 (36.4)	71 (26.1)
working state	Having a job: 126 (46.3)		No job: 146 (53.7)	
Gender	Male: 97 (35.7)		Female: 175 (64.3)	

One hundred and seventy five (64.3%) of the statistical survey sample are female *Saetermins*, and 97 (35.7%) are male. This proportion is almost similar to the actual number of *Saetermins* shown in Table 1. There were 70 (25.9%) under twenty, 99 (36.4%) in thirty, 71 (26.1%) in forty, and 32 (11.6%) over fifty. In addition, 126 (46.3%) of the sample were having a job and 146 (53.7%) were unemployed.

The in-depth interviews were practiced with some key informants identified from the statistical survey sample, and a off semi-structured interview from September to October 2007. Table 4 shows the characteristics of the in-depth interviewees' responses.

Table 4. Characteristics of In-depth Interviewee's Sample

ID	Name	Gender	Age	Year defected from North Korea	Year entered into South Korea	Job in North Korea	Job/ Employment condition in South Korea
1	Gang	F*	38	1999	2003	Researcher	Saleswoman/ Irregular worker
2	Hyun	F	51	2004	2004	Professor	Researcher/ Irregular worker
3	Jang	F	47	2001	2001	Clerk	Insurance saleswoman/ Irregular worker
4	Jeun	M**	43	1991	1997	Police officer	Self-employed businessman

ID	Name	Gender	Age	Year defected from North Korea	Year entered into South Korea	Job in North Korea	Job/ Employment condition in South Korea
5	Jeung	F	38	1999	2003	Peasant executive	Waitress/ Irregular worker
6	Kim	F	44	1997	2002	Announcer	Restaurant cashier/Irregular worker
7	Kim	F	47	2002	2002	Soldier	Part time worker
8	Kim	F	37	1999	2002	Driver	Part time worker
9	Kim	M	23	2004	2004	Construction worker	Self-employed Businessman
10	Kim	M	51	2000	2000	Doctor	Unemployed
11	Lee	M	42	1997	2005	Professor	Driver
12	Lee	F	37	2000	2002	Kindergarten teacher	The chief of travel agency
13	Yang	F	37	2002	2002	Collier	College student

* Female

** Male

The final sample of in-depth interviews consists of nine female and four male *Saetermins*. The mean age is 41.2 years old, ranging from 23 to 51. The average of their years living in South Korea is about 5 years.

Result of Statistical Analysis on Job Seeking

Saetermins usually have different experiences compared with South Koreans in their job searching process in South Korea. They often say that *Saetermins* and South Koreans are discriminatingly treated, in spite of being Koreans ethnically and having a South Korean nationality. *Saetermins* are treated as Asian immigrants rather than South Korean people because of cultural differences between the South and the North Korean region.

As a result, they encounter situations more often than South Koreans in the job seeking process. Their difficult experiences bring out their inferiority complex toward South Koreans, and then the inferiority affects

negatively on their job seeking. *Saetermins* often say, through their testimonies, that South Koreans are more favored than them, and thus given the priority in job placement through their testimonies.

Therefore this part of study looks at the degree of difficulty experienced by *Saetermins* compared to South Koreans in the process of job seeking. In the questionnaire such a degree is addressed by the question: “Have you had much more difficulties compared to South Koreans in the process of job seeking?” The categories base on a five-category variable strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Those variables are analyzed by sex to know the gender difference.

Table 5 shows the degree of the difficulty experienced by the *Saetermins* compared to South Koreans in the process of job seeking. According to the survey result, *Saetermins* generally experience inferiority to South Koreans during the process of job seeking. Seventy six percent of *Saetermins* agreed, 33.5% strongly agree and 37.1% agree, that they are being discriminated during the job seeking process compared to South Koreans, and *Saetermins* feel that South Koreans have a much greater chance of getting jobs than them.

