Family, Mobile Phones, and Money: Contemporary Practices of Unification on the Korean Peninsula

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Moving from the powerful and abstract construct of ethnic homogeneity as bearing the promise for unification, this chapter instead considers family unity, facilitated by the quotidian and ubiquitous tools of mobile phones and money, as a force with a demonstrated record showing contemporary practices of unification on the peninsula. From the "small unification" (*jageun tongil)* where North Korean defectors pay brokers to bring family out, to the transmission of voice through the technology of mobile phones illegally smuggled from China, this paper explores practices of unification presently manifesting on the Korean Peninsula.

National identity on both sides of the peninsula is usually linked with ethnic homogeneity, the ultimate idea of Koreanness present in both Koreas and throughout Korean history. Ethnic homogeneity is linked with nationalism, and while it is evoked as the rationale for unification it has not had that result, and did not prevent the ideological nationalism that divided the ethnos in the Korean War.[1] The construction of ethnic homogeneity evokes the idea that all Koreans are one brethren (*dongpo)*—an image of one large, genetically related extended family. However, fissures in this ideal highlight the strength of genetic family ties.[2] Moving from the powerful and abstract construct of ethnic homogeneity as bearing the promise for unification, this chapter instead considers family unity, facilitated by the quotidian and ubiquitous tools of mobile phones and money, as a force with a demonstrated record showing "acts of unification" on the peninsula.

In North Korean defector communities "small unification" refers to a phenomenon where North Korean defectors provide money to brokers who then facilitate migration of family members out of North Korea, through China and third countries to South Korea and Japan. In the wake of the 1990s famine in North Korea, the number of defections increased, which, in turn, enabled more people inside North Korea, through the ties of recently departed family, to leave via the defector network. Family relations inside North Korea also changed. While some families experienced a breakdown—seen in the emergence of divorce during the famine years[3]—research indicates that adolescents grew more economically responsible in their family units by becoming breadwinners, and ties with extended family strengthened.[4] Many defectors recently settled in South Korea and Japan left the North through the help of previously defected family members. With each arrival, family ties maintained through mobile phones and money played a crucial role.

National Identity and Ethnicity

As Gi-wook Shin observed, the notion of a homogenous ethnic unity, which is a product of particular historical processes, is present on both sides of the divided peninsula.[5] It is easy to find South Koreans, and North Koreans, who readily refer to one another as "brethren" or use the expression "same people (ethnic/race)" *(tokatun minjok)*. Yet ethnic nationalism is not enough to unify the peninsula, and was not a strong enough concept to prevent the Korean War.[6] It is a unifying force conceptually, but ideological nationalism has proved divisive in reality. Ethnic and cultural aspects of nationalism identify kin, but civic and political aspects identify enemies across and within borders. The identification and punishment of seeming insiders (ethnic Koreans) who were actually traitors (ideological outsiders) formed a bloody history before, during, and after the Korean War.[7] To this day legacies exist to identify and punish those who reveal themselves to be ideologically other than what they ought to be.

Regulation over the ideology of North Korea easily leaks over to include regulation of anything or anyone who comes from the North. The ambiguous feeling of compassion for North Koreans and a loathing for their ideology produce a "sticky" emotion that attaches to public sentiment toward North Korean defectors, identifying them as both "sacred and profane."[8] North Koreans are sacred because they are brethren, and in the construction of ethnic nationalism and filial piety they are family. North Koreans are profane because they are so ideologically other, while being disturbingly similar in other ways. Many times during my doctoral fieldwork (2005-2006) in Tokyo and Seoul, I noticed that Koreans (whether South Korean or *Chil'kyop'o*) physically stepped back from me when they learned I did research with defectors. "Isn't it frightening?" they asked.[9] This creation of physical space seemed emblematic of the distance they wish to maintain between the political ideologies of the two Koreas. It marked a fear of contamination by me, being influenced by information I might "leak" on to them and being brought closer to the North through proximity to me, threatening to create an association that would rub off.[10] This space-creating reflex echoes the response one might expect from Syngman Rhee's evocation of communism as a "cholera" that would compromise democracy.[11] To avoid contagion do not go near it and quarantine it.

