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# **The Quality of Life of North Korean: Current Status and Understanding**

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Lim Soon Hee, Jeong Eun Mee, Park Young Ja

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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. ]

# The Quality of Life of North Korean: Current Status and Understanding

## Contents

I . Introduction .....	1
II . Theories on the Quality of Life and an Analytic Framework for its Application in North Korea .....	7
1. Current Trends in International Research on the “Quality of Life” ....	9
2. Applying the “Quality of Life” Theory to North Korea .....	11
3. The Official North Korean Discourse on Life .....	13
III . The Objective Situation of North Korea’s Quality of Life .....	15
1. The North Korean People’s Situation Regarding “Food, Clothing, and Housing” .....	17
2. The Illusion of “Free” Education and the Widening Inequality in the Quality of Education .....	27
3. The Illusion of “Free” Medical Care and the Widening Inequality in the Quality of Medical Services .....	32



<b>IV. Subjective Perceptions on Quality of Life .....</b>	<b>39</b>
1. The North Korean Authority's Official Goals for Life and Actual Perceptions .....	41
2. The Different Classes' Quality of Life: From the "Core, Wavering and Hostility" to "Upper, Middle and Lower" .....	45
3. Generational Changes in Quality of Life: Transitional Period of the Distribution System, Food Shortages, and the Market Generations .....	50
4. Gender Differences in the Perceptions on Quality of Life .....	55
<b>V. Conclusion: Improving the Quality of Life of     the North Korean People .....</b>	<b>57</b>





# Tables

Table 1. Number of Interviewees According to Gender ..... 4  
Table 2. Number of Interviewees According to Age ..... 4  
Table 3. Number of Interviewees According to Region of Birth ..... 4  
Table 4. Number of Interviewees According to Profession ..... 5

# I . Introduction

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North Korea's economic difficulties during the mid-1990s were the decisive factor in fundamentally damaging the North Korean people's quality of life. The standard of living has deteriorated to extreme levels of deprivation in which the right to food security, the right to health and other minimum needs for human survival are denied. Since its inauguration, the Lee Myung-bak administration has proposed policies that strive to improve the North Korean people's "quality of life" by providing humanitarian aid to the North. Although concern regarding the "quality of life" has been discussed with a focus on aid provisions, the reality is that there is a lack of specific analyses on this subject. It is true that one can refute such analyses by stating that it would be pointless to discuss the quality of life when the North Korean economy is in a state of ruin. However, an academic approach is necessary in such discussions as a means to evaluate the propriety of applying international views onto the concept of the quality of life. With this perspective, the paper aims to review the possibility of applying international standards onto North Korea in order to systematically analyze the phenomenon that has disintegrated its quality of life. Should the international views be applicable, then this paper will explore the means by which they can be applied while also acknowledging North Korea's special characteristics.

This paper will designate "the North Korean people" and "quality of life" as the research topics and identify the current situation in particular fields of study. It will also explore whether the North Korean people's perception on the quality of life is a subjective reality or a problem in perception caused by the

disintegration of their lives due to the economic collapse. In order to evaluate the quality of life, the North Korean authority's official discourse will be analyzed. In addition, an in-depth interview with 41 North Korean defectors was conducted for the purpose of analyzing the objective reality and subjective perception on the quality of life according to various categories that include class, age, and gender.

**Table 1. Number of Interviewees According to Gender**

(Unit: persons)

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Number of Persons	16	25	41

**Table 2. Number of Interviewees According to Age**

(Unit: persons)

Age Group	Teens	Twenties	Thirties	Forties	Fifties	Sixties	Total
Number of Persons	1	7	9	12	9	3	41

**Table 3. Number of Interviewees According to Region of Birth**

(Unit: Persons)

Pyong yang		7
North Hamkyong Province	Huiryung City	1
	Onsung County	4
	Gilju County	1
	Yeonsa County	1
	Musan County	2
South Hamkyong Province	Shinpo City	1
	Jungpyung Town	1
North Hwanghae Province	Sariwon City	1

South Hwanghae Province	Ryonggyeon County	1
North Pyongan Province	Bookchang County	1
South Pyongan Province	Nampo City	3
	Soonchun City	1
	Bookchang County	1
Gangwon Province	Wonsan City	2
Jagang Province	Joonggang County	1
Yanggang Province	Haesan City	10
	KImhyungjik County	2
Total		41

Table 4. Number of Interviewees According to Profession

(Unit: Persons)

Profession	Number of Persons
Physical labor	5
Trade	2
Academics (Teachers, etc.)	6
Commerce	7
Technical Services (Cosmetics, Design, Drawing Planning etc.)	4
Administration, Office Clerk (Bureaucracy, etc.)	11
Student	4
Military Serviceman	1
Housewife	1
Total	41



## II. Theories on the Quality of Life and an Analytic Framework for its Application in North Korea



## 1. Current Trends in International Research on the “Quality of Life”

Academic interest regarding the quality of life primarily developed in the United States and Western Europe where industrialization and democratization have been simultaneously achieved after the Second World War. Maslow, the founder of humanistic psychology, established the hierarchy of needs theory (motivational model) that dominated the intellectual climate of his time. Since the 1960s, efforts to develop social indicators that attempt to measure the quality of life on various levels beyond the limits of welfare earnestly gained traction in the United States and Europe. Within the intellectual community, the movement was divided into two broad schools: the American approach which focused on subjective indicators and the Scandinavian approach which was primarily concerned with objective indicators.<sup>1)</sup> The European Union recommended that each member state develop its own core state indicator for the improvement of its quality of life and has publicized the EUROMODULE, a standard format that serves as a model for surveys on the quality of life.<sup>2)</sup>

In the aftermath of the Cold War, international organizations, such as the United Nations, have actively sought to devise strategies

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1) Mark Rapley, *Quality of Life Research: A Critical Introduction* (London: SAGE, 2008), pp. 4~5.

2) Jan Delhey, Petra Bohnke, Roland Habich and Wolfgang Zapf, “Quality of Life in a European-Perspective: The EUROMODULE As a New Instrument for Comparative Welfare Research,” *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 58 (2002) pp. 163~176.



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for developmental cooperation in order to exceed the basic needs of people in developing countries and improve their quality of life. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has published the annual Human Development Report since 1990. It is also noteworthy that the UNDP has devised the Human Development Index (HDI) and has regularly published the results. Furthermore, the international community began to acknowledge the various threats that can hinder political security, economic development and social integration rather than solely consider the traditional forms of security at the state level. In response to these changes regarding security within the international community, the UNDP introduced the concept of human security in its 1994 Human Development Report.<sup>3)</sup> Human security is accordingly defined as the freedom from threats to human life and dignity, which requires two rights: the freedom from fear and the freedom from want.

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3) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 22-40.

## 2. Applying the “Quality of Life” Theory to North Korea

The quality of life theory was propagated in the advanced nations of the West where economic wealth flourished under democratic order. As such, it would be difficult to directly apply the quality of life theory and its relevant discussions onto North Korea, which maintains a totalitarian regime and suffers from extreme economic deprivation. Therefore, this paper will apply the quality of life theory and its relevant discussions while also acknowledging North Korea’s political system and economic realities as follows.