Table 5. Experienced Degree of *Saetermins* on Difficulty of Job Seeking Compared to South Koreans

		N (%)					
Sex \ Degree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
Male	30 (30.9)	42 (43.3)	11 (11.3)	8 (8.2)	3 (3.1)	3 (3.1)	97 (100.0)
Female	61 (34.9)	59 (33.7)	30 (17.1)	8 (4.6)	11 (6.3)	6 (3.4)	175 (100.0)
Total	91 (33.5)	101 (37.1)	41 (15.1)	16 (5.9)	14 (5.1)	9 (3.3)	272 (100.0)
χ^2	$\chi^2 = 5.917, df = 5, p = .314$						

On the process of job seeking, the degree of difficulty experienced by male and female *Saetermins* compared to South Koreans is also shown in table 5. Almost three quarters, by summing up 30.9% in strongly agree and 43.3%, of the males agreed that they experienced much more difficulties compared with South Koreans when seeking for jobs while,

about sixty eight percent, by summing up 34.9% strongly agree and 33.7% agree, of the female admitted to have the same experience. The gender difference is not statistically significant based on the result of the Pearson's Chi-square test of independence with a P value of 0.314, which is greater than the significance value of 0.05.

However, there is the gender difference in the process of job seeking according to testimonies of *Saetermins*. The findings from in-depth interview will give us the answer for that.

Results of In-depth Interviews on Job Seeking

According to the responses gathered from the in-depth interviews on the issue of job seeking situation by *Saetermins*, it appeared that their hardship in the job seeking process has both social and personal dimensions. The main social problems are: (1) discontinuity of career, (2) reluctance from companies to employ them, (3) fierce competition in South Korean society, and (4) discrimination from South Koreans.

The main individual problems include: (1) lack of effort and patience, (2) strong sense of pride combined with their inferiority as a minority, (3) poor ability of human relationship, (4) lack of computer operation and office work skills with a basic understanding of technology, (5) poor communication skills because of difference on pronunciation and accent, and (6) apprehensions about disclosing self-information. The individual problems are partially related to their gender differences. The rest of the problems are related to their age, health and childcare.

The Social Problems

The discontinuity of career is the first problem among the professional *Saetermins*. This is mainly due to the South Korean disapproval on their careers and professions performed in North Korea, also sometimes attributable to the low quality of their career and education as perceived or maintained by South Koreans. Thus, in the process of job seeking, *Saetermins* are usually offered lower positions and often not according to what they have had as career or what they studied. A Saetermin said that:

It is our biggest problem that our career and education are not wholly recognized here. I was a doctor for 25 years in North Korea, but now I can't get the same job. If I want to continue my career, I have to retrain through South Korean residency program, with the very young students like that of my son's age. (Case 11)

Secondly, employers and companies are often reluctant to employ *Saetermins* because of the nationality issue. If a company hires a Saetermin, the company bears the hassle of investigation and surveillance from the South Korean government. Although *Saetermins* have already changed their nationality to being South Korean, they are regularly checked by the South Korean government, because the two states have hostile political and military relationships until now. *Saetermins* said that :

The bosses of firms are usually reluctant to hire us, so we often hide our nationality and identity, and we usually act like Korean Chinese with similar voice and pronunciation. (Case 13)

Big companies usually don't hire foreigners and immigrants, but small firms do. However, the managements of these small companies are also reluctant to hire us though we have already changed our nationality, because if they do something illegal action to us, they are easily punished by the government compared to other immigrants. (Case 8)

Thirdly, there is a fierce competition in the job market in South Korea which *Saetermins* have difficulty adjusting to. In North Korea, their jobs are allotted by the government as characterized by a Stalinist Society where all aspects in the society are regularly planned by the government. However, in the capitalist society, the job seeking depends mostly on individual's choice and capability. This is a big challenge for *Saetermins*. A respondent of this interview said that:

I didn't know well that capitalism society has a very strong sense of rivalry and competition. We had lived in a communist society, a collective society for a long time, so we didn't know what individual choice means exactly. During the job seeking, we usually experience a lot of

difficulties because we don't know how to gather job-related information, how to present myself to the employer, when and where to apply and how to be competitive in the job market. (Case 12)

Finally, *Saetermins* mostly reported discrimination that they experience from South Koreans. The discrimination is expressed in various ways from being unfriendly to giving unsolicited mercy, and treating *Saetermins* like beggars. Two female *Saetermins* said that:

South Koreans think that we are different from them. They never understand about our culture, and we are sometimes mocked because of our pronunciation and accent. Some of them are cold to us and in some instances pity us as beggars. To them we are strangers, never the same like them. (Case 6)

Sometimes the employers and directors pity us, but we never want a treatment like that. (Case 5)

Besides those problems, free job training courses supported by the government do not help the job seeking process as the job training and the job seeking never correspond to each other. There is also an insufficient government aid, which is given to unemployed *Saetermins* for social adaptation over the period of two years.

