

Korea Institute for National Unification



# The Reality and Human Rights of North Korean Workers in the Maritime Province of Russia

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# **The Reality and Human Rights of North Korean Workers in the Maritime Province of Russia**

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

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## Executive Summary

- The Maritime Province (a.k.a. Primorsky Krai) saw a huge influx of immigrants with the promotion of the development policy after the Convention of Peking in 1860, which forced the province's incorporation into Russia from the Qing Dynasty, and is now growing as a center of economic cooperation and development of Northeast Asia, especially South Korea, China, and Russia, requiring more immigrant workers. North Korean workers deployed overseas are satisfying these conditions and needs of Russia and, at the same time, contributing significantly to their country's foreign policy and economic development.
- Given that North Korea's economic base has in fact eroded after the serious structural economic downturn of the mid- and late 1990s, the country's only feasible option to attract foreign currency is to send its workers overseas.
- For North Korea, however, which has so far pushed forward with extremely closed policies regarding its people, the foreign assignment of its workers could be a new challenge and a risky choice that might bring about changes in its regime. Therefore, the North Korean government's current policy of dispatching its workforce overseas is implemented under state control, not allowing individual choice. Separation from family, mandatory payment of a planned quota to the authorities, and surveillance system for workers by government managers are in effect.

- Although international reports consistently express a negative view of North Korea sending its workforce overseas—associating the policy with the human rights and trafficking issues—the majority of the country’s workers dispatched to foreign countries manage to make a living, not departing from the regime despite the harsh environment and the mandatory contribution and surveillance system.
- North Korean laborers that have been sent to the Maritime Province of Russia since 2007 mostly work in the construction industry, and North Korea has supplied such a workforce to Russia under a quota system. Although there is no exact statistic, more than 30,000 North Koreans arrived in Russia for work by 2013.
- North Korean laborers in the province earn anywhere from \$200 to \$3,000 in both the public and private workplaces over a year, excluding taxes and social insurances. But the heads or cadres (including site managers) of North Korean construction companies make an annual income of \$50,000-\$100,000 including bribes from workers and earnings from private workplaces.
- In the process of labor and contract implementation, the payment of wages is reportedly often in arrears between Russian companies and North Korean management firms in the province. The former does not pay the construction cost to the latter, which in turn cannot pay its workers. North Korean laborers or management firms sometimes use illegal tricks to receive overdue wages, such as employing local gangsters despite having to pay them nearly half of the sum

as a commission.

- North Korean workers abroad are subject to many restrictions on remittances to their home country. The maximum amount of foreign currency they are allowed to bring home is \$10,000, and they must declare any currency in excess of the amount. This explains why they turn to a variety of unlawful methods during their declarations. However, as North Korean authorities intensify their crackdowns, the laborers choose to send money to their family through managers or colleagues on their way home.
- The following is the overview of an scheme of sending and maintaining North Korean workers abroad in the context of and from the viewpoint of the North Korean society.
  - First, North Korea's export of workers is, superficially, voluntary labor migration rather than a completely compulsory one, and more intensive examination reveals that it is in fact a combination of compulsory and voluntary choices. To be sent and work abroad, the country's citizens have to offer a huge bribe to officials of related ministries, demonstrating that the initial step in the foreign labor program is voluntary. However, once such workers arrive in Russia, they are included in North Korea's business system and have to toil under a gun and under surveillance to meet their planned quotas. Once they accomplish their assignments to a certain degree, they can find other work to do on their own, which is extra voluntary labor that serves as a larger source of income.

- Second, the payment that exported workers have to make for their “quotas” or “state-planned quotas”- their planned contributions to the state- is regarded as a duty rather than as exploitation from the perspective of North Korean society based on planned economy.
  - Third, North Korean laborers, suffering under their government’s tight surveillance system, form new local social networks. They also build relationships with natives and local Koreans, including Korean Russians and Korean Chinese, as well as colleagues despite the government’s surveillance and regulation systems. Such relationships offer workers opportunities to find additional work and allow them to compare the two societies and think about alternatives.
  - Fourth, the workers who have experienced the migrant labor program in Russia are integrated into the so-called migration circle, in which after returning home they are sent to Russia again through a rise in social position or identity forgery. In this process, a connection between bribery and labor exploitation naturally emerges and is consistently reproduced in the cycle of migration.
- Until now, Russia has turned a blind eye to the human rights abuses of exported North Korean laborers, considering the unique situation in North Korea. But as Russia increasingly faces the need for business alliances with foreign countries, the human rights abuse problem is likely to become a major international issue. Furthermore, the existing labor export program cannot any longer set North Korean workers above the competition in international labor markets. Therefore, North Korea will have to establish a labor dispatch policy in accord with global standards

to make its labor export program sustainable and gradually improve the basic human rights of its workers.

# I. Introduction

## 1. Objectives

This study has been conducted on the basis of field surveys of Primorsky Krai in Russia to understand in depth the reality and human rights status of North Koreans working abroad. In particular, it aims to offer new perspectives and methodologies that can contribute to the future unification of North and South Korea by identifying various factors working between nations, governments, organizations, and individual actors in terms of labor migration to the province and by contextually grasping specific views and perceptions of those workers.

Studies on the Maritime Province in Russia have so far been triggered mainly by practical needs: the history of migration to Russia, anti-Japanese movements there, surveys of Koreans in the region, and pragmatic research for agricultural development.<sup>1)</sup> Recently, the human rights problem of North Korean workers has been questioned inside and outside of Korea, as a result of debates over ideologies or systems, rather than out of practical necessity. However, to promote the North-South joint-development required for future unification, there is an urgent need for specific studies on these workers.

Since the region has great potential to become a field for manpower and economic development collaboration, the combination of South

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1) Lim Chae-wan, "Research on the Views of Russian-Korean Ethnicities in Maritime Provinces about North Korea and the Unification of Korean Peninsula," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Korea Institute for National Unification, 2003), p. 243.



Korea's technology, North Korea's workforce, and Russia's land for a common purpose could yield good results. This requires an understanding of the labor trade between North Korea and Russia and the easing of tensions. On top of that, it is desirable to encourage the migration of the North's workers and improve their human rights and treatment. Participating in the agriculture, the distribution business, and energy development projects in Russia in the form of a joint investment between North and South Korea with the former's labor and the latter's capital and technology would enjoy success surpassing expectations. Moreover, such a series of projects is projected to contribute significantly to building a foundation for eventual unification on the Korean Peninsula.

To create conditions for the use of North Korea's workforce for Primorsky Krai development, a socio-cultural approach is a top priority, such as a clear and deep understanding of the laborers and the promotion of interaction with Korean communities in the province. Despite its significance, South Korean researchers have not been able to conduct a field survey on the North Korean workforce in earnest, because the South's national security laws discourage contact with the laborers. Furthermore, the workers have also increasingly shown tendency to shun contact with South Koreans since the Roh administration ended. Thus, a new measure needs to be developed for a field survey of the laborers. The Maritime Province is a place where Korean Chinese, Korean Russians, North Koreans with permanent residency in Russia, and South Koreans interact with one another and these Koreans come into touch with North Korean workers on occasion. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the extension of the scope of overseas Koreans to include North Korean permanent residents in Russia and exported workers.

Figure 1-1. Greater Tumen Initiative<sup>2)</sup>

\* North Korea withdrew from GTI in 2009 (It can re-join when it denuclearizes).

The Maritime Province, with abundant natural and social resources and multinational culture, including that of Korea, is a sort of “contact zone.”<sup>3)</sup> The commonality of the surrounding regions is that all of them used to belong to socialist nations and are to a greater or lesser degree eager to open up and innovate. The combination of their advantages for example, the vast land of the three provinces in China, the land and resources of the Maritime Province in Russia,

quality workforce of North Korea, and capital and managerial technology of South Korea and Japan—is likely to lead to a significant level of cooperation and development and the future regional integration of Northeast Asia.

South Korea is currently pushing the economic development of Eurasia, encompassing the three northeastern provinces of China, Mongolia, Primorsky Krai of Russia, and the east coast of South Korea through the GTI (Greater Tumen Initiative)<sup>4)</sup>, of which the

2) “Joint Development of the East Coast of South Korea and the Maritime Province in Russia between South Korea and China Hastens the Opening of North Korea’s Economy: Cooperation for GTI (Greater Tumen Initiative) Declared by the Leaders of the Two Nations,” *Maeil Business News Korea*, July 4, 2014.

3) Shim Heon-yong, “The Far East Maritime Province as a Contact Zone in Northeast Asia and Korean Diaspora,” *Siberian Studies* Vol. 4 (Paichai University Korean-Siberian Center, 2000), pp. 113-117.

Maritime Province is an integral part. This initiative is especially important as a conciliatory move to promote North Korea's economic opening. Therefore, it is critical in preparation for the country's economic opening and future unification to boost official and unofficial cooperation with North Korean workers in the Maritime Province; overseas Korean entrepreneurs and organizations; and institutions, companies, and organizations in countries neighboring the Korean Peninsula that are in partnership with North Korea.

## 2. Methodology

This study selected major residential areas for North Korean workers and ethnic communities in Primorsky Krai and conducted three field surveys in 2014, as well as simple literature reviews and door-to-door enquiries.<sup>5)</sup> These field surveys included the establishment of a rapport with subjects, in-depth interviews with and behavior observation of them, interviews with local researchers on North Korean laborers, and the collection of assorted documents and statistics. In addition to the field surveys, this study sought to grasp the workers' daily lives and labor processes in concrete terms through interviews with North Korean defectors with work experience in Russia, and through professional workshops. These methods will help facilitate an understanding of the fundamental conditions and context the workers are in.

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4) The same article in the footnote No. 2.

5) The first survey was conducted September 8-13, the second October 16-22, and the third November 10-20.

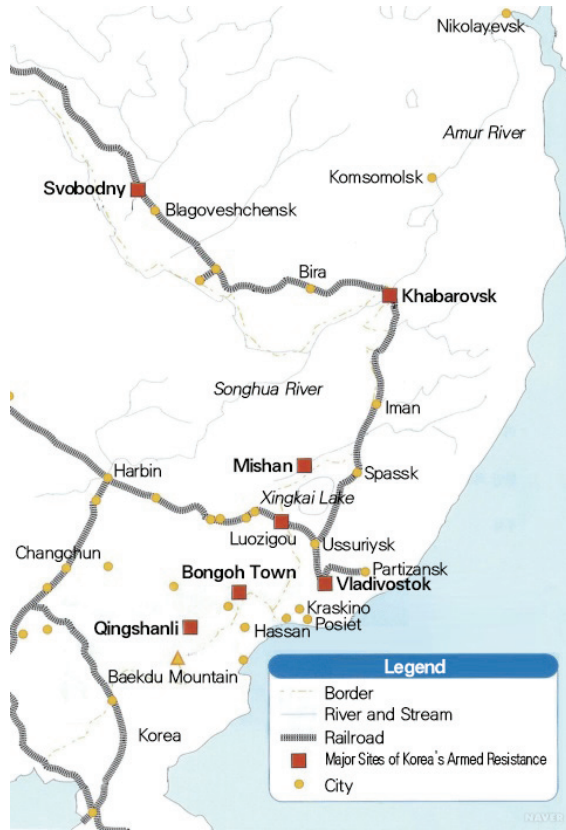
### 3. Overview of the Area Studied

#### *A. Overview of Primorsky Krai*

Primorsky Krai in Russia has an area of approximately 165,000 square kilometers, 1.6 times that of Korea, and a population of 1,982,000 as of January 1, 2010, down by some 100,000 from 2,068,000 in 2003. Since eighty percent of the province is mountainous, seventy-six percent of the population live in cities and the rest in rural areas. In terms of ethnic composition, 89.8 percent, or most of the population, is Russian, 4.54 percent Ukrainian, 0.86 percent Korean, 0.7 percent Tatar, 0.56 percent Belarusian, 0.27 percent Armenian, and the remaining 3.27 percent belong to other ethnic groups.