First, in terms of assessing the objective realities of the North Korean people’s lives, this paper will establish five criteria as a means to evaluate the quality of life among North Koreans while also acknowledging its dire economic situation, specifically in clothing, food, housing (food, clothing, housing), education and health. In addition, when measuring the subject’s well-being, focus will be placed on subjective perception rather than the positive aspects, while considering the level of economic development in North Korea. In other words, the question regarding the North Korean people’s quality of life will be approached from their “perception” rather than the level of their subjective satisfaction. This paper will also take into account factors, including opportunity and access, which are core elements in determining the quality of life. As the distribution system collapses and class divisions are exacerbated by the economic difficulties, the disparity in the

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quality of life widens within the context of survival needs. Therefore, this paper will aim to evaluate the influence of competitive relationships aggravated by the scarcity of resources on the North Korean's quality of life from the perspective of access, the opportunity to make choices, and connections.

First, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory will be considered as the primary objective index for evaluating the quality of life in North Korea. However, the index must be focused on the need for survival and continued existence within North Korea's economic situation.

Second, in reflection of the current tendency of health and medical related issues to represent a significant portion of the research, health and medicine will be perceived as major factors in evaluating the North Korean people's quality of life.

Third, in case of human security, the freedom from fear has been discussed in numerous reports on North Korean human rights, so this paper will approach the issue from the perspective of the freedom from want. Among the seven forms of security that have been proposed by the UNDP, food security and health security will be the main focus in regard to the topic on human security.

Fourth, from the perspective of the people's survival needs, the North Korean authorities have asserted that their policy goal is to provide rice, beef broth, silk clothing and roof-tiled houses. This paper will acknowledge these policy goals and establish "food, clothing and housing" as a major criteria in evaluating the North Korean people's quality of life.

### 3. The Official North Korean Discourse on Life

The North Korean regime relentlessly educates its people to adopt the “Juche philosophy of life.” Through these efforts, it aims to officialize a “standardized and heteronomous life” by realizing the Juche ideology as the equivalent to “the Juche philosophy of life.” This philosophy is based on the concept of Juche with an added humanistic focus that aims to place humans in its center, while illuminating anew the fundamental purpose in life and the means to achieve that purpose. Through these views, the North Korean authorities emphasize that a true and meaningful life is one that follows the Juche philosophy. At the core of the Juche philosophy is the concept of the “revolutionary Supreme Leader.” As such, the North Korean regime educates its people that “loyalty to the Supreme Leader is the fundamental basis of the philosophy of life, in which lies the true values of life and happiness.”<sup>4)</sup>

The Juche philosophy of life is a collectivist belief that places the working people at the center of the relationship between the individual and society, and on that foundation, it builds the purpose of life and the means to realize it. As it is a collectivist philosophy, the North Korean authorities value collective over the individual and demands that individuals submit their own interests to that of the collective. According to the Juche philosophy of life, the socio-political aspect of a human being is more important

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4) Chang Ha Kim, “The Path to True Life” (Pyongyang: Social Sciences Publishing, 1989), pp. 269~290.

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than the physical life because a person is a social being and material life is only worthy when integrated with socio-politics. Thus, a socio-political life is essential to fulfilling a valuable life, which has been bestowed upon the people by the Supreme Leader, the highest representative of the people and the embodiment of “the highest faith and love of the collective.”

One of the characteristics of a Juche communist revolution is its optimism. To the North Korean people, optimism is vitally significant as the strength to overcome hardships and tribulations. A slogan that aptly describes this official discourse is “Even though the path is rough, we tread it smiling.” In addition, “Do not live today for today, but live today for tomorrow” is another slogan that emphasizes an optimistic life in the future. It means that even though one cannot enjoy the luxuries in the present, one must live with the determination to sacrifice oneself for the future of the State and the happiness of “ten thousand successive generations.”

### III. The Objective Situation of North Korea's Quality of Life



## 1. The North Korean People's Situation Regarding "Food, Clothing, and Housing"

Currently, the expression "food, clothing and housing" is more commonly used than "clothing, food and housing" in North Korea. This is due to the fact that difficulties in feeding the population has become paramount. In-depth surveys conducted on North Korean defectors indicate that the most important element in evaluating their quality of life is the issue of dietary needs. "Food, clothing and housing," which should have been standardized through the state distribution system, are now showing visible signs of class divisions through mediating mechanisms, such as market and business activities, since the "Arduous March" in the 1990s. Furthermore, exchanges and cooperation between North and South Korea began to increase in 2000, and the "made in South Korea" influences expanded into the ways in which North Koreans dress. Since 2005, the North Korean people's lives have become markedly diverse in comparison to previous years, and the variety of trends are multiplying.

In terms of food, clothing and housing, the North Korean upper, middle and lower classes can be categorized according to various factors that include the types of staple and subsidiary foods, the clothes' country of production and whether the clothes are new or second-hand, the differences in fuel for cooking and heating, and the use of electronic goods. The upper class "consume rice as the main staple, enjoy meat, fruits, side dishes, ice cream, coffee,



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and other subsidiary foods and processed foods without restrictions; purchase new clothes manufactured in South Korea and Japan for every season without limitations on the number of items that can be imported; and live in residential facilities (usually high-end apartments) where there are little difficulties in utilizing cooking and heating appliances as well as electronics.”

Next, the middle class can be identified as “people who occasionally consume boiled rice and cereals but generally eat rice as their main staple, and whose subsidiary foods consist of mostly vegetable side dishes but are able to afford meat (including red meat and fish) about once or twice a week; purchase new clothes made in China or second-hand clothes made in South Korea for every season; use briquet or wood as fuel for cooking and heating, and own various electronic appliances with restrictions on utilization due to energy shortages.” The in-depth surveys illustrate that a total of 30 to 40 percent of the entire population belong to this category, despite some regional variations. Most people who belong to the middle class are not only involved in administration or other similar professions but also manage some form of business.

Finally, the lower class consists of “people who generally consume corn as their staple and limited subsidiary foods, such as Kimchi and other fermented products, face difficulties in maintaining three meals daily, and only consume meat on holidays or special state events; purchase second-hand clothes manufactured in China or hand-me-downs from others; and are severely restricted in access to fuel for cooking and heating, essentially possess no

electronics,” and live in extreme poverty.<sup>5)</sup> Roughly 50% of the population in North Korea belongs to this category.

## A. Class Disparities in Dietary Patterns

In assessing the conditions regarding class disparity in the dietary patterns of the average household, the survey indicates that the basic staple is a mixture of rice and corn. The composition of the mixture is different according to the level of income, but a household capable of mixing rice and corn at a ratio of 5:5 would be categorized as middle class. However, from 2003 to 2005, more varied forms of dietary patterns emerged. As the gap between the rich and the poor widened, differences in the dietary patterns of the North Koreans simultaneously became more pronounced. Among the upper class, the staple food shifted from corn to rice, the importance of subsidiary foods became more important, and there was a marked increase in the consumption of non-essential goods. The most prominent change was the emerging concept of “healthy foods (wellbeing style)” for the benefit of healthy lives. Healthy foods refer to staples dishes consisting of mixed cereals, such as steamed five-grains, and mostly vegetable side dishes for one’s wellbeing, even if rice and meat are readily available. On the other hand, there are

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5) British sociologist Benjamin S. Rowntree proposed the concept of the poverty line in “Poverty - A Study of Town Life” (1901), which defines absolute poverty as the state in which a person falls below the objectively defined minimum limit, and the basic needs, such as clothing, food and shelter, are not met.