The Individual Problems and Gender Differences

In the process of job seeking, another difficult dimension of *Saetermins* is their personal characters and gender. The individual problems affecting their job seeking include lack of effort and patience, strong sense of pride combined with their inferiority as a minority, poor ability of human relationship, lack of computer operation and office work skills with an understanding of technology, poor communication skills because of the difference in pronunciation and accent, and apprehensions about disclosing self-information. These individual problems are connected with gender differences. The key informants also cited the importance of human networks in South Korea.

Many female *Saetermins* reported that:

The most common problem is our mind. If we exert more effort coupled with a strong will, we would succeed here. We weren't born and didn't grow up in South Korea, Korea; it is a strange place for us. Therefore we must do much more effort than South Koreans. However, a lot of male *Saetermins* especially lack effort, determination and the will to do something. (Case 2)

Human network is essential for job seeking in South Korea, but many *Saetermins* don't know how to do it, who to meet, and where to go. (Case 12)

Especially the males don't know well how to meet people and what to say to South Koreans. (Case 7)

So the male *Saetermins* find it harder to establish networks than the females. (Case 8)

Generally, females lay weight on human relationships, interactions within and between peoples, more than males do, because females are usually more linked to human community than to the state (Seager, 1993). Female *Saetermins* have the character, too. So, although the female usually has complex and difficult experiences during the job seeking process, they maintain a more positive feeling toward South Koreans than the male. Moreover, confirming in the North Korean gender history, the patriarchal background of male *Saetermins* may explain their cynicism toward South Koreans (Park, Young-ja, 2006a; 2006b).

In the North Korean history, the quality of the female has been playing an important role in the period of food shortage since 1995. After 1995 the Public Distribution System (PDS) shut down and many workplaces closed in North Korea, hundreds of thousands of people died from hunger and most peoples suffered the wrath of famine. As of 2004, although the economic condition got a little better, PDS still remained unable to supply food to all the people in North Korea. Large workplaces like the first and the second grade companies would distribute at least three days to fifteen days worth of food at the most. Each workplace would differ, but portions of 15, 10, 5 and 3 days worth of food are usually distributed. If a workplace did not have any work, then no food was given out. The food condition of the people is not better (*North Korea Today*, September 2004).

In the situation of extreme survival crisis, many people, usually the North Korean women traded in marketplace, planted their own crops and took various actions for living, because the females were responsible for their children and family; they struggled to put meals on the table. In the process, the North Korean women developed stronger survival and adaptation power compared with the men who must go to the army because of the North Korean military-first policy, or to the public workplace although their companies were closed.

The historical experiences explain why female *Saetermins* build human networks and establish relationships that help them in the process of job seeking more easily than the male. Female *Saetermins* usually focus more on finding jobs to support their families rather than on a kind of ego side in job seeking process compared with the male. Having a strong masculine pride and inferiority complex does not help at all in job seeking. The males have high patriarchal pride on the one hand, and on the other are enslaved by the feeling of loss as they could not express their power over their families and social groups in South Korea compared to the life in the North.

They had lived in North Korea for a long time, and the society has been *Suryong* (absolute power) community and a patriarchal community ruled by the supreme leader, Kim Ill-sung and his son Kim Jung-ill. Most male *Saetermins* were free to exercise their power compared to the females in the patriarchal society. So they maintain the pride as male with a very patriarchal mind. But male *Saetermins* do not live like the North Korean men in South Korea. Nevertheless, they often say that:

I cannot throw away my authority as a man just for job seeking. (Case 10)

The patriarchal North Korean regime often excludes females from the relatively privileged activities available to many males. The female in North Korean society has an image symbolized as ‘flower’, furthermore they put great efforts in carrying out their given tasks from the regime as ‘the flower of family’, ‘the flower of revolution’ and ‘the flower of Sungun (The North Korean military-first policy)’ after mid 1990s (Lim, Soon-Hee, 2006, pp. 12-14).

But the patriarchal policies sometimes brought out reverse effects on the female. It is said that some females became empowered and

independent instead of being subjective and dependent on the government and on the male. Moreover, since the North Korean regime has forced the more active social participation of females because of the chronic food shortage and the North Korean military-first policy, it has allowed the female to be more creative and productive. Having such experiences, the female *Saetermins* have a relatively more active character than the male, and take less pride during job seeking.

Results of Statistical Analysis on the Working Life

Saetermins have different experiences with South Koreans in their working life such as the job search in South Korea, and their experiences may be different according to their gender. *Saetermins* often encounter difficult situations on the working life especially the inferior working conditions compared with South Korean co-workers as well as the troubles with South Korean co-workers according to their testimonies.

