

# Value Changes of the North Korean New Generation and Prospects

Lim, Soon-Hee

KOREA INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL UNIFICATION

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*by Lim, Soon-Hee*

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The Analyses, comments and other opinions contained in this monograph are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Korea Institute for National Unification.

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# I . Introduction

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Values are important not only to individuals but also to societies. Individual values work to a significant degree during the formation of a society, and to no small degree, they eventually affect the development and maintenance of that society. Naturally, as a member of a society, a person's change of consciousness or changes in the set of values they hold can become the source of societal changes. Therefore, small individual changes are profound and meaningful in the study of the values of an entire population that form the society.

The younger generation in North Korea is the center of their society. They show a sensitive reaction to changes in the society to which they belong. They also, like their counterparts from South Korea, have an important role in leading a future reunified Korea. Researching the changes in their set of value is necessary and significantly meaningful, not only for keeping track of the trends or the prospects for change in North Korean society, but also for considering the possibility of the reunification of the Korean

peninsula and the two Koreas' internal unification. The two Koreas' internal unification is more likely to happen when, in advance, the two societies try to get over their differences and try to find a common identity with the help of this kind of research.

According to a source, changes in North Korean values have been evident since the late 1980s and have become wider and deeper through the 1990s due to economic difficulties like food shortages. Changes in individual and societal values have been more distinct and more quickly apparent among this younger generation of North Koreans, and it is this trend that was deeply analyzed in the author's thesis 'The Values of the North Korean Younger Generation,'<sup>1</sup> which was released in December 1995. This research, however, analyzed related material only up to early 1995, when food shortages had just become known to the world. North Korea asked the international community for food aid in the mid-1990s, and it is known that since then, changes in the younger generation's values have become more widespread and intense. The previous research, therefore, is insufficient to explain the current situation. Analyzing the North Korean younger generation's values after 1995, when the food shortages became known to the world, and comparing the results of related previous research, this paper looks into the changing aspects and trends of the new values that emerged after the food shortages and explores prospects on the values held by future generations based on the researched factors of change. Questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and/or behavior observation can be used to analyze values, although the questionnaire is the most common method. Doing a questionnaire to analyze the North Korean young people's values, however, is not appropriate since this method involves direct contact. Only an indirect way, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Lim Soon-hee, "North Korean New Generation's Values," *The Unification and North Korean Society and Culture* (First volume), (Seoul: KINU, 1995).

is feasible for this research. Content analysis is an indirect research method and it is considered a proper method when the researcher's material is limited to documents or when it's difficult to obtain materials involved in or connected to the subject experience. This paper researched, using the content analysis method, North Korean novels released after 1995. In order to prove or supplement the analyzed results, this research made good use of the relevant research previously undertaken, the results of in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors, here called new settlers, and the collection of new settlers' testimonies and essays.



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## II. Definition of the Main Concepts and Analyzing Measure

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### 1. North Korean New Generation

In North Korea, “juveniles and young students” are termed the new generation. According to the definition from the dictionary, the word, juvenile, covers “youth and boy.”<sup>2</sup> When you follow the dictionary definition like this, the terminology of new generation in North Korea includes all age groups between juveniles and adolescents. Specifically, the members of the ‘Korean Children’s Union’ (aged around 9 - 13) and the ‘League of Socialist Student Corps’ (aged around 14 - 30) belong to this generation. In real life, according to new settlers, the younger generation refers to youths in their late teens or twenties who have just started their social life. The term, New Generation, as introduced into South Korean society around the mid-1990s, is not a common term

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<sup>2</sup> The Science Encyclopedia Publishing Company, *Chosun Language Dictionary*, (Pyongyang: The Science Encyclopedia Publishing Company, 2004), p. 1146.

anymore but has become a proper noun and refers to young people who have alternative morals and values, never suffer from a lack of material wealth, and are eager to be independent and free from the established systems and traditional values.

The term new generation in North Korea has popular use but derives meaning from a different standpoint than the South Korean New Generation. The concept of the new generation, unlike South Korea's New Generation, is restricted to political and ideological aspects. Its official definition is the so-called 'fourth generation of the revolution.' The new generation in North Korea is called "the most enthusiastic believers and protectors of the Juche ideology, reliable combat troops to the party, the successor of the revolution, the court guards and death band of the party, and the relief of the revolution." But, the new generation of the so-called Military First period, which was started by Kim Jong Il's Military First Policy and Military First Politics, is to be "the generation that should become the pioneer of the era and volunteer to build a strong and great nation" and their "most honorable duty" and "obligation" is to become "the warrior and flagmen who realize the comrade of Kim Jong Il's Military First Policy and its line."<sup>3</sup> The new generation should be the "best protectors and best accomplisners" that actualize Kim Jong Il's Military First Policy and its line completely and their important job to achieve is to "wield the great influence of the vanguard troop and shock troop at every combat spot of building a strong and great nation." The new generation also calls itself proudly, "the first pioneers of the military first revolution." The new generation of the Military First period must "be prepared to be the heroes of guns and bombs and be ready to sacrifice themselves to protect the great general's peace

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<sup>3</sup> "Editorial: Let's Wield the Chosun Youth's Revolutionary Spirit with Military First Banners Flying," in *Rodong Sinmun*, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

and power.” They must consider serving in the People’s Army as “the most honorable duty.” North Korea especially emphasizes to the new generation “the spirit of escorting the Dear Leader to the end.”

Ideological disturbance and alternative values have showed up among the new generation since the late 1980s and it is known to have been, gradually, deepening and widening throughout the 1990s. After the 13<sup>th</sup> World Youth and Students Fair, which was hosted in Pyongyang in 1989, the main state media, such as newspapers, broadcasters, and magazines strongly condemned the Younger Generation for their loose revolutionary thoughts, weak ideology, carefree and individualistic attitude, and their tendency to avoid labor. The media also showed strong hostility toward “the circulation of reactionary ideology and culture and decadent life styles,” the spread of a “«liberalization» wind by imperialists and their vulgar allurements.” All these things signified a stirring-up of the youth. The government showed a strong will to maintain socialist control through a complete ban on any perceived capitalistic cultural invasion upon the populace, including the new generation, and introduced the so-called ‘Mosquito Net Policy’ in the early 1990s, the time of the Soviet Union’s demise and the collapse of the East European socialist countries.

Throughout the 1990s, North Korea, as is known, struggled with severe stagnation. Food shortages worsened due to the continuing natural disaster and an estimated hundreds of thousands of people at the lowest and possibly millions at the highest, died of hunger. Food shortages influenced the entire society directly and indirectly and resulted in intensifying the phenomenon of change in the established old values that had already begun spreading among the populace. Since the late 80s, phenomena such as a laxity of ideology and a weakened revolutionary consciousness had started developing due to the food shortage and the partial opening of

North Korea to the outside world. In this matter, the North Korean authorities were most concerned about the new generation. In the early 1990s, North Korea warned of confusion and agitation happening among the new generation due to the incursion of foreign ideas and culture, commenting that “the maneuver of imperialists to demolish socialism, starts through ideological and cultural penetration and affects the younger generation first.”<sup>4</sup> The authorities also emphasized, “the youth should not be seduced by vulgar allurements and the spread of a «liberalization» wind by imperialists and must reject them completely.”<sup>5</sup> It indicated that the authorities were greatly concerned about reducing, as much as they could, negative influences on the new generation caused by the partial societal opening, which was undertaken to break through diplomatic isolation and cure the struggling economy and food shortages.