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many others who can barely afford even one meal a day. The key internal factor that determines the lives of the North Koreans, as opposed to the dietary patterns, is “business.”

Proof that dietary patterns in North Korea are diversifying can be observed in the statistical changes associated with calorie consumption. According to the Lee Yun Sook’s research (2010), more than half of the North Koreans are consuming levels of carbohydrates that exceed the appropriate amount for adults. Since 1995, the rate of calories consumed in carbohydrates increased by 3 to 4% when North Korea’s food insecurity became more apparent. Conversely, protein and fat consumption decreased by 1% and 2% respectively.<sup>6)</sup> Since 2005, proportion of calories from animal fat supplies has been gradually increasing, which indicates that the consumption of subsidiary foods, especially meat, is steadily increasing.<sup>7)</sup>

If the procurement of discriminatory opportunities through the market and market policies are the internal factors, then external factors, such as economic aid provided by relatives living in China or defectors who have settled in the South, are also fundamental in diversifying the dietary patterns in North Korea. Lee OO, a North Korean defector from Haesan of the Yangang Province, had the typical lower class diet. He could only afford rice on the birthdays of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il, and generally consumed corn. He owned a small, personal farm and sold bits of metal in order

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6) Yun Sook Lee, *et al.*, “Children’s Nutrition in Unified Korea” (Seoul: Seoul National University Publishing Culture Institution, 2010), p. 27.

7) National Statistics Organization, North Korean Statistics Portal <<http://www.kosis.ki/bukhan>>.

to buy corn for his three daily meals, while the side dishes were comprised of vegetables grown from the family garden; meat was nearly unimaginable as a subsidiary food and fish was accessible only during the holidays. Among the vegetables grown in the family garden, the profitable ones were sold in the market, while he only consumed the low quality vegetables that were not marketable. However, he was able to make fermented food for the first time since his marriage and life had relatively improved as a result of the money his sister sent from South Korea.

## B. Clothes as Status Symbols

During the economic crisis in the 1990s, the distribution of clothes ceased prior to the food distribution system, so North Koreans have become accustomed to directly purchasing their own clothes from the market. While the quality of one's diet is not openly visible, clothes reveal the stark gap between the rich and the poor. In North Korea, the type of attire one wears is more than a means of basic living and functions as an instrument that simultaneously reveals and conceals one's strengths and flaws. Apparel displays more contrasts among the different classes than food, in which affluent families wear new clothes while the relatively poor wear second-hand clothing. If the upper class focus on "style," then the standard for the middle class is "affordable prices" and "comfort."<sup>8)</sup> The countries that manufacture the clothes

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<sup>8)</sup> Jung A Cho, *et al.*, "The Daily Lives of the North Korean People," p. 80.

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are also divided along class lines. The upper class purchase clothes produced in Japan and South Korea, even if they are second-hand products. Since the year 2000, there have been many interesting changes when fashion trends replaced Japanese clothes with South Korean clothes. The middle class generally purchase new Chinese manufactured clothes and occasionally second-hand apparel from Japan and South Korea. The lower class is unable to purchase new apparel and must wear previously owned clothes or purchase second-hand clothes.

As South Korean television shows and movies have become popular among North Koreans, South Korean fashion has had a strong impact on North Korean trends. The impact of South Korean culture is distinctively seen in clothes rather than dietary patterns and housing among the North Koreans who are especially sensitive to imparting a refined impression. In North Korea, new South Korean apparel and cosmetics have the cultural value akin to that of Western luxury items in South Korea. At traditional markets, Chinese, South Korean and North Korean clothes are all on sale. However, South Korean manufactured clothes are the most expensive and the most popular. Customs has banned South Korean cosmetics, so all logos must be eradicated prior to import. Even without the logos, most North Koreans can recognize South Korean clothes by their design and textile material.

Cosmetics are as effective as apparel as an ostentatious display of wealth. North Korean and Chinese cosmetics are low quality products and therefore, generally avoided by North Korean women. Instead, they prefer South Korean cosmetics. The trend

in consuming South Korean products has extended beyond apparel and cosmetics, and it now includes accessories. As such, the perception among North Koreans is that those who wear South Korean apparel are the most stylish, which has led to the increasing inclination among North Koreans to purchase South Korean apparel, cosmetics and accessories. Furthermore, the standard of beauty and sophistication depicted in South Korean television shows and movies has encouraged North Koreans to consume South Korean products. There are even instances in which poor North Koreans, who cannot afford rice, will strive to purchase South Korean clothes, even if they are second-hand. This can be contributed to the fact that those who live in great poverty feel more motivated to conceal their destitution by embellishing their attire. Therefore, clothes are a means of concealing one's class.

### C. Housing Conditions

According to the 2008 North Korean census report, housing in North Korea can be broadly categorized as detached houses, tenement houses and apartments, and others. Among these categories, the tenement houses account for the majority, totaling almost 2.58 million homes out of a total 5.88 million or 43.8%. Detached houses are the second most common, consisting of 1.98 million homes or 33.8% of the total. About 1.26 million or 21.4% of homes are apartments. In comparing the types of housing in urban and rural areas, 49.5% of housing consist of

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tenement houses, 32.5% of apartments and 17.2% of detached houses in urban areas; while 59.4% of housing consist of detached houses, 35.1% of tenement houses and 4.2% of apartments in rural areas. Most noteworthy is the stark difference in the supply levels of apartments between urban and rural areas, which indicate that apartments are a symbol of urbanization in North Korea, as in any other modern society.<sup>9)</sup>

In order to assess the housing quality in North Korea, it is important to evaluate the facilities and infrastructure, such as water infrastructure, toilets, heating and cooking facilities, rather than the type of housing. According to the 2008 census report, 85.0% of North Korean families use tap water as their source of drinking water. As a result of the nationwide policy, water infrastructure has been installed throughout North Korea. However, in-depth surveys indicate that water is a problem experienced by all classes regardless of the level of income. According to North Korean defector Kang OO, who had lived in a 50-pyong apartment and enjoyed an upper class lifestyle, drinking water is the most serious problem; however, he was forced to drink polluted water and rarely had access to clean water. Water is a chronic social issue caused by infrastructural deficiencies, such as energy shortages and an underdeveloped water system, as well as environmental factors, including deforestation and lack of water resources. As a consequence, water is supplied at “designated hours” in North Korea, which total

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9) Central Bureau of Statistics of DPRK, *DPRK Korea 2008 Population Census: National Report* (Pyongyang, 2009), pp. 230-236. Reorganized.

to about 2 to 3 hours daily during breakfast, lunch and dinner. With an increase in income levels, various responses toward the lack of drinking water have emerged. People with disposable incomes will dig wells or use personal water pumps with batteries to extract water. Others, who are interested in health matters buy bottled water, despite whether they can afford it or not. Thus, people buying bottled water is not an uncommon sight, especially in Pyongyang.

Furthermore, the 2008 census report illustrates that the conditions of toilet facilities in North Korea is extremely dire. The number of flush toilets in North Korea is still quite low. 58.3% of toilets are private flush toilets, while only 1.1% of flush toilets are for public use. The differences among regions is considerably pronounced. While 67.9% of toilets in urban areas (for personal and public use) are flush toilets, about 46.2% of toilets in rural areas are flush toilets.