Therefore this part of the paper looks at the difficulty of working life experienced by the *Saetermins* compared to South Korean co-workers. According to questionnaire for the survey purpose, this is addressed by the following questions:

- (1) “Have you received lesser salary than South Korean co-workers doing the same work?”
- (2) “Have you had lesser chance of promotion compared to South Korean co-workers?”
- (3) “Have you experienced alienation from South Korean co-workers?”

The categories of response is based on a five-category variable: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The variables are also analyzed by sex to know the gender difference.

Firstly, Table 6 shows the salary levels of *Saetermins* compared to South Korean co-workers. The result reveals that more than half of the respondents receive less than South Korean co-workers by doing the same work. The situations of male and female respondents are slightly different from each other.

There are 52.6%, by summing up 17.5% strongly agree and 35.1% agree, of male respondents who have experienced being paid less than South Korean co-workers; while, there are 55.4%, by summing up 21.1% strongly agree and 34.3% agree, of females who experienced the same. Specifically, there are more females (21.1%) than males (17.5%) who respond to 'Strongly agree'. This is because the female jobs are usually under more unstable employed conditions such as irregular and part-time workers compared to the male.

Table 6. Experienced Degree of *Saetermins* on Low Salary Levels Compared to South Korean Co-workers

		N (%)					
Degree \ Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
Male	17 (17.5)	34 (35.1)	24 (24.7)	20 (20.6)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.1)	97 (100.0)
Female	37 (21.1)	60 (34.3)	47 (26.9)	20 (11.4)	7 (4.0)	4 (2.3)	175 (100.0)
Total	54 (19.9)	94 (34.6)	71 (26.1)	40 (14.7)	7 (2.6)	6 (2.2)	272 (100.0)
χ^2	$\chi^2 = 8.007, df = 5, p = .156$						

Generally, the female *Saetermins* working as waitresses or assistant cooks in Korean restaurants, and housekeepers are paid daily. Their jobs are usually irregular and consist of short term employments. They are usually hired by small and medium businesses, and their jobs often change because of the financial instability of those businesses or of the instable employment system. Thus, the female often receive lesser salary than the male with relatively stable jobs. However, the gender salary difference of *Saetermins* compared with South Korean co-workers is not statistically significant. The P-value is 0.156 which is more than the significant value of 0.05 according to Pearson's chi-square test.

Secondly, Table 7 shows the degree on the fewer chances for promotion experienced by *Saetermins* compared to South Korean co-workers. The result is remarkably noticeable. There are 42.3% of *Saetermins* have agreed (22.8%) and strongly agreed (19.5%) on this issue, indicating that there are a number of respondents who experience having

fewer chances of getting promoted in their jobs compared to South Korean co-workers.

Table 7. Experienced Degree of *Saetermins* on the Fewer Chances for Promotion Compared to South Korean Co-workers

		N (%)					
Degree Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
Male	20 (20.6)	18 (18.6)	42 (43.3)	6 (6.2)	5 (5.2)	6 (6.2)	97 (100.0)
Female	33 (18.9)	44 (25.1)	64 (36.6)	18 (10.3)	8 (4.6)	8 (4.6)	175 (100.0)
Total	53 (19.5)	62 (22.8)	106 (39.0)	24 (8.8)	13 (4.8)	14 (5.1)	272 (100.0)
χ^2	$\chi^2 = 3.561, df = 5, p = .614$						

There is a slight difference between the responses of the males and females on the issue of their promotion. Forty-four percent, by summing up 18.9% in strongly agree and 25.1% in agree, of the female experience that they have fewer chances in the promotion compared to South Korean co-workers. while, 39.2%, by summing up 20.6% in strongly agree and 18.6% in agree, of the male responded to this.

But the gender difference compared with promotion of South Korean co-workers is not statistically significant. The P-value is 0.614 which is more than the significant value of 0.05 according to Pearson's chi-square test. Meanwhile, there are many respondents (39%) who neither agreed nor disagreed on this part. It is worth-looking at why they were unclear about this. The findings from in-depth interviews will give us certain hints.