The capital of the province is Vladivostok and other major cities include Ussuriysk, Nakhodka, and Artyom. Vladivostok is also known as the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railroad (TSR). From 1860, with the purpose of developing this area, the Russian government pushed forward the policy of moving farmers, craftsmen, soldiers and refugees in the country's central and southern regions to the far east. In 1880, a shipyard was constructed in Vladivostok and the number of migrants from Western Russia surged. Many people relocated from the west of the Ural Mountains to the Maritime Province, and some of them participated in the railroad construction project in Ussuriysk. The Trans-Siberian Railway, whose project was launched in 1891 and completed in 1916, is the world's longest railway at a total length of 9,298 kilometers. As the 772-kilometer section between Vladivostok and Khabarovsk was finished in 1897, the capital emerged as Russia's gateway to the Pacific.

Figure 1-2. Map of Primorsky Krai



\* Source: Hwan Park, *The Lives of Koreans in Russia and Space of Memory* (Seoul: Minsokwon, 2013) Website of Minsokwon: <http://www.minsokwon.com>.

The TSR played a critical role in the politics, military operation, and economy of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. Its opening blazed a trail for the development and industrialization of the vast Siberia region, serving as a turning point in the history of the region.

Figure 1-3. Trans-Siberia Railroad



\* Source: <<http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=958830&cid=47312&categoryId=47312>>.

After the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Japanese and British armies landed in Russia in April 1918; the united anti-Bolshevik government was established in June; and the US troops arrived and occupied the far east region in August. All foreign armies withdrew following Japan's step in October 1920, and the Soviet regime was set up. Afterwards, the Soviet Pacific Fleet was organized in the Maritime Province in 1932, acting as a supply base for ports on the shores of the Arctic Ocean.

Vladivostok is a region where foreign ships were not admitted in the early 1950s and that was off-limits to foreigners during the Soviet era. The Nakhodka Port allowed foreign ships to enter the city, which had only one consulate, the North Korean Consulate General.

Photo 1-1. March of the U.S. Army Arriving in Vladivostok



\* Source: <<http://www.oldvladivostok.ru/photo>>.

### *B. Koreans' Inroads into Primorsky Krai*

In the Maritime Province, which became Russia's territory after the Convention of Peking, there were a lot of immigrants from the Joseon Dynasty and China. In 1864, when Joseon ruled the Korean Peninsula, thirteen farming households in Hamgyeong-do Province crossed Tumen River and moved to the Maritime Province, which was the first migration of Koreans. Since then, Koreans relocated there to clear and farm unclaimed land or work as a peasant or laborer. While Korean and Chinese immigrants provided labor and food to the province, most Chinese returned home once they amassed their fortune. Koreans from Joseon, however, tried to settle down in the region and adapt to local life. These Koreans also presented a contrast to Japanese immigrants, who worked in the fishing or fishery processing industry in the province and, after accumulating wealth,

returned home.<sup>6)</sup>

Only thirty-five Koreans resided in Vladivostok in 1876, but the number surged to more than 1,000 in just a decade. Korean residents in Primorsky Krai began to acquire Russian nationality in 1896, and by 1905 more than 20,000 Koreans became Russian citizens. After the founding of the first Korean school in 1886, nineteen schools opened in 1897 and forty-six in 1916, with nearly 25,000 students.

As many as 172,000 Koreans moved from Joseon to the Maritime Province from 1864 until they were forced to migrate to Central Asia in the autumn of 1937.<sup>7)</sup> These Koreans deported to Central Asia were subject to restrictions on relocation, but after Khrushchev abolished the restrictions in 1956, they started to migrate to regions other than Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and some returned to Primorsky Krai. The migration of Koreans to the province accelerated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Central Asian countries adopted a discriminatory policy in favor of their own people after their independence from the Soviet Union, some of the Koreans scattered across Central Asia began to relocate to the province, home to their ancestors.

The Maritime Province was a region of military significance as the base of the Pacific Fleet during the Soviet Union, and the government used high wages and all sorts of subsidies to induce people west of the Ural Mountains to migrate to east. This policy brought about population increase from 1.6 million in 1926 to 8.1 million in 1991.<sup>8)</sup>

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6) Heon-yong Shim, "The Maritime Province of Russian Far East as Northeast Asian Contact Zone and Korean Diaspora," pp. 125-126.

7) Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva, *Crossing National Borders: Human Migration Issues in Northeast Asia* (Kokusai Shoin Co., Ltd., 2006), p. 43.



However, as the Russian central government could not provide financial support after the demise of the Soviet Union, many Russians left the far east region and their places were taken by workers from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) members, as well as China and Southeast Asia.

According to the mayor of Artyom in 2004, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union foreign investment headed for Primorsky Krai—which had ports—and manufacturing plants, sewing factories and farms were built there. In these plants and factories, local Russians and Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, as well as Koreans, worked. Especially, in Artyom, home to the Vladivostok Airport, as many as eleven sewing factories were constructed and in Primorsky Krai as a whole, twenty-two plants were in operation. The products from sewing factories built with Korean investment were exported to the United States and Europe. But Russian workers' demand for higher wages and low productivity resulting from dereliction—a vestige of the socialist system—led to investors' decision to relocate factories abroad. As a result, no factories remain in the province.

The Maritime Province is also a refuge for those who were ostracized because of nationalism or who escaped troubled regions. In particular, the province has had a close connection with Koreans since a century ago. As mentioned above, ordinary Joseon farmers voluntarily migrated to the region and supplemented workforce shortages. During Japan's colonial occupation of Korea, the province served as an outpost for the independence movement. Since 1945, the year of Korea's liberation, North Korean workers have filled the region's labor shortages. As Joseon laborers were preferred in the area due

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8) *Ibid.*

to vigilance against Chinese a hundred years ago, the inflow of China's capital and workforce is still not welcomed there.

#### 4. Formation of Korean Community in Primorsky Krai and North Korean Workers

Many people of Korean descent<sup>9)</sup> reside in the Maritime Province. It may be a rarity even in the world that people with the same ethnic root but such a different background live in a region that does not belong to their home country. Koreans in Primorsky Krai have a commonality in that they are of Korean heritage, but their communities vary in composition due to different nationalities and cultural experiences, maintaining their own lifestyles.

Lee Aeliah, one of the authors of this study, has had an interest in the province since meeting some Koreans for the first time during a visit to Moscow and St. Petersburg in December 1992. At the time, however, it was impossible for a foreigner to visit the Maritime Province. Afterward, when Lee first stayed in Vladivostok for a week with the members of the East Coast Rim Academic Forum in Kyoto,

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9) "Koreans" here refers to overseas Koreans or Koreans abroad. Although there are terms like "overseas compatriots" or "hanin (another term for Koreans) abroad," migration researchers that include foreigners often feel a sense of alienation towards the term "compatriot," and in Japan, "*hanin*" is mostly used for "new comers," or those who came there after World War II, in distinction from "old comers," or those who arrived there before the war. In this text, "Koreans" encompass not only those who moved abroad before World War II but also current overseas Korean students and even North Korean defectors, broadly referring to all of people from Korea who are residing abroad. (Asakura Toshio, "Introduction," Edited by Asakura Toshio and Ota Shimpei, *Current Situation of Overseas Korean Compatriots: Voices of Themselves and Japanese Researchers* (Seoul: Hakyoun Cultural Publishing Co. 2012), p. 7.).

Japan in March 1995, she felt a different atmosphere from the Central Asian regions. Lee was able to meet some Koreans who had lived there since the Soviet era and Korean Tajikistani who fled to Primorsky Krai because of the Tajikistani Civil War, which started in 1992. As Central Asian countries began to implement policies in favor of their own people in 1995, Koreans there moved to other countries. In 2004, when Lee visited the Maritime Province to expand the scope of her research and survey Korean Central Asians who had migrated to the province, she launched full-scale research on Koreans with different backgrounds there and took an interest in the North Korean worker issue.

Koreans in Primorsky Krai are characterized by the re-assembly of the Korean Diaspora from many regions. Such an assembly in a third nation, as opposed to a home country—as in the case of Israel—is highly unusual.

The province, a region that foreigners were blocked from entering because of its strategic significance for national defense, has been home to various Koreans since the Soviet Union collapsed. The primary characteristic of the Korean society in the region is multi-culture and multi-nationality. Koreans who used to live in societies of different environment, regime and culture are living in distinct communities, and differences in culture, language, and views lead them to scarcely cooperate or interact with one another unless absolutely necessary. Koreans in the province are categorized as the following and each community has latent conflict factors within itself.

- (1) Koreans living there since before the collapse of the Soviet Union

- (2) Koreans who migrated there from CIS member countries after the Soviet collapse
- (3) Koreans from Sakhalin
- (4) North Koreans with Russian permanent residency
- (5) Korean Chinese
- (6) Workers sent from North Korea
- (7) North Korean defectors
- (8) South Koreans
- (9) Korean Americans

It is difficult to count the exact number of Koreans in the Maritime Province, because it is not easy to access its government's data and the figures counted by the government are all different. The differing nationalities of the Koreans there also make it harder to put them into one category. Counting the numbers by nationality is also not feasible. For example, Korean Chinese are Chinese, after all, but if they acquire Russian citizenship, they become Russian. In addition, there are Koreans who have entered Russia as Korean American missionaries and obtained Russian nationality for missionary work, and those who were from South Korea but acquired Russian citizenship for business and other reasons. It is also difficult to take the headcount of North Korean workers in the province and even validate obtained data. We would like to highlight that this study has used the closest available approximation, considering the circumstances we experienced during ten years of fieldwork in the region.

Among the local Koreans of varying cultures and nationalities, the first subjects for this study are those who migrated there to avoid suffering from the ethnocentrism of the CIS nations after the fall of the Soviet Union but have hard time settling down. Surveying

these Korean Russians from Central Asia, we have learned of the situation of North Koreans who have lived in Russia since 1945 and acquired Russian permanent residency, but we could not start an investigation in earnest.

The second task was to inquire about Korean Chinese peddlers or wholesalers bringing commodities to a region which experienced a shortage of daily necessities even before the Soviet collapse, as well as Korean Chinese that grow vegetables and sell them in a market. In the Chinese market in Ussuriysk of Primorsky Krai, an entire fair opens around 11 p.m. every night. Operating as a retail market during the day, it transforms into a wholesale market, where traders come to purchase products from the far east and Sakhalin areas as well as the Maritime Province. Korean Chinese are growing vegetables on their own in the borderland between China and Russia and selling them wholesale or retail in a market.

Photo 1-2. Chinese Market in Ussuriysk (Retail)



Photo 1-3. Chinese Market in Ussuriysk (Wholesale)



Photo 1-4. Vegetable Section of a Chinese Market in Ussuriysk



Although we have experience in surveying Korean Russians and even Korean Chinese, we have never had the opportunity to look into North Koreans that we often encountered in a market or construction site.

Meanwhile, we applied for research funding from the KINU in August 2014 and were granted aid, which allowed us to survey North Korean laborers in Primorsky Krai, although not for long. Lee Aeliah visited the province in September and November 2014, and Lee Chang-ho did so in October 2014, conducting a total of three field surveys.

