

North Korean Refugee Women's Consumption of South Korean TV Dramas and Movies*

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Abstract

This study attempted to explore the ways in which North Korean refugee women consume South Korean media contents, and experience changes in the perception of women's identity after watching South Korean media contents. Research Question 1 was set to observe characteristics of North Korean women's consumption of South Korean TV dramas and films while applying the notion of cultural proximity. Research Question 2 was established to investigate how an experience of watching South Korean dramas and movies influences North Korean refugee women's perception of women's gender identity. This study is distinctive in two aspects; firstly it included the time prior to coming to South Korea and secondly, it used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The results showed that in the quantitative study, North Korean women enjoyed South Korean media products and also used dramas and movies as a means to learning about South Korean society. Qualitative analysis revealed more specific areas where the interviewees felt cultural differences from South Korea dramas and movies.

Key words

North Korean refugee women, consumption of South Korean TV dramas and movies, cultural proximity, perception of gender identity, perception of South Korean women

Introduction

From the early to mid-1990s, North Korea experienced extreme food shortages due to internal and external reasons. A series of natural dis-

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asters including drought and flooding hit North Korea around the same time economic support from the former socialist allies discontinued due to the collapse of Eastern European socialist bloc. Such pressures from in and out of the destitute nation-state resulted in a massive emigration of North Koreans (Oh, 2011). Around the mid-1990s, when the death rate from starvation in North Korea was soaring, North Korean mothers or wives went out of their family residence areas to look for food and resources from outside sources since fathers or husbands were under the government's direct surveillance and could not leave their homes. Some of these women began to cross borders to China to secure food, medical supplies, and money. These wives and mothers progressively took the role of the breadwinner in the family, and the number of North Korean women crossing borders to and staying for longer periods in China began to increase. These North Korean women in China lived in fear for their safety and life and were vulnerable to repatriation to North Korea and possible persecution afterwards. To obtain security, these North Korean women gradually chose to seek asylum in South Korea. It can be pointed out that one of the reasons these women wished to go to South Korea was due to their knowledge about South Korea's economic affluence and cultural background they learned from television and the Internet while staying in China.

Statistics supports this trend of feminized migration pattern. It shows that over 67% of incoming North Korean refugees are women (Statistics Korea, 2012). Even though there has been a steady increase in number of incoming North Korean refugees in South Korea, only a few studies have focused on North Korean refugee women. Moreover, given that a large number of North Korean refugee women in South Korea experience a great deal of difficulties with adjustment to new cultural structures and meanings and undergo a transformation of perceptions toward gender roles, there has not been much discussion about their new experiences and other aspects of gendered identity as newly migrated women.

This research delves into North Korean women's gender issues and attitude changes in perception of South Korean women's gender identity with particular interests in the connection between their migration experiences and media consumption. As such, this paper aims to analyze the role of the media in North Korean refugee women's identity formation.

For this purpose, the study explored North Korean women's consumption patterns of South Korean popular culture media contents. Based on that examination, the study analyzed the impact of media consumption on North Korean women's attitude toward gender identity.

Consumption of Media Contents and Cultural Proximity

Mass media plays a key role in socialization process of members of a society. Immigrants, as a means to adjusting to a new culture, also prefer cultural assimilation via mass media and rely heavily on them for gathering information about the new society (Bahk & Jandt, 2004; Kim & Gudykunst, 1987; McGuire & Mcdermott, 1987; Walker, 1999; Woo & Dominick, 2001). In the process of immigration, the consumers of cultural contents begin to project their lives from what they see on the screen, and these mass-mediated cultural contents provide a projected reality for individual consumers. In this way, immigrants consume media contents as a means to obtaining their new identity. A similar pattern is found among the North Korean migrants in South Korea. Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) reported (1998a, 1998b) that North Korean refugees have watched South Korean television programs prior to arriving in South Korea, and over 89% of those in South Korea selected television as a helpful medium for adjusting to life in South Korea. In addition, Lee and Woo (2004) reported that South Korean television dramas influenced the most as a frame of reference for human relationships between a husband and wife, man and woman, families and friends.