Intragroup dynamics of censure on both sides of the peninsula sanction "certain unlikable in-group members as primary threats to national identity" and complicate unification through ideological censure.[12] The message of containment and "treatment" that Rhee evoked about the political ideology and social system of the North is still present, for example, in the South Korean government's reeducation program for newly arrived North Korean defectors, and in control over access to information from North Korea. The education program, as well as health and welfare assistance, provided by Hanawon and related facilities in South Korea are truly touching and remarkable.[13] Even the name of the center "One Centre" relates the idea of unity, but North Koreans who leave these facilities identify as defectors (*talbukmin*) and new settlers (*saetoemin*) before they identify as North Korean. Significantly, it is not possible to simply identify as a North Korean (*bukhansaram/bukchosonsaram)* in South Korea without raising suspicions of political allegiance.

Both North and South Korea have endeavored to ensure control over the leakage of information from the other. In the South, the 1948 National Security Act liberally criminalized communist sympathies as pro-North Korean ideology, which posed a threat to the government of the South. Antagonism toward North Korea-related content grew more overt in the 1980s with the Anti-Communism Act. As Danielle Chubb notes, the government discourse at that time was geared toward strengthening anti-communist sentiment, "anti-government elements [were] seen as having communist tendencies and thus labeled as pro-North Korean."[14] Nowadays, in addition to arrests and deportations, anxiety about material deemed pro-North Korean, or ambiguous in sentiment to North Korea, raises the attention of the National Security Services. This has resulted in the monitoring of blogs, emails, and websites, but also in the blocking of websites that are North Korean (hosted by IP addresses in Japan, for example *Uriminjokkiri)*.[15] During the Lee Myung-bak administration content removal requests for websites significantly increased, leading some in the international community such as Amnesty International and Reporters without Borders to criticize South Korea as a censorship state.[16]

As Gi-wook Shin observes, the "unification approaches of both Koreas" are "based on the premise that ethnic unity ought to ultimately lead to reunification," but such assumptions are unjustified.[17] The definition of the "fundamental norm and identity associated with the category of the ethnic nation" is a point of conflict as each tries to claim legitimacy and entitlement of the "ethnic territory" currently occupied.[18] However, as Shin concludes, referencing Benedict Anderson, if the nation is constructed, transformation of nationalism can take place through political institutions and social movements, which can construct a new identity or imagined community.[19]

Transformations are taking place in how unification is practiced through defector use of mobile phones to connect with family; they unite with an absent family member through modern means of connection. This indicates timeliness in the development of a new conception of unification where technology offers connection that is more powerful emotionally and practically than ethnicity and nationalism in bringing together two parts of the divided peninsula.

Family

The division of the peninsula has meant the division of families. The problem of divided families has been variously dealt with by both Koreas, but also by the United States and Japan. The vast majority of families were divided during the Korean War, with the remainder being divided in the wake of the Korean War. The first generation has little time remaining. In 1983 KBS set up the "Campaign to Reunite Ten Million Divided Families" spearheaded by Choon-lim Chun, a Korean-Canadian reporter for *The New York Times*. The telethon lasted 453 hours and 45 minutes and resulted in the reunion of 10,000 of the 109,000 families who applied to find their loved ones. The KBS campaign was the first to unite families who were divided within Korea and abroad, with the omission of kin in North Korea.[20] The 1989-1991 reunions were held with Korean-Americans advocating for reunions with family in North Korea. From 1992-1997, North Korea permitted Korean-Americans with family in the North reunion visits. In 2000 there was the historic summit in Pyongyang, which saw the first reunion of families between the two Koreas. Between 2001 and 2007, there were over a dozen reunions held between the two Koreas.