In mid-1995, North Korea asked for food aid from the international community. This led the country to be, albeit limitedly, opened even more. In addition to that, manpower exchanges between the two Koreas increased significantly after the South North summit agreed to and announced the ‘6.15 Inter-Korean Basic Agreement’ in June 2000. Besides this, the North expanded the opportunities and paths for outside thought and culture by hosting international conferences and international film festivals in Pyongyang. Concerned about the weakening of the people’s revolutionary and ideological mind due to this expansion, the North Korean authorities strengthened their regime’s propaganda. All of this was evident in what was called the ‘Mosquito Net Strategy’<sup>6</sup> introduced

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<sup>4</sup> Kim Jong Il, “Youth! Let’s Become a Vanguard with Perpetual Loyalty to the Party and Dear Leader,” in *Chollima* (November 1991), p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Il Sung, “Youth! Let’s Uphold the Leader of the Party and Complete the Juche Revolution Brilliantly,” in *Youth Literature* (April 1993), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> “The Mosquito Net Strategy” was actualized in the “Rodong Sinmun,



in the late 1990s. The North asserted that they must crush the infiltration of “the imperialistic thinking and culture,” which, they emphasized, is based on “excessive individual egoism,” and “their capitalistic yellow wind” with “the revolutionary ideological offensive.” And to do this, the authorities emphasized that they have no choice but to strengthen the regime’s propaganda on the population. The North also warned that imperialistic thinking and culture most easily impacts upon the area where ordinary people live their every day lives. Concerned greatly with the negative influence upon its young people due to the expanding of the partial opening to the outside world, the authorities geared up ideological lectures targeted to the new generation.

## 2. Analysis Frame

This author did research on the same subject in 1995 and to compare that previous work with this one, the same analytical frame is used. The areas of analysis are divided into three categories: views on life, views on family, and views on women. These areas of analysis also include subordinate categories. The section

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Workers, collaborative editorial: Let’s Reject the Infiltration of the Imperialists’ Ideology and Civilization,” *Rodong Sinmun*, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999. The point of the editorial was that “the infiltration of the Imperialists’ ideology and civilization is a key method of the world hegemony strategy,” so a capitalist yellow wind must not be allowed. North Korea needs to put up the mosquito net securely in most sectors of the society and “harden the socialist ideology and civilization like an impregnable fortress.” In brief, the Mosquito Net Strategy is that, despite of the infiltration of the capitalist’s yellow wind due to the partial opening of the society, North Korea must not let any factors (mosquitoes) of the bourgeois ideology and civilization (Imperialist ideology and civilization) by practicing exhaustive ideological education. “Rodong Sinmun, Workers, collaborative editorial: Let’s Reject the Infiltration of the Imperialist’s Ideology and Civilization,” in *Rodong Sinmun*, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999.

discussing the new generation's views on life includes the subordinate categories of self-cognition, the goal of life and views on occupations. The section discussing the new generation's views on the family includes the subordinate categories of views on marriage, views on parents, and views on married couples. And the section discussing views or values of women are analyzed mainly, like the previous work, on the basis of the social concept of men above women.

The general idea of values in this paper is “a criterion of behavior or appraisal standard when an individual or a group is in a circumstance to make a choice” and it is defined as “something that has an important role when an individual or a group decides its behavior.”

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### **III. The New Generation's View on Life After the Food Shortages**

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#### **1. Self-cognition**

The primary subject of life is oneself, in other words, the “I.” For the conscious self to plan a happy and meaningful life, it is very important to have the correct cognition and understanding of oneself. And before everything, forming a desirable ego should precede. The formation of ego means the awakening to one’s internal and external conditions and circumstances, and when its meaning is considered, to shape a desirable ego. In this, other people or external physical demands or interferences should be excluded. When the new generation of the North forms their ego, however, external factors are involved and these are through the North Korean regime’s propaganda. Through ideological education, the North has its young people come to realize and understand, positively, their personalities, volitions, abilities, employments, their worth and meaning of existence, relationships with others and their social circumstances. To the new generation, this is also a

procedure for accepting and learning the authority's officially desired set of values.

The new generation's self-cognition through North Korean novels seems equally positive both before and after the food shortages. In the novels published after 1995, the characters that speak to and represent the values the authorities desire to instill are all satisfied with their social circumstances and perceive them positively. The characters claim that, due to the grace of the party, theirs is a generation free from difficulty. They emphasize with pride that they are "the new generation raised up happily in the bosom of Dear General." They also say they are "warriors of the supreme commander" and they find their life's meaning in upholding the "leader of the Military First Policy." They insist on repaying Dear Leader and the authorities for the generosity of being raised as the "children blessed with happiness." They consider this not as an obligation at all, but as a conscientious and just thing to do as a person. It is considered the demand of their times. The new generation's positive self-cognition as shown in the novels is also seen in their accomplishment of and satisfaction in the job they are doing and their sense of mission, obligation, strong volition and self-confidence. In contrast, the ideal character suggested in the novels as a role model to the new generation is the 'People's Army.' In the novels the North urges the new generation to protect the country with a soldier's attitude and to live with the 'revolutionary military spirit' and with the "heart of a soldier." The teachers also assign the People's Army as their role model and they commit themselves to being armed with the Military First ideology and to treat and teach the students with a revolutionary military spirit. Before 1995, it is difficult to find any content in North Korean novels related to the new generation's formation and recognition of ego that specifically assigns the People's Army as a role model and asserts to live with the revolutionary military

spirit. It is after the so-called Military First Policy and Military First Politics when the revolutionary military spirit or ‘learning after the People’s Army’ is emphasized. The revolutionary military spirit originated from the ‘Military First Politics,’ which was presented as a new way of politics during the process of establishing and strengthening the status of Kim Jong Il as the successor and Dear Leader after the death of Kim Il Sung. The emphasized factor embodying ‘Military First Politics’ is that the entire population should actively learn the revolutionary military spirit, the fighting spirit and traits of military life. The revolutionary military spirit refers to the “spirit of the age of socialist Chosun in the period of the Military First Revolution.” The revolutionary military spirit is “the spirit to protect socialism created by Kim Jong Il’s Military First Politics, indomitable fighting spirit, mainly focused on embodying the spirit of escorting Dear Leader to the end.”<sup>7</sup> The core of the revolutionary military spirit is ‘the spirit of escorting Dear Leader to the end.’ The intention of all of these, such as learning after the People’s Army and cultivation of the Revolutionary Military Spirit, is the strengthening of loyalty toward Dear Leader. The new generation, who lives by the revolutionary military spirit in the novels, has the lucid sense of mission and responsibility to accomplish the will of Kim Jong Il and to follow the teachings left by Kim Il Sung.

In the North Korean novels released after 1995, the new generation understands the self as a standardized one not as an independent individuality. They perceive the ‘self as belonging to a group’ not ‘a group I belong to.’ The young people depicted as positive characters in the novels form their egos following, without any criticism, the authorities’ officially approved values and live as a

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<sup>7</sup> Lee Hyun-soon, “The Realization of Military First Revolution Line through the Literary Arts,” in *Chosun Art* (April 2001), p. 17.

‘typical Juche-type of person’<sup>8</sup> that the authorities desire. In the North, a group-oriented system is the basis of social life in the communist society and this rule doesn’t exclude the new generation. Young people are brought up collectively and socially at the public nursery or kindergarten based on the group-oriented policy, which is the basic principal of North Korean society. They have to start their daily life in the systematized society after entrance to primary school. The life of ‘Chosun Boy Scouts’ and that of ‘the Union of Kim Il Sung Socialism Youth’ are examples. The North’s authorities educate the new generation through group lectures about group power and indoctrinate them to “think they can’t live apart from organizations or groups.”<sup>9</sup> The authorities want the new generation to be conscious only of a formed and standardized self that is buried within a group, an individual who exists only for the country and society and not an independent one who aims for a better life. Heavy duties and responsibility are imposed on individuals who believe in their existence only for the country. There’s a view that this kind of self-conception can lead to blind devotion and fanaticism toward the country or righteousness.<sup>10</sup> Holding this view, the new generation in North Korea is not free. The new generation, in novels that embody the

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<sup>8</sup> “Juche-type individual or Juche-type communist” refers to a person who embodies, most harmoniously, the ideological consciousness and moral consciousness features of an independent person. He is a true person who is armed with Juche ideology. He considers the loyalty to the Party and Dear Leader the reason of his life. He is a strong revolutionist who can fight to complete the Juche revolution for the nation and people, devoting himself entirely. Kim Jong Il, in *The Juche Literary Theory* (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1992), p. 113.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Il Sung, “About the Several Tasks for Strengthening the School Educational Work,” *The Kim Il Sung Selections 29* (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1985), p. 181.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Stewart, “The Cultural Differences and Human Relations,” (Seoul: Bosung Pub. 1991), p. 98.

party's officially approved values, doesn't have any realization or opinions about their own rights. Performing the duties imposed by the country, society and organization is all that matters to them. Those duties, after all, are for Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung. It is a fact that the object of blind devotion is but one person, the Dear Leader.