On the other hand, one of the characteristics of viewers who consume mass mediated cultural contents from a different country or culture is that the viewers tend to internalize the contents by using his or her own cultural frame of reference (Chua, 2004; Liebes & Katz, 1986). In other words, the viewer interprets the contents of the mass mediated information according to his or her cultural values. For example, dramas that are televised in East Asia are often consumed for commonly shared cultural values, lifestyle, and Confucian beliefs (Do, 2012; Yoo & Lee, 2001; Yoon & Na, 2005). These common values become an appealing point to consumers in different countries with somewhat similar values.

Cultural proximity theory can best explain such characteristics of cultural content consumption. Cultural proximity was first suggested by

Hester (1973) who hypothesized that cultural and historical similarities between countries affect the volume and direction of the international information exchanges. The success of Telenovela gave a boost to the theory of cultural proximity (Rogers & Antola, 1985). In the midst of Hollywood's dominance in media market world-wide, South America's Telenovela has become an exemplary of global distribution/circulation of television programs in Spanish-speaking media markets. Rogers and Antola (1985) illustrated that the example of Telenovela's success proved that local production companies were at a more advantage than a foreign corporation in terms of attracting a larger number of viewers for their media contents.

The ways two countries make contacts through popular cultures tend to be formed according to cultural and domestic constraints of each country. Iwabuchi (2002) analyzed the Japanese TV drama consumption patterns in Taiwan and found that Japanese TV programs became popular through the process of history between Japan and Taiwan. He suggested that local audience does not simply accept media contents from similar linguistic and cultural group. Local audience must recognize 'perceived cultural proximity' while processing the media contents. By the notion of perceived cultural proximity, Iwabuchi stresses that local audiences experience jointed reception of symbolic images that have born out of historical and cultural contexts.

To examine the ways in which North Korean refugee women consumed South Korean dramas and movies, this study used the notion of cultural proximity as a tool for the analysis. We examined North Korean refugee women's consumption patterns of South Korean media products. The study extended the time frame of viewing experiences of the research subjects and asked North Korean refugees their media consumption experiences during the time when they lived in North Korea, when they were in a third country, and shortly after they entered South Korea. By investigating North Korean refugee women's consumption of South Korean TV dramas and movies across time, we will obtain a better description of the ways in which they consume South Korean media contents. Therefore, Research Question 1 is set as follows:

Research Question 1:

What are characteristics of North Korean women's consumption patterns of South Korean TV dramas and movies prior to coming to South Korea? Specifically, how does cultural proximity between North and South influence the ways in which these women consume the media content products?

Media Content Consumption and Gender Identity Negotiation

In South Korea, sexuality and familism are two typical elements with which gender identity of migrants, especially that of North Korean refugee females, are associated (Lee, 2006). These elements suggest that the gender of migrants plays a significant role in their social integration and that women must negotiate and actively engage in a new gender role prescribed by the capitalistic patriarchy of a new nation (Glascock, 2003; Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978).

In this context, North Korean refugee women undergo changes in the attitude toward gender identities and gender roles within their families. One of the important studies conducted in 1998, *Report on North Korean Refugee Women's Living Conditions* (as cited in Yoon, 2009), revealed that North Korean refugee women showed a tendency to be family-oriented and traditional. This study illustrated that compared to South Korean women, North Korean refugee women considered it more important to protect virginity before marriage, marriage was an essential part of life, a woman should be a wise mother and submissive wife, and a woman should be sacrificial to protect her husband and children.

Other studies found that North Korean refugee women experienced conflicts with their spouses as they progressed to settle into a new life in South Korea. Lee (2006) argued that such a conflict was due to the cognitive changes that occurred among these women which altered her expectations for family relationship and the husband's role in the family. Lee (2006) found that North Korean refugee women in her study expressed dissatisfaction with their North Korean husbands who showed stronger tendency of being patriarchal and dominating than South Koreans and complained about their husbands expectation that wives be submissive. In combination, these factors contributed to conflicts in

their relationship.