Thirdly, Table 8 shows the experienced degree of *Saetermins* on alienation from South Korean co-workers. There are 32.7% of respondents who agreed (25.7%) and strongly agreed (7.0%) to this item, while there are 37.5% of them either disagreed (21.7%) or strongly disagreed (15.8%). Although there are more respondents (37.5%) who disagreed that they experience difficulties related to South Korean co-workers at the workplace, we cannot exclude that a considerable number (32.7%) of respondents do much experience the difficulties.

Table 8. Experienced Degree of *Saetermins* on Alienation from South Korean Co-workers

N (%)

Degree Sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
Male	6 (6.2)	27 (27.8)	18 (18.6)	23 (23.7)	16 (16.5)	7 (7.2)	97 (100.0)
Female	13 (7.4)	43 (24.6)	51 (29.1)	36 (20.6)	27 (15.4)	5 (2.9)	175 (100.0)
Total	19 (7.0)	70 (25.7)	69 (25.4)	59 (21.7)	43 (15.8)	12 (4.4)	272 (100.0)
χ^2	$\chi^2 = 6.170, df = 5, p = .290$						

The experienced degree of male and female respondents on this issue is slightly different. There are more males who agreed to this item than females. There are 34%, by summed up 6.2% in strongly agree and 27.8% in agree, of male and 32%, by summing up 7.4% in strongly agree and 24.6% in agree, of female expressed 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. While 40.2%, by summing up 16.5% in strongly disagree and 23.7% in disagree, of the male and 36%, by summing up 15.4% in strongly disagree and 20.6% in disagree, of the female say 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. However the difference between the two sexes is not statistically significant at 0.05 with a P-value of 0.290, and worth-noting in this part is the higher number of the female (29.1%) than the male (18.6%) who neither agreed nor disagreed.

Their unwillingness relates with the policy on *Saetermins* of the South Korean government because some of them are receiving government aid given only to the unemployed *Saetermins*. This will be treated in the analysis of the in-depth interviews. Moreover, although the gender differences related to working life are not statistically significant on the results of Pearson's chi-square test, there exist the gender differences on the working life according to testimonies of *Saetermins*. The findings from in-depth interviews will give us certain answers for that.

Results of In-depth Interviews on the Working Life

In this part, this study looks in detail over that upside mentioned results of statistical analysis are molded from what sorts of experiences and minds, based on in-depth interview with *Saetermins*. Specifically, this study recognizes the important causes of conflicts with South Korean co-workers and the perspective of *Saetermins* toward them in the working life. It is said that:

Certain conflicts with South Korean co-workers were often caused by the differences in our language. When they laugh at my accent or pronunciation, my pride is hurt, and my willingness to work or live decreases. They also ignore us, because we are from the poor country. (Case 3)

There are a lot of mental stresses. We couldn't trust South Korean co-workers. They exclude us to reason from North Korea ... In South Korea, the work is more intensive than in North Korea. Moreover, competition at work is also greater in South Korea. We sometimes cannot follow to working speed of South Korean co-worker. Because of this problem, they often give us ridiculing gesture, also ignore us. (Case 11)

I think that our South Korean co-workers do not see us as the same people like them, but rather strangers from a poor country. Usually *Saetermins* are segregated from the South Koreans at working process and lunchtime. We are often alienated from them. The sense of alienation is causing certain laborious or painful working life. (Case 8)

Our South Korean co-workers sometimes ask us private questions, and ask for our address why I come to South Korea, what we had done, how we had lived in North Korea, and how we are poor, the questions are not to understand us, but only out of curiosity. So I sometimes give negative answers, or end up in quarrel over that. (Case 6)

Although we are doing the same work, our salary is not the same with our South Korean co-workers, but similar with the immigrants such as Korean Chinese, Chinese, and other Southeast Asians. (Case 3)

The firms hire us often because of financial support for our employment from government, from 2 years to 5 years for approximately 500,000 won per month. Now, South Korean co-workers take a pay at least 1,500,000 won per month, Korean Chinese usually take a pay about 1,000,000 won per month, and we also take the pay of Korean Chinese degree summing up government aids...If so the financial support policy of this government for us is of what use? (Case 5)

As stated by the *Saetermins*, they have experienced being ignored or excluded by South Korean co-workers at work. Moreover, they are paid less and have fewer chances for promotion than South Korean co-workers. Like in the job seeking process, various difficulties that point to their working life have both social and personal dimensions too.