Some youth, however, who are depicted as negative characters in novels, have an alternative self-cognition that departs from the party's desired set of values. These characters are tormented by their doubts about uniform egos buried within a group and show self-centered and individually oriented self-cognition rather than presenting blind devotion toward the organization and society or achieving the will of the party and Dear Leader. This behavior contradicts the party's approved set of values and is depicted variously in novels released after 1995. In the short story, *A Lucky Bag*, Choi Soon, a new generation woman who retired from the furniture factory after getting married at the age of 24 and right after becoming a higher technician, laughs at her friend who is upset about the reality that she has to live apart from her husband because it has been only eight years since she became a higher technician.

“Ho ho ho! Other people are trying to come up with some reasons to leave the factories. What is so good about being a higher technician? It's just nothing but a good name. People talk to you with respect, but so what? Do they take care of you? No! They are so busy taking care of themselves and you know it's a natural thing living in this nationally difficult situation.”<sup>11</sup>

And her friend criticizes Choi Soon for having selfishly changed her thoughts and behavior due to the hard living.

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<sup>11</sup> Park Chan-eun, “A Lucky Bag,” *Korean Literature* (Oct. 2001), p. 16.

When the living gets temporarily difficult, Choi Soon doesn't care about anyone except herself. There's a big stir-up in her mind... Will that be true? Isn't it a happiness to be loved by all the people in the factory as a higher technician? But, Choi Soon doesn't call it happiness and puts her self-satisfaction first.<sup>12</sup>

According to the officially prescribed values, for young women in the North, marrying an honorably discharged soldier is an obligation, and the women should be conscious of pleasing the party and Dear Leader and should be internally motivated to do so. And the same is true for the young men. However, the reality is different and the new generation in the North isn't willing to get married to soldiers, and their parents don't desire it either. In the novels, negatively described characters mind getting married to honorably discharged soldiers and persistently hold back their friends from getting married to them. Negatively described characters in the novels tell the younger generation not to follow the party's guidance, and we can sense the changing of the younger generation's values. In fact, as was mentioned in the author's previous research, the change of the younger generation's self-cognition has been becoming deeper and deeper due to the 1990s food shortages. Some young people, claiming to be doing so-called 'liberalism,' have committed behaviors in school or the organization they belonged to that are not unapproved of by the party. In addition, juvenile violence and theft are becoming a social problem in the North. And recently, it has been reported that drug use among young people is increasing. According to a related survey, despite the authorities' strong warnings, regulations and punishment, in certain areas like Hamgyungbuk-do, men in their 20's and 30's have increasingly been found to be using drugs. Also,

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<sup>12</sup> See Park Chan-eun above, p. 16.



in the Yeonsun area near the border, it has been a problem for teenagers from wealthy families to use ‘ice,’ actually Philopon, a kind of drug.<sup>13</sup> The North Korean authorities have taken this matter seriously and have focused on controlling the drug dealers.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Goal of Life

According to the officially prescribed values that the North Korean authorities desire to instill, the ideal youth is an independent communist with “endless loyalty toward Dear Leader,” accomplishing the will of the party and that of Dear Leader and devoting his life to the organization and people. This kind of life goal is actualized through the basic lessons of socialist education in the process of growth. The basic lessons of socialist education, which are what is called the “hypostatical human thought remolding project,”<sup>15</sup> aims to produce an ‘independent communist revolutionist’ whose life goal is focused on loyalty toward Dear Leader. According to the party, this devotional life as an independent communist revolutionist is the goal and ultimate aim of life for the new generation even after the acute difficulty of the food shortages.

Young people described positively in the novels, appreciate the beauty of youth, happiness, and hope only through their loyalty toward the party and Dear Leader, and the spirit of escorting Dear Leader to the end. Even when they choose jobs, the first thing they

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<sup>13</sup> Good Friends Foundation: Center for North Korean Research, News Letter: North Korean News Today,” *Draft Publication No. 24* (June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Good Friends Foundation: Center for North Korean Research, News Letter: North Korean News Today,” *Draft Publication No. 23* (June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Kim Jong Il, “On Improving the Educational Work all the more,” *The Kim Jong Il Selections 8* (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1998), p. 102.

consider is its meaningfulness to the party. They choose to live for the country, society, organization and people. In the short novel, *Captivation*, one young man expressed that the real happiness and beauty of youth can be found in devotion to Dear Leader, for the party and for other people.

What is the real beauty and real happiness of young people in our time? When you put the Dear Leader, party and other people first, rather than the pursuit of personal happiness selfishly, you can call that beauty of life. And when you lead that life, don't you think that will make you happy?<sup>16</sup>

However, since the late 1980s, the life goal and aim of the new generation has changed from organization-centered to self-centered, and from socially oriented to individually oriented. These changes have deepened and become more widespread after the food shortages that started in 1995. Some young people negatively described in the novels are, for example, reluctant to volunteer to go to the countryside or to work in the mines in order to fulfill the leader's will, instead pursuing a stable life and success rather than sacrificing their life for the organization and other people, or preferring a spouse who is rich or has access to power rather than someone who has similar goals or aspirations. The testimonies of new settlers support this values shift. According to them, self-centered and individually oriented life goals or aims started to show from the late 1980's, and they have been deepening and becoming more widespread since the food shortages. The new generation experienced the agony of hunger during the food shortages, and regardless of will, many suffered the deaths of family members or separation from some of them. So, to them, money and possessions and a life for oneself and one's family take

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<sup>16</sup> Ro Chul-su, "Captivation," *Korean Literature* (Jan. 1998), p. 77.

precedence over ideas, ideology and a life for the country, society, organization or other people.

### 3. Views on Occupations

According to the dictionary, a job is defined as ‘when an individual takes some part of societal labor and works professionally or that kind of work.’<sup>17</sup> This definition shows that the reward from a job is found in its duty to society, so with regard to job respect, societal meaning is the first consideration. In other words, the totalitarian view of job respect is dominant. In the long novel, *Our House*, Hye-sung’s father finds meaning in his job through the societal obligations it entails.

You don’t work for fun. It’s a societal duty. Well, though, it’s true people in foreign countries work for living.<sup>18</sup>

Article 70 of the North Korean Constitution states, “People have the right to their choice of employment according to their desires and talents and a right to stable jobs where favorable conditions of work should be provided.” In the North Korea, however, the choice of jobs is up to the labor supply and demand of the party or the government, not up to an individual’s will. Jobs in North Korea are organized according to the central economic plan and people are assigned jobs in accordance with the demands of individual sectors, so individual wishes, talents and abilities are secondary considerations. North Korean citizens don’t actually have

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<sup>17</sup> The Academy of Social Science Press editing, “Korean Language Unabridged Dictionary 2,” (Pyongyang: The Academy of Social Science Press, 1992), p. 382.

<sup>18</sup> Choi Young-hak, “Our House,” (Pyongyang: Literary Art Press, 2005), p. 229.

the freedom to choose a job. They are stationed where the Party tells them to go and the Party executes direct commanded and controlled wherever they work. Where citizens are stationed depends on personal background and the level of Party allegiance. Except a minimum number of people, most of North Korean citizens are stationed as a group through the so-called 'group assignment' system.