Gender roles reflected in TV programs sometimes become models for establishing gender roles for members of a society. Studies on women's images and roles reproduced in television programs pointed out that the portrayal of women in television was predominantly stereotypical and unrealistic, and most of these televised programs reproduced stereotypical images of women (Kim, Jang, & Jung, 2007; M. H. Kim & H. S. Kim, 1996; McCauley, Thangavelu & Rozin, 1988). One study analyzed the relationship between watching South Korean media and changes North Korean refugee women experienced afterwards and showed that these women began to admire the aggressive images of South Korean women the more they watched South Korean movies. This attitude change resulted in their challenging against patriarchal authority (Park & Kang, 2011).

Even though the few studies we discussed above illustrated attitudinal changes in North Korean women and the media, there are not enough studies done on the relationship between South Korean media content consumption and changes in perception and attitude of North Korean refugee women to reach a conclusive consensus about which kind of programs produces what kind of change. Moreover, previous studies mainly focused only on the time period of after entering South Korea, excluding the time periods such as when they were North Korea, or after leaving North Korea before entering South Korea. As set in Research Question 1, this study set the scope of the time frame of the exposure to South Korean media contents from their life in North Korea, after leaving North Korea, and after arriving in South Korea to evaluate the effects of media content exposure to gender identity and gender roles in the family. Therefore, Research Question 2 is set as follows:

Research Question 2:

What is the impact of having an experience of watching South Korean TV dramas and movies prior to arriving in South Korea? How does the pre-experience of watching South Korean TV dramas and movies influence North Korean refugee women's perceptions of gender identity?

STUDY 1

Research Methods

Measurements

Consumption of South Korean TV drama and movies. To quantify the consumption on South Korea dramas and movies of the respondents, we asked how many TV dramas and movies they watched in a week in three different phases of their migration, firstly while they lived in North Korea, secondly while staying in a third country after defecting from North Korea, and finally during the investigation period¹ in South Korea.

Evaluation of South Korean TV drama and movies. To examine how the respondents evaluated South Korean media contents, we asked two questions: ‘how enjoyable were South Korean dramas and movies?’ And ‘how much did you learn about South Korea through watching them?’ (5 point scale with 1 = ‘not at all’ and 5 = ‘strongly agree’).

Cultural proximity of South Korean TV dramas and movies. Five questions were asked to proximate the influence of cultural homogeneity of North and South Korean cultures of consumption of South Korean dramas and movies. The questions asked were: ‘South Korean dramas and movies have different story lines from North Korean dramas and movies’, ‘They are similar to Russian and/or Chinese dramas and movies’, ‘I have never seen a lot of the background scenes used in South Korean dramas and movies before’, ‘I cannot understand many of the words spoken in South Korean dramas and movies’, and ‘Actors/actresses look very differently from North Korean people’ (5 point scale, 1 = ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 = ‘strongly agree’).

Perception of South Korean women in South Korean TV dramas and movies. North Korean women’s perception toward South Korean women was measured in the following seven questions. Do you think South Korean women are: ‘pretty’, ‘outgoing’, ‘good-natured’, ‘honest’, ‘smart’,

¹ Once North Korean refugees enter South Korea, they are detained at a government facility for a joint investigation. After finishing the investigation, they are admitted to an educational institute called Hanawon, which is designed to assist North Korean refugees with adjustment to life in South Korea. The investigation period specified in this study includes the time they spent at the joint investigation and at Hanawon.

‘selfish’, ‘goal-oriented and work hard to get that goal’ (5 point scale, 1 = ‘strongly disagree’, 5 = ‘strongly agree’).

Evaluation of South Korean Women’s images in South Korean TV dramas and movies. Six questions were asked to analyze how the respondents relate to the images of South Korean women: ‘I empathize with women’s role and behavior’, ‘I thought things (in the stories) were similar how things were when I lived in North Korea’, ‘I do not like how women are portrayed’, ‘The women in the stories are good examples’, ‘I would like to imitate the female behavior from dramas and movies’, and ‘They are not realistic’ (5 point scale, 1 = ‘strongly disagree’, 5 = ‘strongly agree’).

Perception and evaluation on women’s role within a family in South Korean TV dramas and movies. Four questions on the position of South Korean women in the family were asked: ‘Women are stronger than men’, ‘Women have an equal position with men’, ‘Women are submissive to their father or husband’, and ‘Women sacrifice for their families’ (5 point scale with 1 = ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 = ‘strongly agree’).

