

North Korean Gender Roles and Changes in Women: Under the Military-First Politics and the Economic crisis

Park Young-Ja*

Abstract

This paper aims to examine North Korean gender roles and changes in women in the process of the social transition under the military-first politics and the economic crisis after the mid 1990s—focusing on gender roles by the military regime and the women's behaviours/minds as well as their economic activities as the major source of the peoples' survival basing on family and changes of the society from below. The main contents of each chapter are as follows: prior studies and survey method as a qualitative study, gender roles in the military-first era, warriors for survival doing family's support and societies' maintaining, strong viability and effect of private property, changing of the traditional gender role and consciousness, and then market economy and woman in conclusion.

According to this study, women awareness of gender roles and the hierarchical order, constituted by the political authority, have begun to be reconstituted by the economic activity and change of their mind/behaviour. The change in women's ideas and behaviours often cause a crack in the hierarchical order between men and women in North Korea. Meanwhile, they are rapidly merchandising. In particular, the "sex business"/human trafficking of women have been on the increase. Therefore, North Korean militarist system and market economy from below provides women with both the light and the darkness in the process of the social transition under the military-first politics and the economic crisis after the mid 1990s.

* Ph. D. Political science. Research Professor, Institution of Unification Studies, Ewha Womans University (sister1102@hanmail.net). Main studies: North Korean Women and System, Relationship of South North Korea and Unification, North Korean defectors and Social integration.

With strong women's social value and voice than before, on the one hand, the most serious health consequences for women that the hunger and malnutrition stemming from the food crisis and the abundant responsibility/ labour have brought on develop during pregnancies, child-deliveries, child rearing, and when in a state of deteriorating health. On the other, We have to be worthy of notice is that the rise of the individual in the change has resulted in a paradoxical transition of private life that is characterized by a surge of egoism and the rise of the uncivil individual, who emphasizes the right to pursue personal interests yet ignores her moral obligations to the public and other individuals. These results will, also, be important to study and policy on female defectors about 80% among North Korean defectors in South Korea.

**Key words: gender roles, changes in North Korean women, the military
-first politics, economic crisis, market economy from below**

I . Introduction

North Korea's military-first politics (sŏnkun chŏngch'i) beginning in 1995 has become a structural survival strategy of Kim Chŏng-Il's regime under international and domestic crises' situation in the 2000s. The regime has been to mobilize the military to control the society, restore order, overcome the economic crisis, and carry out major construction projects. Although the Public Distribution System (PDS) on the people has been cut off except for army, high-level party/government's officials and Pyongyang's partial residents because of economic crisis, the country's key industries have been in the area of national defense and military industry. The regime has tried to transform the country into a 'militarized' society because the politics has been possible when the whole society and family strive with an attitude and spirit of the military (Kim Jae-Ho, 2000; Chon Hyun-Joon et al., 2009: 15).

During this process, the society and family have been influenced by the military culture. Gender roles²⁾ have been also divided: males are, at all times, ready to go to war whereas females take care of daily life. Before the time, North Korean normal women did housework, raised the children, and participated actively in socialist construction movements. They attempted to stay faithful to the roles given to them. They kept up a life of being a revolutionary and a good

2) The concept of gender focuses on the political, social, and economic hierarchy structure of human community that changes the idea of biological difference between male and female to discriminatory (Susan Hanson and Geraldine Prat, 1995). Gender roles also refer to the set of attitudes and behaviours socially expected from the members of a particular gender identity. Gender roles are socially constructed which are often politicised and manipulated, which then result in the oppression of people. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_role Last on 15 September 2010.

housewife with traditional values, as the regime requested. However, after the mid 1990s, family was forced to survive on their own and the women's lives changed completely. The politics forced North Korean women to take the lead in providing for their families in place of their husbands. The fact that women had to take on these roles is largely dependent on the idea of division of labour according to traditional gender roles, which state that women must obey their husbands, look after their young, and do the housework. Furthermore, the social notion that it is embarrassing for men to pursue commercial activities also brought about the change in women's lives (Cho Jeong-Ah et al., 2009: 31-32).

The politics didn't succeed in being supported by the normal people, especially by the women; because it impose a survival burden on family and women while the men/ husbands make take care of the countries' defence, military industry and public business basing on sexual role norm/model during the war.³⁾ The women have to shoulder the responsibility for family survival and peoples' economy and go to marketplace in the crumbled situation of PDS. In this condition, the market economy from below has expanded and the women leading private initiated economy have appeared changes of traditional mind as well as behaviour.

The social status of women, doing business for survival of their family, has been sometimes raised or gained value. According to the international aid agencies that have been involved in the aid of North Korea, as of 2004, out of 330 households they surveyed in North Korea, 30 percent of North Korean women identify themselves as full-time housewives and the rest of the 70 percent say that they are involved in some kind of economic or trade activities. The latter also

3) The men's roles are in the front line, the public duty and national mission while the women's roles are in the home front, private affair and economical business.

identify themselves as the breadwinner of her own household. There are a greater number of women than that of men among people who do border trades between North Korea and China to exchange daily commodities or are permanently settled down in China. You can see North Korean women not only selling commodities in a marketplace but also driving a truck or carrying a heavy luggage on her back. It is women who run the market economy of North Korea.⁴⁾ According to Richard Reagan, Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Pyongyang, as of 2005, North Korean housewives running in marketplaces have become the beneficiaries of the new market economy in North Korea.⁵⁾ Under the military-first politics, the marketplaces were crowded with women who were trading from dawn to midnight. These days, more and more women in North Korea are exposed to and attracted by money, fashion and values that have been created through the market economy.

Meanwhile, it has been well accepted that the North Korean economy would not be able to revitalize on its own. If the North Korean regime, which is not capable of guaranteeing its people the right to subsistence, stays for long or if the North Korean (food, economy, security, and regime) crisis becomes more serious, who would be suffering the most? The answer is the North Korean women who have formed and operated the market economy on which tens of millions of people's lives depend. These women led the market economy of North Korea where the majority of men have been conscripted to the compulsory military service, working at the military industry according to the country's defence policy, and with the officer/management of the society. So the normal men didn't well

4) <http://www.rfa.org/korean/simcheongbodo/2004/08/09/seg4>, Last visit on 15 November 2008.

5) http://www.rfa.org/korean/simcheongbodo/2005/04/07/nk_women Last visit on 15 November 2008.

take care of family because of the social role and norm in the time war.

Having considered this social reality of North Korea, this study on gender roles and changes in the women, under the military-first politics and the economic crisis, will contribute to our understanding of the society and to study on North Korean women. This paper, therefore, aims to examine gender roles and changes in North Korean women in the process of the social transition under the military-first politics and the economic crisis after the mid 1990s—focusing on gender roles by the military regime and women’s behaviours/ minds as well as their economic activities as the major source of the peoples’ survival basing on family and changes of the society from below.