Young people in novels, however, choose jobs freely, and they have a variety of jobs from which to choose. Especially, positively described young people pursue the officially desired values of the Party and, in order to fulfill the will of Dear Leader and the Party, they volunteer for work in mines, the countryside or as a pioneer, even though they have other preferable jobs. And without exception, these characters have all graduated from privileged universities and are competent enough to land good jobs as professors, researchers or doctors. Their parents' work and social status are quite different from the ones of regular workers. In the novels, the parents of positive characters have highly respected jobs, such as professor, doctor of medicine, scientist, engineer, or diplomat and their social standing is high. This feature also appeared in the previous research and out of this we can assume, before and also after the food shortages, the new generation in the North desires to study at university and aspires to become university graduates. They have a preference for white-collar jobs and a university diploma is necessary to land those kinds of positions. There are a number of novels that reflect the social perceptions of university students and graduates and that backs up the assumption. For example, in the short story *A Girl Came with a Breath*, a young man wants to go to college and is considering illegal means to enter, taking advantage of his father's powerful status as a highly placed figure in the diplomatic area. His mother strongly supports her son's idea and argues with her husband who

is opposed his son's illegal university admission.<sup>19</sup>

Negative characters in the novels put a different meaning on and concept to jobs and these are in opposition to the officially condoned values. The young people who are negatively described in the novels are not diligent in their work, and they don't consider their job as a social duty. These characters are reluctant to volunteer to go to the countryside or the mines or to follow the will of the Party and Dear Leader. In North Korean novels, it is also not difficult to observe the new generation's discrimination against physical jobs. Parents also desire that their children take part in service work rather than physical labor. This shows that, in reality, a deep-rooted discrimination against physical labor still exists, even though North Korea has tried to abolish the view through the so-called 'Intellectualization of the Whole Society' aiming for a classless society. A short story entitled, *The Road We Go Together*, describes the common preference against physical labor. A mining engineer, Tae-young, reveals his self-accusation as a physical worker toward Ok-ju, who is a doctor and whom he has in mind.

Tae-young's heart suddenly lit up with the thought of Ok-ju, but soon, he laughed at himself. To him she is like a rainbow in the sky he can never catch.<sup>20</sup>

According to new settlers, North Korean young people want to go to college, look enviously upon college graduates, and especially look up to Kim Il Sung University graduates, the North's premier university. Parents also want their children to graduate from university and secure a white-collar, service job.

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<sup>19</sup> Kim Gil-son, "A Girl Came With A Breath," *Youth Literature* (Aug. 2004), p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Gong Cheon-young, "The Road We Go Together," *Korean Literature* (Nov. 2001), p. 23.

In real life, however, opportunities for young people to enter and study in the university are rare. Middle school graduates are given the opportunity to take a college entrance examination only with a letter of recommendation. The competition is intense because the number of recommendation forms allotted to each school is extremely limited. So, the real number of students who can be admitted to a university is a very small group. University enrollment depends on national demand rather than students' intentions, so the process is passive rather than assertive. At regular periods, the government determines the levels of demand for national staff and on this basis the Party organizes universities, departments and subjects and determines the sizes of the student bodies.<sup>21</sup> In reality, preferable admissions are given to the students who have good personal backgrounds and the quality of their allegiance to the party. So, the opportunity for ordinary students to get a higher education is unfairly limited. The government has adopted the college entrance examination and gives the chance for the middle school graduates to take the test but a student's eligibility to enroll in an elite university is determined by personal background or Party affiliation, not by fair academic achievement and competition.<sup>22</sup>

According to new settlers, it is true the new generation aspires to professional jobs, which are only possible with a university diploma, but the actually preferred jobs are the ones with a lot of money in them or the ones offering extra income. They also prefer to perform mental or service work in the city. Especially after the food shortages, most young people think it is extremely unrealistic behavior to volunteer to go to the mines or the

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<sup>21</sup> Kim Il Sung, "A Thesis on Socialist Education," *The Kim Il Sung Selections* 32 (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1986) p. 402.

<sup>22</sup> Lim Soon-hee, "The Reality of North Korean Youth Education," (Seoul: KINU, 2005), see p. 75.

countryside to fulfill the will of Dear Leader or the Party. As the food shortage intensified, the new generation has come to consider earning money for their family and for themselves as more important than anything else. In the previous research, it was shown that young people in the North felt envious of college graduates and preferred jobs such as diplomat or trader to jobs such as doctor or professor. They are all considered highly respected jobs, but the difference is that it is possible to earn more money from the former jobs, while with the latter, workers must live on fixed incomes. So, in reality, younger people actually desire to work in areas where it is possible to make extra money, positions such as driver, salesperson, hotel and restaurant waiter or waitress, and a dollar-earning instructor. Entertainers like singers or actors are also preferred jobs because of the special treatment these people receive. Young people, of course, also want to be executives of the party or of Youth League, Defense Staff and People's Safety Agency because of the power these workers enjoy. This inclination has persisted even after the food shortages. As mentioned previously, young people in the North prefer jobs that allow them to financially support their family while they also want jobs that can make them rich. Accordingly, their desire to be a member of the party has waned.

The positive characters in North Korean novels exhibit strong professionalism. They maintain positive attitudes regardless of the work at hand and enjoy working assertively. According to new settlers, the professionalism of citizens is relatively strong, at least before the worsening of the food shortages, as is similarly described in the novels. But, as the food shortages intensified, residents of the North came to put their families and themselves first rather than devoting themselves to working at a stationed workplace and, simultaneously, their professionalism weakened along with this change. This reality is well described in the North Korean novels.





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## IV. The New Generation's View on Family After the Food Shortages

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### 1. Views on Marriage

#### A. Meaning of Love and Marriage

Kim Il-sung once revealed his thinking about the description of love and romance in the novels.

We should not describe love just for love. Love just for love is nothing but a shallow natural phenomenon. There is no accomplished value in that and it can even be harmful to us. The love of the people armed with the Juche ideology must be subordinated to the dignified goal of the revolution, and it has to be related closely to the fight for victory of the revolution.<sup>23</sup>

He claimed that, “the so-called Juche-type of people believe that true love has to be based on the camaraderie between revolutionary

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<sup>23</sup> Kim Hae-wol, “Profound Research on the Love World of Women in Our Times,” *Korean Literature* (July 1991), p. 65.

comrades. So, it is not right to describe love as a shallow natural phenomenon. It has to be described as related to and sympathized ideologically with the fighting process to perform the duty imposed by the Party and the revolution more successfully.”<sup>24</sup> The officially desired or prescribed values of the North form the basic concept of love and marriage of the young people described positively in the North’s novels. Although some of the recently published novels, however, don’t reflect the officially desired value directly. They depict the new generation’s way of meeting people, dating and getting married, which is different from the officially prescribed values of the Party. For example, in some novels young people don’t care much about the harmony of the hope, aspiration or devotion. They are attracted by a partner’s personality and validate their sincerity for each other’s love and get married. In the short novel *The Key*, a young lady falls in love with a man’s masculine passion and gets married to him against the wishes of other people.

There was no sympathy or instant excitement, but I was in love with him with all my heart. I couldn’t even define the meaning of love, but I loved him. I just fell for him. He was wandering in the dark, but I loved his personality. He wasn’t perfect at all. But he had a passion like a man. And he could cry about something. Everyone wasn’t happy with my marriage to him. They thought he wasn’t in the same league as me. But, I ignored everything. I was so into his passion, his masculine passion. I enjoyed seeing myself burning into his hot passion.<sup>25</sup>

In the previous research from 1995, most of the young female characters that appeared in novels maintained their passive attitudes when it came to love and marriage and found the meaning of

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<sup>24</sup> See Kim Hae-wol above.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Hye-sung, “The Key,” *Korean Literature* (April 2004), p. 71.

marriage through their roles as a sincere ‘helper’ or ‘supporter.’ Also, marriage, to men, is the choice to be a supporter on the premise of love, meaning the responsibility of taking care of his wife. This view on marriage is shown as the general tendency in the novels after 1995. However, in some of the novels published after 1995, some young women are portrayed with more assertive, more passionate attitudes toward love and marriage. For example, the novel, *A Burning Desire*, which was published in 1999, depicts Ok-ryeon as a passionate woman. She works in a factory and falls in love at first sight with Cheol-ryong. She decides to ‘achieve and win his love ultimately and definitely.’ She approaches him in an assertive way. She offers arm wrestle and asks him to walk her home in order to get close to him.