According to the in-depth survey, most North Korean homes use briquet and wood as their main source of fuel for heating. The upper class use centrally heated water, oil and gas, while the lower classes use briquet and wood. With the exception of a few luxury apartment complexes, most North Korean apartments have heating facilities, such as open fireplaces and floor heaters that require the use briquet or wood. Apart from centrally heated apartments in Pyongyang, most residential buildings have open fireplaces that are used for both heating and cooking, regardless of the type of housing. About 2 tons of briquet is required during the winter in North Korea. Since 2000, the increasing disparity



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in income has led to class divisions based on the methods of heating and cooking. Recently, LPG has become popular as a source of fuel for the newly rich.

Energy shortages has relegated consumer electronics into mere decorative items in North Korea. The middle class own most electronic goods available in South Korea, such as refrigerators, washing machines, electric fans, televisions, recorders and rice cookers, but they rarely own electronics with a high degree of energy consumption, which include as air-conditioners and microwave ovens. However, energy shortages have rendered these goods virtually obsolete. Energy shortages have changed the North Koreans' perception on indispensable goods, and now the product that is considered a greater necessity than washing machines or refrigerators is the recorder. Currently, the types of consumer goods that are considered the most essential for North Koreans are apparently recorders and transformers. Contact with South Korean culture is not only changing their perception of the North Korean people but also their cultural needs in context with their lifestyles. North Korean women will intently study and copy the interior decoration of homes seen in South Korean television shows. "The middle class no longer struggle to feed themselves. As a result, they have naturally become more concerned with the means to imitate ordinary South Koreans through their dress and home decorations. This change indicates the emergence of a new class that seek a better quality of life, as the market system in North Korea flourishes and income levels rise.

## 2. The Illusion of “Free” Education and the Widening Inequality in the Quality of Education

### A. The Disintegration of the Free Compulsory Education System

The institution, which North Korea propagates as one of its most superior, is its free compulsory education system. North Korea’s primary education is legally defined as well as free and compulsory. However, the State has been unable to fulfill its guarantee on free and compulsory education due to the perpetuating economic crisis, so the burgeoning divide between the educational institution and the real circumstances regarding the education that the people receive is further widening. As the free education system provided by the State continues to disintegrate, the gap in the right to access educational opportunities has widened due to the class divisions within North Korean society that have resulted from the economic crisis as well as increases in business activities.

First, the illusions of “free” education indicates that the burden on the people to finance the management of the schools has increased. Despite the facade, the reality is that the funds should have been provided by the State but is largely financed by parents. One of the most demanding responsibilities that the schools request from parents is the hands-on management of the schools. The parents provide the schools with sand, cement, glass panes and other material goods as well as cash for management. In addition,

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this inclination to place a variety of responsibilities onto the parents for basic equipments has proliferated. It is also claimed that the parents provide the desks and chairs for their children to use at school. There are even cases in which the schools charge 10,000 won per student in order to install educational computers and televisions in classrooms, since the schools lack the necessary funds to install the equipment themselves. The greatest concern is the fact that the parents pay for the fuel for heating.

Second, there is the issue of collecting resources. There is an increasing pattern in which students are mobilize to collect the resources for the State, an activity that is not relevant to schooling. Some of the resources collected through the student labor include discarded steel, copper and lead. There are even demands for wastepaper. Furthermore, since North Korea has a shortage of trees, there are cases in which students are required to provide seeds as part of the nationwide movement to plant trees.

Third, teachers face difficulties in acquiring a stable income, so as a result of the economic crisis, the burden on the students' parents has increased. These responsibilities include covering the costs of various events. It is also customary that money be given to the teachers on their birthdays. The class president's parents will be designated as the head of the committee that collects money from other parents or grants the teacher's wishes.

Fourth, the mobilization of labor and the decreasing quality of education is an issue. Due to the persisting economic crisis, child labor is used in the workplace, which has been a contributing

factor to the decreasing quality of education. In particular cases, parents provide cash or gifts to the teacher so that the teacher will promise to exempt the child from being used in labor. The parents will offer gasoline, rice, food or even secret bribes in order to exempt their children from labor and have them sent home instead. In other cases, parents who cannot afford to procure bribes will defy the policy of sending their children to work and keep them from going to school altogether.

## B. Increasing Inequality in the “Free” Education System

First, as private responsibilities of the students’ parents increase, instances of discrimination and truancy concurrently increase. The teachers use the parents’ additional responsibilities against them to discriminate particular the students. If the parents cannot provide the cash and goods that the schools demand, then they will be reprimanded by the teachers. Even if the parents live in poverty, they will buy the required goods from the market and provide it to the school for the sake of their children. However, when they are unable to procure cash, they will encourage their children to skip classes in order to avoid antagonism from the school. As the burden on the parents increase and the free education system disintegrates, more families from the lower classes that cannot afford the bribes are reluctant to send their children to school.

Second, instances of students skipping school to help their families, rates of illiteracy and criminal activity are on the rise.

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Some students, who live in poverty are unable to attend school because they must work to feed their families. At times, children climb mountains in place of their parents to pick berries and dig for roots to sell in the market. Others will skip school and follow their mothers to conduct business because they are too poor. The children in these cases divide the heavy workload among themselves while their mothers maintain their businesses. In other cases in which the children have only one parent or sick parents, they are forced to skip school in order to help the household. Reports claim that the teachers persuade and appeal the families when students fail to attend classes. As more students are forced to skip school to help their families, more children fall into a state of illiteracy. Cases in which children partake in criminal activities, such as smuggling narcotics, have emerged as children are forced to help their needy families survive.

Third, private education has spread among the middle and upper classes. While the children of lower class families receive lower quality education due to truancy and discrimination, the middle and lower classes increasingly pay for their children's extracurricular education. Differences in access to education due to economic disparities have deepened with the collapse of the education system. Families, who can afford private education, willingly pay for the sake of their children. Aside from the classes at school, the students from the North Korean upper class receive private lessons in various subjects, such as piano, violin and other performing arts, mathematics and English. When a child selects a future career in the performing arts, the parents will not only

pay for the private lessons but also for the musical instruments, including piano. As the private education sector expands, competent and talented teachers can sustain their livelihood with these private lessons, while also gain additional income.

Fourth, the differences in the quality of education influences the attitudes toward learning, admissions and careers. Due to the collapse of the free education system, the family's income level is the decisive factor in determining the student's future career and attitude towards lessons. Students, who have lower chance of being admitted into higher ranked schools, are more inclined to lack interest in their studies, while upper class children tend to be more enthusiastic about their lessons. There are even instances in which students from the upper class are admitted into top schools despite their lower level of intelligence. Upper class families also pay for extra lessons in order to send their children to gifted schools. With the proliferation of private education in North Korea, it is inevitable that the students' future goals are set according to their families' income levels.

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### 3. The Illusion of “Free” Medical Care and the Widening Inequality in the Quality of Medical Services

#### A. The Illusions of the “Free” Medical Care

North Korea essentially maintains a universal healthcare system based on its socialist constitution and the People’s Healthcare Laws. North Korea has established free medical services with the various laws to support it, but the economic crisis has made it difficult for people to receive benefits from a system decreed by law.