II. Survey method and Sample

The recent important prior studies connected with this paper were achieved by Im (2004),⁶⁾ Lee (2004),⁷⁾ Kim (2006),⁸⁾ Park (2006),⁹⁾ Noh (2006),¹⁰⁾ Cho (2007),¹¹⁾ and Lee (2007).¹²⁾ Although

6) Im Soon-Hee, Food Problem and the Change of North Korean Women’s Role and Consciousness (2004), Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2004. pp. 49-77.

7) Lee Mi-Kyung, “Yesangjeginn yeoseonsangyul thonghaebon bukhanui yeoseong jungchach,” [Women’s Policy of the North Korean through the View of Ideal Women with Contents Analysis of Choson Women], The Study of China-Russia Vol.28, no2 (2004), Seoul: Hanyang Univ. pp. 145-173.

8) Kim Seok-Hyang, “Bukhangongsikdamlonehe genderpunkdunggwah yeoseongguallyul gaenheum bunsuk,” [An Analysis on the Concepts of “Gender Equality” and “women’s Rights” in the North Korean Official Discourses], The Journal of North Korean Study Vol.10, no.1 (2006), Seoul: The Society of North Korean Study. pp. 25-51.

9) Park Young-Ja, “Sungunsidae bukhan yeoseongui sexuality yeongu(1995-2006),” [The Sexuality of North Korean Women in ‘Songun’ Politics period (1995-2006)], The Journal of Korean Unification Studies Vol. 15(2) (2006). Seoul: The Korean Institution for National Unification.

articles/works of Lee (2004), Kim (2006), Park (2006) and Lee (2007) inspired this study with various ideas, those studies aren't so dynamic and well showed North Korean women's behaviour/mind because of mainly discourse analyses with articles selecting from/on Choson Women (chosen nyeoseong), the magazine is a channel of the North's official discourses and policies about women, and Workers' Daily (rodong sinmun). While, studies of Im (2004), Noh (2006) and Cho (2007) attach importance to North Korean women's behaviour and mind under the economic crisis. I think that two studies' trends have to mix with qualitative research methods.

Thus, this study bases on the in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors and tries the content analysis as a qualitative study, which is subsequently double-checked by the testimonies of North Korean defectors and the official documents/ literatures of North Korea. In society like North Korea, where the male military culture by 'party-state unification' power is absolute, the surviving skill of women subtle and varies. So, rather than the small number of heroines/high-level officials, ordinary North Korean women's experiences, mind, and behaviours should be carefully investigated. This study, therefore, attaches importance to the in-depth interviews with ordinary North Korean defectors. These in-depth interviews practiced with some key informants during April 2008 to March 2010. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the in-depth interviewee.

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- 10) Noh Gui-Nam, "people' Lives," The Social Culture of North Korea compiled by Sejong Institute for North Korean Studies, Paju: Hanul Academy, 2006.
 - 11) Cho Jeong-Ah, The Changes of Everyday Life in North Korea in the Aftermath of their Economic Difficulties, Korea Institute for National Unification. 2007.
 - 12) Lee Sang-Kyung, "Bukhannyeoseongjakgaui jehjakehse femalejungchesungul yeongu," [A Study of Female Identity in Works by North Korean Women Writers], The Korean Journal of Women Literary Study Vol.17 (2007), Seoul: The Korean Society of Women's Literature. pp. 349-385.

〔Table 1〕 the characteristics of the in-depth interviewee

ID	Gender	Age	defecting time	Occupation in North Korea	Region of Origin
1	F	60s	Jan. 2006	Housewife	Najin, Hamgyöngbuk-to
2	F	60s	Feb. 2007	Saleswoman	P'yöngyang
3	M	50s	Dec. 2007	Chief of trade business	Ch'öngjin, Hamgyöngbuk-to
4	M	50s	Nov. 2007	Factory engineer	Musan-kun, Hamgyöngbuk-to
5	F	40s	Mar. 2007	Mine clerk, Restaurant manager	Musan-kun, Hamgyöngbuk-to
6	M	40s	Dec. 2006	Worker of business earning foreign currency	Ch'öngjin, Hamgyöngbuk-to
7	F	40s	Feb. 2006	Senior factory engineer	P'yöngyang
8	M	40s	Jan. 2006	Foreign trade manager	Ch'öngjin, Hamgyöngbuk-to
9	F	40s	Jun. 2007	Money exchange, Smuggler (illegal trade with China)	Musan-kun, Hamgyöngbuk-to
10	F	40s	Nov. 2006	Collective farm member	Haeju, Hwanghae-to
11	M	30s	Jan. 2006	Youth League cadre	Ch'öngjin, Hamgyöngbuk-to
12	F	30s	Jul. 2006	Factory worker	Onsöng-kun, Hamgyöngbuk-to
13	F	30s	Jan. 2006	Saleswoman belonging to trade business	Ch'öngjin, Hamgyöngbuk-to
14	F	30s	Aug. 2006	Saleswoman	Hyesan, Yanggang-to
15	M	30s	Nov. 2007	Staff of external(international) affairs agency	P'yöngyang
16	F	30s	Sep. 2007	Petroleum blackmarketeer(Smuggler)	Ch'öngjin, Hamgyöngbuk-to

[Table 1] the characteristics of the in-depth interviewee

ID	Gender	Age	defecting time	Occupation in North Korea	Region of Origin
17	M	40s	Feb. 2004	Railway worker	Hamhŭng, Hamgyŏngnam-to
18	M	40s	Nov. 2003	University professor	Hamhŭng, Hamgyŏngnam-to
19	F	40s	Aug. 2005	School teacher	Hamhŭng, Hamgyŏngnam-to
20	F	40s	Nov. 2005	Collective farm member	Ch'ŏngjin, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
21	F	40s	Jan. 2007	Restaurant manager	Ch'ŏngjin, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
22	F	30s	Jul. 2007	Factory worker	Musan-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
23	F	40s	Dec. 2002	Noodle factory supervisor	Musan-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
24	F	40s	Feb. 2006	Middle school teacher	Sakchu-kun, P'yŏnganbuk-to
25	F	40s	Jan. 2006	Kindergarten director, hospital clerk	Hoeryŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
26	M	40s	Aug. 2004	Materials manager at industrial enterprise	Ion-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
27	F	40s	Mar. 2007	Factory worker	Hoeryŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
28	M	40s	Apr. 2006	Middle school teacher	Ch'ŏngjin, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
29	F	50s	Aug. 2006	Collective farm member	Hoeryŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
30	M	40s	Aug. 2006	Writer	Hyesan, Yanggang-to
31	M	40s	Aug. 2002	Supervisor at military support agency	Namp'o, P'yŏngannam-to
32	F	40s	Dec. 2005	Agricultural labour lecturer	Hamju-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to

[Table 1] the characteristics of the in-depth interviewee

ID	Gender	Age	defecting time	Occupation in North Korea	Region of Origin
33	F	40s	Nov. 2005	Collective farm member	Hoeryŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
34	M	60s	Jun. 2007	Physician	Puryŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
35	M	70s	Jan. 2005	Supervisor of business earning foreign currency	P'yŏngyang
36	M	30s	May. 2007	building engineer	Ch'ŏngjin, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
37	F	50s	Dec. 2006	Factory clerk	P'yŏngyang
38	M	30s	Jan. 2004	Reporter	Hyesan, Yanggang-to
39	F	40s	May. 2007	Physician	Hoeryŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to
40	F	40s	Jun. 2007	Office clerk	Onsŏng-kun, Hamgyŏngbuk-to

The samples of in-depth interviews consist of forty North Korean defectors who are living in South Korea. The mean age is about 40, ranging from the thirties to the seventies. Their defecting year from North Korea ranges from 2002 to 2007. Most of the respondents were from the Chinese border areas of Hamgyŏngbuk-do (North Hamgyŏng province), where trespassing into China is relatively easier than in other areas of North Korea. The transcripts of their interviews illustrate personal experiences of individuals including both organized and unorganized facts, which differ from theoretical concepts and abstracts. Thus, this paper deals with gender roles and changes of the women as well as conditions surrounding them under the military-first politics and the economic crisis.