The Divided Families Foundation, a U.S.-based organization spearheading reunions between Korean-Americans and their North Korean families, noted that of the possibly 109,000 to 500,000 Korean-Americans who have family in the North only 80 were reunited in this way. The United States and South Korea grew timid in 2008 about the way reunions were proceeding with Lee Myung-bak putting an end to the visits and the U.S. National Defense Authority Act requiring a report to Congress on those Korean-Americans who have reunions with family in the DPRK. But 2009 saw a thawing of these Cold-War style anxieties and the House Report 111-187 urged the special North Korean human rights envoy to prioritize issues of family unification between Korean-Americans and North Koreans. In 2012, Ambassador Robert King urged those with family ties in North Korea to register with the American Red Cross for assistance connecting to family. In the same year, the Divided Family Foundation sent 588 letters to the DPRK, using addresses provided by the South Korean Ministry of Unification. The reunions are ongoing, but always a political tool used by the governments of North and South Korea.[21]

The primary social institution of the family already demonstrates promise for unification as defectors on the ground in South Korea forge unification practices in daily life, principally through mobile phones and money linking them back to North Korea. When defectors remark that they wish to return to North Korea, when and if the country reunifies, it is not the political ideology or the ethnic homogeneity with which they seek to reunify, but rather with their family and friends remaining there.

It may come as a surprise to learn that in a country that has an international record for crimes against humanity, the people themselves have a "warm heart" (*dattaun maum*). A warm heart and casual banter are ways defectors describe the character of North Korean people. "Even warmer than South Koreans," Kim Eun-hye said to express the spirit of North Koreans to me. She added, "When you get on a bus or trolley, they will ask you, where are you from? Where are you going? How are you doing? That kind of thing. People readily talk to one another in a friendly way."[22]

Family is not only about who is related to whom by blood or marriage, it is also about exchange, insurance of generational descent, and insurance against loss of wealth. The structuralist method of studying kinship, formulated in the work of Levi-Strauss, is about alliances and networks of exchange. In anthropology, kinship is seen as the primary social institution common to virtually all peoples across time and place. Precisely how kinship is defined has cultural variability, but the fact that we all have kinship ties is a unifying feature of humanity.[23] The family unit, being the most primary institution, shapes value formation and economic outcomes, and it influences national institutions.[24] Economists who study the effect of family ties on economies find strong family ties impede economic development. Where family ties are strongest there is a greater tendency to distrust those outside the family unit and maximize material gain within the family institution. Although strong family ties are linked with low political participation and political action, they are positively correlated with happiness and health.[25] They correlate with good codes of conduct within small circles, such as within the family or kin, but are also identified with selfishness outside of the family network.[26]

Ideologically, familialism has shaped North Korea's national self-image. As Bruce Cumings explains, "It has rarely occurred to Asian thinkers to abandon the family as metaphor or reality: only Mao's China during the Great Leap Forward assaulted the family structure, and even then this monumental effort was dropped rather quickly. The family has been the centerpiece of Asian corporatism, the preeminent example of which is interwar Japan and its failed attempt to fashion a 'family state.'"[27] Three images correspond to this corporatism of North Korea: political fatherhood, the body politic, and a great chain (of the organism).[28] This linkage of the governing leadership of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, and by natural extension, Kim Jung-un, is something that Suk-young Kim also observed in her reading of theater, film, and everyday performative acts in North Korea. Not only was Kim Il-sung a paternal figure, he was a motherly benevolent figure.[29] While North Korean defectors may associate Kim Il-sung with benevolence and charity, and Kim Jong-il with incompetence and frustration, interviews with recent defectors indicate that Kim Jung-un is identified as incapable of his job.[30] The breakdown of the public distribution system in the 1990s and the famine and subsequent economic shocks that followed have led to stronger extended family ties in North Korea.[31]

The family network as the overarching and oldest social institution cannot be overemphasized in the lives of North Koreans or defectors. Family ties have facilitated the movement of defectors through the region, making their lives more resilient and more transnational.[32] Insights from contemporary defector experiences show that this most basic of social institutions signals new conceptualizations of unification. Family ties are maintained across borders because of money and mobile phones, objects which facilitate practices of family unification, and help us to rethink processes of unification on the peninsula.