Data Collection

Procedures. Many of surveys distributed to North Korean refugees have been criticized for difficult readability of the survey questions. To remove this barrier, researchers of this study conducted preliminary interviews with North Korean refugee youths and verified the readability of survey questions. The survey was conducted between August and October in 2012 at two alternative educational facilities for North Korean refugee youths in Wonju, South Korea and at four churches in Seoul where many of North Korean refugee youths regularly attended.

Survey respondents. A total of 102 participated in the survey, and the average age of the respondents was 20.92 years old (SD = 4.26). Eighty-five respondents answered that they either had attended or graduated from high school in North Korea (53.9%), and the most of the respondents chose college student as their employment type (N = 67, 39.2%).

Results

Analysis on North Korean Women's Consumption of South Korean TV Dramas and Movies

Analysis on consumption of South Korean TV drama and movies showed that the respondents watched on average 3.65 drama episodes (SD = 5.41) and 3.07 movies (SD = 4.00) in a week when they were in North Korea, 10.03 dramas (SD = 20.82) and 10.65 movies (SD = 20.80) per week during their stay in a third country after leaving North Korea, and 3.84 dramas (SD = 4.24) and 3.31 movies (SD = 3.61) in a week after they entered South Korea. The majority of the respondents thought South Korean dramas and movies positively. The respondents answered South Korean dramas and movies were enjoyable (M = 4.04, SD = .98) and they also expressed that they learned about South Korea through watching dramas and movies (M = 3.65, SD = 1.09) (See Table 1).

Regarding perceived cultural proximity to South Korean TV dramas and movies, the respondents reported that they felt South Korean movies were somewhat foreign to them, in that the story lines were different from North Korean movies and dramas (M = 4.12, SD = 1.15). More specifically, the respondents said they saw most of the background scenes for the first time (M = 3.40, SD = 1.04), and they thought South Korean actors looked differently from the way North Korean actors looked (M = 3.04, SD = 1.16). Interestingly, the respondents answered the language was not as unfamiliar as backgrounds or actors' appearances (language, M = 2.87, SD = 1.12; look, M = 3.04, SD = 1.16) (See Table 1).

Table 1
Summary of Variables

	M	SD	N
Consumption of South Korean TV drama and movies			
TV drama in North Korea	3.65	5.41	79
TV drama in a third country	10.03	20.82	95
TV drama in the investigation period	91	3.84	4.24
Movies in North Korea	3.07	4.00	81

	M	SD	N
Movies in a third country	10.65	20.80	94
Movies in the investigation period	3.31	3.61	87
Evaluation of South Korean drama and movies			
Dramas and movies were enjoyable'	4.04	.98	98
Learn things about South Korea through watching them	3.65	1.09	99
Cultural proximity of South Korean dramas and movies			
Have different story lines from North Korean dramas and movies	4.12	1.15	100
Are similar to Russian and Chinese dramas and movies	2.68	1.10	100
I have never seen a lot of the background in South Korean dramas and movies	3.40	1.04	100
I cannot understand many of the words	2.87	1.12	100
Actors/actresses look very differently	3.04	1.16	100
Perception of South Korean women			
South Korean women are pretty	3.19	1.04	99
South Korean women are outgoing	3.33	.95	99
South Korean women are good-natured	2.56	1.00	100
South Korean women are honest	2.59	1.07	99
South Korean women are smart	3.23	.89	99
South Korean women are selfish	3.44	.90	100
South Korean women are goal-oriented	3.74	.93	100
Evaluation of South Korean Women's images			
I empathize with women's role and behavior	3.19	.88	98
I thought things were similar to when I lived in North Korea	2.31	1.08	98
I do not like how women are portrayed	2.67	1.04	98
They are good examples	2.83	.98	101
I would like to imitate the female behavior	2.68	1.06	100
They are not realistic	3.06	1.02	100
Perception and evaluation on women's role in a family			
Women are stronger than men	3.62	1.07	99
Women have equal position as men	3.41	.91	100
Women are submissive to their father or husband	2.85	1.00	98
Women sacrifice for their families	3.00	1.04	100