Ok-ryeon smiles and urges him. It doesn’t matter for her to win at arm wrestling or not. She just wants to touch his hand and feel him. But without knowing her heart, Cheol-ryong just stands there and doesn’t even think about trying. He must be thinking it is such a silly thing to do arm wrestling with a woman. Ok-ryeon, however, is not going to change her mind. She dashed to him and grabs his arm and drags him to an iron chair... It has been less than three months, but enough days for Ok-ryeon’s burning heart to draw him into her world deeply. When she goes home after the night shift, Cheol-ryong walks her home. Ok-ryeon asked him to do it at first. It became their routine.<sup>26</sup>

In the novels, young women also care about the age of marriage. Their parents want their daughters to get married at the right age. But, according to the interviewed new settlers, after the food shortages single women in her 30’s are not uncommon and although the idea of an older single woman is socially disdained, the

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<sup>26</sup> Kim Moon-chang, “A Burning Desire” (Pyongyang: The General Literary Art Press, 1999), p. 187.

preference for the single life is on the rise. This tendency is also described well in the North Korean novels.

In the novels released after 1995, younger people meet and date freely, although the dating has to lead to marriage. In the process of dating and getting married, they don't meet new people at all. They think 'love and marriage are the same' and it's not acceptable to repeatedly meet and break up with many partners. Among young people, however, the tendency to think of love and marriage as separate has been growing since the late 1980's, causing even a well-known screenwriter to publicly criticize the trend.

I want to say something I didn't in the movies. I suggest you think about love and marriage once again. It is a very small number, but it is true some people differentiate love and marriage and they consider them as separate. This kind of love is a bourgeois concept and this kind of person can't realize the meaning of true love for the whole of his life.<sup>27</sup>

Recently the authorities have taken an easy stand toward young people's romantic lives while the conservative cultural concepts of dating are losing popularity among citizens. Most young people now date and get married freely. A strong negative opinion, however, still exists regarding women dating freely and virginal purity is, in particular, highly emphasized.

## **B. Conditions to Be a Spouse**

A young man who is depicted as a positive character in the novels wants a spouse with the following characteristics: understanding and devotion toward a man's work, ambitions and goals; lofty ideals

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<sup>27</sup> Jang Yu-sun, "Things to Say about Love and Marriage," *Korean Movies* (Sep. 1993), p. 47.

and intelligence; a pure, modest and sincere heart; and an attractive appearance. Understanding and supporting the man's work, ambitions and goals is considered as the most important condition. Young men prefer a woman who has a professional job, who holds up the family, the building block of the society, assertively and a woman who assists with the society and revolution. That means the preferable woman is one who can carry out housework - traditionally considered as a woman's job - and her professional job side by side without any difficulty while still able to devote herself to the society and revolution. These preferable conditions were the same in the previous research. In some of the novels that were published after 1995, some young male characters appear who, in contrast, uphold the will of the party by getting married to female soldiers.

Young women who appear as positive characters in the novels also expect a perfect spouse. Like the previous research, young women in the novels prefer a man who is intelligent, has a natural curiosity and is future-oriented. They consider a man's goals and ambitions most important, and, in reflecting the officially sanctioned values, believe the ideal spouse is someone who can fulfill the will of Dear Leader and the Party. These characters feel an obligation to marry with honorably discharged soldiers, repaying the grace and consideration of Dear Leader and the Party.

In the novels released after 1995, young women who showed active and assertive attitudes in love and marriage-related matters also maintained the same attitudes toward their spouses. For example, in the novel *A Burning Desire*, a factory worker Ok-ryeon refused to marry a young man who has very good qualities but undermines Ok-ryeon's job. He can't or doesn't want to understand her job, but still wants to get married to Ok-ryeon for her beauty.

It was so boring to meet him. He's not a man of principle and he

doesn't have any conviction. He graduated from college thanks to his dad, but he's not competent enough to improve his lot. I don't want to get married to someone who just cares about my looks. So immature... And he said if I marry to him, he wants me to stop working in the factory and with his father's help, he's going to get me a job in an organization for earning money or somewhere else. And I turned around saying coldly I didn't want to see him again.<sup>28</sup>

According to the previous research in 1995, in real life, young people's conditions for a spouse are quite practical, unlike the officially prescribed values. Specifically, young people consider family background, competency, social and economic status as most important. Women's appearance is especially important to young men. Further, as the food shortage and economic difficulty worsened, the new generation came to prefer a spouse who, even without Party connections, had a job dealing with money or products. Young women especially prefer men who reside in Pyongyang. This tendency to prefer city dwellers and to choose a spouse based on personal convenience and comfort rather than on the will of the Party, was continually evident after 1995. With the worsening of the food shortage and economic difficulty, the new generation has taken a serious look at practical conditions for choosing a spouse, and this tendency has only intensified. A gap between rich and poor has started to show due to the differences in incomes. Consequently, the new generation gives serious consideration to economic power when choosing a spouse. The parents support this and want their children to have a spouse who meets these practical considerations and to, consequently, lead an easy and comfortable married life.

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<sup>28</sup> Kim Moon-chang, "A Burning Desire," p. 138.

## 2. Views on Parents

In the novels used as analysis material in the previous research, young people who were described as positive characters didn't neglect to respect or take care of their parents. They took good care of aging parents, and after the parents had passed away, they still respected their will. These characters showed respect and longing for their deceased parents, remembering the day their parents died and performing memorial ceremonies. The new generation's view regarding their parents has remained the same in the novels released after 1995. According to new settlers, it is true that the new generation in the North upholds their duty to their parents and doesn't neglect to take care of them, even in the face of the severe economic difficulties that resulted from the food shortages. New settlers also confirmed that young people have a basic respect for older people.

## 3. Views on Married Couples

As it was revealed in the previous research, North Korean citizens have a similar view on the marital relationship as the one in traditional society. The new generation's view on this matter is not exceptional. In the previous research, young people's marital relationships appeared as a vertical relationship that revolved around the husband. A wife puts her husband's will before everything and follows that without any resistance. She has to be satisfied with her role as assistant because doing so is traditionally considered a virtue. This kind of view still emerges in the novels published after 1995. The expression, 'Well, once a woman gets married, that's the end of her,'<sup>29</sup> is often found in the novels and

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<sup>29</sup> Kim Ho-suk, "A Green Field," *Korean Literature* (Feb. 1995), p. 34.

reflects the younger generation's view on married couples. Once a woman gets married, she loses the meaning of her existence as an individual and comes to helplessly and entirely lean on her husband. She simply becomes subordinate to her husband. We can learn, through the novels, that a wife herself easily accepts the marital relationship focused on her husband, and she even thinks it is she who must keep that relationship well.

According to new settlers, it is true that the marital relationship in the North is a vertical relationship revolving around the husband. This originates in the common thought that men are above women, which is a feudal remnant of the Chosun Dynasty still prevalent in the society. On the other hand, among the novels used for the previous research, it was rare to find any that criticized the vertical marital relationship focused on the husband. Although among the novels released after 1995 and especially published after the year 2000, horizontal relationship-oriented couples begin to appear.

According to new settlers, most households maintain the vertical marital relationship of the patriarchal culture, however it is not rare to find husbands who share the household chores. Further, as a consequence of the worsening of the food shortages and economic destitution, wives became important money earners, thus weakening husbands' patriarchal consciousness. Thus, wives' attitudes and thoughts toward their husbands also started to change.