First, inadequate hospital facilities and the exhaustion of medical resources prevent the system from providing appropriate medical services to patients in need of hospitalization and surgeries.

Second and most important of all, the pharmaceutical factories do not properly function and medical drugs are in short supply.

Third, the quality of medical professionals has deteriorated. The training for health and medical professionals has not been properly conducted, which has caused problems in medical equipment and prescriptions for drugs.

Fourth, the state of health among the North Korean people is extremely dire due to “contagious diseases” and “malnutrition.”

Fifth, the transportation system and energy infrastructure are other factors that have lowered the quality of the medical system. Unstable energy supplies, heating, water system, substandard conditions of roads and telecommunications facilities, as well as the overall dilapidation has created a bottleneck situation in

pharmaceutical logistics and the transfer of patients, while droughts and floods have destroyed the infrastructure that is imperative to the maintenance of the healthcare system.

While the burden on the patients has increased, the universal healthcare system has now simply become an illusion. Currently, free medical services are limited to prognosis, surgery and the cost of beds for hospitalization.

First, medical drugs are now primarily charged to the patients. They are the main reason behind the collapse of the free medical system. As previously analyzed, drugs are secretly embezzled amidst the dire shortage of medical supplies, while it has become commonplace for patients to directly pay for the drugs. Since the economic crisis, the doctors have not received supplies through the distribution system and face difficulties, resulting in some to charge the patients for applying medication or secretly selling hospital drugs in order to maintain their livelihood. As hospitals have become unable to provide drugs to the patients free of charge, the private distribution of drugs have now become ubiquitous. In this process, there are instances in which private enterprises that sell drugs collude with doctors. North Korean defector Lee OO reports that his mother was hospitalized in the Hamheung City Hospital for leg surgery, but she had to purchase the antibiotics herself. In the apartment complex next to the city hospital, there are many businesses that sell drugs to patients, and the doctor had even provided instructions to a particular one. This implies that there was a business arrangement in collusion with the doctor.



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Second, patients are forced to pay for their own meals and heating. Hospitalized patients must prepare all three of their daily meals from home. This demonstrates that while patients can be hospitalized, they must pay for their meals and heating.

Third, health and medical professionals have increasingly demanded material goods from patients as a result of the economic crisis. In order to receive better quality services, patients must bribe the doctors and nurses with cash, goods and meals. For instance, in order to receive higher quality medicine and health care, the patient will purchase food and manufactured products that they cannot afford as bribes. Reports also indicate that the order in which patients receive their treatment depends on the bribes. The procurement of cash will influence the order in which the patients receive treatment. Defectors claim that the order depends on whether the patient provides cash or goods to the doctor, regardless of the order that they have registered at the hospital. To receive ultrasound tests at city hospital, many procedures are required. In South Korea, the city hospitals maintain policies that the order in which the patients have registered determines the order of treatment. However, a patient can receive ultrasound tests without an examination if he or she arrives late and secretly provides cash or cigarettes.

Fourth, private medical practices has proliferated. According to North Korean medical laws and the free medical system, only state-run hospitals are allowed to practice medicine. Doctors have experienced difficulties in receiving food from the distribution system following the economic crisis, so they have resorted to

illegally practicing medicine in their homes. Abortions are frequently sought in these private homes of doctors. Since hospitals do not perform abortions on women, who have become pregnant through inappropriate relationships, they are forced to accumulate money and seek doctors who will discreetly perform the surgery.

## B. The Collapse of the Medical System and the Increasing Inequality among the Classes in access to Medical Services

First, access to medical services within North Korea is increasingly discriminatory in accordance to class following the collapse of the healthcare system. Although the first and second level of medical services are accessible to ordinary citizens, they are relatively debilitated. The third and fourth level of medical services, which are available to the middle and upper classes as well as Party leaders, are adequate in comparison. The fundamental causes for inequality among the classes in access to medical benefits are attributed to the partial collapse of the medical system and the differences in the access to service.

Second, even within the same universal healthcare system, the patients' access to medical drugs are unequal. When drugs are in very short supply, ordinary citizens may be denied drugs but high-ranking party officials will be provided with drugs should they come to the hospital. In some cases, the best quality drugs in the hospital will first and foremost be given to the party officials. Therefore, members of the upper class officials can enjoy the

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benefits of the free medical system in comparison those of the lower class citizens.

Third, the most serious cases of inequality that stem from power and income are associated with expensive treatments, such as surgery. In order receive surgery from larger hospitals, the patients must speak with relatives and make connections with those who can act as a broker. Furthermore, the patients must pay for the operation. Surgeries for serious illnesses must take place in the larger hospitals in Pyongyang rather than at county or province level hospitals. High-ranking officials can easily access these large hospitals, but ordinary citizens, who lack the money and connections, cannot afford such luxury. They must capitalize on their connections to procure bribes or ask favors from those who are more powerful than the doctors, if they are not acquainted with the doctors; however, ordinary citizens lack those connections. In addition to the cost of the surgery, extra incentives must be offered to the doctor. Doctors earn their living through operations. In extreme cases, some doctors will even refuse to perform surgery if the patient does not have the money. As such, there are those who simply wait for death due to their destitution.

Fourth, as amateurs continue to sell drugs in the market, the health of ordinary citizens remain under threat. Medical drugs are in extremely short supply, so the North Korean people believe that it is natural to buy and sell drugs in the market. Since ordinary citizens without expert knowledge about medical drugs sell them, it is possible that the health of these people is in severe danger. For instance, some old women secretly sell medicine in the market

to make ends meet. People who sell drugs buy them from importers who in turn buy the drugs in China and explain the symptoms that the drugs should cure. However, the general perception among the North Koreans is that there is no need to go to a licensed person to buy drugs. As a consequence, severe misuse and abuse of drugs is widespread. The people, who prescribe themselves, unnecessarily buy drugs, which leads to drug abuse. For lower class citizens, the use of opium and other narcotics for medicinal purposes has become a problem. If a North Korean becomes ill and is unable to procure the necessary drugs, then he or she will turn to poppies and other narcotic substances. Nevertheless, the use of narcotics provide only temporary relief, and the patient will often encounter a situation in which the disease has progressively become incurable, forcing the patient to go to a hospital.

Fifth, as the first and second level of the free medical system has deteriorated, the health of the poor from the lower classes has also become severely threatened. The clinics and hospitals in the cities and counties do not provide adequate medical services, so the lower classes avoid the hospitals altogether. While some will prescribe themselves and buy drugs at the market or private drugstores, the people generally tend to simply bear with the discomfort. Reports claim that the lower classes cannot afford to go to the hospital or buy drugs, so they will initially endure the illness by resting at home. If this does not alleviate the ailment, then the patient will buy drugs; should the symptoms continue to deteriorate, the patient will go to a city, county or province level hospital.

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Sixth, a factor that threatens the health of North Korean women from a hygienic perspective is the issue of sanitary napkins. In North Korea, sanitary napkins are distributed within the military. Recently, however, there has been a short supply, even for female soldiers. Despite the shortage of sanitary napkins for the women in the military, some of the supply has been leaked into the market. Reports claim that women living in the Pyongyang area and upper to middle class women are able to use sanitary napkins, but the women in the middle to lower classes have difficulties in finding supplies. Even if the market sells sanitary napkins, poor women cannot afford them. In general, North Korean women are known to use “gauze cloth” instead of sanitary napkins. Women who are wealthier can afford to frequently change their gauze cloths or sometimes use disposable cloths when traveling. Lower class women are known to use either undershirts or repeatedly use the same gauze cloths by periodically washing them.