The "small unification" that is created each time a North Korean defector brings family members South is made possible by the seemingly insignificant, quotidian objects of money and mobile phones. Maintenance of contact across the border is not always with "small unification" in mind. The vast majority of defectors send remittances home, which facilitate better living conditions and opportunities for family who remain in the North. The principal means of getting money into North Korea is through brokers via the use of mobile phones, but mobile phones serve multiple purposes. They ensure timely relay of information about the condition of family and friends, and of other news. Mobile phones and the money they help to transmit to North Korea can help the defection of North Koreans, but by keeping contact and helping family to receive remittances, they encourage some to stay put, opting against defection. In other cases, those who cross to China to earn money discover through phone calls that returning to North Korea will be difficult and, thus, the decision is made to defect to South Korea.[33] Relations between family and friends are brokered through the exchange of money or objects into and throughout North Korea generating and maintaining networks through capital not sanctioned by either the North or South Korean state.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones, purchased in China and using the Chinese telecom network, are smuggled back into North Korea via a friend or broker and then delivered to family and friends residing in North Korea. If used near the border, these phones can receive signals from Chinese cell phone towers. The telephone number is noted and the phone can be reached from anywhere in the world because it is as if the mobile phone remained in China. Defectors in China, South Korea, Japan, and in other countries are able to maintain contact with family through this means. Thus, when North Koreans arrive in South Korea, even while at the Hanawon Center, they can use local phone boxes or personal mobile phones to contact family in North Korea speaking to them in real time and relaying information directly. Detection equipment is used by the North Korean government to determine who is using a Chinese cell phone,[34] so clandestine, quick, and irregular use is essential to avoid getting caught with these illicit devices. There is no fear of North Korea tapping these phones because they use Chinese telecoms. The risk comes if your conversation is overheard or if your phone rings when the wrong person can overhear it.

Official mobile phones in North Korea, known as Koryolink phones, and unofficial phones from China are transforming the unofficial economy in North Korea.[35] In contemporary Pyongyang about 60 percent of residents between the ages of 20-50 use official North Korean mobile phones, with some residents such as adolescents and merchants identifying mobile phones as an essential item.[36] Mobile phones have existed in North Korea for over a decade now since the fiber cables were laid during the March of Suffering, but they are still a rare, luxury item. A few years ago the mobile phone rendered a person vulnerable to robbery and suspicion, but the increased presence of the objects has transformed their meaning into a status symbol of the new rich.[37] Koyrolink phones cannot make international calls, they are understood to be under regular surveillance and subject to jamming by the DPRK government if users try to make calls in the border region using a Chinese cell tower, but there are adaptive ways to call internationally. Hyun-Jung Ryu published an MA dissertation at the University of North Korean Studies in 2012 which explained how, with the assistance of brokers based deep within North Korea, a person could call South Korea by linking up the microphone of the Koryolink phone with the earpiece of a smuggled Chinese mobile phone which dials South Korea. The phones are aligned by microphone and earpiece; two brokers are required.[38] With a smuggled Chinese cell phone and access to a cell tower network, calls can be made and received internationally.

When examining the social impact of new information and communication technology there is a tendency to focus on the Internet. But research on poor, low-income countries and places where the Internet is limited indicates that social change in such places happens through mobile phones, which are far more influential than the Internet.[39] Mobile phones offer an economical and efficient means of redistributing money among those who are poor and disadvantaged.[40] New social alternatives become possible.[41] The mobile phone speeds up and makes more reliable former low-tech ways of keeping in touch, and a single phone is usually used by many people. When the first wave of defectors left North Korea in the 1990s their contact with family was almost certainly severed; however with the use of mobile phone relations are maintained. Reuniting can be carried out safely and with greater care through the use of the phone. The mobile phone also provides the option to "reunify" via a short phone call.

The use of mobile phone between defectors and their families assists in social behavior beyond the norm of acceptable, legal behavior in either North or South Korea. The technology cannot be fully monitored or controlled by either country; thus individual family relations are privileged through the modern capital-driven loophole of mobile technological communication, which North Koreans appropriate for their own ends. Perhaps more than ever, contemporary use of mobile phones demonstrates that public space and private dynamics can break free of controls to communicate across the otherwise impassable geopolitical dividing line of North and South Korea.[42] Maintaining contact with people who would otherwise be inaccessible across space and time is a key feature of modern global dynamics, as identified by Giddens.[43] On a micro-scale, unification is currently manifesting as a practice that is virtual and, paradoxically, more real than ever since the partition.