III. Gender roles in the military-first era

After the death of Kim Il-Sŏng in July 1994, Kim Chŏng-Il started to use the military as the tool for risk management. Starting in 1994, Military-first Politics was conceptualized between October 7, 1997 and May 26, 1998. The concept emerged in 1997 and was suggested as the new mode of politics for Kim Chŏng-Il in 1998. The concept was more sophisticatedly adapted after September 5, 1998 when the system of the National Defence Commission was established and Kim Chŏng-Il was elected the Chairman of the Commission. As the theorization of the sophisticated Military-first Politics began in 2003, “Military-first Ideology” was introduced as Kim Chŏng-Il’ ideology. The term was used in various forms such as Military-first Era in 2004, Military-first Revolutionary March in 2005, and Military-first Philosophy in 2006. (Jeon Mi-Young, 2006: 13)

Military-first politics is a political method of mobilization and, under the politics, the gender roles in North Korea have been constituted in such a way so that men become warriors of the front line while women become warriors of the rear. North Korean men have to show their passion and loyalty for the country by being warriors who then can protect the country in the front and the rear line for national security. North Korean women, on the other hand, “with a high level of loyalty and patriotism,” should “work hard to take care of their households, villages, factories, or workplaces in the same way in which the warriors in the People’s army run their camps in the era of military-first politics” (Li Kye-Rim, 2006: 43). In particular, married women are encouraged to be the main actors for “militarization of family” by raising their children as “the third or fourth generations of the revolution” and sending them to the army as well as by taking care of the survival of families and social reproduction through

selfless attitude and hard labour (Li Sŏn-Kŭm, 2006; Li Ch'un-Kil, 2006). What is important here is that when the regime militarizes the entire country, the hierarchy in gender roles becomes obvious, too. Socio-culturally, members of the society have lived in a social environment where the hierarchical order in gender roles traditionally existed in the society and a male-dominant militaristic discourse was prevalent for a long time (Oogoshi Aiko, 2000: 162). The concept of the gender hierarchy goes beyond the different roles between men and women. The difference between male and female identity is political social hierarchy. The male identity is described as something positive towards the society where sexual violence is nominally accepted as a result of the male-dominant culture and widespread sexual discrimination. The female identity, on the other hand, is negatively perceived against the male-dominant society and the violent social order. People in North Korea are forced to accept this male-dominant gender hierarchy.

We occasionally see women, who are biologically female but live with male identities, take violent cultures/ behaviours in society for granted and even defend the male-dominant social environment. These women are sometimes cynical about the women's rights/movements and feminism, and they oppose these approaches.¹³⁾ The type of women who support the male dominant society is peculiar to countries where a nationalistic discourse is strong and a militaristic system prioritizing national defence is launched. Most militaristic regimes tend to normalize the national unity and solidarity saying that they need to establish a strong security system in order to respond to the existence of enemies and prevent the threat from them. Furthermore, the concept of unity and solidarity is made up of

13) On the other hand, there are considerably men who support the gender equality and the peace.

masculine values that are believed to protect the country from foreign invasion. One thing we should not miss here is that since the twentieth century, for militaristic regimes, it was not the existence of enemies and their threats that required unity and solidarity, but the political desire of the military regimes to maintain their power by creating jingoists and enemies of a nation (George L. Mosse, 2004: 205-208, 215). The North Korean regime has systemized the militaristic policy in order to protect 'North Korean Style Socialism', a combination of patriarchal and military government, and one of the main characteristics of the policy is that the regime has forced its people to accept the hierarchical social order, regardless of whether it was a conscious decision or not. The gender hierarchical social structure between male and female, driven by the regime in North Korea has formed with a continuous historical process since the nation-state building period. By the end of the Second World War, when the Cold War structure began to take shape and nation-states were built, the idea of nationalism became a universal phenomenon.

Nationalism carried the notion of masculine ideals such as manliness and mannish tolerance and established a sort of nationalistic stereotype in society. Through this ideational process, the stereotyped virtues of male and female were made. For men, the political authority encouraged man's personal desire to be the ideals of nation-states, idealizing the supreme value of man as 'sacrificing one's own life for the fatherland'. Women were told to respect, praise, and protect this manliness. One of women's roles for national contribution was in reproducing national warriors in order to continue the 'warring' heritage from father to son (George L. Mosse, 1985; Anthias Floya & Yuval Davis Nira, 2000). The women also take care of the people's survival and bear the responsibility for social reproduction without public support. North Korean society has

experienced a war, the Korea war, and the political authority keeps generating a constant threat from outside, USA or South Korea, in order to form willing loyalty/ obedience towards the regime of its people that they have to prepared for a war at all times. The regime's prime interests are in 'security and self-defence'. Since war and politics are the two extreme forms of national strategy to combine unbalanced and unstable power relations, it is possible to rank the gender role between male and female and form hierarchical gender role models under these circumstances (Michel Foucault, 1997: 107).

The North Korean authority demands violence, bravery, honour, and authority from the male who should be 'the warriors in the front line' so that they can bear the fear of death in a war. On the other hand, the government commands a sacrificing motherhood, a role to preserve the divine national heritage, an ethic to be subordinate to male role, and a morality for charity for female who should be 'the warriors in the rear line' to take care of the basic need for subsistence for the people. Another important aspect about the influence of war and militarism on restructuring gender roles is the distribution of power and resources by the government that supports the gender hierarchical order of the society. The priority for resource distribution is in favour of expansion of the military expenditure. National resources are concentrated in the area of security. Women's hard labour and austerity would get worse, compared to the level of men's because the distribution of power and resources works exclusively against women and everyday life. Whether a country's distribution of resources is concentrated on the welfare system or on the military is one of the most decisive factors for women's social and economic conditions/ status in the society (Lee Sam-Söng, 2003: 124).