Interviewees in this study are presented under an alias to protect their identities and all photos, with the exception of those with a source indicated, have been taken by the authors throughout the research.



## II. North Korean Workers in Primorsky Krai: The History and Current Status of the Dispatch

### 1. Dispatch of North Korean Workers to the Maritime Province

Koreans' entry into the Russian Far East dates back to the late Joseon Dynasty, when many people moved there mainly for economic reasons. As the region later served as a base for Korea's independence movement, a lot of independence activists migrated there for political reasons. It was right after the Soviet Union's occupation of North Korea in 1945 that North Korean laborers were first sent to Russia. The Soviet government recruited unemployed North Koreans to be dispatched to the far east and Magadan regions under the condition that it would pay seventy percent higher wages to them than they do to locals. The dispatch of North Korean workers to Russia has been conducted in the following four phases:

- (1) 1945-early 1950s: Dispatch at the Soviet Union's request in order to supplement labor shortages in the far east region
- (2) 1967-early 1990s: Invitation as a part of the Soviet government's policy to prevent North Korea and China from forming a close alliance
- (3) mid-1990s-2007: Gridlock because of the worsening relationship between North Korea and Russia
- (4) 2007-present: Expansion of dispatch throughout Russia, including the far east region

From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, the North Korean authorities aggressively sought to dispatch their workers in order to reduce unemployment.<sup>10)</sup> Between 1947 and 1949, officials sent by the

Soviet government to North Korea recruited and took North Korean workers to their country. At the time, an estimated 20,000 workers arrived and some of them were single and others were with their family. The total number of these workers' family members was almost 5,000.<sup>11)</sup> Until the early 1950s, North Korean laborers sent to the far east region of the Soviet Union mostly worked in the fishing, forestry, wood processing, road construction, and runway building fields in remote areas including Khabarovsk, Sakhalin, and Magadan. Among the workers, lawbreakers and political prisoners that had opposed the trusteeship rule staged protests in the workplace, sometimes causing frictions with local residents. This made the Soviet Union authorities try to send the problematic workers back to North Korea, but a significant number of them reportedly dodged repatriation by escaping to other regions or cohabitating with a Russian or Korean Chinese widow. As the workers caused more troubles, the Soviet government constantly complained to Pyongyang, which led to the dispatch of ordinary workers. From 1953 after the end of the Korean War, North Korea sent South Korean prisoners of war to uranium mines in the far east region. From 1947, a total of 300 Koreans from Central Asia were mobilized in the far east to interpret for North Korean workforce.<sup>12)</sup>

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10) БЕЗИК И.В., "КОРЕЙСКАЯ РАБОЧАЯ СИЛА НА СОВЕТСКОМ ДАЛЕКОМ ВОСТОКЕ(1950-Е ГГ.)," ВЕСТНИК ЦЕНТРА КОРЕЕВЕДЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ ДАЛЬНЕВОСТОЧНОГО ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА, 1(4), 2003, p. 63.

11) Aeliah Lee, "Multinational and Multicultural Koreans Struggling in the Maritime Province," Edited by Asakura Toshio and Ota Shimpei, *Current Situation of Overseas Korean Compatriots: Voices of Themselves and Japanese Researchers* (Seoul: Hakyoun Cultural Publishing Co. 2012), p. 104.

12) БЕЗИК И.В., "КОРЕЙСКАЯ РАБОЧАЯ СИЛА НА СОВЕТСКОМ ДАЛЕКОМ ВОСТОКЕ(1950-Е ГГ.)," p. 68.

Figure 2-1. Map of the Far East Region



\* Source: <<http://politicstory.tistory.com/808>>.

Since few people volunteered to work in the harsh conditions of the far east region, North Korean authorities reportedly sent prisoners in the early days. Encountering a backlash from the Soviet government, however, Pyongyang forcibly sent intellectuals there. Some of the North Koreans who volunteered for the work had once resided in the Maritime Province. They were Korean Russians who fled to North Korea in 1937 when Stalin's regime deported those in Primorsky Krai to Central Asia. After returning to the province, they tried not to be repatriated to North Korea and many of them acquired Soviet citizenship. When the Korean War broke out, those who had not obtained citizenship sought to extend their work contract to avoid returning to North Korea and only after the war

ended did some go back. At the time, North Korean workers are said to have returned home with as much as 100,000 to 250,000 rubles (exchange rate of those days: \$1=4 rubles) per household.<sup>13)</sup>

After the Korean War, there was a ten-year lull in the export of North Korean workers, because a lot of workers were required for the reconstruction of North Korea. The Soviet Union therefore negotiated with China the employment of 3 million young Chinese workers aged between eighteen and thirty-two, but the two nations could not reach an agreement. Moscow wanted to put Chinese workers in the logging projects in the north of the far east region, whereas Beijing hoped its laborers would be deployed near the border under the pretext of managing them. But as the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union was concerned with a potential border dispute between the two countries, negotiations broke down.

In 1957, Pyongyang officially asked Moscow for the repatriation of North Koreans that had been sent to the Maritime Province. This led 15,000 workers to return home. Others who remained were still of North Korean nationality, as a permanent resident of the Soviet Union.<sup>14)</sup> As they frequently visited North Korea during the Soviet era, they received special treatment from the North Korean authorities and maintained a close relationship with the North Korean Consulate in the province. At the time, 10,314 Japanese that had been captured by the Soviet army were also sent to North Korea.<sup>15)</sup>

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13) Aeliah Lee, "Multinational and Multicultural Koreans Struggling in the Maritime Province," pp. 204-205.

14) *Ibid.*

15) БЕЗИК И.В., "КОРЕЙСКАЯ РАБОЧАЯ СИЛА НА СОВЕТСКОМ ДАЛ ЪНЕМ ВОСТОКЕ(1950-Е ГГ.)," p. 65.

In 1959, North Korea launched the project of attracting Korean Japanese to supplement its labor shortages. However, in the mid-1960s when domestic unemployment increased, Pyongyang again sought to send its workers to the USSR. To this end, after Brezhnev, then communist leader of the Soviet Union, and Kim Il-sung, supreme leader of North Korea, met in Vladivostok in May 1966 and agreed on the dispatch of logging workers, 15,000 North Koreans were sent to Khabarovsk. From 1967 to the early 1990s, Moscow deliberately requested the dispatch of North Korean logging laborers with the purpose of preventing the North from politically and economically approaching China and of maintaining its close relationship with North Korea. At the time, the North accepted the request of Moscow so that it could reduce its trade deficit by using extra workforce produced by its slow economic growth as a source of foreign exchange.<sup>16)</sup>

Afterwards, North Korea and the Soviet Union agreed on the expansion of the scope of labor in 1975 and 1977, and North Korean workers started to cut down trees in the deep forest with equipment provided by Soviet firms.<sup>17)</sup> This was the result of Pyongyang's intent to make its workers live away from the locals, fearing that they would be influenced by the revisionism of the USSR. The workers had to observe North Korean laws, rather than local laws, and lived shut off from contact with locals. The working term was limited to three years. Although they lived a hard life in the Soviet Union, once the contract expired they could return home with a lot of home

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16) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, "Analysis of North Korean Labor's Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia," *The Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Seoul: The East Asian Association of International Studies, 2007), p. 68.

17) Interview with Professor Larisa V. Zabrovskaya.

appliances and commodities, which provided them with a rich life in their home country. For this reason, North Koreans are even now trying to be sent to Russia even by offering bribes.

During Kim Il-sung's visit to Moscow in May 1984, the two nations agreed to increase the number of North Korean workers in the far east region to 20,000-30,000. Their salary was paid in rubles, not North Korea's currency, and the amount was around 100 rubles (equivalent about US\$100 at the then-exchange rate). Only married North Koreans with a good background who had membership in the Workers' Party and who did not speak Russian were qualified for the job. Despite the strict criteria, the escape of the logging workers became more frequent from 1980 to the early 1990s. The escapees hid with the help of Korean Russians, or made their way to South Korea, but Pyongyang and the USSR or Russian authorities did not make an issue of it.

## **2. Change in North Korean Workers in the Maritime Province After the Collapse of the USSR (Mid-1990s to 2007)**

Between 1992 and 2007, the number of exported North Korean workers decreased due to the birth of the Russian Federation following the fall of the Soviet Union and the worsened relationship between the two nations. However, after the Arduous March, North Koreans wanted to be dispatched to Russia from the late 1990s. From 1992 to 2003, the workers were sent to Primorsky Krai and Sakhalin, as well as the far east region, working in logging, construction, and farming sites. Considering the frequent escape of logging workers in the 1980s, the North Korean authorities asked Russian firms to deposit the workers' wages into the local account

of their North Korean branch, which managed the workforce, and to pay the money when the workers returned home.

In the late 1990s, there were some 10,000 North Korean workers in Russia, most of whom returned to their home country after the short term of three months. Between 1995 and 1999, the North Korean Consulate in Nakhodka collected a “loyalty fund” of \$200 per worker every month in the name of helping financially challenged people and the total monthly revenue of the consulate exceeded \$200,000. With this money, the consulate purchased food from China and coal and heavy oil from Russia and sent them to its home country. As a consul of the South Korean Consulate in Vladivostok was murdered in October 1996 and the number of illegal North Korean workers increased, the Russian government abolished the no-visa entry of North Koreans.<sup>18)</sup> The North Korean authorities sought to send as many workers as possible to Russia for the acquisition of foreign currency, but Russia’s worsening economy from 1998 dashed their hope.<sup>19)</sup>

Significantly fewer North Korean workers sought to escape from the late 1990s, because they were allowed to do extra work apart from what was specified in the contract. In addition to logging work in complete isolation in the deep forest, they could work many other jobs with local Russians. These workers were under the control of North Korean worker management firms in the contractual relationship with Russian companies. However, they could earn money by doing extra work on weekends or at night, and some even

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18) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, “Analysis of North Korean Labor’s Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia,” p. 59.

19) Aeliah Lee, “Multinational and Multicultural Koreans Struggling in the Maritime Province,” pp. 196-197, 207.

departed from the designated workplace under an agreement with a manager at the management firms, made their personal money and then returned to the workplace before their contract expired.

Meanwhile, Russia placed restrictions on the entry of North Koreans with the revision of migration laws in 1997. Those without a passport, visa, and invitation were not admitted. Even the North Korean workers that legally entered Russia had to register their residence as other foreigners did. At the same time, Russia's economic downturn made it difficult to provide jobs to all North Korean laborers in the far east. Therefore, they hunted for a job on their own, leading to the entrenchment of the practice of bribing managers.

As North Korea and Russia restored their estranged relationship by holding the summit conference in 2000, they started to discuss a variety of economic cooperative measures. In 2000, there were 10,000 North Korean workers registered for farming and 2,000 for construction, and 15,000 logging laborers were registered in Khabarovsk Krai and Amur Oblast around 2000.<sup>20)</sup> In the third North Korea-Russia joint economic committee meeting in October 2000, the two nations agreed on economic cooperation projects in a variety of fields. Specifically, the agenda included collaboration in coal mining, logging, light industry, and transportation, and they reached an agreement on the use of North Korean workforce in the site preparation for the Bureiskaya hydroelectric plant between Amur Oblast and the North and the use of North Korean specialists and laborers in the construction sector.<sup>21)</sup>

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20) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, *Development of the Far Eastern Region in Russia and North Korean Workers* (Seoul: Korean Institute for National Unification, 2012), p. 53.



Photo 2-1. North Korean Passport



\* Source: <www.korea-press-production.com>.