Mobile phones are used in ways particular to the cultural context of North Korea and defectors. Slang is used as a means to shorten speech, speeding up talk time, to avoid getting caught.[44] If the State Security Department does catch someone communicating internationally via mobile phone, they can be punished to discourage others from similar behavior.[45] While there is, indeed, great risk, the ability of the state to achieve surveillance over all communication is shown to be impossible.[46] Mobile phones are used to transfer money and goods, but also information. The mobile phone creates the chance for defectors to send micro-broadcasts, in the form of their individual voices, back into North Korea.

Clandestine radio signals have been sent into North Korea for decades, and since the early 2000s defectors in South Korea have used long and shortwave radio to communicate with North Koreans. Their voice is a means of raising consciousness and democratic empowerment in North Korea. Kim Seong-min founded Free North Korea Radio in 2004. He defected from North Korea in 1996 after being exposed to information in his job in the Korean People's Army. Monitoring foreign broadcasts helped him to learn that North Korea was not quite the country it has presented itself to be. He also recognized the power of the voice, carried in radio broadcasts, to influence the decisions that empower individuals.[47] Free North Korea Radio has been joined by Radio Free Asia, Open Radio for North Korea, Radio Free Chosun, and North Korea Reform Radio, all of which send radio broadcasts into North Korea that are accessible through radios that have not had dials fixed by authorities. A survey conducted by the Korea Press Foundation asked 300 newly arrived defectors about the impact of radio broadcasts in the North. Of the respondents, 4.27 percent had experience listening to them while in the North.[48] As Danielle Chubb observed, "Activists argue that defector broadcasting directly into North Korea is a highly effective form of advocacy. Insofar as it allows North Koreans in Seoul to interface directly with their fellow nationals in North Korea, it is a unique and unprecedented form of activism in the history of the North Korean human rights campaign."[49]

Once having left their home, defectors used to be voiceless to their loved ones left behind. They could not send letters, make calls, or stay in touch over the Internet. They could not even get a spot on the broadcast schedule to send a direct message home.[50] Mobile phones have allowed their voices to target those who matter about topics that matter to them. Through the mobile phone North Korean defectors "voice" themselves and their current lived experience abroad back into North Korea. This achieves greater familial intimacy than radio broadcasts could offer because it is no longer a monologue, no longer selected and acceptable messages, which are broadcast to an audience of listeners, but rather a dialogue between known subjects. The communications happen in real time, unlike pre-recorded broadcasts, and the voice carries emotion and immediacy, as is so often the case when we speak with loved ones. It bypasses the obstacles of state censorship in both Koreas, albeit with great clandestine care, and passes beyond the physical distance that formerly made communication impossible. North Korean defectors and their North Korea-based interlocutors create mini-broadcasts between themselves, bypassing all other media noise.[51] This generates a flow of individual, private narratives of experience that are outside the purview of states and activist networks. It permits the transmission of unalloyed voices into North Korea, but also the transmission of North Korean voices out of their country without defection. Furthermore, the defector diaspora becomes momentarily present in North Korea again through their voice on the mobile phone, and North Koreans can be present in South Korea through the transmission of their voices.[52]

Along with radio broadcasts, DVDs, and thumb drives, the mobile phone offers real-time connections between absent others. While mobile phones and money transfers are typically used to secure the safe passage of would-be defectors, remittances and the quick exchange of information also keep people from making the decision to defect. Would-be migrants to China benefit from remittances that are brought into North Korea, and they do not have to make the risky choice of heading into unknown territory in a new country. Sometimes the mobile phone is a "third space" where the decision to defect is debated. "She doesn't want to come, she doesn't want to be without her friends," a North Korean defector-friend explained to me over dinner in a Seoul restaurant. A call had come to her mobile in the middle of our meal. An angry, quick conversation ensued in a matter of moments between North and South Korea. Ji-young told me her mother was debating whether to defect, even though the broker had been paid.[53] Yes, she would live better, but she was afraid of being lonely, I was told. A survey conducted by The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights found that 78.1 percent of North Koreans intended their remittances to North Korea to secure the safe passage of family out of North Korea.[54] But as the above phone call shows, this percentage does not necessarily reflect the intent of those back home.