## IV. Subjective Perceptions on Quality of Life



## 1. The North Korean Authority's Official Goals for Life and Actual Perceptions

As the food shortages and severe economic difficulties persist and even worsen, the conscious of the North Korean people have shifted from a socially oriented mentality to self-centered individualism. North Koreans, who suffer from constant hardships, not only pursue lives that prioritize the self and family over the State, society and collective, but now also value lives that focus on money and material gains rather than politics and ideology. The North Koreans have also realized through experience that an autonomous and active lifestyle is more adequate in easing hardships and ensuring basic survival instead of one that is strictly regulated and passive. Most North Koreans, who lead difficult lives due to the chronic lack of food and rampant diseases that have resulted from malnutrition, “fight” to survive and struggle to live today than hope for a better tomorrow. They are physically and mentally exhausted for “living today for today” instead of “living today for tomorrow.” To these people, “Even though the path is rough, we tread it smiling” has become a severely unrealistic and empty political slogan that has created even greater burdens. The people’s actual perceptions in reaction to the North Korean authority’s official goals can be summarized as “the intensifying and expanding individualistic views on life,” “autonomous learning and active modes of life,” and “instability and pessimism about the future.”

The North Korean people claim that power is most vital to achieving happiness. This is attributed to the fact that power



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guarantees monetary and material wealth and privileges. Nevertheless, the idea that power will “automatically bring money” is not simply “low power” but “high power”, which the high-ranking officials of Party organization and legal institutions possess. Ordinary citizens, who have very little chance of attaining “high power” prefer “money” to “low power.” As a Party official must strictly adhere to the organization rules and economic activity is also limited to one’s position, ordinary citizens prefer to accumulate money rather than endure a restricted lifestyle. The food shortages and economic difficulties has continued to intensify unabated, so the perception that money is the absolute condition toward happiness has proliferated amongst the people. Money trumps the law, especially in regard to illegal activity (anti-socialist actions). There are numerous cases in which the might of wealth has nullified the effects of law. For instance, violations against the law, such as the illegal crossing of the river, trafficking, unlicensed medical activity, deviation from the organization via truancy and other group activities, anti-socialist activities including the viewership of South Korean television shows and movies on CD or prostitution, and the absence from elections, can all be tacitly accepted or appeased with money. Even admittance into the Workers’ Party can be arranged through money. However, North Koreans are more attached to the idea of saving and accumulating “money” rather than the perceived idea of “happiness” itself. As North Koreans continue to face difficulties in survival, the solely focus on earning “money” rather than discussing “happiness.”

The concept of self-revival, which has spread among the people, is not an official slogan propagated by the North Korean authorities but an unofficial attitude. Since the economic crisis, people live freely and autonomously due to the unsanctioned notions of self-revival in their lives and attitudes, which counters the authorities' goals. In this context, the unsanctioned self-revival also implies a life that utilizes illegal means and methods. Even in real circumstances, North Koreans have learned to live a capitalistic lifestyle rather than one that is socialist as a result of self-revival. With the persistence of the economic crisis, the people are pressured into the belief that "I must feed myself and my family through my own efforts" and work diligently to achieve self-revival. The most ubiquitous means with which the North Koreans freely and autonomously achieve their goal of self-revival is through business. Additionally, the people struggle to achieve self-revival through criminal activities, such as the illegal logging and trade, the smuggling of antiques, prostitution, appropriation and exchange of State-owned goods, illegal medical activity, real estate dealings in the black-market, the smuggling of goods across the border, illicit sale of narcotics, theft and burglary. Bribery is the most widespread and common means in achieving unsanctioned self-reliance. Through bribery, the North Koreans will also use private education to achieve self-revival. Moreover, another method in achieving self-revival for women is the exchange of foreign currency. Reports claim that many married women work as dealers who exchange North Korean currency for Chinese "yuan" and American "dollars."

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Reports also claim that since the economic crisis, people who partake in activities that the State has “forbade its people from doing” are the ones who thrive. In other words, those who utilize methods for self-revival or illegal means and methods to garner money are wealthier than those who work in State-run companies or manufacturing plants. These circumstances illustrate that the gap between the rich and poor has widened and intensified among the North Korean people.

The North Koreans will watch Chinese movies and South Korean television shows, compare their lives with what they perceive on the screen, and envy the wealthier lives of their Chinese and South Korean counterparts. This envy consists of anger towards the State and Party leaders, which stems from the belief that the unreliable State cannot be responsible and guarantee the lives of the “people,” disappointed and disinterested in the Party that claims to be the people’s “mother’s bosom,” and the leaders’ demands for praise and worship as the “people’s” “loving father.”

Finally, despite the emphasis on a future-oriented and optimistic life, North Koreans live with the attitude of “today for today” for the sake of oneself and one’s family rather than “today for tomorrow.” The reality is that the people live with pessimism and insecurity about their future instead of optimism. This can be observed from the fact that the illegal sale and use of drugs is widespread.

## 2. The Different Classes' Quality of Life: From the "Core, Wavering and Hostility" to "Upper, Middle and Lower"

### A. Changes in Class Divisions and Quality of Life

Since April 1966, North Korea has conducted the citizenship re-registry project in order to categorize its population. As a result of changes in the industrial structure, class division in North Korea, which had previously been defined through political lines by the previous administration, has been reorganized as upper, middle and lower classes in accordance to wealth and the quality of life. Above all, a new class of rich North Koreans has risen with a "symbiotic network of wealth and power," closely connected to power. Prior to the currency reforms, the upper class consisted of about 10-30% of the population, the middle class 30-50%, and the lower class 50-70%. According to witness accounts from North Korean defectors in 2010, the upper class consists of 10-20% of the population, the middle class 15-30%, and the lower class 50-70% after the currency reforms. It is important, however, to bear in mind that the standards in which North Koreans categorize class structures are not similar to that in South Korea, but is determined by North Korea's perception on the quality of life.

Since North Korea remains a society dominated by politics, high-ranking officials easily enjoy an luxurious lifestyle by abusing their powers. Thus, the upper class includes high-ranking Directors

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and Deputy Directors of the Security Agency as well as Directors of the Political Bureau. Since the Arduous March, the more intelligent top-ranking officials maintained their positions as well as their opulent lifestyles. People with connections to these upper class officials have opportunities to join the upper class through business. On the contrary, some members of the Intelligence and Security Agencies endure difficulties in maintaining their lifestyles. Reports claim that not all intelligence officials live comfortably, as there are many officials who struggle to eat three meals daily. They are like parasites among the North Koreans, leading middle class lives. According to reports, some parasitic intelligence officials can be categorized as upper class.

Most members of the middle class are considered to be people who earn their livelihood through business deals. However, such business involves intelligence and security officials, which are conducted on a large-scale. On the other hand, people from the lower class earn their livelihood through the traditional markets, but they engage in small-scale business to maintain their daily sustenance as a result of their lack of connections with those in powerful positions.