As the North Korean militaristic culture is spread in the entire

society and the socio-economic system, the distribution of power and resource is also concentrated on the militaristic/ violent parts of the society. Belligerent and masculine behaviours are recognized as brave, fair and divine whereas peaceful and feminine attitudes are conceived as cowardly and vulgar because the gender hierarchy and women's status in society are critically influenced by war and militarism. An epistemological reason that militarism can systemize the gender hierarchy is because the belligerent and violent security system is ideationally close to the repressive social structure over women and the identity of masculinity over femininity. Masculinity is a prerequisite for being a soldier and being a soldier in and of itself is also a condition for having substantial citizenship (Michael T. Klare ed., 1994). Even in Western Europe where the history of civic movements has been the longest in the world, the universal suffrage for women took a long time to achieve after numerous rough struggles against the male-dominant social environment.

The North Korean regime has been concentrating its power and resources on the militaristic part of the society, which in fact has greatly influenced people's lives, especially women's. Under the militarized North Korean system, the distribution of power and resources is apparently unbalanced in favour of men by imposing the unilateral male-dominant social values. However, although women's harsh labour was stronger over 15 years under Military-first politics, a real war didn't break out and the male-dominant regime didn't show up any more significant power/action than people's everyday survival for national security. Therefore, Military-first politics didn't succeed in being supported especially by the women imposed a survival burden on family and society. Many normal men are spiritless and more languor than normal women. It is why North Korean men don't well care of family and women have to shoulder the responsibility for

family survival and peoples' economy in the crumbled situation of PDS.

IV. Warriors for survival: family's support and societies' maintaining

When the national priorities are on the military and munitions industry, women have no choice but to be accustomed to a habit of austerity in order to uphold their own families and themselves. For a long time in North Korean history, women have been the main actors taking care of fundamental subsistence such as clothes, food, and housing. They are always the first ones to bear the hard labour of the country's poverty and austerity since the government's priorities are on the military and munitions industry. Especially during the "March of Ordeal"¹⁴⁾ period when about two million people died or disappeared because of famine, North Korean women have gone beyond the level of austerity and bloody hard labour and shown the extreme degree of strength for survival. The following is refugees' testimonies:

In North Korea, women are the breadwinners. We have to feed the children and have to go to marketplace for food. My company criticizes me in public but I don't care. When your children are starving, can you listen to them? (Case 23)

Still the North Korean society is quite feudalistic; we put husbands

14) Flooding and poor harvests caused North Korea's worst food crisis after the middle 1990s, especially from 1995 to 1997, and put millions at risk. The period is named "March of Ordeal."

and then children before ourselves (women). (Case 40)

(in 2007) we then earned 2,000 won a day and bought 1kg of rice, then all the households pack a box lunch only for the man(husband). (Case 21)

I was told that one woman feed her whole family by prostituting herself for seven years. Initially most of the customers were Chinese, but later soldiers and regular North Korean men came to her if they had money. (Case 2)

Women who have stalls in the private markets are lucky. Women who peddled their goods by walking around or moving by car are often killed. Women selling their goods moving from one area to another live outside their home for days, weeks or even several months. I used to be absent from home for 20 days a month for business/ selling goods in P'yŏngyang and Kaesŏng. (Case 40)

Because of malnutrition, women's menses stopped sometimes for years. Not only for me but also for all 15 women who were forced to attend mobilization work. We were undernourished and were living a tough life. So, all of us skipped our monthly cycle for three years after the last period. (Case 29)

There are numerous opinions regarding this dissolving of patriarchal power, which began with the economic and food crises. In broad terms, the opinions divide into two camps: one side argues that patriarchal power has weakened, while the other side argues that it is still going strong and if anything has gotten even stronger. There are divergent opinions on this issue because the case-by-case

situations differ from home to home. Both opinions have some truth to them. However, what is clear is that with more women working to support the family in the midst of the food crisis, their voices have gotten stronger. Another clear fact is that the way society views women in North Korea is slowly changing. This change in perspective stems from feelings of gratitude and pity for the women who work tirelessly and sacrifice themselves to support their families. Furthermore, the South Korean soap operas that North Koreans watch, as well as the stories they hear from China about the changing status and role of women, have helped to bring about a change in the way they view their women. (Cho Jeong-Ah et al., 2009: 34)

North Korean women have been starting to become aware of their own situation and strength. For example, in marketplaces where they normally meet and chat with neighbours, there is a famous phrase ‘the running *Yōmaeng*, the Democratic Women’s Association of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DWA), the standing *Saroch’ōng*, the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth Organisation (SYO), and the sitting Party, the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP)’.¹⁵⁾ After the economic crisis in the mid 1990s, the party had just been sitting and ordering “do this and do that” to people and this is why the KWP is called “the sitting party.” The association of men leading called *Saroch’ōng* is standing because the ordinary men workers except workers of military/munitions industry cannot do anything but to stand still under the factories operate at a whisper caused the country’s economic crisis. On the other hand, women who are

15) The membership of *yōmaeng* is women between the age of thirty-one and fifth-five that represent the general women doing business in the markets of North Korea after food crisis. On the other hand, *Saroch’ōng* is composed of the youth, students, workers, and soldiers who represent North Korean men. The party represents the political authority.

represented by the women's association called Yŏmaeng, are in control of the lives of their own households and lead the society economically (Good Friends, Centre for North Korean Studies, 2006).

Many North Korean women wake up at dawn, clean streets and buildings in their villages, recover the flood damage, take part in agricultural activities in rural areas, and sell their items in marketplaces until late at night. The following is refugees' testimonies:

I get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and make breakfast. I help my husband and children get prepared for work and school, do the housework, go to mobilization work and struggle to get some food and go to bed around 11 o'clock in the evening. (Case 5)

Female farmers usually get up at 5 in the morning, have breakfast and go to the farm at 7~7:30 a.m. They work from 8 o'clock a.m. to around 8 o'clock p.m. During the two-hour-long lunch time, they go home to have lunch and do the housework. Even on an off-duty day, once every ten days, these women work in the private market. (To get to the private market) It takes 30, 40 minutes. We don't have any cars and have to carry things we sell and buy. (Case 10)

As for women, society considers unmarried young ladies should not engage in trade. But once married, wives leave their company and start selling things without hesitation. Without doing business, we cannot sustain our lives. We cannot keep a family. We cannot survive. Everyone tries to seek food in the market. (Case 4)

After our eight-hour daily work, we still are compelled to be ready for extra work, "Social work" as it is called. Two hours... never get

paid... grass picking in the summer, making fishing farms... During the winter when big projects are hard to do, we should gather one full 10kg bucket of human feces as fertilizer for each person every day... nothing is given to us as a reward. It's compulsory... If you don't work, you will be checked and if you don't want be checked, you should pay cash. (Case 10)

North Korean women, who are forced to labour to provide for their families, often suffer from poor health because of their physically demanding workload. The food crisis which began in the 1990s, and worsened since then, drove many North Korean women to malnutrition and anaemia. According to the nationwide survey conducted in 2002 by UNICEF and WFP together with the North Korean regime on the nutritional health of children and mothers, 1/3 of mothers were found to suffer malnutrition and anaemia. In the same research done in 2004, 1/3 of mothers were again found to suffer malnutrition and anaemia. (Lee Geum-Soon, et al., 2008: 244)

However, even in their horrible states of health, women had to work many hours to provide for her family and society. This made their health worse. The psychological stress that came with having to support their families also added to their physical and mental pain. Because of poor nutrition, North Korean women's reproductive health deteriorated sharply. Their childbearing abilities declined due to lack of nutrition, and there have been many instances of miscarriages and stillborn babies. (UNFPA, 2007: 87)¹⁶⁾ Because the economic crisis

16) According to the "State of the World Population 2007,"(UNFPA) North Korea's proportion of maternity deaths, the number of women who die out of 100,000 from pregnancy, childbirth, and reproductive complications, was 67, which places North Korea 60th in the world. Its newborn mortality rate, the number of babies under one year old who die out of 1,000, was 42, and its total birthrate, the total number of children a woman has during her lifetime if she gives birth at the same rate as women in other age groups, was 1.94. This is lower than the world average which

and militaristic politics led to a collapse of the healthcare system, women have turned to illegal birth control methods and abortions, which can severely damage their health.