Money

Traders benefit from mobile communication to confirm prices and to receive or send goods using trains in North Korea.[55] Mobile phones are also used as a means of money transfer. Money sent from defectors in South Korea is referred to as the "Mount Halla Stream," which trickles money into North Korea as a mountain lets water flow from its peak.[56] One of the first things North Koreans learn when they arrive in South Korea is how to send money to family back home. Through the mobile phone system an arrangement can be made for remittances. A defector in South Korea contacts a South Korea-based broker, sending money via a South Korean bank account. The South Korean broker then sends the money to a Chinese broker, via mobile phones or Internet banking. The broker in China then sends the money to a contact in North Korea—directly delivering the money or via a remittance house in North Korea.[57] While some sources say this process takes as little as 15-20 minutes,[58] my recent interviews suggest it takes even less time. "They can get the money in five minutes," Kim Sang-won told me, "five minutes."[59] Recipients do not have to reside along the border region; inland transfers are also possible. At each stage there is a ten percent cut from the initial fee sent. "The money is necessary because wages in North Korea are not enough to live off. When I got to South Korea I was shocked to learn you could live off your wages," Kim Eun-hye told me, "it is confusing isn't it? Well, in North Korea you can't even dream of living off your wages, you have to have another job, something on the side."[60]

The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights found that 49.5 percent of North Koreans sent money back to North Korea that year (2010), while 46 percent had not; while only 4.5 percent had no family in North Korea.[61] The amount remitted is significant, particularly for a new settler population. Among those surveyed, 44.2 percent sent about $900, 16 percent sent $900-$2,000, and 12.5 percent sent $2,000-$3,000 or more. Of the amount remitted, 30 percent went to transfer fees, but what remains is still a staggering amount of money by North Korean standards, and it is increasing, with the greatest number of recipients living in the northern mountainous regions of Hamgyunbukdo.[62] This area is where the cellular phone reception is strongest between China and North Korea. Most remittances are facilitated by ethnic Koreans in China (*Chosŏnjŏk*) about 64.8 percent, followed by 16.3 percent facilitated by North Korean defectors, and then 8.2 percent by Han Chinese.[63] The majority of North Koreans send money at least once a year, but some send it upwards of ten times per year, and many report that they will send it again.[64]

Virtually all of the money is going back to family. Among women defectors, 74.2 percent transfer money to family or children in North Korea, or to family in a third country such as China.[65] Remittances contribute to unofficial economic development in North Korea.[66] Sending money back to North Korea is causing some newly settled defectors to struggle with debt in South Korea, leading to stress caused by the expectation to remit.[67] The outflow of defectors and inflow of mobile phones and money reveal the information system inside North Korea to be an "incompletely closed" porous system.[68] North Korea is aware of the remittances and is trying to crack down on them.[69]

In the early history of defection through China, passage to South Korea with the help of a broker could cost upwards of $10,000 for transportation and a fake passport, a cost unimaginably prohibitive for many North Koreans.[70] When the international community put the spotlight on China for *refoulement* of North Korean defectors in the early 2000s, China, in turn, cracked down on those helping refugees through the underground railroad. In time, there were fewer activists in China who could help. However, as increasing numbers of North Koreans settled in the South, they began to work with brokers to help their family make the journey, having taken it themselves and having friends and contacts in the area meant they had some skill in brokering defection.[71] Nowadays the brokered journey can cost anywhere from $2,500-$15,000. Since the influx of settled defectors has led to "small unification" via family-led defections and perhaps because so many defectors are now settling in South Korea, the ROK government reduced the one-time amount of settlement money given to North Korean defectors in 2005, from about nine million *won* to about six million.[72] While North Korean defectors sometimes do struggle economically, there are others who succeed and go on to become surgeons and business owners.