### 3. Recent North Korean Workers in the Maritime Province (2007–Present)

#### A. Contractual Relationship between North Korea and Russia and the Revenue

In a series of intergovernmental meetings in 2004 to 2005, North Korea asked Russia for cooperation in the form of economic aid and Russia requested collaboration in the form of labor supply. In March 2007, the North Korea-Russia joint economic committee meeting, which had been suspended, was resumed and the agenda included how Russia could expand the use of the North Korean workforce. Suffering from a local workforce shortage, Moscow preferred the influx of North Korean labor to block the excessive invasion of Chinese workforce.<sup>22)</sup> As a result, more than 30,000 North

21) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, “Analysis of North Korean Labor’s Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia,” p. 56.

22) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, *Development of the Far Eastern Region in Russia and North Korean Workers* (Seoul: Korean Institute for National Unification, 2012), p. 50.

Korean workers were legally registered before and after 2007.<sup>23)</sup>

After 2007, most North Korean laborers in the Maritime Province worked in the construction industry. In 2010, Japanese news reports said that the North Korean workforce was flowing into the construction sites of western Russia, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. As of 2011, Pyongyang is reportedly sending 70,000 workers (double that of 2006) abroad, including 30,000 workers to Russia, 5,000 to Southeast Asia, 15,000 to the Middle East, and 5,000 to Eastern Europe, using them to earn approximately 100 billion yen (\$1 billion) of foreign currency every year.<sup>24)</sup> North Korea is sending dozens of companies to Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, Sakhalin Island, and Amur Oblast, actively participating in the development projects of the Russian Far East. These firms are mostly working in construction, agriculture, restaurants, and automobile maintenance.

In particular, Pyongyang is dispatching construction workers mainly to the far east region and Siberia.<sup>25)</sup> The workers are sent based on a quota provided by Russia, although it was difficult for us to grasp the exact number. The quota for the Maritime Province in 2014 is known to be 4,700, but as of August 2014, 7,336 North Korean workers are registered in the immigration office of the province. A total quota for foreign laborers in the province is 23,616 but 26,000 foreigners are registered. More foreigners, as well as North Korean workers, are registered than the total quota for them (see Appendix).

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23) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, "Analysis of North Korean Labor's Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia," p. 57.

24) *Chunich Newspaper*, August 1, 2011.

25) Yeoung-hyeong Lee, "Analysis of North Korean Labor's Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia," p. 57.

In the Memorandum of Understanding between the two nations for the dispatch of laborers signed in October 4, 2012, North Korea requested a quota of 33,000, and a contract at the time says that the number of North Korean workers in the Russian territory amounted to 32,858 in 2013. Therefore, it would be reasonable to presume that more than 30,000 already stayed in Russia in 2013. The workers are supposed to enter Russia under a five-year contract, apply for the contract extension six months before the expiration of their visa, and immediately leave the country if they do not apply for the extension.

Table 2-1. Numbers of North Korean Workers in Russia

Year	Number of North Korean Workers in Russia
2011 (March 30, 2011)	32,000
2012	45,000
2014	53,000

\* Source: Report of the Russian newspaper The Far East (Газета «Дальний Восток»).

The Russian authorities receive \$650 as a commission for one person. It is common practice that each North Korean agency finds a local Russian partner, signs a contract with the partner, obtains visas after the receipt of an invitation, and sends workers to Russia. As seen in Table 2-2, the workers belong to different agencies.

Table 2-2. List of North Korean Firms in the Maritime Province (As of 2013)

No.	Name of Firm	Note
1	Korea Rungrado General Trading Corporation – Vladivostok	
2	Korea General Zinc Industry Group	
3	Korea General Corporation for External Construction (GENCO)	
4	Chonggyechon Technology Trading Corporation	
5	Korea Cholsan General Trading Corporation	
6	Ministry of Land and Maritime Transportation, Geukdong General Shipping Corporation	Ocean Shipping
7	Ryungsong Trading Corporation	
8	Hassan branch of GENCO	
9	Namgang Trading Corporation	National Security Agency
10	Seonggong External Construction Office	
11	Ministry of Forestry, Far East Forestry Agency	
12	Rakwon General Trading Corporation	
13	Korea Science Corporation	
14	Korea General Petroleum United Corporation	
15	Korea Ferrous Metals Export & Import Corporation	
16	Ministry of Fisheries	
17	Technology Development Corporation	
18	Ryonghong Economic Corporation	
19	Korea Songsan Economic and Trading Group	
20	Green Pine Associated Corporation	

The conditions that Russia demanded for North Korean workers can be found in the full agreement (see Appendix) between the two countries on the employment of workers signed on August 31, 2007. The third article says that a dispatched worker should be more than 18 years old and a medical certificate should be provided that the workers does not have AIDS, drug addiction, and infectious diseases. The seventh article states that in case of industrial disasters or accidents, the worker is subject to the laws of the country of his/her nationality (North Korea) and shall observe the public holidays of

North Korea, not Russia. The tenth article says that if the worker dies in his/her workplace, the employer should provide notice of death to the North Korean Consulate, submit a death certificate, and cover all the expenses for transporting the dead body to North Korea. In addition, it should return the personal property of the dead worker to North Korea and pay consolatory compensation to his/her family. The eleventh article states that rubles can be changed into dollars and vice versa unless it is against law. Table 2-3 below shows the full contract

Table 2-3. Agreement between North Korea and Russia on the Employment of Workers

RAY STORY Co. – Contractor – Representative ○○○

GENCO Overseas Construction – Employer – Representative ○○○- Company that provides workers

- Contract term: Five years
- Responsibilities of the Contractor: Supply of experienced workers and provision of medical insurance and social security
- Responsibilities of the Contractor:
  - (1) Prior notice of the number of necessary workers to the Employer
  - (2) Preparation of documents related to the employment of workers
- Contract amendment or termination
- Problem solving: Problems should be solved through a court if the solution cannot be found in the contract
- The Russian and North Korean versions of the contract have the equal force.

Seonggong Co. – Contractor – Representative ○○○

(GENCO) Employer – Representative ○○○- Company that provides workers

- Contract term : Five years
- Responsibilities of the Employer: Supply of experienced workers and provision of medical insurance and social security
- Responsibilities of the Contractor:
  - (1) Prior notice of the number of necessary workers to the Employer
  - (2) Preparation of documents related to the employment of workers
- Problem solving: Problems should be solved through a court if the solution cannot be found in the contract
- The Russian and North Korean versions of the contract have the equal force.

Pension Fund of the Russian Federation – Shkotovo, Artyomand Primorsky Krai

As a result of the revision of the federation law in December 3, 2011, foreign workers must pay pension fund from January 1, 2012 (except for highly qualified experts).

The Russian government considers that there is no basis for the exemption of foreign workers from pension fund.

**Agreement between the Russian Federation and the North Korean Government on the Temporary Employment of Citizens of Both Nations**

- A worker should be 18 years old or older and have a medical certificate proving that he/she does not have AIDS, drug addiction, or infectious disease.
- The worker should take public holidays of the country of his/her nationality and the provision on holidays should be included in the contract.
- Medical service
- The contract provisions for medical workers shall not be regulated by the laws of a nation that accepts the workers.
- Workers that serve at the request of Russian medical institutions shall have the right to receive free healthcare service for accidents, addictions, injuries, and acute diseases that threaten a patient's life or health, including childbirth.
- Other medical services shall be provided under the law of the nation that accepts the worker and the international contract, and the worker may pay himself/herself depending on the contract conditions.
- In case of a worker's death, the Employer should pay for the transportation of the body, return the personal property of the deceased worker to North Korea, and provide consolatory payment (compensation) to the worker's family.
- In case of a worker's death, the Contractor should report the death to the North Korean embassy (consulate) in Russia within three days of the death. The Contractor should submit a death certificate (death notification) to an agency that the worker belongs to.
- The worker may purchase foreign currency under the law of the country that he/she stays in and take the currency home when returning to his/her country.
- The taxation on the income of the worker shall be subject to the agreement with respect to taxes on income and capital signed by the Russian Federation and North Korean government to avoid double taxation.
- The worker should leave the nation in which he/she has worked on expiration of his/her visa.
- Contract - The contract term is five years and, after five years, automatically extended by one year. In case of termination, both parties should notify each other six months before the termination.
- The agreement is written in Moscow, Russia on August 31, 2007.

North Korean workers have to pay a thirteen percent income tax for their total earnings. Of the thirteen percent tax, sixty-five percent is collected by the city and thirty-five percent by the state and the federation. In addition to an income tax, they should pay social

security insurance. The annual income of average North Korean construction workers, after deduction of the tax and social security insurance, is anywhere from \$200 to \$3,000, whether they work in a public or private workplace. The representatives or managers (including site managers), however, annually earn \$50,000 to \$100,000, including bribes from the workers and incomes from private workshops. It is common for them to drive a Toyota Land Cruiser (used cars sell at \$60,000 to \$70,000), the epitome of luxury cars in the region.

Figure 2-2. Advancement of North Korean Construction Companies in Russia in 2013



\* Region names (estimated number of construction companies).

Meanwhile, it is reported that late disbursement of wages often occurs. If Russian firms do not pay construction costs, North Korean worker management companies cannot pay their laborers. For example, in 2010 a North Korean management company entered into a contract with a Russian construction firm (Crocus) to participate in the development of Russky Island in Vladivostok,

which was to hold the APEC summit, but the company withdrew the following year because it could not receive wages for its three-hundred workers. This caused the workers to lose one year without receiving any money from their company, but no one took responsibility for that. North Korean workers or management companies sometimes hire local mafia to demand full payment of overdue wages, but in this case the commission is known to account for half of the sum of the wages.

Table 2-4. Number of Foreigners in the Maritime Province (As of 2013)  
(unit: person)

Country/ Nationality	Number of Foreigners Registered in the Immigration Office	Others									
		Perma- nent Resi- den- cy	Foreign- ers Allow- ed for Tempo- rary Stay	Sojour- ner	Purpose of Stay						
					Private	Busi- ness	Tour	Stu- dy	Work	Hum- ani- tarian	Oth- ers
China	17,531	118	9	17,404	287	5,178	5,107	759	6,003	62	8
North Korea	4,778	3	1	4,774	53	15	11	30	4,524	-	141
South Korea	1,170	170	40	960	37	262	417	106	109	25	4
Moldova	363	19	49	295	247	10	2	3	33	-	-
USA	244	15	2	227	24	42	48	17	13	83	-
Tajikistan	3,539	53	404	3,082	2,226	102	1	51	702	-	-
Turkey	373	3	-	370	34	100	7	-	229	-	-
Uzbekistan	39,811	370	2,277	37,164	29,564	1,576	38	52	5,925	1	8
Ukraine	2,582	225	358	1,999	1,054	52	7	14	871	-	1
Japan	365	5	2	358	33	65	152	75	19	10	4
Others	1,251	57	40	1,154	194	371	346	55	146	38	4
Stateless	280	103	76	101	74	21	5	-	-		1

\* Source: Report of the Russian newspaper *The Far East* (Газета «Дальний Восток»)



North Korean workers are prohibited from contacting South Koreans, as well as Russians. Only site managers and interpreters are allowed to contact with the outside world. The workers, with a few exceptions, must participate in a review meeting held in the company's dormitory every Saturday night.

When asked "why did you come here despite all the suffering?" an old North Korean worker that we encountered during the field survey replied, "I cannot get my hands on even \$1 in the North, but here I can send home \$10 or \$100." Hearing this remark, we came to reconsider whether demanding an end to the dispatch of workers over human rights abuse would actually help their human rights concerns.

