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The reality of Christian mission work towards North Korean Refugees and its future strategy.

-Seoul Centered-
I. Introduction

In Korea, as of May 2013, the number of North Korean refugees hits 25,210, and in these years more than two thousand are entering South from North every year. It is no longer a hot issue in the media that North Koreans are entering South Korea because it has become so common. Moreover, over the past few years, the rapid growth in the number of North Korean refugees influences Korean society in many ways.

The definition of North Korean refugee is that of North Koreans who leave their home, immediate family, spouse, work and etc, and escape from the country without getting foreign nationality (법률).

North Koreans escaping from the country started from 1980 with the fall of the former Soviet Union and the East-European bloc, the reunification of Germany, the end of the East-West Cold War ideology confrontation structure, the crucial movements of international situations, the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, and increased with the shortage of food from natural disasters, and the economic blockade by America, which led to North Korea's financial difficulties as an isolated country. (안혜영, 1999).

The North Koreans who suffer from financial difficulties and food shortage escape from North Korea entering South Korea with hope and expectation, but quickly realize that there is a gap between the reality of South Korea compared with their excessive expectation. North Koreans face the reality that from the moment they enter South Korea they have to rely on the South Korea government and its system of support as well as their own North Korean refugee community. (박하진, 2004).

The South Korean government, considering the distinct characteristics of the relationship between North and South Korea, put more resources to North Korean refugees than to the needy in South Korea. The government supplies and provides programs for North Korean refugees to establish themselves in the country with houses, jobs, administrative assistance, and financial supports. (안혜영, 1999).

Nevertheless, with the dramatic rise of North Korean refugees, the government has faced a financial burden due to the poor efficiency and high cost of the support system. As well, there has been controversy from low-income citizens within South Korea, conflicts with local residents, a weakness to become independent, conflicts between family members, problems in education of teenagers, etc. All of these conflicts and problems increase 'misfits' in the society, and the worse
result is that some choose to go back to North Korea.

This shows that, with only the help of the government, there is a limitation for North Korean refugees to settle down in South Korea society. The government needs assistance from citizens, and especially, Korean churches play a major role in helping North Korean refugees settling down in South Korea.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discover the role of Korean churches, and how to efficiently assist refugees to become settled, how to alleviate all the problems North Korean refugees face in adjusting to life in South Korea, the support system of the government and its results, and to prepare for future reunification between North and South Korea.

In other words, our purpose is to exhibit the kind of love showed in the Bible towards foreigners, to spread God's love, to prepare for reunification from a Christian point of view, and to build strategies for North Korean missions. Primarily, we are trying to develop and provide welfare that helps refugees, who are members of the same ethnic group and yet have become foreigners in the South, to settle down. Secondly, through experiences of refugees from North Korea we will prepare strategies for North Korean missions after reunification. As well our purpose is to train Christian leaders among North Korean refugees.

II. The reality of North Korean Refugees

1. The current state of North Korean refugees into the country.

The annual number of North Korean refugees into South has been growing constantly since 1998. By February 2007, the total number of North Koreans who had entered South Korea grew to over ten thousand. By December 2010, the total number hit 20,360. Comparing gender, from 2002 females outnumbered males making 69% in total in August 2013.

Up to August 2013, a total of 25,123 people had entered the country. In 2006, the number of North Korean refugees went over 2,000 and since then the number was growing arranging from 2,500 to 3,000. In 2012, the number dropped to 1,509 which was 55% down compared to 2011 due to the reinforcement of Chinese and North Korean border controls.

2. Settlement and adaptation of North Korean refugees in South Korea

According to a survey of 2012 in which 9,493 people participated, over 67.3% of refugees
answered 'satisfied' with life in South Korea ('not satisfied', 4.1%). The top reason, well paid for work (50.0%); second, a better economy compared to North Korea (47.8%); third, they were free to do things they want (42.7%). 38% of refugees identified themselves as 'low class', experiencing relative poverty. In a question of perception of South Korea life standard experienced by the refugees, 0.6% people answered high class, middle class 60.2%, low class 38.0%. That puts almost 40% of people who considered themselves as low class.

Regardless of aid from the government, there are still misfits. The reasons are seen as low participation in economic activity, too much reliance on social security, difficulty of teenagers at school. In addition, poor health conditions (not able to work), the gap between education and career, cultural difference at work, social prejudice and etc. can be major reasons. The fact that 70% of the refugees are females, and 16% are teenagers can also be considered major problems. Females appeared to have difficulties in getting jobs (52.4%), and problems with taking care of babies (22.2%).