The ROK government estimates that defector remittances back home total approximately $10 million per year.[73] The true amount is difficult to estimate. The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights asked what kind of impact remittance-senders thought their remittances have on North Korea: 49.5 percent said that remittances would make those inside North Korea hanker after a South Korean lifestyle, 15.8 percent reported that it would lead to an increase in defections, and 8.4 percent said it would lead to increased resistance to the North Korean system. Overall, 73 percent of respondents thought the remittances would have some kind of effect on North Korea, while 11.1 percent said it would have no effect whatsoever.[74]

Conclusion

At this point it is not possible to accurately assess the number of official mobile phone users in the country. Some estimates say there are two million subscribers to Koryolink, but the question of users and subscribers is unclear.[75] The number of unofficial Chinese mobile phone users in North Korea also cannot be estimated. There is room to explore, possibly through a survey of defectors in South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere. It would be useful to know how many use mobile phones to contact family in North Korea, how often they contact loved ones, what demographics use the phones, for what duration, and to discuss what topics. Such research will shed more light on this technology as a mode of technologically-driven familial unification.

Despite the barriers of politics and the constraints of states, it is possible to reflect on the role of families, mobile phones, and money in fashioning a new conception of unification in step with contemporary life where most of us are separated from loved ones and yet exist in their lives through technology. The influence of mobile phones on North Korean society indicates hope for a liberalized day-to-day life for ordinary people as use of mobile phones by defectors indicates new practices in step with contemporary global trends of maintaining social ties through technology. This technological practice of connecting with home from afar indicates a new mode of unification currently taking shape on the peninsula. This is a person-to-person, telecommunications-based, virtual unification that bypasses state apparatuses of both North and South Korea, and it is being spearheaded by defectors themselves. The phones "ferry" money back into the unofficial economy of North Korea through a network of folks who opted to leave. The phones transmit the sentiments of defectors and their family across the DMZ, each side voicing itself to the other. There is a new mode of unification taking shape privately, on a day-to-day basis, on the Korean Peninsula.

Endnotes

1. Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* Studies (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California 2006), pp. 156-65.
2. For example, studies of adoption in South Korea show that the rate of adoptions in-country are chronically low with Koreans identifying a reluctance to adopt children with whom they are not genetically related. For a detailed ethnographic study of Korean international adoptions, see Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).
3. Sandra Fahy, *Marching through Suffering: Loss and Survival in North Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
4. Jeong-ah Cho, Young-ju Cho, Eun-hee Cho, Eun-young Choi, and Min Hong, "The Emergence of a New Generation: The Generational Experience and Characteristics of Young North Koreans," Study Series 14-03 (Korea Institute for National Unification, Seoul: KINU, 2014), p. 37.
5. Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea.*
6. Ibid., pp. 156-165.
7. Ibid., p. 155.
8. This idea of sticky emotion is borrowed from the work of Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (UK: Edinburgh University Press and Routledge, 2004).
9. 무섭지않이에요?
10. This certainly is not representative of all Koreans, I have many colleagues and friends who readily work with defectors and do not identify the work as frightening.
11. Robert Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960* (Seoul: Panmun Book Company, Ltd. 1978), pp. 352, 391.
12. Shin, 2006, p. 164.
13. Each North Korean who arrives in South Korea is required to spend a period of three months learning about South Korea's economy, society, and history. This typically takes place at a Hanawon center. Formerly, the stay-period in Hanawon was six months. Due to increased numbers of defectors arriving the length of stay-time has been reduced to three months. Facilities are state of the art, offering excellent physical, dental, and psychological care for male and female defectors (housed separately) and for children and adolescents (housed with women).
14. Danielle Chubb, *Contentious Activism & Inter-Korean Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 42.
15. 우리민족끼리, http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/ [accessed 7 April 2015].

16. "S Korea's anti-communist law encroaches on private, cyber spheres: AI" Yonhap News Agency, November 29, 2012, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/11/29/79/0401000000AEN20121129008300315F.html. Reporters Without Borders, "Internet Enemies 2012: Countries under surveillance - South Korea," March 12, 2012, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fba1decc.html [accessed 4 February 2015].
17. Shin, 2006, p. 164.
18. Ibid.
19. Shin, 2006, p. 165.
20. Choong Soon Kim, *Faithful Endurance: An Ethnography of Korea Family Dispersal* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).
21. BBC 2014 "Korean Brothers Meet After 64 Years," British Broadcasting Corporation, February 19, 2014. Available at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26259624; "North and South Korean Families Unite," *Time Magazine*, February 7, 2015].
22. Personal Interview with Kim Eun-Hye, January 11, 2015, Seoul. All names have been changed as per the request of interviewees.
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