Gender Differences in the Working Life

These experiences of *Saetermins* differ in detail between the two sexes. The female *Saetermins* usually adapt more easily to the working life than their male counterparts in South Korea. Above all things, the main reasons for this are the so-called male pride and the difficulty in forming a human network for the male. Many key informants say that usually the male do not adapt well in their jobs because of their high self-respect. A representative testimony on the reason was that:

The female have more experiences doing business with persons from other countries than the male in North Korea. Almost 80% of the male *Saetermins* have never been into business, trade or commerce, so they only want to work in an office or at a company. But when they work at a company, they are often discharged because they lack the abilities, or they resign because of some troubles with South Korean co-worker or their boss. The female *Saetermins* usually strive for positive and progressive attitude in their working life. But the male usually cannot do this, or sometimes they just do not want to be progressive at all. (Case 6)

The most striking difference is caused by their gender-role attitudes in the North Korean society. Due to double standard gender-roles, being a laborer as well as a mother, a North Korean female bears twice the burden in her family for the children, in the society for the country. But many females attach more importance to their family life than to the country, and since 1995 the difficulty in obtaining food in North Korea has let the female act constructively and struggle for survival, and a lot of the female empowered themselves.

In addition, female *Saetermins* usually have greater cohesive power among family members than female South Koreans hence they exhibit a higher adaptability. Each family member being taken care of plays a very important role for a family to survive under an insecure and poor living condition. It directly reflects the difficulties of living that females are experience in North Korea (Park, Mee-Sok & Chang, Jin-Kyung, 2000, p. 246). Meanwhile, a respondent said that:

I don't tell others that I work somewhere, because I am receiving some amount basic living expenses from the government which are only given to unemployed *Saetermins*. This is the only way for me to send money to my family in North Korea. A lot of *Saetermins* do this. (Case 5)

This testimony also makes it clear that although the female *Saetermins* work wherever possible, they conceal the correct facts on their work and income in many public investigations and researches.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the life of labor of female *Saetermins* focusing on their experiences and difficulties compared to South Korean co-workers, and perspectives toward South Koreans. This study especially looked into their experiences in the job seeking process and working situation which included salary, promotion, and treatment from South Korean co-workers. Moreover, this study focused on the females, analyzing their situations in comparison with the male. The main results of this study are:

Firstly, *Saetermins* have more difficult experiences during the process of

job seeking than South Koreans.

Secondly, they have fewer job opportunities compared to South Koreans.

Thirdly, they are paid less and have fewer chances for promotion than South Korean co-workers.

Fourthly, they often have experienced being ignored or excluded by South Korean co-workers at the workplace.

Fifthly, the gender differences between female and male *Saetermins* are not found to be statistically significant.

Finally, the results of in-depth interviews reveal that female *Saetermins* adapt more easily than the male in the process of job seeking and working life.

It appeared that their hardship of social adaptation had both social and personal dimensions. The main social problems were: discontinuity of career, reluctance from companies to employ them, high competition in South Korean society, and discrimination from South Koreans. The main individual problems included: lack of effort and patience, strong sense of pride combined with their inferiority as a minority, poor ability of human relationship, lack of computer operation and office work skills with a basic understanding of technology, poor communication skills because of difference on pronunciation and accent, and apprehensions about disclosing self-information. The individual problems were also involved in their gender differences. The rest of the problems were related to their age, health and childcare.

Moreover, the *Saetermins* claimed that they were paid lesser and had fewer chances for promotion than South Korean co-workers, and that they felt uncomfortable being ignored and excluded by South Korean co-workers at work. Like in the job seeking process, their difficulties in the working life are affected by both social and personal issues as well. Those results show that their life of labor is similar to that of other immigrants in the South Korea, as mentioned in 'prior studies and trends'.

Meanwhile, the gender differences are not found to be statistically significant. The results of the in-depth interviews, however, revealed the following gender differences: the female *Saetermins* adapted more easily than the male *Saetermins* in the process of job seeking and even on the working life, although the female *Saetermins* were usually into unstable

jobs paid on daily wages with poor working conditions. This is attributable to their survival experiences on the 1990s famine of the North, their status in the patriarchal culture, and above all things, the drive to support the family, specially their children.

Finally, exploring the experiences of female *Saetermins* and their perspectives toward South Koreans also provides a way to further research on the perspectives of the female *Saetermins* toward other immigrants (i.e. Korean Chinese, Chinese, and other Southeast Asian immigrants) sharing similar positions as immigrants in South Korea. In addition, as South Korea becomes more and more the society of multi-peoples, studies on the issues of *Saetermins* should be conducted particularly on their societal status, social integration and multi-culture.

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