The reality of North Korean refugees in adjusting to life in Korean society has been below average.

III. Research method

Quantitative research and qualitative research was carried out in the study at the same time.

1. Quantitative Research

This research took place among refugees residing in Seoul. The study took place in one on one interviews. This study was to deal with the continuous growth of North Korean refugees and corresponding social problems. To expand programs helping refugees adjust to Korean society, the study targeted refugees in South Korea. We carried out the research to have a better understanding of the life condition of refugees in South Korea, the degree of adaptation, the satisfaction of life in South Korea, and moreover, to have a Christian way to support refugees, and to prepare for the reunification of North and South Korea and mission work towards North Koreans.

This survey had took place from August 1st, 2013 to September 30th, about two month. The means of collecting data was a nonprobability sampling method. A total of 210 questionnaires were distributed, and a total of 202 collected, 2 of which were rejected as being incomplete, and 200 of them were used for analysis.
(1) General Condition

In this study, participants were 70% female, and 30% males. The number of females was two times higher than males. According to the data provided from the Ministry of Unification, Resettlement Support Division, the number of males refugees stands at 7,718, with females at 17,492. When comparing female rates of 69%, we had a similar gender ratio on the research project. In age comparison, people in their 40s accounted for 29%, which was the greatest number, the average age of people in the study was 44.8. The youngest person interviewed was 20 years, the oldest was 83. In academic background, High School graduates were 52.3%, Associate and Bachelor's degrees were each 20.3%, and People’s School (elementary school) graduates were only 4.1%. Regarding of the family makeup, 35.3% are couples with children, 33.5% are alone and this is the highest rates. 14.5% is of childless couples, 5.4% is of living with parents, 2.3% is of family with couples, siblings, children all together. Living conditions, 68.3% of refugees lived in rented apartments, 14.5% pay monthly rent, 5% own houses, 1.4% live in temporarily places. Among the refugees, 42.5% were not getting help from the government, 39.3% were getting funds from the government, 16% of people were partly funded, and disabled were 2.3%. 18.5% of refugees had lived in South Korea over 5years, with the average time being 5years 7months; the shortest was 1month, the longest was 15 years 5months.

(2) Social Support

When North Koreans experience stress from their lives in South Korea, first they look for help from their spouses (29.3%), friends or religious community (13.7%), parents (11.2%), children (9.8%), and siblings 5.4%. In other words, in difficult situations 55.7% of refugees rely on their own families, and the next is religious communities at 13.5%. This shows that religious communities play an important role in their lives.

(3) Economic Situations

In the careers they had back in North Korea, most of them were laborers at 41.2%, office clerks 18.1%, coorporative association 13.6%, no job 7.2% and military 3.2%. In South Korea, 40.7% of refugees had jobs, 59.3% of them answered no job. In the 40.7% with jobs were included stay-at-home mothers at 29.1% and students 12.7%. If we remove these two groups from the 40.7% with jobs, those who are without jobs exceed those with jobs, and even among those with jobs, more
people had part-time jobs than stable and well-paid careers.

When we took a look at the satisfaction of careers reported, normal was 41.6%, satisfactory 30.7%, low 13.9%, highly satisfied 10.8%, and very low 3%. Two times the number of people showed satisfaction than those have complaints. 25% of people were not thinking of changing their jobs, 22.5% slightly considering to change, 21.9% were considering, 16.3% reported not planning to change at all, wanting to change 14.4%. Those who are not considering changing jobs were 41.3%, those who consider changing jobs were 36.3%. The highest reasons for not obtaining jobs were disability or illness 28.5%, family problems 15.3%, never found the right job 9.5%, lack of education, skills, and experience 7.3%.

Family average income not higher than 1,000,000 won 40%, the minimum income was 100,000 won, the maximum income was 5,000,000 won, and the average income was 1,350,000 won. Compared to South Korean workers, North Korean refugee workers' incomes were only one third of South Korean workers.