Lately, these have changed again. Since women started working to earn money for food, their conception toward men has started changing...<sup>30</sup>

In some novels, young married couples' different views on their roles at home are interpreted as meaning affection for each other or as signs of love, although most of the related novels described

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<sup>30</sup> Kim XX (30-year-old female, fled from North Korea in 2003), interviewed on May 27, 2006.



men who willingly accepted an equal share of the house work and who performed this work sincerely and without taking it as a division of labor between the sexes.

Since the mid-1990s, changes have stirred up the marital relationships of the North Korean population mainly due to economic destitution. Many husbands couldn't get paid from their employers and this reality assigned the role of money earner to the wife. As a result, the husband's authority as the head of the household has been weakened. This phenomenon can be seen in the novels published in the late 1990s. However, according to many female defectors, while it is true that wives have started to have a voice at home as their economic capabilities increased, mainly through peddling and vending, many women still wanted to keep the traditional pattern of family life because of the belief that it would be more peaceful to accept a husband as head of the family. In some households, on the contrary, the patriarchal culture has significantly eroded due to economic destitution.



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## V. The New Generation's View on Women After the Food Shortages

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Before the regime's inception, North Korea had formulated the "law concerning the equality of men and women." After its foundation, the regime protected women's political and social roles by enacting various laws, including in the constitution, the law on children rearing and education, socialist labor law, and family laws. The regime devised to elevate the social status of women and for the entry of women into public affairs by abolishing the traditional family registry system, and by pursuing institutional reforms such as the implementation of the national childcare system and the socialization of household chores. So, in theory, North Korean women should enjoy equal rights with men, and their social status and social roles should be improved greatly. In reality, however, the social status and roles of North Korean women do not actualize the related laws or system. Gender discrimination in the society, rooted in the patriarchal order, still exists as it did. A woman's status in the household is a lot different from the socialistic gender equality that is claimed in the socialist setup. Even though the law

and system have been established, they have not actually been implemented in real life and the traditional patriarchal system is still practiced with traditional roles regarding housework and childcare still emphasized.

Women are housewives and they are flowers to make the home sound and filled with happiness. They are the ones who take good care of aging parents, uphold their husbands and give them assertive help to do well with the revolution's business. They are the ones who give birth to and raise the children and they are the ones who first educate the children as trustworthy successors of the great revolution.<sup>31</sup>

In the North, the thought of men above women is considered as 'a reactionary moral view of the exploitative society where people respect men and despise women,' and it is also considered as patriarchal Confucianism thought which should be exterminated. But, the fact that the status of North Korean women and their roles don't embody the related law and system signifies that the traditional thought of men above woman is still alive throughout the entire society in a deep and meaningful way. In the novels, the new generation's concept about women appears without any distinctions between the positive and negative characters. The examples below are the parts that show, consciously or unconsciously, young men's gender superiority over women. First, in the short novel, *A Lucky Bag*, a young man shows the fixed idea about women saying 'well, such a woman...' to the woman he has in mind when she didn't understand his joke and contests it.

Well, such a woman... I excluded you because there were too many

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<sup>31</sup> Park Young-sook, "Revolutionizing Families and Women's Responsibilities," in *The Korean Women Magazine* (March 1999), p. 15.

people. I made a joke out of it and you are so upset about it. OK, I'm sorry.<sup>32</sup>

Teenagers also show the same sexual bias. In *Growing Troops*, a medium-length story depicting middle-school students' lives, a student shows his thinking about being in competition with a girl by saying, "It is such a shame to compete with a girl."<sup>33</sup> In the short novel, *A Soul*, a boy was playing the boss in a group of boys when a girl confronted him asking for verification of the story. The boy confessed later, "I didn't want to lose. It wasn't acceptable for me, as the boss, to lose to a girl."<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, what is especially noteworthy is that men show their superiority as a man to a woman consciously or unconsciously, while, on the contrary, women reveal their sexual belittlement toward men. Regardless of being positive or negative characters, young women in the novels show this attitude. For example, in the short story, *The path of the Female Warrior*, a young woman is discharged from the military after being paralyzed from the waist down. She hesitates to accept the proposal of Myeong Do-cheol, prompting him to reveal his fixed idea toward women saying, 'such a woman....' She feels bitter against him because he doesn't understand why she hesitates to say yes. It's not him but her who is so humble. She belittles herself.

"If you don't like me, Myeong Do-cheol, just say no. It's up to you. I'm not going to force you or anything. It's not that kind of matter. I just can't understand women." She thinks to herself, "Oh, well, I know I'm pitiful, but how can you think of me as such a

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<sup>32</sup> Park Chan-eun, "A Lucky Bag," p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Min Kyung-sook, "Growing Troops," (Pyongyang: Keumsung Press, 2005), p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> Kim Young-sun, "A Soul," *Korean Literature* (Nov. 1996), p. 18.

narrow-minded person who considers you just like that? You suspect me and become jealous.”<sup>35</sup>

In North Korea, women are considered and symbolized as “flowers of life, flowers of happiness, flowers of the country,” and after entering the Military First period, women were also called “flowers of the military.” Women take this very proudly rather than resentfully and feel especially honored to be called “First Military flowers.”

In the novels, also, women are objectified and symbolized as flowers. Specifically, the short novel, *Fascination*, directly reveals Kim Il Sung’s view on women. In the novel it describes Kim Il Sung as saying, “Women are flowers among flowers that can fulfill a human’s life forever with it’s lovely beauty and it’s captivating scent.”<sup>36</sup> The desirable woman to Kim Il Sung is a woman who “respects her husband, upholds her parents, educates her children well, takes good care of the household, and performs work for the society.” The ideal woman has to carry out the role of a traditional housewife and the role of a socialist revolutionist together. Kim Il Sung also especially emphasized the beauty of the ‘Chosun (meaning Korean) woman’s moral character.’

Kim Jong Il’s view on women is the same as his father’s view. This concept is prevalent among North Korean citizens and the new generation is not an exception.

In addition, North Koreans consider virginal purity very important in the concepts of feminine beauty and the “Chosun woman’s moral character.” This is depicted in *The sincere love concept* written by a female writer, and is considered essential.

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<sup>35</sup> Cho Geun, “The Path of the Female Warrior,” *Korean Literature* (March 1996), p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Kim Joon-hak, “Captivation,” *Korean Literature* (Sep. 1998), p. 26.

If a guy asks her to go out, she takes it as an indignity and considers it like she's losing her virginal purity. Her purity and her rustic simplicity... Those are exactly Sook-im's touches of humanity.<sup>37</sup>

But with the worsening of the food shortages, the customary concept of virginal purity has been weakened among the young women of the North along with changes in their self-conception. When faced with extreme difficulties due to economic destitution, making a living took precedence over keeping virginal purity, and many women even came to earning a living by means of sex. This transformation of consciousness is reflected in the sudden increase in prostitution, cohabitation and common-law marriage since the mid-1990s.

In this case, the new generation's view on women in real life is not much different from the previous description in novels. As it was revealed in the previous research, the thought of men above women is prevalent among young people in real life. They also engage in gender discrimination and have fixed ideas toward women just as the older generation does.

Officers are usually men. Sometimes women are seen in these positions, but there are not many. Usually men work as officers. According to my school, most of the officers are men.<sup>38</sup>

For example, office workers and laborers are the same at work. If you graduated from university you are the same as instructors but the authorities don't qualify women as officers. ... It's not difficult for men to join the party, but it is for women. And medals, medals

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<sup>37</sup> Kim Hae-wol, "Profound Research on the Love World of Women in Our Times," p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> Dongguk University Institute for North Korean Studies, "Human Rights in North Korea through the testimony of new settlers," (Seoul: Dongguk University Institute for North Korean Studies, 2005), p. 106.

are given to people. Woman are usually more loyal to the party, but men are given the medals a lot more than woman.<sup>39</sup>

Until now we performed our analysis using North Korean novels as the main research material on the changes occurring in the new generation's values since 1995 when the North Korean authorities asked for food aid from the international community. When this analysis is compared with the results of the previous research, the North Korean new generation's values haven't changed much based on real life or the officially condoned and prescribed values. Changes in the new generation's values started showing from the late 1980s and have continued changing in the same direction and pace after 1995 when lots of people died of hunger. Only what is especially noteworthy is that after the food shortages, gender equality and the horizontal marital relationship became more emphasized in the official set of values. This trend that the North Korean residents, including the new generation, are becoming increasingly horizontal marital relationship-oriented, sharing housework with the husband helping in the wife's work, is apparent in real life. This trend is well depicted in the short novel, *A Story about a Family*. The part below is the comment of a superior at work about a man in his mid-30s.