V. Strong viability and Effect of Private property

The refugees' testimonies illuminate the very real reality that North Korean women do live like real warriors in a war of daily lives. What is noteworthy here is the distinctive 'shrewdness', referred to as "yiaak" in North Korea,¹⁷⁾ told a peculiarity of North Korean women. This unique characteristic of 'shrewdness' is important in order to understand North Korean women. Many scholars in North Korean studies point also out the shrewdness of North Korean women. They normally have very conventional authoritarian ideas, but at the same time they have a peculiar form of competitiveness, sensitivity for economic interest and active energy that go beyond toughness. That cannot be only explained by the general 'sacrificing motherhood' or the 'strong surviving skill' that might have been formed by going through some difficult times in the past.

The type of 'shrewdness' that characterizes the women can be often found in North Korea's official documents and has not been formed naturally: it is in line with the historical continuity of the government's women policy that has forced women take care of people's lives, the role of which should definitely be in the government's hand. After the economic crisis in the mid 1990s, especially during the process of a limited resource distribution, the

is 2.56. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2007/english/notes/indicators/e_indicator1.pdf.

17) The term 'yiaak' isn't much used in South Korea. The literal meaning is that if someone is 'yiaak', then, first of all, the person focuses only on self-interests, second, the person is stubborn and patient, third, the person is too much persistent.

regime has, to some extent, abandoned their responsibility for people's material well-being and instead implemented the women policy that forced women to take responsibility of people's daily survival. However, more fundamentally perhaps, it is the continuous history of them that they have been conducting the dual labour both in their families and in the society (Park Young-Ja, 2006).

Generally speaking, women learn how to protect their body and economic interests through adaptation, compromise, silence or resistance in a family structure with an authoritarian father and brothers as she gets older. This daily survival skill, on the one hand, is related to a social standard represented as passiveness, softness and fragility, but on the other, described as an ability to respond to any kind of emergency situation and to survive through a difficult situation with a great deal of more tolerance than men. Women's survival skills are embodied through the social process of the combination of the sexual "differentiation" policy by the government, the socialization of the characteristics within the society, and individuals' own personality development. Women learn these skills as a way to avoid the force from above and to realize their own interests at the same time. It is the power of them who have taken care of the people's lives and led the 'market economy' from below.

North Korea's 'military-first politics' has led many men to go to the army and the field of the military industry and women to take part in the daily business/ work in agriculture and the light industry. Furthermore, when women could not work due to the lack of resources, they were told to show sacrifice and shrewdness for the country. Surviving though the economic crisis, North Korean women have learned to use and develop the internal part of their shrewdness. It would be difficult not to be economically sensitive under the unstable socio-economic environment where the normalized

antagonism and the threat about the country's survival are constant fear generated by the regime to its people. The distinctive shrewdness of the women is not just a common natural characteristic of women in under-developed countries, but a specialized femininity that the militaristic regime has actively constituted and demanded in the course of transferring one of the biggest government responsibilities to them, the obligation to guarantee people's material welfare and basic subsistence. Furthermore, women are often idealized as the protectors of private order in survival of the countries where nationalism is particularly emphasized. In countries with a particularly strong nationalism, personal autonomy is strictly restricted because an individual's personal desire is forced to turn into a national ideal. Masculinity is composed of the image of "warriors in the front line" who know how to die for the fatherland whereas femininity consists of the idea of "warriors in the rear line" who take care of the community in order to maintain the society where men are absent.

However, the discourse about war is mostly full of government propaganda and political manifesto. Details of war would never be specified till now and can only be identified to the closed circle of the political power. The status of the front line of war has been standstill for more than fifteen years and this situation has weakened considerably from below the heat of the front line in North Korea. On the other hand, 'the rear line of a survival war' with development of market economy, part of which the planned economy has seriously abandoned, has been fierce and extensive. For more than fifteen years, the unequal gender hierarchy, formed by the regime and systemized by the male-dominant military policy, have now begun to be reconstituted.

Historically, the internal space where women were able to be the

main actors in North Korea's market economy is the household working groups. These groups have begun during the first five-year national economic plan in 1957 and massively expanded during the 1980s. Expansion of household working groups was the policy that 'a neighbourhood unit' (inminban) or 'a district of workers'(nodongjaku)—mainly consisting of full-time housewives or those who find difficult to get a job in a small town—collect industrial waste and recycle them without any subsidy from the central government. They produce daily commodities that have long become secondary because the state industry policy has been the prioritization of the heavy industry. In addition, by participating in household working groups, women can earn money to supplement their living expenses (Kim Il-Sŏng, 1983: 72). Especially, in the late 1970s, the unstable supply of raw materials and the malfunction of factories have caused serious economic downturn and an increasing number of idle labour powers. Factories had fired a huge number of married women, who then joined or formed a household working unit, becoming more independent from the government, which has made household working groups even stronger. The '8/3 Campaign' ordered by Kim Chŏng-Il in 3 August 1984 was a continuous form of the previous government policy (Kim Chŏng-Il, 1993: 398). Nevertheless, the activities of household working groups, reinitiated by '8/3 Campaign', have played a crucial role in expanding the market production in the society, going through the economic crisis.

The production in North Korea has been a failure due to the unreliable operation rate of factories. The government's prime economic slogan has been "the normalization of production" since the late 1970s. The authority did not recommend married women to work and normally the married women workers retired when they got pregnant or after she gave birth to a baby. The operation rate in

factories has decreased while the idle labour power has increased due to a lack of raw materials and fuel supply. The government cut down the number of workers for whom it had to provide food ration. Under the authoritarian society, when demand of labour power decreased due to the country's economic difficulties, the government mostly decided to lay out female workers first, especially married female workers as part of its structural adjustment. However, this does not mean that the retired female workers were completely abandoned by the government. They were automatically registered as members of 'a neighbour unit' and became the first people who could be mobilized to seasonal agricultural labour or other forms of government-led labour activities. The government also encouraged retired women to form a household working group so that they could produce commodities that the people would need in their daily lives.