58.4% of refugees answered they experienced financial difficulties, 5.5% of refugees answered they were economically well off, almost 60% refugees were suffering from financial difficulties. The main income for 45.9% people was provided from the government for basic living expanses, job salary 38.1%, religious communities sponsored were 7.3%, lectures on security performing 1.8%. From this we can see that most of refugees were getting basic expanses from the government and most of them were still going through financial difficulties. The areas in which refugees reported expecting to receive help from the government was: 31.8% to have more jobs, 24.6% of people to receive training for jobs, 14.7% expect nothing, 12.3% support for children's education, 5.7% support of spouse and family relationships. 29.5% to receive training in computers to get jobs, 13.4% support for food and cooking, 12% language, 11.1% mechanical skills, 5.5% children's education, and 5.1% nursing.

(4) Culture Condition

For the reasons for escaping from North Korea, 'shortage of food' had the highest frequency at 50.9%, 'political issues' had 26.6%, 'help from previously escaped family' had 14%, bad native elements had 7.2%. Shortage of food and financial difficulties played the biggest role in North Koreans' escape from their country.

40% of North Koreans answered that they stay in touch with relatives in South Korea, but
33.9% of people answered they have no more connection with relatives in South Korea. 44.3% said they joined North Korean refugee groups, 55.7% said they did not. Not joining had a higher rate. Of those who join groups, 43.4% of people answered that it is comfortable being with people who share the same background, 34.4% of people attend to get more information, 5.7% of people attend because of hard relationships with South Koreans. Of those who do not join, 39.1% of people answered they have no time for meetings, 21.8% said there is no point of attending. 19.5% said they did not have enough information, 14.3% said they do not join because there is no benefit.

(5) South Korea Settlement Condition

In reporting the most hardships North Koreans go through, 23.9% reported for economic difficulties, 18.9% said language barriers, 14% said the prejudice from South Koreans being biased against them, 12.2% reported worrying about families left behind in North Korea, life styles, while culture difference and health conditions each were reported by 6.8%. On the other side, 35.7% of people answered they were settling down well 'just on their own'. 25.9% from getting government aid, 16.5% were from religious activities, 9.4% were getting help from friends. Programs most helpful for North Koreans to adapt to South Korean society, 32.1% said economic education, 22.5% said relationship with people, 15.6% said basic living information on living in South Korea, 12.8% said language training, 9.6% said culture training, 6.9% said welfare organizations. When going through hardships, 22.2% said families were most helpful, 17.6% said the government, 16.7% said other North Koreans, 16.3% religious communities, 10.9% South Korean friends or neighbors, 7.2% refugee communities, 6.8% welfare facilities.

(6) Satisfaction level of life

Medical treatment in South Korea had the highest satisfaction ratio at 3.66 out of 5. Next was welfare service at 3.55, housing at 3.43, culture and sports systems at 3.3, livelihoods at 2.91 and getting jobs at 2.84 had the lowest satisfaction rate. The total satisfaction rate out of 5 was 3.19. The all-around satisfaction rate was 38%, and dissatisfaction was 6.6%. Even though the dissatisfaction rate was not high, the satisfaction rate was relatively low.

To improve North Korean refugees’ life in South Korea, 39.6% of people answered 'need support financially for those who suffer economically.' 21.2% answered 'counseling system,' 10.6% answered
'to provide more jobs.' Hoping to get financial support had the highest rate of 29.9%, and to get counseling had 16.8%, and jobs for 15.4%.

(7) Religious Life

Before coming to South Korea, 77% of people answered 'had no religion,' 16.7% were Christians, and 0.5% each for Catholics and Buddhists. In the North Korean political situation where people do not have freedom to choose their religion, 17% Christians was a significant number for our study.

Looking at North Koreas who lived in South Korea for a period of time, the numbers change to 66.2% Christians, no religion 26.1%, Catholics 5.3%, Buddhists 1.4%. Almost 40% of people who had come chose to become Christians.

49% of people answered their religion has helped them settle down in South Korea, 16.6% answered 'no help.' 46.7% of people answered that for living in South Korea a religion is needed, 17.1% of people answered there is no need. The reasons for having a religion were, 60.3% to 'receive comfort,' 10.6% 'to get financial support', 5% 'to get information', and 3.9% 'to have a moral life' and 'the family wants to.'

The period of their religious life was 19.7% at 2 years, the minimum was one month, 16 years was the most, and the average was 4 years. 65.2% of people were participating in religious activities, 34.8% were not participating. Participating in activities showed Christians at 90.3%, Catholics at 72.2%, and Buddhists at none. Christians had the highest number in the survey. 45.1% attended worship four times a month, 20.5% three times a month, 18.9% twice a month, 13.1% over five times a month, and 2.5% once a month.