### *B. Stay and Working Process of North Korean Workers*

#### (1) Entrance to Russia

The transportation available from North Korea to Russia includes flight and train. The transportation expense is paid by a worker. North Korean workers enter or leave Russia via the Ussuriysk Station or Vladivostok Airport. In case of a flight from Sakhalin to Pyongyang via Vladivostok, they arrive at the airport Thursday night, sit up all night, and then return home by flying a flight at 2:45 p.m. Friday. Those who use a train first move from the airport to the Ussuriysk Station, wait for anywhere from five to thirty hours, and then depart for Hassan.

Photo 2-2. North Korean Workers Entering Russia (Vladivostok International Airport)



Air Koryo planes arrive at the Vladivostok Airport every Monday and Friday. When we went into the baggage claim to see North Korean workers arriving at the airport, they dressed in a variety of clothing, including plain clothes, suits, and dress shirts matched with trousers. They also carried their luggage in a variety of cases, such as suitcases and plastic bags, depending on their circumstances. They all wore a badge with Kim Il-sung's face or both his and his son Kim Jong-il's faces.

North Korean laborers are prohibited from reading South Korean newspapers or magazines, as well as having a dialogue with South

Koreans at a train station or airport. They are not allowed to read even *Koryo Newspaper* published in Korean, because it contains articles on the South.

Photo 2-3. First Issue of *Koryo Newspaper*



The workers travel to their management company from the airport building, following a person in charge. If a high-ranking official comes from North Korea, he is first led to his accommodation. After that, the workers are brought to their company by car.

Photo 2-4. North Korean Workers Gathering outside the Airport after Entering Russia (Vladivostok Airport)



Recently, North Korean officials have stayed at Hotel Primorye in downtown Vladivostok. It is a small-scale hotel with a price range of \$130 to \$150 per night.

Photo 2-5. Hotel Primorye with a North Korean Consulate Car Parked in Front



## (2) Stay and Working Process

According to an information consul of a certain country's Consulate General, North Korean workers mostly work in aquaculture, fish processing, vegetable farming, and construction fields. In construction sites, they are mobilized in bricklaying, cement dumping, and painting. Apart from construction, the second largest group of North Koreans is employed in restaurants.

Pyongyang Restaurant, the most popular North Korean restaurant in Vladivostok, offers only a meal for lunch and, as with other North Korean restaurants, a meal and performance for dinner. When a

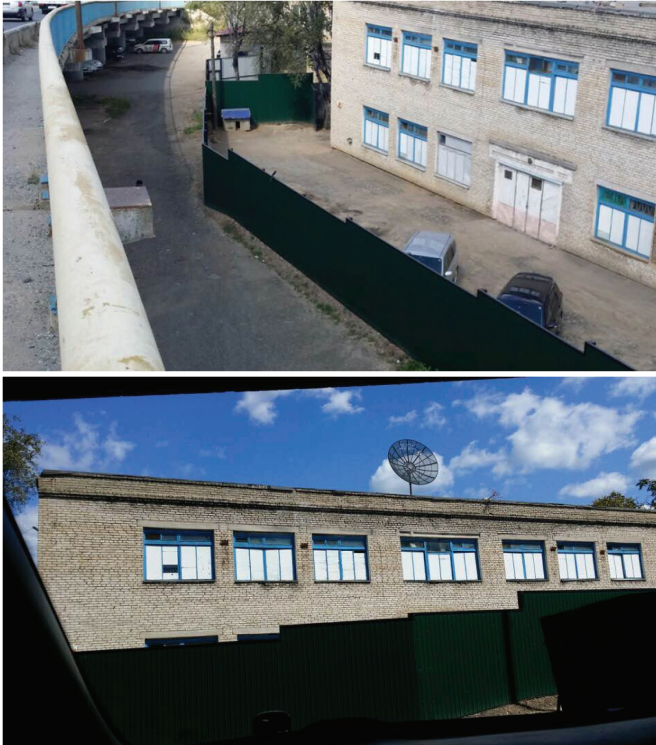
restaurant becomes settled to some degree, it often opens branches. Currently, Moranbong and Geumgangsang are Pyongyang's sister restaurants. Their cooks are all from Pyongyang Restaurant. The North Korean Consulate is reportedly discussing the opening of a restaurant in Artyom City, which has an airport, with the city's international department. Pyongyang Restaurant is frequented mostly by North Korean laborers, and by the staff of the nearby Japanese Consulate. The manager of the restaurant is a female who has been living there for ten years with her husband in the trading business. Some other workers hold an exhibition of North Korean products to earn foreign currency.

Photo 2-6. Poster of North Korean Product Exhibition (Top) and Embroideries on Display (Below)



It is said that, when accounting for transportation costs, visa commission, and food expenses at a dormitory, North Korean workers go into a debt of some \$1,000 even before they depart from the North. They were required to pay a monthly planned quota of \$130 to their country until 2005, and the amount rose to 30,000 rubles (\$1,000 at the exchange rate at the time) in 2011. This made them focus on paying the debt for a few first months after arrival in Russia. Few of the workers are experienced, and most of them are unskilled that only can participate in operation after learning from their predecessors. The laborers also prefer simple tasks that allow them to earn money without special skills.

Photo 2-7. Accommodation of Namgang Corporation's Workers (Artyom)



It is not clear from when North Korean workers had to pay a monthly planned quota to their management company. All that is known is that the Consulate General started to collect a \$200 per capita “loyalty payment” from the workers in an effort to help countrymen when numerous people starved to death in the North between 1995 and 1997. At the time, \$200,000 was collected every month in the Maritime Province alone. The fund was used to purchase food from China and heavy oil and coal from Russia to be sent to the North, which is probably the beginning of the planned quota system.

This quota began to rise piecemeal from 2005, approaching \$300 per month in 2009. A construction worker who escaped to South Korea in 2011 testified that the amount ran to 30,000 rubles (equivalent to \$1,000, \$1=30 rubles). The worker added that he, as a team leader (also called “platoon commander”) of some twenty workers, had once earned up to \$3,000 to \$5,000 per month even after paying the quota.

The quota seems to vary in amount and payment system by company. There was a case in which a company with a lack of work in winter had its laborers pay a larger amount from March to October and a smaller amount from November to February. Some firms have their employees pay once a month and others have their workers pay at a review meeting held every week. Sometimes at the meeting they encourage competition between workers by calling the roll of those who have paid the quota.

Most workers carry their money with them, which often causes them to be robbed by Russian muggers and North Korean colleagues. A worker who escaped from the Maritime Territory stated that he had managed his money by burying in several places, and another

defector said he had carried money in his tool bag.

A platoon commander who we saw at the construction site of a South Korean missionary's church in November 2014 had been a painter but came to the Maritime Province after studying architecture at a school. He said that he had arrived in the province with dentures after pulling out all his teeth in the North and that he was now struggling because he had discarded the dentures with food waste by mistake. As the arduous work had forced him to drink a little alcohol to fall asleep and the amount of alcohol had gradually grown, he had now become an alcoholic that needed to drink even during day. He complained that he could not attend his child's wedding and see his grandchild. Saying that it was very hard for him to carry heavy tools with him to the distant workplace because he did not own a car, he beamed showing us a photo of his daughter and son-in-law. Although he lamented that he had only sent wedding expenses to his daughter instead of attending the ceremony last October, he boasted that his son-in-law was a member of the Workers' Party. The South Korean missionary testified that he hated the platoon commander for spending days drinking without doing any work but taking so much money.

The photos below show the church construction site. A family home was being converted into a church building, and a warehouse at the rear of the house was being used as an accommodation for workers. The North Korean workers there were hired not directly by the missionary but by a local Korean Russian who directed the building project.

We also met three North Korean laborers at the construction site for a family house of some South Koreans. One of them, who had



stayed working in the province since 1998, was living at the site instead of returning to his dormitory. Another worker, who had come to Primorsky Krai after seven years of waiting, complained that although he was contributing more than \$10,000 to his home country every year he could not send even \$1,000 to his family, adding that he had not realized the contradictions in North Korean society until he arrived in the province. He was so critical of the North that we were concerned that other workers might inform on him. We still have a vivid recollection of an old laborer who had managed to come to the province after seven years of falling victim to cheats and who shed tears, saying that he felt sorry for his wife for raising money by selling household goods.

Photo 2-8. Church under Construction for a South Korean Missionary



Photo 2-9. Workers Carrying Their Tools



The worker said his wish was to leave \$2,000 for his family. Aware that in case of a worker's death, colleagues chip in \$20-\$30 each to raise \$2,000 for his family, he hoped he could be a beneficiary of the system. However, after realizing \$1,000 of the money is used for a funeral there, he bleated that he would not die for \$1,000. We wondered if it is right to take away a job from a man like him over human rights infringement.

Photo 2-10. Inside and Outside of Workers' Accommodations within the Construction Site



Many North Korean laborers work part-time. After toiling from morning till evening, they do additional work from 5 p.m. to midnight. New workforce (dispatched this year) and old workforce (who have worked there for more than one year) work together in such a way that after setting a price for the whole project, rather than being paid daily, a number of workers participate in the project all at once to finish the work as soon as possible. The daily pay was 2,300 rubles in 2013, and some workers earned up to 5,500 rubles a day in November 2014.

Some of North Korean workers commuted from their dormitory to the workplace, whereas others resided in the workplace. Although the workshop hardly provided access to running water and the workers suffered the inconvenience of not being able to wash themselves, they could use as much electricity as they wanted. Accidents often occurred in which workers died while sleeping with a heater or generator on. A local Russian newspaper once reported that a North Korean laborer had died because of carbon monoxide poisoning while sleeping at the construction site with a heater turned on. Although the agreement between the Russian and North Korean authorities states that, in case of a worker's death the employer should pay for the funeral, the provision does not seem to apply to the deceased at a part-time workplace since the dead laborer is considered to have worked illegally.

Photo 2-11. North Korean Laborers Working at a Construction Site in Russia



Part-time jobs were found by North Korean workers themselves or interpreters sell them to a platoon commander. Even though interpreters were supposed to bring jobs, they would sell them to workers. The workers preferred jobs that do not require special skills, such as plastering, tiling, and apartment or restaurant repair, to those that require expertise, including electrical work, plumbing, logging, and roadwork.

It was recognized that North Korean laborers finish work more

quickly than their Russian counterparts. Despite no difference in the daily wages of the two groups, North Koreans completed in a week work that would take Russians a month to finish. North Korean workers pay taxes when they work as employees of a company, and do not as a part-timer.

The workers were more popular than Russians or people from other countries. Russian laborers never work outside business hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) or on weekends, while Chinese and Vietnamese never pull an all-nighter. North Koreans, though, live at the workplace, work late into the night, and finish their job more quickly than they are supposed to. That is of mutual benefit for the workers and the employer in that the former can find a new job after finishing their work quickly and the latter can complete the project more quickly than previously estimated.

Photo 2-12. North Korean Workers that Died of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in Winter While Sleeping with a Generator on



\* Source: <<http://www.s125.ru>>.

For example, for the bathroom repair of a church in Artyom City, a Russian contractor estimated 80,000 rubles (\$3,000) a month. In contrast, Namgang Corporation, which hired former-soldier North Koreans, signed on for the same price and a week. The platoon commander and four skilled workers that he had brought the first day worked for two days, and two of them for a few days. On the last day only one showed up and completed the job. The client was satisfied that he did not have to be inconvenienced for a month, and the workers were also happy that they did not have to pay tax while earning 80,000 rubles in a week.