In regard to the process of class division among the North Korean population, the most prominent aspect is the “wealth-power symbiosis network.” With the exception of the top 1% of the most powerful North Koreans, the upper class are involved in “inhuman relations mediated through bribes” in which people receive sponsorships to accumulate wealth through personal and family connections as well as acquire freedom from inspection

or control from others. The “wealth-power symbiosis network” is a foundation that upholds the regime, but conversely also creates the potential to become a force for rational objectives that can form public sentiment in favor of social change during periods of rapid social upheaval. Furthermore, the upper class will represent the class most likely to emerge as the capitalist class, should North Korea be subject to a process of regime change toward capitalism. Currently, the relationship structures that ensures the new class divisions and class hierarchies are valuable connections to family and friend through blood, academic and generational ties, business ties in monetary and market activity, sponsorship ties mediated by bribes, and power relations between the ruling class and the general population, all of which undergoing changes.

Reports claim that there is a widespread phenomenon in which collusion between low-ranking bureaucrats and those with power and wealth are connected in the market. The “wealth-power symbiosis network,” which has a boundless influence on the North Koreans’ lives and changing conscious, manifests on a level of comradery between the people and the mid to low-level bureaucrats, who directly have everyday influence over the former. This relationship is a typical “sponsorship” that is common in authoritarian societies in which the bureaucracy exerts an enormous amount of influence. Nevertheless, the North Korean case is different in that it is the “standardization of direct and inhuman relations mediated through material interests.” Reports emphasize the reliability of social capital in fostering relations

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with foreign currency officials and members of the State Security Agency and the People's Security Agency, the organizations responsible for inspections and controls. When the stakes are larger, one must foster ties with higher-ranked officials from the Party and prosecution, since it is the most effective. Furthermore, low-ranking officials, who have daily contact with the people, including members of disciplinary organizations, will be ordered to crack down on the market, so even the smallest bribes for these officials will determine the people's quality of life.

## B. Class Differences in the Perceptions on the Quality of Life

As the distribution system has become unstable and the market economy has persisted for past 15 years, many North Koreans are aware that the socialist ideology of equality is disintegrating. Therefore, the era in which equality was utilized to judge those who are better off than others, whether through power or ability, has passed. The period in which the North Korean society was managed by the distribution system and therefore free from the concept of inequality manifested by the rich or poor is now of the past. The reality is that the autonomous trend of marketization from the bottom-up is underway, along with a general weakening notion of socialism. Society is now in transition, as the gap between the rich and poor widens and the differences in quality of life along class lines are distinct. North Koreans have seen people learn to survive in an autonomous market society, especially those

who did not have significant power but still accumulated wealth or fell into destitute after the currency reforms. They have lost their faith in the State, which indicates that the people perceive official policies as a decisive factor in determining one's quality of life.

The North Korean people now perceive survival and money as the most significant issues in life. The manner in which greed manifests for the purpose of survival and economic gain differs for each class, but it is clear how materialism is closely associated with the quality of life. Even members of the upper class, who enjoy sophisticated lifestyles, perceive their quality of life as low in terms of "safety." The perspective of "safety," in regard to the quality of life is highly influenced by social unrest, which is ubiquitous throughout all classes. The general perception among the people is that as anti-socialist inspections become stricter, fewer people live in safety. This indicates that there are similarities and differences in the perspectives on the quality of life in accordance to class divisions, but the key point of difference is that the changes in perception are more distinct in the upper class than in the other classes. Since the wealthier have more opportunities and leisure time to discover new cultures, the changes in perception are more pronounced in the upper and middle classes in comparison to the lower classes. On the contrary, people and farmers who belong to the lowest and lower middle classes remain relatively stagnant in terms of both their quality of life and changes in perception.



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### **3. Generational Changes in Quality of Life: Transitional Period of the Distribution System, Food Shortages, and the Market Generations**

North Korea's economically active population will be re-conceptualized and divided into three broad categories: first, the transitional generation that experienced both the stable and unstable distribution systems; second, the food shortage generation; and third, the market generation. In particular, the transitional generation consists of North Koreans who are in their early to mid forties as of the year 2011. The food shortage generation attended middle school or university during the Arduous March when the distribution system was terminated, and they are currently in their thirties and forties as of the year 2011. Finally, the market generation consists of those who have a distinct attitude toward freedom and change, while their behavior has had an impact on society through the market. As they would have been middle school students after the year 2000, they are currently in their teens and twenties as of the year 2011.

The transitional generation has experienced both stable and unstable distribution systems, so it is the conservative class that supports the regime and society because it understands the collective mentality as well as the difficulties in maintaining the regime. On one hand, they understand the changes that the younger generations have experienced through the economic crisis and market development, but on the other hand, most are loyal

to the State and seek to preserve their lifestyle. However, an understanding among the new generation with a focus on material needs and practical gains has also gradually proliferated among this generation.

North Koreans, who have spent their twenties and thirties during the 80s and the early 90s, are those who have experienced both the benefits of the State's public aid, such as the stable distribution system, and the collapse of the system. Therefore, this generation appears to be more conflicted and in despair, since the regime and the realities that force one to live in anti-socialism also demonstrate a proclivity toward gradual changes in lifestyles and perspective along with the changing attitudes of other generations. Some people from this generation will either change their perspective or choose to leave North Korea if they are caught by anti-socialist inspections or face difficulties in living within the regime.

According to generational divide officially categorized by the North Korean administration, many people from the first revolutionary generation have passed away. Although the second generation has grown to become grandparents, the third generation consist of parents, and the fourth generation comprises of children who have experienced the Arduous March. From this standard, the third generation had spent its youth during the period of an unstable distribution system and had experienced State benefits, such as the food supplies and free education, as well as the hardships, including the Arduous March and starvation.

This generation is perceived as the transitional generation since

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it has experienced both periods of stable and unstable distribution systems. Therefore, this generation functions as an axis for generational change in North Korea, having experienced the instability of the distribution system and the Arduous March during their youth and adulthood. Changes in lifestyles and mentality can be observed in this generation.

The food shortage generation comprise of those who have spent their youth during the Arduous March and therefore, tend to display distinctly low levels of loyalty toward the State or sense of duty and responsibility in preserving the regime in comparison to previous generations. They have either directly or indirectly experienced the instability of the North Korean economy since the mid to late 80's when their sense of self had begun to develop. They have also participated in the fervor caused by the socialist regime change and the Pyongyang Celebrations of 1989, so their views on foreign countries and South Korea are markedly different from those of previous generations.

These days, young North Koreans do not want their life goal to be the investment of one's entire life on the family or the academic achievement of their children, like the transitional generation before them. Their ideals for life have grown taller. A North Korean colloquialism expresses this sentiment as "drinking a lot of water." This indicates that despite its efforts, the North Korean regime cannot stem the tide of social change. The people, who are in their mid forties, have witnessed these changes and are now very clear and even opinionated about the realities they have observed. They believe that the harsh anti-socialist inspections

and social controls limit their lives, but should these severe restrictions be eliminated, they will be able to catch up with South Koreans in no time.

Generally, the grandfather and father's generations have a strong sense of loyalty to the regime and understand the importance of the collective way of living; however, the younger generation has a much keener sense of an individualistic quality of living. Moreover, one can see that the younger generation believes that family and money are the most crucial factors that will benefit one's life.