Ministers in each religion had the most influence in having people participate in activities, and the rest was the individual's intention to participate.

In their lives in South Korea, for 63.1% Christianity was most helpful, 27.7% reported no religion, 7.3% Catholicism, and 1.5% Buddhism.
2. Qualitative Research

In-depth interviews were used to enhance the survey studies; through qualitative research we collected data which we used for our purpose to draw conclusions for Korean churches to help make North Korean policy for Korea and accurately reflect the reality of North Koreans and their voice.

We had randomly chosen four North Koreans for this research. These participants received help from Christians while escaping from North Korea. In order to prevent getting too biased a religious point of view, we picked Christians and non-Christians together. These four participants do not represent everything of the study, but help to understand what we are trying to study.

Considering intimacy, we chose those who had close relationships with the researcher from the past. In order to receive enough information we created questions for them and distributed them ahead of time so they could think about the topics. The questions we prepared to avoid causation, and we have focused on intrinsic and fundamental questions.

Collecting data took place in one-on-one interviews, extra information needed was collected through phone interviews. Group interviews took place twice, and the researcher lead the program while other researchers joined as observers. The host of the study started off with explaining that the purpose was doing research to help North Koreans settle down in South Korea. With an unstructured questionnaire the participants joined in sharing their thoughts.

This research recorded the entire interview and used it as the original data. Afterwards the analysis compared data with other research carried out. In the process of analysis, three other researchers worked together to prevent a subjective analysis.

The researchers tried to get the best results out of the process, and help the North Korean participants to deliver their experiences and stories clearly.

IV. Results and the policy proposal

In order to have a better understanding of North Korean refugees in South Korea, Christian mission work on their behalf, and to get a grasp of problems, we proceeded with quantitative research.
Through research our goal was to seek and set a concreted policy to improve their lives in South Korea.

This study proposes that religious activities of North Korean refugees positively influence their lives in Korea. Therefore, we propose stressing religious activities to help North Koreans to have higher satisfaction, and add programs to lower their difficulties in South Korean society. The following alternatives from the study are suggested to help North Korean refugees settle down in South Korea.

First, we need to provide a sociologically customized welfare service. By gender ratio, females play a bigger part than males, therefore, we need to provide more welfare service for females. Moreover, programs to help North Koreans settle down in South Korea are needed. As we consider family backgrounds, most of them came to Korea alone, and so they will need counseling to get over being lonesome for families in North Korea. More programs are needed to help them make good relationships with new neighbors and friends.

Second, the hardest drawback for adapting in South Korea is the financial problem. Therefore, training systems to help North Korean refugees get jobs are needed. Most of the North Korean refugees are suffering from financial difficulties. At first we need to support them with the most basic needs, and for the long term, prepare them to get better jobs and have good careers in South Korea.

Third, because religious activities play an important role for North Korean refugees living in South Korea, we need cooperation from religious communities. Religious activities in South Korea bring them psychological stability. We can especially see that Christianity plays the biggest role helping North Koreans to settle down in South Korea. Therefore, churches which work with North Korean refugees should come up with a systematic program for professional supports.

However, in group interviews we found out that in the process of escaping North Koreans, participants had experienced illegal dealings by some ministers, conspiracies of brokers, prostitution etc. which resulted in distrust of ministers and of Christianity. Those cases need to be punished. Also, some Korean churches tend to entice North Korean refugees to come to their churches by giving them money; we need to support them with welfare services without forcing them into religious activities.
Fourth, vitalizing groups only for North Korean refugees is needed along with group counseling, and welfare programs. Through having meetings with other North Korean refugees, they can exchange information that help them better adapt to life in South Korea. However, political tendency over pure purpose for North Korean refugees prevents more people from participating.

Fifth, programs are needed to help them understand South Korean culture, and lower their stress living in Korea. The cultural differences make their lives harder in South Korea, therefore, programs are needed to help them understand the cultural differences. The language difference appeared to be the biggest problem, and the prejudice of South Koreans makes it harder for North Koreans to adapt. We need a language program for North Korean refugees, and a campaign for South Koreans to reduce the prejudice against North Koreans.

Sixth, to settle down in South Korea, North Koreans need to economic education, information on relationships with other people, and basic information on South Korea life. It is hard for North Koreans to understand the system of Capitalism, This makes them vulnerable to getting cheated by others; therefore, economic training will be very crucial for their new lives in South Korea.