Photo 2-13. Front View of the Church Repaired by North Korean Workers and Inside of the Bathroom



According to the international department of Artyom City, 1,006 North Korean workers entered the city by August 2014, much more than the 378 Chinese.

Two North Koreans were working at a construction site in Artyom. They had agreed to work 12 hours a day, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.,

for a month. They, however, were living at the site. Although they said they ate lunch delivered from their accommodations and had dinner there, they were occasionally seen working late into the night at the site with lights on.

Realizing that the senior researcher in charge of this study was South Korean, they obstinately refused an interview. However, the interview was arranged thanks to a city official as a mediator. We gave them instant soybean paste soup, furikake (seasoning meant to be sprinkled on top of cooked rice) made of salmon, and South Korean laver, all of which we had brought from Japan. They thanked us saying the foods were delicious. Reminded of South Korean workers that had to live in a foreign country for several years, including soldiers dispatched to Vietnam in the 1960s and workers in the Middle East in the 1970s, we thought that we could understand the tough lives of North Korean laborers.

As inter-Korean relations became strained after the Lee Myung-bak government took office in the South, North Korean workers were strictly prohibited from contacting South Koreans. This made South Korean businessmen use brokers to hire North Korean workers. The brokers were mostly Korean-speaking Korean Russians, and they often embezzled money between the two parties. In such cases, the workers usually commissioned Russian mafia to receive overdue wages by paying the gangsters half of the money, as mentioned above.

Meanwhile, according to a customs official in Vladivostok, it is illegal for the workers to have a job of their own. It infringes the terms of the visa issued based on an invitation of the company with which they signed after entering Russia. Since they worked illegally, they

have to use the mafia to receive the unpaid wages instead of reporting to the police or a Russian government agency.

### (3) Remittance and Returning Home

North Korean workers are allowed to carry a maximum of \$10,000 when returning to their home country. A larger amount must be declared. Since in case of declaration, customs officials tend to pry into the source of the money and the tax payment, few workers do this. At first they threw their luggage or belongings to the North Korean territory from Russia before crossing the border and then picked it up after passing through customs, but some people, having become aware of the practice, would take the workers' effects. This made workers swallow their money wrapped in vinyl to go through customs, but the officials in Hassan, informed of the trick, force-fed the laborers purgatives to confiscate the hidden money. As a result, North Korean workers have adopted another approach of sending money to their family frequently via officials or colleagues on their way home.

Larisa V. Zabrovskaya, a senior researcher at the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Peoples of the Far East in Vladivostok, stated that although it was known that the families of North Korean workers were paid monthly as long as the laborers worked in the Maritime Province, her inquiry with them revealed that the families do not receive a cent unless the workers make a remittance. Shops for payment in foreign currency in North Korea accept rubles as well as dollars and euros, but the workers always either convert rubles into dollars or purchase food, clothes, or electronic goods in Russia and carry them home. These items are again sold to others in North Korea or used as a bribe to leave



the country for work. Though the Russian customs authorities stipulate that those departing with a lot of goods should declare, North Korean workers commonly bribe officials to let them pass through customs without declaration. They seem pitiful as they have been suffering from the tyranny of the officials since the Soviet era.

### III. North Korean Workers' Living Conditions and Human Rights

#### 1. Raising Issues Regarding North Korean Overseas Workers' "Human Rights"

This chapter aims to describe the daily lives of North Korean workers<sup>26)</sup> dispatched to the Maritime Province of Russia in their own point of view. Previous studies have presented the migration of North Korean workers by taking only a political approach, especially in terms of capitalism. This approach, however, would lead to the conclusion that the collapse of the North Korean regime is the premise for Korean reunification. Therefore, in order to achieve a soft landing in Korean reunification, it is necessary to have more comprehensive, multifaceted approaches to understanding North Korean workers' migration by relating it to "international migration," and their human rights based on the concept of difference,<sup>27)</sup> not a generally shared one.

Table 3-1. Types of Migration

Criteria	Types of migration
Spatial	Internal migration
	International migration
Temporal	Temporary migration (ex. temporary contract workers, seasonal workers, and circular migrant workers)
	Permanent migration
Causal	Voluntary migration (ex. migrant workers, marriage migrants, student migrants,

26) North Korean workers usually call themselves as "laborers," but after they migrate to Russia they often call themselves "workers."

27) Terence Turner, "Human Rights, Human Difference: Anthropology's Contribution to an Emancipatory Cultural Politics," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (University of New Mexico, 1997), pp. 285-287.

Criteria	Types of migration
	and retired migrants)
	Involuntary or forced migration (ex.slavery, indentured laborers, asylum-seekers or refugees, internally displaced persons, and human trafficking)
Scale	Individual migration
	Mass or collective migration

\* Source: Jae-Gak Jeong, *Theory of Migration Policy* (Seoul: Ingansarang, 2010), pp. 49-50; Han-jin Um, *Sociology of Multiculturalism* (Seoul: Sohwa, 2011), p. 42.

As seen in Table 3-1, the migration of North Korean workers to Russia can be considered “international migration” in terms of geography and “temporary migration” in terms of temporal criteria. The causal criteria is rather disputable concerning the issue of human rights; according to the United Nations and the U.S. Department of State, it is involuntary or forced migration and slavery, but based on the data acquired from on-site research, including interviews, it is voluntary migration. But an in-depth investigation into their voluntariness is still necessary. In terms of scale, it can be classified as mass or collective migration rather than individual one. The number of North Korean workers overseas is estimated at 52,300-53,100 as of 2014 and they are reported to earn \$1.2-2.3 billion<sup>28)</sup> (1.3-2.6 trillion won) per year.<sup>29)</sup> But it seems that the actual number of North Korean workers dispatched overseas is two or three times bigger than this.

28) Song estimates 60,000-65,000 North Korean workers have been sent abroad and the North Korean government collects \$150-\$230 million from their forced overseas labor. Bong-seon Song, “The Prolongation of Kim Jong Un through Hard Currency,” *Monthly North Korea*, October. (Institute of North Korea Studies: Seoul, 2012), p. 75.

29) Chang-hoon Shin and Myong-hyun Go, *Beyond the UN COI REPORT on Human Rights in DPRK* (The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2014), pp. 21-30.

There have been several articles and reports regarding North Korean laborers in Russia. Lee (2007, 2012)<sup>30)</sup> relates North Korean workers to the development of the Russian Far East. The North Korea Strategy Center and Korea Policy Research Center (2012)<sup>31)</sup> shed light on the working and living conditions of North Korean overseas workers based on interviews with those who had been dispatched to labor in foreign countries. Shin and Go (2014) further examine the human rights situation of North Korean overseas workers beyond the investigation of the COI (the UN Commission of Inquiry) on Human Rights in North Korea.<sup>32)</sup> The US Department of State also deals with the status of North Korean workers sent abroad in its “Trafficking in Persons Report” in 2014.

Shin and Go (2014) identify North Korea’s human rights violations of its overseas workers as delaying payment of wages, inhumane working conditions and forced separation from family members during contract terms. The critical findings of the report are as below:

- North Korea’s labor export is organized, managed, and overseen as a matter of state policy.
- Work hours range between twelve and sixteen hours a day. Due to excessive workloads, they often sleep for only four hours

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30) See Yeoung-hyeong Lee, “Analysis of North Korean Labor’s Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia,” and *Development of the Far Eastern Region in Russia and North Korean Workers* (Seoul: Korean Institute for National Unification, 2012).

31) North Korea Strategy Center and Korea Policy Research Center, *The Conditions of the North Korean Overseas Labor* (Seoul: North Korea Strategy Center and Korea Policy Research Center, 2012).

32) Chang-Hoon Shin and Myong-Hyun Go, *Beyond the UN COI REPORT on Human Rights in DPRK*.

- a day.
- Overseas workers are subject to constant surveillance by North Korean security agents, who are embedded with the workers.
  - The average wage is \$120-\$150 a month, as stipulated by the North Korean government's regulations. Workers are not paid directly by their foreign employers, who pay higher amounts to the North.
  - Individual workers have a labor agreement of three years in average, during which they are not allowed to visit the North. They have no vacations, but one or two rest days a month.
  - The wages for North Korean overseas workers are not sent back as remittances, but transferred back to North Korea in the form of cash, which is a clear violation of UN sanctions.

The US Department of State also reports human rights violations of the North Korean overseas workers as below:

“... Many North Korean workers under these contracts are subjected to forced labor. Their movement and communications are conducted under surveillance and restricted by North Korean government “minders.” North Koreans sent overseas do not have a choice in the work the government assigns them and are not free to change jobs. These workers face threats of government reprisals against them or their relatives in North Korea if they attempt escape or complain to outside parties. Workers’ salaries are deposited into accounts controlled by the North Korean government, which keeps most of the money, claiming various “voluntary” contributions to government endeavors. ... Workers receive only a fraction of the money paid to the North Korean government for their work. Thousands of North Korean workers are estimated to be employed in logging, construction, and agriculture industries in Russia’s far east,

where they reportedly have only two days of rest per year and face punishments if they fail to meet production targets. Wages of some North Korean workers employed in Russia reportedly are withheld until the laborers return home.”

As seen above, most reports regarding human rights and human trafficking are based on universal legal regulations and these formal, legal terms are not efficient to elaborate North Korean workers’ awareness and experiences in detail. Therefore, it is necessary to review and analyze their human rights in the context of their daily life. This chapter focuses on examining the daily life and working process of North Korean workers dispatched overseas through the interviews with North Korean defectors who worked in Russia, workshops operated by professionals and investigations carried out over the areas of Vladivostok, Ussuriysk and Artyom.

## **2. The Process of Dispatching North Korean Laborers and Working System**

The North Korean government is exporting its labor workers to many countries where they have diplomatic relations, including Russia, China, Mongolia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Angola, Poland, Oman, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Algeria, Guinea, and Ethiopia. Among them, North Korean workers prefer Russia as their destination. Countries like China, with many industrial districts, are not popular and considered “a cheap place” or “women’s place” because they have to live off only their wages. Neither are the countries in the Middle East because it is rumored that many workers who worked in the area became ill and died due to the extreme climate.

Researcher: What is the order? I mean, which country is the most popular among workers? I heard Russia is the first and then the Middle East.

A: Russia is... kind of popular with us laboring workers. It's not "popularity" people say, but to manual laborers like us, it was popular.

Researcher: You're saying that you can make a lot of money there...

A: Yes, I mean, because we try to make some money by going abroad.

Researcher: You can earn extra money besides your wages there.

A: Right. That was why Russia was popular with laboring workers. But now, they're not that interested in going to Russia. I mean, these days...

Researcher: I found that workers are paid monthly wages in countries like Qatar, right?

A: Yes. ... But we don't like to go to the Middle East because there are many who got diseases and died. ... I'm not sure if they died or got sick because of the climate there. But I heard it is because of the weather conditions there... Anyway, many of those who had worked there died one or two years later. Then why should I choose such a country even though money (is important)... You don't have to risk your life. Few people try to go there.

Researcher: Then, what about comparing China with Russia?

A: I don't think there are opportunities for construction work in China. China is... we have to think about income versus expenses. The ratio of income to expenses in China is different from that of Russia. Because you don't get paid much when you work in China...

North Korea first began to dispatch a significant number of laborers to Russia in 1967. 3,500 logging workers were sent to Russia under a “Forestry Agreement” between the two countries.<sup>33)</sup> The occupations of the workers sent to Russia vary from loggers to construction workers to miners to agricultural workers to fishery workers. Among them, most are loggers, and they have been regulated by the “Management Department for Jaesso” under the Ministry of Forestry in each region of the North. Construction workers, who account for most of those sent to the Maritime Province of Siberia, were managed by External Construction Office in each Province until 2009.<sup>34)</sup> Some of the construction workers are from the 7<sup>th</sup> Bureau of People’s Guards and assigned to work for special construction projects such as building villas.