When the government buys the products manufactured in household working groups as part of the national commercial networking system, a producer would have 60-90 percent of the total value of the product whereas the rest of 10-40 percent had to be paid to the government. Depending on the region, the season, or the feature of a product, a producer's final income varies. The average is 70-80 percent for a producer and 20-30 percent for the government. As the products have flow into black markets, those have contributed to development of market economy. Highly skilled and productive women can also accumulate a considerable amount of money. Household working groups became a place where highly skilled, productive women could save a considerably amount of capital and where women could overcome economic difficulties in daily lives and implement their own survival strategies. Through the income from their economic activity, the women realized the 'taste of money' and attempt to change the authoritarian gender roles set up by the

political authority and supported by the society in the past. Women want to change the authoritarian perspective and create a new developmental strategy beyond survival. The following is refugees' testimonies:

I was shy and embarrassed when I started to sell goods in the market. I looked away when my neighbors passed by. I thought peddling was shameful because I was educated that way. But as I tasted the power of money, I changed. I gathered anything that I could sell and went out to the market. I got to know the taste of money, the pleasure of making money. (Case 1)

Now, being unable to go to the market is considered shameful. While buying and selling goods, we opened our eyes about the concept of money. As people learned the power of money, the society changed. They started to do anything to make money. (Case 14)

"What do you expect from Communist party membership? Money? Rice?" (If you depend on the state these days, you would starve to death.) Now parents said this and changed their thinking. (Case 2)

I, who was not from a good social class, have thought making money is making success. With money, you can buy power and respect. (Case 13)

Private property provides a motivation to seek independence of individuals from a collective group. The effect of currency, a symbol of private property, causes the atomization of individual human beings and the individualization of internal human beings. Human beings before the emergence of the currency economy had been

dependent on the group they directly belonged to. Exchanges of services made each member of a society closely united. However, modern human beings who live in a massively extended monetary economy can claim their rights to the evaluation of others' work whose values are systematically recorded as a form of currency. They also have a right to choose when and where they would exercise their right. Therefore, the direct relation between traders in the earlier form of exchanges has become naturally obsolete.

The biggest impact of currency to a human society is that it has endowed people with the power of being "independent from relations of collective interests." This power of independence is not only from the fundamental conflict between the barter economy and the monetary economy but also appears within the monetary economic system itself (Georg Jimmel, 1983: 432).¹⁸⁾ The impact of currency has been significant for women's role in North Korea. Women were able to possess private property through participating in household working groups and going out to sell them in a market. Especially as the society's militarization was accelerated due to Kim Chŏng-Il's military-first politics, the economic activities run by women became systemized and general throughout the society. Women's participation in economic activities has grown in household working groups as well as in peasants' markets and black markets.

As of 1987, the total number of women participating in economic activities was approximately two million more than that of men (Eberstadt and Banister, 1990: 135). The reversal of the sex ratio in economic activities was because the expanded local industry until the 1980s had been run by women, especially by married women (Li

18) Jimmel analyses socio-philosophically how the institutions of money (value, price, or currency), the economic relation, and the space are related to the various social phenomenon, the individual personality and vitality, and the culture.

Ch'ang-Kün, 1989: 125). When the local industry faced difficulties with production, various forms of household working groups were created to supplement the lack of production.¹⁹⁾ Along with the increased activities of household working groups, the number of North Korean women who are taking part in the economy has been growing in an unofficial level as well. Since the middle 1990s, the operation rate of North Korean factories has been less than 30 percent and the food ration has been malfunctioning (Naeoet'ongsinsa, 1995: 269).

Consequently, the function of the household working group and the market has been activated. And then, a large number of women wanted to retire and join a household working group because this could bring them more money than working in a factory (Chǒng Se-Chin, 1999: 78-79). This caused a lot of trouble between female workers and party cadres in factories and some women refused to go to work. The economic crisis has made household working groups produce various kinds of consumers' goods such as clothes, stationeries, electronics, shoes as well as daily commodities. The vitalization of household working groups has made economic activities of women in North Korea more active than those of men.

According to the testimonies of North Koreans, there is a phrase in North Korea since the mid 1990s that says 'if a woman in a family moves and acts, then her family can survive, if she does not, her family will starve to death.' Under a series of serious economic crises, the reason women are able to overcome economic difficulties better than men are because women can earn money for food and living

19) Furthermore, many adult men had to be conscripted to the compulsory military service and so they were excluded from economic activities. Therefore, the increased economic activities of North Korean women have been closely related to the enforcement of the North Korean army and its militaristic policy (Li Ch'ang-Kün, 1989: 126).

expenses. They produce goods through various forms of moonlights or joining a household working group, sell these products by trade, and reinvest capital for the future production and trade. While a lot of men have belong to military industry/army or have been to go their factories/companies through no working, because they mostly operate the planned economy, the women have earned private property through joining a household working group or/and other forms of moonlights and are involved with business in sales and trades in the market economy, becoming the major actors in the peoples' economy.

Furthermore, women often go beyond the level of government's control. The regime tried to make people return to their workplaces by introducing 'the system maintenance project' by the end of the 'March of Ordeal' in 1997 and 'the 7/1 Economic Reform policy' in July 2002, but women who had already become the major actors in the market economy refused to go back to their work. The government has initiated another policy that was to make people register as members of '8/3 workers', which means if an individual is registered as a member of a factory and pays a certain amount of cash to the factory, then in return, the worker can be excluded from various responsibilities such as daily attendance and therefore can freely run a business without any government control. On the contrary, unregistered individuals would be the targets for government control, which makes their business in the market unbearably difficult. Especially, if a person is registered as an '8/3 worker' of a foreign trade company, then it is far easier to set up a business since s/he can use the company's name for foreign trade.(Case 13).

As the economic crisis worsened, women's role in the market economy has become stronger. At the same time, women's active

character has often nullified the country's planned economy. People have often stolen raw materials from their factories. Various forms of business connections and cooperative networks have developed. Lower levels of networks became stronger and more systemized as businesses developed while the country's economic situation deteriorated. (Case 12) Household working groups contributed to strengthening various business cooperation and networks during the process of trades in the market economy in order to increase private property. Combined with the corrupted structure among lower-level government officials in North Korea, women's power to survive under these circumstances became even stronger than ever. Various forms of business connection and networking have become a base for North Korea's 'market economy'. On the other hand, in rural areas, once a farmer receives his own ration from the government per term, s/he can get by for the first couple of months but after that, s/he can hardly survive. Farmers, therefore, started growing cereals in their 'kitchen gardens' (tutbat). It is reported that some farmers can harvest one ton of sweet corn per a kitchen garden, Cereals from individual farmers' land can be owned by farmers and they can be sold or traded with other industrial products in the marketplace. Just as in other socialist states in the twentieth century, in North Korea men are pictured as workers whereas women as peasants. A lot of women are taking part in agriculture and strengthening their survival power by producing food and trading them in the marketplace. Through this process, the women can possess their own private property. (Case 20)

With private property and the capital they earn in the marketplace, women reinvest the money in order to carry on more production. As they learn market principles for making more profits, women do not sell their products via the nationalized commercial network but

directly trade them with items they want or sell them in the marketplace. Those, who own a large amount of capital and are brave enough, cross over the border to China to run businesses with Chinese traders, especially, in the 2000s, the area of trade with Chinese has expanded to include rice as well as numerous industrial products. (Case 9)