To investigate the ways in which cultural proximity influences North Korean refugee women's consumption of South Korean dramas and movies, researchers performed a statistical analysis. From the results of regression analysis, it was revealed that the variable of 'South Korean movies were fun to watch' can be explained by cultural proximity variables, $F(5, 89) = 5.75, p < .01, R^2 = .24$. More specifically, the respondents reported that the more dissimilar the story lines were from North Korean movies ($\beta = .31, t = 3.22, p < .01$) and the less familiar the backgrounds were ($\beta = .33, t = 3.12, p < .01$), the more interesting South Korean dramas and movies were. Meanwhile, the variable of 'I learned about reality through dramas and movies' is explained partially by cultural proximity ($F(5, 89) = 3.87, p < .01, R^2 = .18$). The respondents answered as South Korean dramas and movies are similar to Chinese dramas and movies, they felt that they learned about the reality of life in South Korea through dramas and movies ($\beta = .34, t = 3.34, p < .01$) (See Table 2).

Table 2

Analysis of the Impact of Cultural Proximity on Consumption of South Korean TV Dramas and Movies

	Dramas and movies are fun ^a					Learned about reality through dramas and movies ^b				
	B	β	SD	t	p	B	β	SD	t	p
Different from North Korean TV dramas and movies	.27	.31	.52	3.22	.00	.08	.08	.10	.79	.43
Similar to Russian and/or Chinese dramas and movies	.02	.03	.09	.27	.79	.33	.34	.10	3.34	.00
Backgrounds are different	.32	.33	.10	3.12	.00	.20	.19	.12	1.73	.09
The language is different	-.13	-.14	.09	-1.40	.17	-.12	-.12	.10	-1.14	.26
Character appearances are Different	-.01	-.02	.09	-.14	.88	.04	.04	.10	.40	.69

a. $F(5, 89) = 5.75, p < .01, R^2 = .24, adj R^2 = .20$.

b. $F(5, 89) = 3.87, p < .01, R^2 = .18, adj R^2 = .13$.

Analysis of North Korean Refugee Women's Perceptions toward South Korean Womanhood and Gender Role

The results from the survey showed that North Korea refugee women thought South Korean women were goal-oriented and worked hard toward achieving the goal ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .93$), selfish ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .90$), outgoing ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .95$) and smart ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .89$); on the other hand, they said South Korean women were not good-hearted ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .10$), or honest ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.07$). In addition, when the respondents were asked to compare the images of South Korean women seen in the movies and dramas with themselves, the respondents answered positively only on one item, 'I empathize with the roles and activities of women in dramas and movies' ($M = 3.19$, $SD = .88$) and disagreed with all other items. In other words, South Korean women's images from dramas and movies were different from actual women's life in North Korea ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.08$), the respondents did not like the portrayal of women ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.04$), South Korean women's images were not exemplary ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .98$), and the respondents would not imitate the behavior of South Korean women ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.05$). The respondents also thought those images were somewhat unrealistic ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.02$) (See Table 1).

On women's roles in families, North Korean women thought that South Korean women were stronger than men in the family ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.07$), or they were equal ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .91$). They thought South Korean women within the family were somewhat sacrificial for the family ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.04$) and rated low on the item that asked whether South Korean women were obedient to their father or husband ($M = 2.85$, $SD = .10$). (See Table 1).

STUDY2

Research Methods

After the survey, the authors conducted focus group interviews to provide more meaningful understandings about North Korean refugee women's media consumption and the ways they thought about women's roles and images.

A total of six interviewees were selected from a group of North Korean refugee youths in the age groups between the late teens to late twenties. All of them have been enrolled in an alternative educational institution. These interviewees were divided into two groups. The first group comprised of young North Korean refugee females whose migration motivation was due to the dire economic conditions in North Korea and left North Korea approximately from the mid-1990s to early-2000s. The second group was formed with young female interviewees who left North Korea after mid-2000s with a help of family members who had already settled in South Korea and were exposed to the news about quality of life in South Korea through various channels while living in North Korea. In-depth interviews were conducted with both groups².