There is a lot to say about his human nature, but, above all, I must talk about his love toward his wife. He never talks roughly to his wife like some other morons do. He always respects his wife and talks politely. It's not rare to see him helping his wife cooking and doing the laundry...He thinks that rather than being shameful to help his wife, it is a thing of pride.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Lee Hee-nam, "A Story about a Family," *Korean Literature* (May 2004), p. 27.



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## **VI. Main Causes of the Changes in the Values of the New Generation**

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### **1. Economic Woes and the Food Shortages**

North Korea suffered from economic destitution in the 1990s. In the mid-90s, the food shortages worsened partly because of a continuous series of natural disasters. Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of people died of hunger around this time. Famine directly caused the death of many North Korean citizens. Food shortages affected the entire North Korean society directly and indirectly and resulted in the changing consciousness of citizens, especially the new generation. The food shortages that deepened throughout the 1990s were a profound force behind North Korean citizens forming a new set of societal values. They have collectively decided that the individual and the family take precedence over the nation, society or organization. They came to consider money and material wealth more important than politics or ideology. The accelerating causes of this happening were the collapse of the central distribution system, the resultant activation

of Jangmadang, and the sudden increase in movement of residents in order to obtain food. With the collapse of the central distribution system, the authorities lost the *raison d'être* of the ruling ideology and patriarchal system and their control over citizens loosened. And, in contrast, Jangmadang became activated and the sudden increase of movement of the population has had a ripple effect. Citizens could contact one another and exchange information, causing a deepening and widening of values changes among the population. This, in turn, led to a change in consciousness on antisocialist behaviors or social deviation, which spread nationwide. As it is known already, deviation from the society or, what is termed 'antisocialist' behaviors, increased among North Korean citizens commensurately with the deepening of the economic destitution. This trend also gained speed and range as the activation of informal parts of the economy increased. North Korean residents previously relied on the national supply system, but as the national production and supply system was no longer in operation, illegal activities like desertion from work, absence without notice, deviation from the organization, absence from living harmony meetings or lectures that took place in the workplace or official organization, bribery toward government or party officers, misappropriation and trade of public goods, illegal medical treatment, black-marketing, smuggling, farmers' diversion of food and personal trading became prevalent among the North's citizens.<sup>41</sup> Personal farming also increased, including farming a kitchen garden or a small piece of land and farming as a sideline. Personal side jobs and services, or moonlighting, rose as well as theft and pickpocketing to augment daily incomes. Generally, in a socialist society, this kind of trend is an alarm of the dissolution of the established social

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<sup>41</sup> Lim Soon-hee, "The Food Crisis and the Changing Roles and Attitudes of North Korean Women," (Seoul: KINU, 2004), see pp. 27-34.

order, and North Korea in this regard was not exceptional. In panic, the authorities in the North started to tighten control over residents through various regulations, close observation and propaganda lectures. However, the atmosphere of understanding and acceptance of these behaviors was already in existence and the activities continued to increase among the citizenry. People took it as an inevitable choice for making a living and making up for shortages in necessities such as rice. Disregarding an unmarried woman who lives alone is now a generally accepted practice in North Korea. After suffering through the food shortages, this idea has changed to an understandable and acceptable idea. Some North Korean women have a tendency to prefer to live alone because of certain burdens: family support, giving birth, or raising children. The novels suggested that the changes in the values of citizens was due to the food shortages but describing the trend as “antisocialist factors,” “antisocialist behavior,” “liberalism,” or “vulgar style.” The medium length novel, *The Fruits are for Spring*, also pointed out that the trend indicates an increase in antisocialist behavior, a social chaos due to the food shortages and residents’ laxity of ideology.

To unite the “Hardship March” triumphantly, farming well and solving the food shortage was the first thing to do. Not to mention the pain the people suffered due to the food shortages, the healthy living spirit and order of our society is becoming disordered. It is such a sad thing to watch that antisocialist factors have sprouted from somewhere and now grow to cloud the image of our system.<sup>42</sup>

As was mentioned before, the food shortages had a ripple effect on the whole society that included a sudden increase in residents’ migration. According to one source, a majority of residents have

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<sup>42</sup> Park Oong-jeon, “The Fruits are for Spring,” p. 5.

participated in peddling and vending in the Jangmadang to make a living, and there are not a few who have ventured out for peddling. Some citizens visit their relatives who live far away to ask for help to support the family, while there are even some people who have crossed the border to China. Many citizens migrated to support their family with the new generation as no exception. Suffering from shortages of food, a lot of young people gave up studying in school and began to wander around in search of foodstuffs or to venture out for peddling with their parents. The deteriorating economic situation was reflected in school attendance and in the rate of truancy. For example, despite the economic decline, the schools in Pyongyang kept up the normal schedule, although a “Teachers’ Newspaper” edition released in May 2001 implied that a middle school in Pyongyang had a significant problem with student absences.

It was in spring a few years ago that we started to have some absentees in several classes. That never happened before. Staff members sat down with faculty members to analyze the causes. Several problems, including shortages of food, were the reasons.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, while traveling around, North Korean people came to meet many people and exchange information with one another. In the process, they came to acknowledge new facts and their thinking and values were transformed. According to a 31-year-old male new settler who fled from North Korea in 1998, he listened to South Korean broadcasting for the first time in his life while he was traveling to sell goods. That experience changed his view toward the outside world.

It has been especially in China that the new generation in the North could have chances to transform their views about the outside

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<sup>43</sup> *Teachers’ Newspaper*, May 3, 2005.

world, foreign ideas and foreign culture. A 30-year-old new settler who fled from North Korea in 1997 admitted he had his views on South Korea changed by members of the Chosunjok, a Korean diaspora in China, who had worked in the South and in South Korean broadcasting and magazines along the Chinese border area.

## **2. The Invasion of Foreign Ideas and Culture Through the Partial Opening**

As it was revealed in the previous research, North Korea has sought the partial opening and improvement of relationships with western countries including the United States of America and Japan in order to break through the economic difficulties and diplomatic isolation existing since the late 1980s. The North Korean government tried hard to show their willingness toward opening to improve their public image through hosting ceremonies such as ‘The 13th World Youth and Students Fair’ in 1989 and ‘The International Sports and Culture Festival for Peace’ in 1995. But in the process of opening the society to the outside world and improving relationships with western countries, foreign ideas and culture have infiltrated the country and made an impact on young people, who are considered most susceptible to outside stimulus. The North Korean authorities’ frequent criticisms and warnings to the new generation regarding ideological laxity and easygoing and individualistic attitudes indicate this trend.

North Korea kept trying to improve its relationship with western countries after 1995 and opened the society more to the outside world. Actually, it was inevitable for North Korea to be opened to the world because North Korea had asked the international community for food aid in 1995 and the North required western capital and technology to break through the economic woes that were worsening from the early 1990s. Since 1995, people from

international organizations and South Korea had begun to visit often for matters related to food aid to North Korea. Also, entering the year 2000, North Korea established diplomatic relations with several European countries prompting European people to also visit more frequently. North Korea hosted ‘Arirang performance’ in Pyongyang in 2002 and 2004 and many people from South Korea and other foreign countries visited the North to see the show. The country also hosted international conferences and international movie festivals in Pyongyang. North Korea, as a result, offered citizens, including the new generation, various opportunities to have contact with foreign ideas and cultures. But, the moment that most accelerated the incoming of western ideologies and cultures, and for North Korean residents to redevelop their views of the outside world, including about South Korea, was the South-North summit meeting that took place in June 2000 and the resulting South-North Joint Declaration. Since the joint declaration, the scale of inter-Korean personal exchanges has increased and become more frequent while the two Koreas became to understand each other better. In the process, the consciousness of North Korean residents, including the new generation, about South Korea and outside ideas and cultures has changed. Since 1995, the North Korean authorities have feared outside ideas and cultures infiltrating the country and in response tightened ideological control over the people and stressed, especially to the new generation, a strengthening of the ideological fight against the “invasion of imperialistic thought and culture.”