Furthermore, their awareness about the regime is changing. They usually perceive Kim Il-Sŏng in a bright light, while they have negative opinions of Kim Chŏng-Il. North Korea praises Kim Chŏng-Il as the “incarnation of Kim Il-sung” and the “protector of socialism,” and proclaims that he takes care of the people’s lives, having only light sleep and limits himself to only eating rice balls. What refugees have said is that most people do not blame Kim Chŏng-Il for their poor living conditions, because the people who know nothing about international trends and the domestic and foreign situation still believe, due to the authorities’ education, that the ongoing economic crisis in the country is caused by U.S. economic sanctions. (Lee Kyo-Duk et al., 2008: 47-48)

However, many people, especially women, started to complain and oppose the leader as rations were cut off and many people died of hunger in the Arduous March. Complaints and criticism have spread as the food crisis continues and peoples’ lifestyles are not yet secure. Furthermore, such a social atmosphere among the people has been widespread since the 7.1 measures. North Koreans are realizing that North Korea is a poor country, which has led to negative opinions about Kim Chŏng-Il and his regime. People, especially women, who have been to China to visit relatives and engage in business, discovered that North Korea is a poor country by seeing and hearing evidence for them. They began to think that the country is perishing because of Kim Chŏng-Il’s dictatorship.

VI. Changing of the traditional gender role and consciousness

What I have described above is the process of how women have become the main actors in North Korea's market economy. The function of currency and the expansion of the marketplace have affected the women's desire for freedom and independence from the government and created changes in their values system, which partly have guided to change of the traditional gender role and to rise in social standing in the society. The following is refugees' testimonies:

As women work more actively out of the home, they get more power. They started to have a voice. A family where a woman does trade lives well and a family where a woman doesn't is poor. Therefore women are rising in social standing. (Case 22)

In a family, the one who earns money holds the power. Family affairs are dealt with by the high earner. I managed all the things in my family. After I started economic activities, many things changed. (Case 12)

Though there is a bit difference depending on each family, influenced by market activities, the concept that kitchen work is only for women began to break down. Since a wife goes out to earn money, the husband helps housework like making a fire for breakfast. Now, men's housework in the kitchen is no longer shameful. (Case 11)

A lot of women are reluctant to marry. Clever men want to live with older women who have a strong earning ability and do business

in the market. There are men who marry to five, six-years-old women. They don't care whether these older women have children. Such marriages are common, though the state prohibited. Nowadays daughters are preferred since they can support the family financially. (Case 7)

My husband had never engaged in housework, but after I left home to sell goods far away, he got use to doing the laundry and cooking by himself. Men weren't like that when we used to receive ration tickets but after the rationing stopped and women went out and started business in the marketplace, men changed. Women go out early in the morning and come back home late at night. While they work all day long, men at home are doing housekeeping such as cooking and raising the kids. (Case 13)

The ideational changes of women who have found their place as the main actors in the market economy appear as behavioural changes as well. This is especially evident between husband and wife. A married woman who is not happy with her husband initiates an appeal to a divorce trial. This is considered to be a serious issue in North Korea. Or she just leaves her husband if a divorce does not seem to work. In Hamgyŏngbuk-to (North Hamgyŏng province), for example, the proportion of separated or divorced couples reaches approximately 20 % of the total married couples as of 2006 (Good Friends, Centre for North Korean Studies, 2006). A lot of single women try to avoid getting married, flee North Korea, and find non-North Korean men to marry. These behaviours were unthinkable until the 1980s. The following is refugees' testimonies:

Before 2000, when you look at the families, North Korean men

drank alcohol and hit women, firstly their wives. Women were abused and looked down on. But from 2005, women changed. They started to think they didn't have to live with violent husbands. Family breakups began. So, more and more men started to understand women. Men and their behavior in the family changed. (Case 30)

Divorce was rare in the past. But with severe poverty, the whole society changed and so did a family. Because they cannot tolerate each other, couples separate. If a woman is beaten by her husband, she can't stand it, counters and tries to divorce. Judges are usually men. If judges don't allow divorce, some women run away from home. (Case 24)

North Korean men tend to drink and try to beat their wives. Their tempers, even by seeing their way of talking, they are impatient. They are hot-tempered. I cannot stand it any longer. You cannot stand his violence while you are struggling to support him. (Case 9)

When a man likes drinking too much, his family is destroyed. About 70% of North Korean men like drinking... You cannot sustain your life with a drunken husband. Many of North Korean women who crossed the border into China mostly had such husbands. (Case 33)

Young single women are not willing to marry like here in South Korea especially to poor men. They think they can feed themselves by themselves. (Case 25)

Since the 1990s, not only women' role but also thoughts on

marriage and acquaintanceships with the opposite sex have changed, and liberal attitudes to acquaintanceships with the opposite sex and love marriages are developing. According to the testimony of refugees', the couples in love worried about attracting too much attention before, but now they show off their relationship and it is very often the case that they can be seen holding each other's hands. These tendencies have been evident since the 13th World Festival for Youth and Students hosted in Pyongyang in 1989. Another reason can be found in the frequent travel to China and other foreign countries to do business or get food during the economic difficulties because the trend towards openness, referred to as the 'yellow wind', has developed through these contacts and experiences. (Cho Jeong-Ah, 2007: 38-39)

These trends are reflected in the novels, so recent North Korean novels describe the love between man and woman in rather bold terms and in some detail. While previous novels placed an importance on the ideological agreement dealing with acquaintanceships between man and woman, but since the 1990s, North Korean novels treat various forms of love such as the combination of emotion and desire, devotion, the camaraderie of the old era, and as an agreement based on faith. In particular, the novels which attempt to unravel the emotions of love like "multivariate function, so to speak, the emotions of love connected with language, behaviour, appearance, and the body as the object of love," accompanied with bold and rich descriptions have increased tremendously. It is in the series of other novels dealing with female problems that we can most clearly see the gushing forth of private desire. The matter of man and woman's love has changed from the subject of enlightenment to something of everyday reality by describing the complex and concrete nature of the emotion in such detail. The fact that North Korean literature plays a

role in public education and that dealing with men and women' love straight forwardly in North Korean literature is reflective of the great changes of the society where private desire and the arena of individual life is expanding. (Noh Gui-Nam, 2006)

VII. Conclusion: Light and Darkness

During the process of capitalization, market economy can provide plenty of opportunities for women to experience individual freedom and personality development that might lead them to desert the idea of becoming more independent. On the other hand, women are easily attracted to money, the rapidly changing market mechanism, and the monetary relations of trade. Market economy provides women with both the light and the darkness. Let us briefly review the relations between market and women in other twentieth century real-socialist states—a system which was established when the capitalist system was immature. First of all, it is noteworthy that in the twentieth century real-socialist states, the bureaucratic adjustments led by the planned economy, the prioritized heavy industry, and the military-first policies have emphasized the areas of the male-dominant politics such as the military, the heavy industry, and the military industry. Second, the former real-socialist countries have implemented the policy that divided gender roles between male and female. Third, the sexual 'differentiation policy' has placed the priorities on the 'manly' values and men in terms of the distribution of power and authority (Sharon Smith, 2005). Therefore, most high officials in the major part of the planned economy, the party, and the government were dominated by men.