Interview questions were designed to further scrutinize the results from the survey. Specific interview questions included such as how the interviewees felt and thought about South Korea and South Korean women after watching South Korean TV dramas and movies. Interviews were conducted in two groups of three interviewees, and each group interviews lasted for approximately two hours.

Results

Analysis on North Korean Women's Consumption on South Korean TV Dramas and Movies

North Korean refugee women explained cultural dissimilarity domains in the absence of political ideology in the stories, use of everyday life events as the backgrounds of the story, difference in the ways South Koreans and North Koreans thought about love and controversial issues, and proportion and the portrayal of villains in the stories. Most of all, the interviewees felt absence of political ideology and everyday

² Interviewees in the first session of group interview were Choi Bokhee (left North Korea in 1998, entered South Korea in 2003), Kim Hyejin (left N.K. in 1999, entered S.K. in 2002), and Kim Hayoung (left N.K. in 2002, entered S.K. in 2002). Interviewees in the second group interview were Park Eunhee (left N.K. in 2010, entered S.K. in 2010), Kim Yeonmi (left N.K. in 2010 and entered S.K. in 2012), and Kim Heeju (left N.K. in 2011 and entered S.K. in 2012). All names are pseudonyms.

life theme as the most alien aspects of South Korean dramas and movies.

Firstly, to a question about differences in TV dramas and movies between North Korea and South Korea, the interviewees said materials or subjects used to in the stories were the most different aspect of dramas and movies from the two countries. One of the interviewees, Kim Hyejin, said that North Korean dramas and movies were “All are about Pyongyang. Pyongyang people may say it’s their story.” North Korean TV dramas and movies used the city of Pyongyang and the privileged group of Pyongyang citizens as the subject of the story. Unlike North Korean films, the interviewee felt that “South Korean dramas and movies talk about average people.”

On the other hand, in terms of the main theme of dramas and movies, Kim Hyejin said that in North Korea, “It’s all about loyalty to the country, like ideologies we learned in school” Another interviewee Park Eunhee also commented that “North Korean ones are all about ideologies about Kim Jong-Il and Kim Il-Sung, but South Korean ones do not talk about ideology.” Another interviewee commented that even the stories dealing with love “are related to Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il,” but she felt that South Korean dramas expressed love, as in the drama *Autumn in My Heart*, “as romantic love between a man and a woman and makes me fantasize about dating with a man in South Korea.”

Regardless of the time period of their migration, all interviewees said that the unequivocal themes of loyalty to the country or loyalty to North Korean leaders in North Korean media were platitudinous. Yet, South Korean dramas and movies mainly used “events or stories of common daily life of anybody and everybody” that they felt these media materials talked about “stories about someone who could be me are on TV” (Kim Hyejin). In addition, they said that South Korean dramas and movies used a variety of subjects and themes for the storylines which made them quite different from North Korean dramas and movies (Kim Hayoung).

To another question that asked about differences between South Korean and North Korean dramas and movies, the interviewees responded a diversity of villains and detailed description of evil acts by these villains in the story were quite different from the stories they were used to watching in North Korea. The interviewees felt that the pro-

portion and the portrayal of villains in South Korean dramas were very strange. They explained that in North Korean movies, villains may appear in the story, but they usually would be portrayed as the Prodigal Son, and the villain's evil actions were not specifically told. Yet in South Korean movies, villains' actions were specific and proportion of their presence was quite large.

On the other hand, to a question about their impression on backdrops of the story and main characters' physical appearances and way of speaking, interviewees said the backgrounds of the movies and actors' appearances were unfamiliar to them. Yet to the question about the language, the interviewees felt they were comfortable with South Korean language spoken in dramas and movies, and these stories were enjoyable. Kim Yeonmi pointed out that the presence of South Korea's regional dialects just like North Korea made her feel that "South Korea is also a place where common people like me live."

Popularity of South Korean popular culture in China gave North Korean refugee women very slight yet superior emotional pride against Chinese people due to their better ability to speak Korean language. This was due to their illegality of status put them in the margin of the society in everyday life in China. Significance of this aspect is the shift in the ways North Korean refugee women identified themselves.