Most construction workers sent to Russia are from Pyongyang, accounting for eighty-five to ninety percent of the total migrant workers there. Workers sent to the Maritime Province of Siberia through the External Construction Office before 2009 are known to have worked as technicians in a factory after serving in the military and then made all possible efforts, including bribery, to be assigned to External Construction offices in each province, where they would find opportunities to be sent abroad. According to a worker who used to be assigned to the External Construction Office under the Ministry of Urban Management and then dispatched to the Maritime Province, companies that made an agreement with the Russia government (dubbed *jinjaya*) belonged to the office and there were two companies back in 1998.<sup>35)</sup> There are two types of agreements:

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33) Won-woong Lee, “North Korean Overseas Workers, What Is Their Life Like?,” *The Unified Korea*, Vol. 12 (The Institute for Peace Affairs, 2013).

34) It is reported that each office has been integrated into Korea External Construction Administration since 2009.



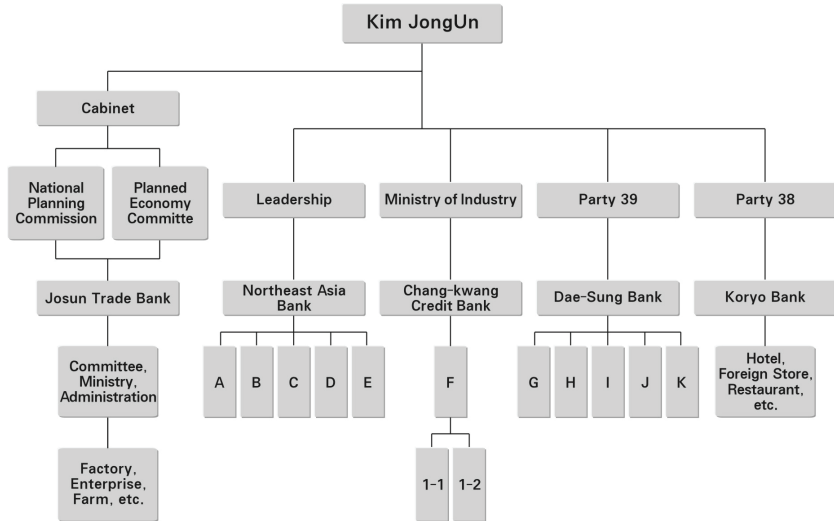
between North Korea and Russian local governments and between North Korea and Russian private companies. While workers were usually sent to work as loggers in Amur Province and Khabarovsk Province, most workers sent to the Maritime Province are construction workers, including concrete workers, plasterers, stonemasons, carpenters, plumbers, engineers, etc.

While workers are employed in an office under the Ministry of Urban Management, they can be sent to Russia when there are occasions to replace workers. Since they never know how many years the dispatch will take place while waiting for their turn, workers try to “pull the strings” or pay bribes. They have to bribe several people involved, and it takes more than \$100 in total. North Korean workers often sell their houses or borrow money to offer bribes.

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35) Recently there are such companies in many regions of Russia including Moscow besides Vladivostok and Nakhodka.

Figure 3-1. North Korea's Hard Currency Structure



- A. Korea National Insurance Corp.  
 B. 2 Administration  
 C. 727 Administration  
 D. Capital Office  
 E. Jo-sun Gardening Corp.  
 F. 2 Economic Commission  
 G. Dae-Sung General Bureau  
 H. Kyung-heung Administration  
 I. Nak-one Administration  
 J. Kum-gang Administration  
 K. Dae-heung Administration  
 1-1. International Economic Administration  
 1-2. United Trade Corp.

\* Source: North Korea Strategy Center and Korea Policy Research Center, *The Conditions of the North Korean Overseas Labor*, p. 16.

### A. North Korean Workers' Length of Stay in Russia

Once confirmed to be dispatched overseas, North Korean workers leave for Russia. They usually receive a five-year visa from the Russian government.<sup>36)</sup> However, after three years of working, the workers are assessed to determine whether they will stay longer in Russia or return to the North. The assessment is carried out because

<sup>36)</sup> Unlike ordinary construction workers, those who belong to Korea People's Guard return to the North in three years and they are not allowed to visa extensions.

of the late Kim Il-sung's instructions. Before he died, Kim instructed, "Three years is enough for overseas workers." To keep his directions, the North Korea government fixed the length of stay overseas to basically three years. But a source reports workers are often allowed to stay two more years by offering bribes to North Korean managers in Russia.

Table 3-2. North Korean Workers in Russia

Types of occupation		No. of workers		First immigration permission and the period	Working area
		① T/O Statistics of Immigration Office of Russia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Latest year of immigration permission)	② Estimated no. of workers (by FSR)		
1	Logger	13,700 (2010)	15,790	Brezhnev (1972) <sup>37)</sup>	5 towns in Khabarovsk, including Tynda and Chegdomyn
2	Construction worker	1,500 (Mar. 2011)	1,880	Andropov (1983)	Russia (Especially APEC construction site)
3	Miner	1,100 (2001)	970	Khrushchev (1954)	Chukotka, Magadan, Kamchatka and Sakha Republic
4	Agricultural worker	550 (2009)	540	Khrushchev (1963)	The Maritime Province and the Black Sea areas including Krasnodar and Rostov
5	Fishery worker	150 (2010)	150	Brezhnev (1979)	The Arctic areas including Bering Sea and Okhotsk Sea
6	Wandering laborer	0 (N/A)	1,090	After the establishment of diplomatic ties between North Korea-Russia	Distribute medicinal ingredients such as wild ginseng, musk and bear gallbladder and super notes
Total		17,000 (T/O)	20,420		

\* Source: Unpublished workshop data book of this project (October 31, 2014).<sup>38)</sup>

37) Generally, 1967 is considered the starting year, but this table sees 1972 as the first year when North Korean workers migrated to Russia.

38) Source: a. Russia's Far East Governor's office and immigration office b. Sasha, son

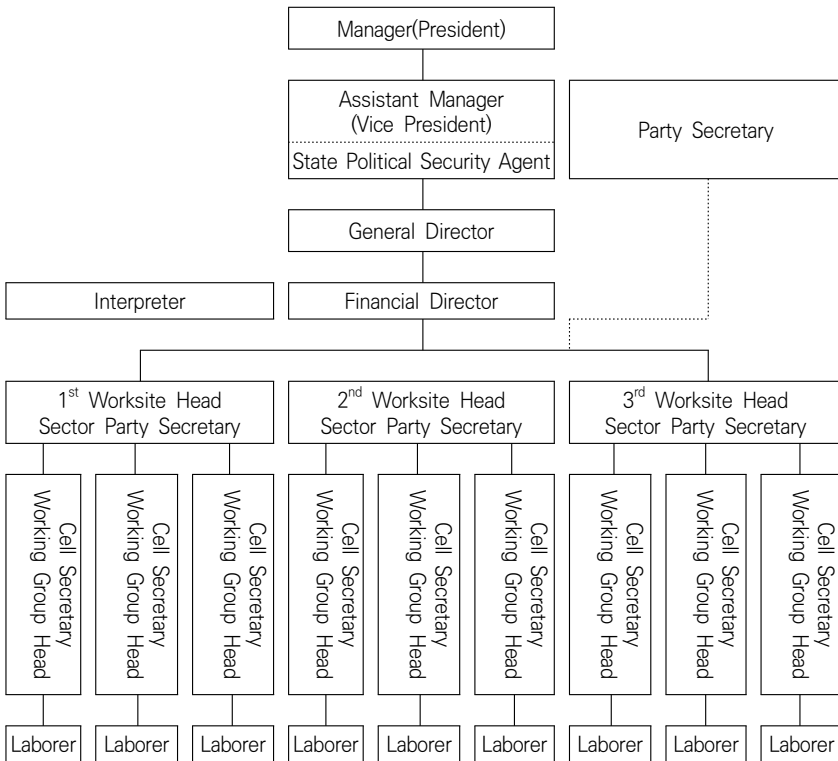
### *B. Structure of the Workplace and North Korean Workers' Lives in Russia*

When North Korean workers are dispatched to Russia, they are assigned work under the management of Russian local governments or companies. After a company established by North Korean authorities in Russia and a Russian construction company reach an agreement, the Russian company takes charge of assigning work and managing all income from the work. The main tasks of North Korean companies are to secure interpreters, provide workers with living facilities, and keep watch over them. These companies take the form of foreign venture capital firms and an apartment or factory building in the suburbs is usually rented for them. North Korea workers call these places “quarters” and, in addition to workers, officials of different positions dispatched from North Korea such as the manager, vice manager, and party secretary stay there. The North operates one to four companies like this in Nakhodka, Vladivostok, Artyom, and Ussuriysk in the Maritime Province and 200–400 people live together in each office or company. However, not all workers stay over in quarters every day. Some of them often stay over at worksites. Each company is strictly organized in the form of a hierarchy from manager (president) to individual laborers.

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of Alexander Mikhailovich Sakharovsky, a former chief of foreign intelligence operations and administrator of KGB.

Figure 3-2. Organization of North Korean Office in Russia



\* Source: Interviews with workers at worksites and North Korean defectors.

As illustrated in Figure 3-2 above, the manager (or president) takes charge of every affair in an office. The next person in the hierarchy is the assistant manager (or vice president), who is usually a dispatched agent from the State Political Security Agency. Since it is hard for them to use the title of “State Political Security Agent” in foreign countries as they do in their homeland, they use the title of “assistant manager.” But within a company rather than an office, the roles both the positions of “assistant manager” and “State Political Security Agent” are present. Security Political Agents are responsible

for overseeing North Korean workers not to be influenced by capitalist world.

The party secretary is usually dispatched from the Korean Workers' Party and in charge of arranging review meetings on ideology. Among laborers, sector party secretaries and cell secretaries follow directions from the party secretary, who supervises their review meetings on Party life.

Usually three or four interpreters work for a company and bigger companies have four interpreters. Interpreters are divided into main interpreters and manager interpreters. Main interpreters usually take care of making contracts and the rest are in charge of "fetching" work.

Worksite heads take care of about forty laborers respectively in an office. The group is divided into three working groups, each of which has about thirteen workers. A working group head in charge of each worksite is also called "platoon commander" in a company and one of their important roles is to arrange review meetings on planned quotas every week. Meanwhile, cell secretaries are responsible for the "review meeting on Party life," a review meeting on ideology. Review meetings are typically held every Saturday from 7 to 8 p.m. In review meetings, they mainly emphasize planned quotas they are supposed to pay to their country. In review meetings on ideology, they investigate whether workers have watched South Korean dramas or used the Internet. There is a "mutual criticism" session during a meeting, in which the workers have a hard time criticizing one another. But they do not attack each other as harshly as they do in the North because they know how they are toiling in a foreign country. This session usually closes with only a few talks. The kind

of meeting North Korean workers are most afraid of is the review meetings on planned quotas.

### 3. Planned Quotas and North Korean Workers' Wages

Only when a contract is made do North Korean workers have work to do. For example, when a Russian company and a North Korean company make an agreement that employs 500 North Korean workers, the workers go and work at the site. When the office is paid directly from the Russian company, it then pays back a certain amount of money every month to another Russian company's president who has arranged this business. Aside from this kind of agreement, there are small-sized contracts as well which interpreters make with Russian businessmen. Interpreters make extra money by fetching these work and personally make deals with individual workers. When workers first come to an office and do not understand Russian, they work where these interpreters introduce and pay a commission to them. However, six months after they start working, they even find their own work.