The main actors who have formed and expanded peasants' markets

and black markets in the twentieth century real-socialist states were women who had been excluded from fair distribution of resources, values, and authority. Women have actively participated in market economic activities from below and become the main actors of the development of market economy. In agriculture, the light industry and small/middle-scale companies, women have produced necessary commodities that ordinary people needed in their daily lives. Furthermore, as part of their survival tools, women have learned to develop handcraft skills such as weaving and knitting of family necessities. These were inherited from their ancestors within a family tradition. In this way, women were able to dominate the area of daily necessities that had been neglected and become secondary because of the government's priority in heavy industry in North Korea. When the bureaucratic adjustment of the planned economy could not control and distribution, women formed 'a spontaneous market economy' in order to supplement daily necessities and this became the so-called 'the second economy' or black market in North Korea. Women have unconsciously trained themselves and their self-learned skills have become a powerful force to sustain their daily lives under the harsh circumstance of 'the austere economy' in the North Korean socialist system.

This situation was also common in other real-socialist states in the twentieth century. However, the degree and the characteristics are distinctive in North Korea. Since the late 1970s, as factories' production and operation rate dropped, the number of idle workers in factories increased and the government's capability to take care of people's basic subsistence was utterly impossible. Furthermore, factories in North Korea started firing married women and the government placed them in household working groups instead. This unequal labour policy resulted in the ironic fact that women became

more active in market economic activities and gained a survival strategy much stronger than that of men. Most of the men working for the government's official industry have to attend their factories every day even though the factories are not functioning. On the contrary, women mostly taking part in a household working group or running moonlights are relatively less controlled by the government and in this way they learn how to survive under the severe economic situation.

The space where women have learned their surviving skills was the marketplace. Market economy has provided women with the opportunity to learn to have the desire for freedom and personality development through the information about the outside world circulated within the marketplace. Women realize the irrationality in the reality of North Korea and some of them want to desert to be independent. When she has problems with her 'house dog' husband, a woman in North Korea actively initiates to lodge an appeal to a divorce trial or just leaves her husband to live with another man who can be more economically helpful. This was unthinkable in the past. The changed in women's ideas and behaviours cause a crack in the hierarchical order between men and women in North Korea.

North Korean women now partly have the ability to develop their surviving strategies through market economy and learn to be curious about the new world outside. Some of them actively try to expand their businesses with China or attempt to flee to China, planning new lives there. They extend their desire for more humane lives, developing the idea of human rights through the broadening of market economic activities. The awareness of gender roles and the hierarchical order, constituted by the political authority, have already begun to be reconstituted by the economic activity and change of women's mind/behaviour.

On the one hand, the most serious health consequences for women that the hunger and malnutrition stemming from the food crisis and the abundant responsibility/labour have brought on develop during pregnancies, child-deliveries, child rearing, and when in a state of deteriorating health. (Lee Keum-Soon et al., 2009: 18). On the other, they are rapidly merchandising. In particular, the “sex business”/human trafficking of women have been on the increase. We have to be worthy of notice is that the rise of the individual in the change has resulted in a paradoxical transition of “private life that is characterized by a surge of egoism and the rise of the uncivil individual, who emphasizes the right to pursue personal interests yet ignores her/his moral obligations to the public and other individuals.”(Yunxiang Yan, 2003: 217)

North Korean militarist system and market economy from below provides women with both the light and the darkness in the process of the social transition under the military-first politics and the economic crisis after the mid 1990s. These results will also be important to study and policy on female defectors about 80% among North Korean defectors in South Korea (Park Young-Ja, 2008).

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북한의 젠더 역할과 여성의 변화 : 선군정치와 경제난 시대

박 영자*

본 논문은 북한의 선군정치와 경제위기 상황이 초래한 사회적 변화 과정에서 젠더 역할과 여성들의 변화를 연구하였다. 1995년 종반 이후 북한체제의 경제위기가 2010년 현재까지 지속되는 상황에서 체제 생존전략으로 선군정치를 지속하고 있는 김정일 군사정권은, 주로 군대와 군수산업, 공공기관에 남성을 배치하여 '전방의 전사'로서 남성역할과 가족을 중심으로 한 주민들의 일상생활을 책임지는 '후방의 전사'로서 여성역할을 정책 및 제도화 하였다. 그러나 전방의 전투가 외현화되지 않는 15년 이상의 상황에서 경제난은 지속되었고 아래로부터의 북한 경제와 사회 변화가 진행되며 후방에 배치된 북한여성의 경제적 활동이 증대하였다. 이 과정에서 북한정권의 가부장적-군사주의적 위계에 기초한 젠더역할론이 아래로부터 흔들리며 여성들의 의식과 행위 변화가 두드러짐을 분석하였다. 연구방법으로 선행연구 분석과 함께 질적연구 방법론인 탈북자 심층면접과 문헌분석을 결합한 맥락적 분석을 활용하였다.

각 장을 구성하는 주요 내용은 선군시대 젠더 역할론, 가족부양과 사회유지를 책임지는 생존의 전사, 강한 생존력과 사적 소유의 효과, 가부장적 젠더역할과 의식의 변화를 다루었다. 마지막으로 결론에 군사주의와 아래로부터의 시장경제가 북한여성에게 미친 빛과 어둠을 다루었다. 15년 이상 남성부재 사회를 초래한 선군정치와 해결의 전망이 보이지 않는 경제난 속에서, 아래로부터 시장을 형성하며 생존전략을 실행하던 북한여성들이 확장된 경제활동과 시장경제를 통해 권리의식을 발전시키며 인간다운 삶에 대한 욕구가 증대하여, 선군 권력에 의해 위계적으로 구성된 젠더역할 뿐 아니라 남성종속적인 의식 및 행위가 변화되고 있음을 논증하였다. 또 다른 한편으로, 과다노동과 영양결핍 등으로 여성들의 건강문제 등이 심각하며 성매매 및 여성 인신매매가 급증하고 여성들의 물질주의적이고 이기적인 의식이 확산된 어둠의 측면도 함께 다루었다. 북한의 선군정치와 아래로부터 시장경제 진행과정에서 여성들의 사회적 가치와 목소리가 높아진 측면도 있으나, 여성의 육체적/정신적 건강문제와 물질주의/개인주의/이기주의적 경향이 우리가 주목해야 할 문제이다. 이는 여성이 80%에 달하는 북한이탈주민 연구 및 정책과도 중요하게 연동되는 지점이다.

주제어: 젠더역할, 북한여성의 변화, 선군정치, 경제난, 시장경제

* 정치학박사. 이화여대 통일학연구원 연구교수. 주요 연구주제: 북한 여성과 체제, 남북 관계와 통일, 탈북자와 사회통합.