As I watched Korean movies that were imported to China, I noticed Chinese people liked Korean things. They followed Korean fashion and wore clothes like South Koreans. I felt that a lot as I watched movies in China. (Kim Heeju)

Around that time, Korean singers and dramas were very popular. I felt superior since I was somewhat relevant [to the popularity of South Korean culture]. I think it was since then I slowly started accepting things like that. (Kim Hyejin)

Popularity of Korean culture in China for some North Korean refugee women worked as a mechanism for affiliating with South Korean identity rather than a mere act of consuming popular cultural contents.

Analysis of North Korean Refugee Women's Perceptions toward South Korean Womanhood and Gender Role

To the question about what were peculiar about the ways female characters were portrayed in South Korean TV dramas and movies, interviewees frequently commented on their impression of South Korean women who played villains as strange and eccentric.

The villains are very realistically portrayed, beyond my imagination. Especially I was really surprised at the ways women showed jealousy and how they manipulate at work to win a competition. I felt South Korean women were scary, you know. They would fabricate things to get ahead of other people. I thought South Korean women were scary when I watched them on TV. South Korean women are really tough. (Kim Hyejin)

Contrary to the villain characters, the interviewees said that images and roles of wives in South Korean dramas portrayed women as someone who enjoyed affluent and comfortable life of a supportive housewife.

I used to think all South Korean women were like Song Hyegyo. Something like, in a two-story house, a woman dressed in white would call her husband “oh, honey” and take his briefcase from him. I used to think if a woman doesn't have a job, she would do only things like that. (Kim Hayoung)

As the above interview responses illustrated, detailed retelling of the specific behavior of villains in dramas showed that the interviewees did not feel affinity to those characters. Especially, interviewees remembered details about female villains more vividly than male villains.

Meanwhile, for the six women interviewees who grew up in North Korea, a patriarchal society, it was much easier to give specific comments about the roles of father and mother, the relationship between a mother and son, and so forth, in direct comparison to family relationship in North Korea.

When I watched the drama ‘What Is Love’, I could be related to the father character. He was very much like fathers in North Korea. He was taciturn, unfriendly, and bossy to his family. But in the scene where the mother character became hysterical and left the family (because of patriarchal ways the father ran the family), I was very surprised, since I felt the father and mother’s characters were normal until that scene. (Choi Bokhee)

In North Korea, there is no such thing as mama’s boys, whether in movies or in reality. But here (South Korea), when I watch dramas about that (mama’s boy), I think to myself, ‘What, are those characters real? I shall never marry someone like that.’ (Choi Bokhee)

North Korean women who watched a South Korean drama *What Is Love* judged the mother who acted against the domineering father as hysterical, and they thought it was not commonsensical for mothers to control every aspect of the sons’ life.

Regarding status of South Korean women, interviewees mentioned that they felt puzzled at the beginning, but as they adjusted to South Korea, they came to understand women’s diversified statuses in reality.

We watched the world of adults through dramas, and I felt the life in South Korea seemed very scary... But as I spent more time in South Korea I realized and thought to myself ‘Ah, these things could be misunderstood in North Korea.’ Things like that... (Kim Hyejin)

In reality (South Korea), things were different (from dramas and movies). Women’s status was getting higher and now things have changed that women also must work, so now I am used to these things. (Kim Hayoung)

The personal interviews revealed that North Korean women, while they were in North Korea, used to feel alien to the images of South Korean women in South Korean dramas and movies, yet they felt such difference fascinating at the same time. As they spent more time in South Korea, North Korean refugee women became more familiar with the images and roles of South Korean women and came to realize that, in actuality, South Korean women assumed many more roles in families and society than they had thought before.

Conclusions

This research explored and analyzed the interrelatedness between North Korean refugee women's South Korean media content consumption during their migration phases and their views on women's gender identity and roles. In doing so, this study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the quantitative study 1, it was revealed that North Korean women enjoyed South Korean media products and also used dramas and movies as a means to learning about South Korean society. In addition, the findings showed that North Korean women felt dramas and movies were more enjoyable when the contents contained greater cultural difference from North Korean dramas and movies, and the respondents thought these media contents were more helpful to learn about South Korea.