The youth should put up a mosquito net to strongly protect from reactionary and decadent bourgeois morals and their lifestyles. At the same time, the youth should launch organized control and a constant ideological fight to root out the old morals and life trends that can be a hotbed of bourgeois morality and their lifestyles.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Youth Vanguard*, May 25, 2001.

There are many novels that criticize and caution against the infiltration of foreign ideas and cultures due to the expansion of the opening of the society. For example, the medium length novel, *The Fruits are for Spring*, warned against the invasion of “Yankee culture” and “American-style values” mentioning ‘Free Asian broadcasting.’ The novel criticized the “boss-head” for his laziness, loose ideology and also his indulgence in foreign thoughts and cultures.

Imperialistic America launched “Free Asian broadcasting” in spite of the Asian countries’ constant protest and censure and recently it started Chosun language broadcasting for our country. This is such crap that they are trying to do something to us with ‘their values’ and rotten Yankee culture. Our mosquito net is strong and there is nobody to listen to the bullshit but the enemy still tries to dissolve our people ideologically and their atrocity is reaching its peak.<sup>45</sup>

In fact the people in Songja-dong are observing their heads sharply and catching the early signs of ideological degeneration. First of all, what is dangerous in him? It is his political apathy. He never reads the newspaper and doesn’t attempt to learn the current situation. The newspaper is delivered everyday but is often left there. Secondly, he doesn’t like to carry grass or manure loads... And he acts like he is a little king and looks down on people. He also has started to indulge in foreign goods.<sup>46</sup>

According to the results of related research, more than half of new settlers who answered the questionnaire had been in contact with outside news or information, including South Korean sources, while they were in the North and the channels were, in order, radio, relatives living in China, and TV.<sup>47</sup> Also, recently it became

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<sup>45</sup> Park Oong-jeon, “The Fruits are for Spring,” pp. 76-77.

<sup>46</sup> See the book above, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> Dongguk University Institute for North Korean Studies, “Human Rights

possible for defectors to talk to their family in the North through their cellular phones, so outside news and information delivery was fast and widely available to people.

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in North Korea through the testimony of new settlers,” (Seoul: Dongguk University Institute for North Korean Studies, 2005), see pp. 140-145.



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## VII. Conclusion: Prospects

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Entering the year 2000, North Korea claimed an end to the 'Hardship March' that had lasted for a number of years after the death of Kim Il Sung. Subsequently, the North has taken various actions, including the 'internal economic management improvement' of 2002, to recover the deterioration of its economy. Also, although food shortages persist, thanks to food aid from the international community including South Korea, massive death by starvation has not occurred. However, unexpectedly, after the 'internal economic management improvement' of July 2002, the economic situation for most of the general public has gotten worse while a class of newly rich has emerged. The phenomenon of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer has presented itself for the first time. Statistics on school absenteeism prove residents' poor economic situation. Being absent from school was not allowed before the period of severe economic destitution but in became permissible with many schools complicit after the economic situation entered severe difficulty. Absences abruptly increased and

schools in many areas, except in Pyongyang and other cities, continued to have the problem. According to a related report,<sup>48</sup> Juwon middle school, which is located in Juwon laborer District, Onseong County, North Hamgyeong Province, had only 7 to 8 present students in a class of 30 students dated June 2005, and sometimes they had 1 to 2 present students for a class of 27 students. The freshmen in the middle school were not absent much, but the higher the grade, the higher the rate of absenteeism observed. The reason being that as the children grow up, parents can use their labor, especially in poor families, and consequently, parents have their children help raise crops, send them to do odd jobs, or ask them to watch the house.

Also in the period of the “Hardship March,” North Korea experienced a yearly shortage of about 2 million m/t of food with the problem continuing into the early 2000s. Recently, according to food experts, North Korea required 6.5 million m/t of food yearly, but domestic production will only reach 4.5 million m/t, a shortage of approximately 2 million m/t.<sup>49</sup> Especially this year, international humanitarian aid has been reduced due to the North’s nuclear test and missile launch, generally worsening the food situation.

After entering the new millennium, North Korea has assertively tried to improve its relationships with western countries and even though it’s partial and limited, the North has tended to expand its opening since the South-North Joint Declaration in the year 2000 and after Kim Jong Il’s remark in early 2001, ‘We have to solve the problem with a new view point and a new attitude.’ It totally hinges on conditions in the North whether this tendency of opening

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<sup>48</sup> Good Friends Association, ed., “North Korea Today, North Korea Tomorrow,” (Seoul: Jungto Pub., 2006), see pp. 120-121.

<sup>49</sup> *CBS No Cut News*, Nov. 2, 2006.

will continue or not and how the nuclear issue will play out. The international community censured North Korea for the nuclear test and the missile launch of last July. North Korea is under UN Security Council-ratified sanctions and that means diplomatic isolation. North Korea can't afford to give up on the practical alternative plan described as opening the system to maintain the system because of the seriousness of the economic situation and an awareness of the national loss that would follow a reduction in or stoppage of the opening already started. Indicative of this is that despite the tension between the two Koreas after the launch of the missile, the Mt. Kumgang Tourism Project and Kaesung Industrial Complex businesses had continued uninterrupted. Economic woes such as food shortages and the infiltration of outside thoughts, ideas and culture due to the partial opening have interacted to become the direct reasons behind changes in the set of values held by the new generation. Alternatively, school education is the institutional mechanism that most directly affects over a long period of time the new generation when they form their values. North Korea's new generation internalizes the party's official values through systematized school education. The younger generation in the North also internalizes the party's official set of values through experiences in organizations such as the Korean Children's Union or the Youth League. Especially, the regularly practiced 'Harmonious Life' is a systematized mechanism that can check and inspect young people's internalization of the party's official set of values. However, under severe economic conditions, institutional education and organizational experiences as systematic or ideological mechanisms can't do the job of guaranteeing young people's internalization of the party's official values. In other words, the 11-year compulsory education system in the North doesn't embody its function and meaning. In economic destitution, a school's educational facilities and materials are sometimes so poor

that practical use by students is unrealistic and students have to become involved in purchasing and fixing the own educational materials. Also, as to the economic situation worsened, the compulsive feature of the younger generation's organizational experience loosened. 'Harmonious Life,' now practices nominally and irregularly. It is coming to lose its significance and importance among young people.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, if the economic woes including the food shortages continue and the North Korean authorities keep widening the partial and limited opening in order to break through the diplomatic isolation from the international community and to reverse economic destitution, the trend changes in the new generation's set of values is predicted to only intensify. The North Korean new generation is expected to go through a phase of changes. They will be more interested in gaining riches and material wealth than in politics or ideology. They will have an unprecedented focus on themselves and their families than on trying to fulfill the will of Dear Leader and the Party, or devotion to the country, society, organization and people. This change is likely to speed up because of the weakened education system and the lack of organizational experience that normally work as the main mechanisms for young people to internalize the Party's official set of values. In the long run, the changes in the values held by the North Korean new generation, the young who will form the core group of a future North Korean society, may work as a driver of change for the entire society, eventually causing the incapacitation of the Juche ideology.

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<sup>50</sup> Lim Soon-hee, "The Food Crisis and the Changing Roles and Attitudes of North Korean Women: Continuance and Changes," see p. 91.