Finally, the generation that deserves the most attention is the market generation, which is profoundly different from the previous generations in terms of their perception on the marketization of North Korea and the subsequent freedom and changes. People of this generation are currently in their teens and twenties and many were middle school students in the 2000s. They are described as more active and engaged in all matters in comparison to the previous generation. Anecdotes claim that if the family opposes a romantic relationship, then the youth will threaten the family by stating, "I'll kill myself by drinking poison" or will defend drug use by claiming, "If I don't take drugs, I cannot eat or sleep." Prior to the food shortage, the family and school acted as safety nets to prevent students from falling into dire situations, but now these safety nets have been destroyed. Therefore, as materialism and individualism has become widespread and the collective has become obsolete, the mentality of middle school students has moved towards extreme tendencies.

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The rapidly developing market culture has facilitated the youth to find new outlets for expressing their new passions. These middle school students are said to be fashion leaders in North Korea and crave to find outlets that express their youthful energy.

In dividing the North Korean people into generational categories, one becomes aware of the general lifestyles that they have endured during the periods of functional distribution system and State benefits to encourage a stronger sense of loyalty and place greater importance on the collective way of life. These are the grandparent and parent generation to the current North Koreans in their thirties and forties and therefore the most economically active. On the other hand, the general perception among these people is that they belong to a transitional generation due to their increasing awareness on the importance of family and individualism and belief that their children's generation will gravitate toward materialism and a more individualistic quality of life. Furthermore, as confirmed in previous statement, materialism is ubiquitous among the younger generation, who believe that money is the most important factor in improving one's life. The younger generation are also more inclined to perceive that the individual rather than the collective and the family rather than the State are more closely associated to one's quality of life.

#### 4. Gender Differences in the Perceptions on Quality of Life

A happy life for a North Korean man is a life with power. This is attributed to the fact that being in a position of power will guarantee bribes and authority over others. In addition, power is interconnected with occupation, so it is important that one holds a position of power and graduates from a university with connections to such occupations.

Among North Korean women, the most important factor in leading a happy life is still a good marriage. Therefore, marriage to a city man, who is from a good family, wealthy background, holds a decent occupation and has served in the military, is vital in guaranteeing a higher quality of life. There is an increasing perception among both men and women that money is an important component in assuring such marriage. In addition, it is more important for men than women to graduate from a prestigious university that ensure occupations with power and bribes. The desire for a higher quality of life has catalyzed an increased demand for better education.

Considering the differences in the quality of life among the various classes and generations as well as the differences between genders in their perception on the quality of life, marriage to the right spouse is the most vital element for happiness among those unmarried. Most women believe that it is important to meet a caring and loving husband while also enjoying a comfortable lifestyle in order to be satisfied and happy. Men also believe

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that it is important to marry a decent spouse in addition to obtaining power and material comfort in order to lead a happy life, as previously mentioned. Since the 2000s, an important condition for marriage is a woman who is capable of earning her own livelihood. Nowadays, men believe that it is important to meet women who are capable of earning income and building stable homes in order to fulfill a satisfying life. Accordingly, the most important quality in a potential spouse for men is money, which is followed by appearances, strength of mind and character.

## V. Conclusion: Improving the Quality of Life of the North Korean People





The overall quality of life for the North Korean people is known to be very poor. Therefore, it is imperative that North Korea builds internal capacities for growth as well as receives aid for the mid to long-term as a means to improve the quality of life. In addition, it is necessary to establish a policy that provides aid support to North Korea while acknowledging its unique characteristics, as stated in this paper. A new blueprint for aid provisions to North Korea is required, which must take into account class divisions and regional distinctions.

First, a strategy for improvement must be established by recognizing the realities in the quality of life for the different classes of people in North Korea. Since the disintegration of the distribution system following the economic crisis, inequality in the quality of life caused by class divisions has exacerbated. Therefore, the Lee Myung-bak administration's policies, which aim to provide aid to the North with a focus on the most vulnerable people and regions, are appropriate. In order for these policies to be successful, however, the approach toward vulnerable people and regions must be expanded. In the future, it will be necessary to firmly and constantly recommend the need to establish a system that can determine the need for aid during the deliberation process on providing relief to North Korea. In other words, a system that can calculate demand for aid must be established in advance so that regions and groups of people, who are in dire need of aid, can be correctly identified.

Second, aid must be provided with an understanding about the limited opportunities for North Koreans due to the disparity

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in class distinctions. Policies designed to improve the quality of life must incorporate strategies that can resolve inequality in opportunities and access to resources. As stated above, the symbiotic relationship between the factional ties and power strengthens in a political and social regime, which tightens its control and surveillance over society and has only a limited amount of resources.

Third, medical assistance must be expanded to improve the quality of life in North Korea. However, the medical drugs that are currently supplied to North Korea are later distributed through a system that is inadequate to meet the needs of the lower class. Even if the supplies reach the people of the lower class, it is common for the goods to be misappropriated. Thus, a strategy must be devised in which potential consequences of providing aid to the vulnerable, such as stolen drugs, are taken into consideration. In the case of drugs, it will be expected that the stolen goods will flow into the market. Furthermore, agreements also must be made in concern to the distribution system for medical drugs.

Fourth, the overall improvement in sanitation such as infrastructure and water supplies must be administered in order to improve the quality of life in North Korea. The people's health depends on the improvement in sanitation, including roads and the transportation system for patients as well as the water system. This health infrastructure cannot be reliant on several emergency relief efforts. These problems can only be resolved through development and cooperation in the medical field. Humanitarian

aid is not enough and it will require changes in the North Korean authorities' policies and institutions. Therefore, a flexible approach that recognizes the unique qualities of North Korea along with a firm application of international standards is imperative to the process of development and cooperation. A process must be implemented that allows the participation of the North Korean people in these development efforts. In addition, the mid to long-term establishment of health infrastructure must be used as leverage in negotiations so that the repercussions of aid for the different regions and classes can be maximized.

Fifth, a must be designed that can provide an impetus to the growing trend of marketization must be designed. To achieve this, the marketization of North Korea must be intertwined to the economic cooperation between North and South Korea in the mid to long-term.

Sixth, a gap has formed between the official discourse promoted by the North Korean regime and the actual life goals that the people strive for, so there is a need to provide assistance to in a manner that will enhance their perception of self and a recognition of their own rights. It is especially important to devise a strategy in which the people are able to compare their perceptions on quality of life with that of others. In improving the quality of life, policies must incorporate the means to improve the North Koreans' subjective perceptions on quality of life, as well as improve the material aspects of their lives. In order to achieve this, strategic negotiations must be devised during the process of development and cooperation so that an information infrastructure can be established.

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Seventh, a strategy to improve the quality of life in North Korea must incorporate the concept of human security and human rights. Currently, the reality is that strict controls and surveillance influence the quality of life in North Korea. However, the collective mindset has weakened and a sense of autonomy has proliferated in the process of seeking unsanctioned self-revival. Distrust toward the State as well as a rudimentary level of resistance are emerging. Therefore, policies regarding human rights and the improvement of quality of life must be connected to one another so that the North Korean people can better understanding of their own rights.

# The Quality of Life of North Korean: Current Status and Understanding