Such findings show that North Korean women critically consumed and evaluated the contents through her own cultural lenses. According to the theory of cultural proximity, North Korean refugee women should rate the contents that are closer in cultural proximity when receiving South Korean dramas and movies. Yet the result of the research revealed that the interviewees highly rated the contents as enjoyment when the programs they were watching were more different from North Korean dramas and movies. This result illuminated that the concept of cultural proximity was broadened from the original theory of cultural proximity. Cultural proximity should be understood the system that allows recognition of similarities and articulating what have been recognized by the consumer. Particularly, this research utilized both survey and interviews to illustrate the cognitive process of cultural proximity of the research subjects in more concrete detail.

Qualitative analysis of this study revealed more specific parameters of cultural differences between the audience and media contents. The first cultural difference the respondents expressed was the absence of political ideologies and a thematic usage of everyday life as materials and subjects of the South Korean stories. Secondly, popularity of South Korean culture in China provided North Korean refugee women with a meaningful outlet which transcended a mere act of consuming popular media contents and constructed a newly adopted identity. In other words, fluency in Korean language and affinity to South Korean culture provided a channel to feel somewhat superior to Chinese people. In this process, these women developed a newly constructed identity that was closely affiliated to South Korea.

Thirdly, the interviewers commented on the representation of detailed behaviors of villains in the story as culturally strange. Interviewees responded to the villains with sentiments like strange, unfamiliar, and unacceptable, instead of thinking of villains as an element of fun in the story. The interviewees evaluated South Korean female villains negatively and remembered the bad behavior of characters in close details.

On the other hand, in understanding marital and parental relationship with family, North Korean women who grew up in patriarchal North Korea maintained male-dominant ideas. However, as these women spend more time in South Korea, they began to understand that there was a wide range of representations of women in dramas and movies. At the same time, the study respondents began to realize some representations in South Korean dramas and movies could be misleading and misunderstood by North Koreans due to portrayal of fictitious characters and unrealistic roles assigned to these characters.

The results of the study revealed that the quantitative analysis of the Study 1 needed to be elaborated with qualitative analysis. Quantitative approaches assume that novel attitudes and behaviors TV programs contain are presented unilaterally to the audiences, and this assumption failed to shed a light on the influential power of consumer's reality and experiences on the ways in which these audiences received the newly presented attitudes and behaviors (Gauntlett, 2005). Through qualitative analysis it was possible to draw out the conclusion that North Korean refugee women did not watch these media contents without any active participation, but rather, individual audience's experiences and contexts

within which these media contents were viewed influenced the ways in which the audiences digested the media contents.

Lastly, the results of this research can be read in terms of transnational feminism. Mohanty (2003) claims that we must pay attention to the process in which sexualized, ethnicized, and stratified female bodies are subject to recolonization under neoliberal globalization. Transnational feminism allows North Korean refugee women to be the agent of carving out their own place in society according to their unique experiences of crossing ideological and socio-structural borders, in the midst of South Korean context that validates globalization logic. According to transnational feminist argument, these North Korean refugee women have not only crossed the physical border but also attempt to overcome symbolic borders that constricts the ways and views that label them. Therefore it is essential to take a close look at these women's identity formation process that are closely related to their particular experiences and contexts of migration. This research, which focuses on North Korean refugee women's reception of South Korean culture and process of assimilation, can be summarized as a study that attempted to illuminate on understanding multitude of physical environment and experiences of women in their unique positions even though their cultural scenes may appear to be similar.

This study's limitation lies in that the study attempted to reconstruct media consumption experiences and conceptualization about South Korean women's identity and gender roles from the memories of North Korean refugee women who settled in South Korea. Some women had to go as far back as ten years of time to retrieve their memory about watching South Korean dramas and movies. Some of their perception and attitude could have changed in that time period as they spend more time adjusting to life in South Korea, which might have influenced the ways in which they evaluated South Korean dramas and movies at the time of this research. In addition, as it was revealed in literature review, it was difficult to draw out a general consensus about North Korean refugees' television consumption patterns and attitude toward gender, and this study confirmed that future studies are in dire need.

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