B: These four interpreters have to introduce work to laborers to be paid their basic wages. Basically...

Researcher: Interpreters?

B: Yes. But they don't work for that, but individually find work and sell it to laborers. Do you understand? Let's say I'm an interpreter and I found a work. Then I say to workers, "You take this. Bring five workers with you and take this job. Do this task. This is how much, and my share is this much. That's how interpreters earn money.

North Koreans do the work given to them and pay their own planned quotas to the government on the twenty-fifth of every month in a review meeting of planned quotas. The planned quota, also known as a “contribution” among researchers on North Korean laborers, has increased over recent years, as seen in Table 3-3. Managers of North Korean offices or companies in Russia do not inform the workers of the exact amount of planned quotas, so the sum is meant to include monthly management fees to them.

Table 3-3. Contributions North Korean Workers in Vladivostok Pay to the Government

Period	Amount (US\$)
Around 2000	200
Around 2003	300
2006	500

\* Source: Yeoung-hyeong Lee, “Analysis of North Korean Labor’s Role and Present State of Affairs about Advancement into the Far Eastern Region, Russia,” p. 70.

According to an interview with a North Korean defector who used to work as an associate manager in Russia, the amount of monthly planned quotas they had to pay to the North Korean government was fixed at \$240 until 2013. However, since many offices and companies include extra fees they have to pay to the Russian government such as dormitory rent, food expenses, maintenance fees, and taxes in the planned quotas, the workers’ monthly contributions amount to \$550-\$1,000.

Researcher 1: \$500 are contributions for the state, and the rest are maintenance fees and food expenses...

A: No, you have no idea. Actually the money you return to the state is not that much. It’s not much.



Researcher 2: Right. The amount is the same in any places in the world. So even if you go to Qatar, it's \$120...

A: It's not \$120, but \$240. \$240 now. It used to be \$120. Now it has increased to \$240.

Researcher 1: No, it used to be \$240 and then became \$550.

A: No, it's not \$550 either. 550... They don't pay that much to the government. ... That was miscalculated. It can't be \$550. In that way contributions paid to the company could be more than \$1,500.

Researcher 2: Yes, that's right.

A: Right. It used to be 45,000 rubles, but now it is about 60,000 rubles.

Researcher 1: Then is it \$240? \$240?

A: Yes. It's \$240 now. ... It used to be \$120.

All these extra fees, such as planned quotas, company operating fees, and taxes are deducted from the workers' wages as "planned quotas." The workers are not notified of the exact amount for each deducted item. Sometimes "loyalty funding" is included in this deduction list. The amount is not fixed and North Korean office or company managers sometimes make excuses saying, "The Russian company lowered the construction budget, so the amount increased." As a result, the workers rarely get paid \$800 for their monthly wages which Russian companies decided to pay for each worker.

A: You know, that's why a human is a human. Humans try to use their brains. These managers make excuses in order to make a living. They say businesses are not good with Russian companies, the construction budget is low and other things. To be honest, if I were president, I could make money only

when I deceived my employees. I know it's not right, but I have no choice. I have to tell a lie to make money. Then what kind of excuse can I make? That's why they say the budget is low, so even though you decide to get paid little, there's nothing left. This is what they say.

Researcher: Then doesn't it offend the workers? You just did what you were told.

A: Why do I get upset... What can I do even if I feel bad? They just say, "If you don't want to do it, you just leave." They are always like that. "You can go back if you want. We'll let you go back home."

Among weekly review meetings, meetings of working focuses on assigned planning quota<sup>39)</sup> by the State. Not only individual laborers but individual offices only emphasize how much of their quotas they have been able to complete. If they don't complete their quotas, they have to finish it in installments by the 25th to 31st of each months, even by paying it in. When workers fail to complete their quotas, they are called to "carry out outstanding debt" and they have to pay the missing amount by the next month. Therefore, workers say their monthly wages exist in the document but they do not, practically speaking, exist for them. In fact company managers and interpreters do not inform workers of the exact budget of the business case, but only mention in review meetings whether they completed their planned quotas or not.<sup>40)</sup> When a worker keeps

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39) It is also called "state-planned quotas." In the societies under the socialist economic system like North Korea, the concept of planning indicates establishing and implementing plans for a national economy and overseeing and assessing the execution of the plans. The concept was created in the 1960s and has been maintaining its format so far. Mun-su Yang, *Planned Economy and Marketization Trends in North Korea* (Seoul: Institute for Unification Education, the Ministry of Unification, 2013), pp. 7-11.

failing to meet his quota for a few months, he is repatriated to North Korea. Returning to the North is all but a death sentence for the workers because most of them went into a lot of debt coming to Russia.

I never got paid anything while I was working at this company. I have no idea about the amount of wages. But in every meeting, in every weekly meeting on Saturdays, they only talked about whether someone completed his planned quotas, and B fulfilled his planned quotas. They only mentioned workers completed their quotas. It's comfortable there. They feed you and you have no problem with sleeping. You can't get any money in your hand though you want some. That's why we go out at night to work. We find night work to do personally, and go out and do it over night.

The bottom line of labor in Russia is whether North Korean workers are able to pay contributions to the North. Since the workers have lived under the socialist economic system without any concept of working "as an individual," they take paying money to their country for granted at first. The workers often use the expression that their planned quotas are "stuck to the body." This means they already had outstanding contributions to pay to the state for three-four months when they left for Russia.

Researcher: Have you ever felt it was unfair that \$1,000 was already deducted from your wages from the start?  
I mean when you came here.

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40) Some offices and companies pay extra fees such as dormitory rent, food expenses, maintenance fee and taxes for the Russian government so they usually add these fees to the workers' monthly contributions which amount \$700-\$1,000.

A: I would have come any way.

Researcher: Did you hear about this \$1,000 after you arrived here? Or when you were leaving North Korea? Or while you were still in Pyongyang

A: When we leave for Russia, it sticks to us. It sticks to everyone.

Researcher: Did you know it even before you left North Korea? About the \$1,000?

A: Yes, I knew it. Everybody told me about that ... I had that information too. And I knew some people who had already been there. I knew that money was stuck to my body.

Researcher: You've felt it was already stuck to you.

A: I felt it before I came here.

Researcher: Is it \$1,000 for three years? Or do you have to pay \$1,000 a year?

A: It's not that you pay once a year. It's like \$1,000 was sticking to my body. I have to pay back that \$1,000 as soon as I get there.

On the other hand, however, this may imply that workers can possess whatever they earn from their laboring once they completely fulfill their planned quotas. The workers may have additional income by doing a side job in addition to their assigned work or asking for the manager's permission to let them work at other places. When they formally report to the manager or president of the company and find work by themselves, it is called going out to fulfill a "contract." Workers are allowed to have a contract only when they can make more money than their quotas or when they have little income with only one year left before returning home. At first, North Korean workers start to do a side job through interpreters' introduction but as time goes they secure work by using all

connections they have developed or from Korean-Russians<sup>41)</sup> who mediate work for them. Recently, as smartphones have become popular in Russia, the workers often advertise job ads on the Internet. Korean-Russians post want ads for workers on the Internet flea market charging them some commission (Photo 3-1).

Photo 3-1. A North Korean Worker's Want Ad on a Local Job-seeker Internet Site (bottom right corner of the screen)



Since the workers can keep the rest of wages except for their planned quotas, they do not mind working overtime. They even decide to

41) Local Korean-Russians usually charge ten percent of wage when they intermediate a work for North Korean workers. While some are willing to help the workers, some embezzle their wages, causing them to be harshly criticized and cursed among North Korean workers. However, as the workers are not fluent in Russian, they cannot help asking them for work.

stay over the worksites rather than commute there to shorten the construction duration and start another work quickly. The workers do not save their money at the bank but usually carry it with them or hide it in their own secret places. Depending on individual techniques and employment status they have different income from each other. Some workers earn \$500 a year and some workers earn more than \$3,000 a year. Working group heads or platoon commanders sometimes earn \$3,000 a month. In order to send this money to their families in the North, workers ask their colleagues who are returning home<sup>42)</sup> or carry it themselves during their vacation.

Topics whether they could pay contributions or how much they earned in addition to planned quotas often cause mutual distrust and fights among workers and sometimes it leads to murder cases. Some of the workers call their colleagues “coyotes,” because work is limited in the area and they believe “I can make money only when I steal another’s work.” Colleagues have been killed accidentally during arguments over who has worked more or less, or who has not worked but fooled around at the worksite. As a result, they do not share how much they have earned or where they have worked.

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42) When asking a colleague to deliver the money, they usually pay ten percent of the total amount. But when they have a close relationship, they deliver it to the family without commission.

#### 4. Working Process in the Form of “Contract Work”

Besides the work they are assigned from the contract they made with the office, North Korean workers often win private contracts with Russians, such as for repairing their houses. Many houses in the Maritime Province of Siberia are twenty to twenty-five years old and are known to be drafty because the window frames are made of wood. These houses often need their wooden window frames replaced with plastic ones and to have their old kitchen furniture replaced. Russian, North Korean, and Uzbekistani laborers are usually employed for this job and recently Vietnamese workers joined in. Of these, Uzbekistan and Vietnamese men are known to be slow at work and less skilled. Chinese laborers are also working in the field, but are not welcome in this area bordering Russia and China. Uzbekistani laborers are a burden of sorts to the Russian government, because it is hard to control them and they have to grant citizenship to these laborers. North Korean workers are therefore the most popular in the house-repairing business.

Regarding visas, North Korean workers have greatly benefitted from the Russian government compared to workers from other countries. They generally receive a five-year visa with an extension and sometimes a ten or fifteen-year visa. Workers from China and other countries, by contrast, mostly receive one-year visas under the quota system and rarely receive extensions. As their length of stay lengthens, their skill and technique improves.

Another reason why North Korean workers are favored, other than the fact that they are more diligent than other workers, is that they are not paid on a daily basis, but under a contract system, which gives them a more advantageous position than workers from other

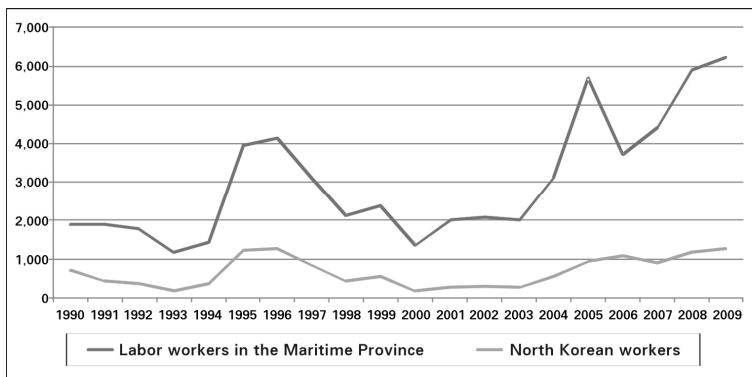
countries. For example, there is a house-repairing case which will cost at least 100,000 rubles (approx. \$1,870 as of Oct. 2014). While Russian workers charge 200,000 rubles for a month, North Korean workers suggest 100 rubles for half a month. Russian workers get to work on time, go home at 6 p.m., and have breaks during working hours. But North Korean workers do not have breaks, working all day long till night and even staying over at the work sites, reducing the duration of construction. For the remaining fifteen days they can find additional work. Even when they are paid daily, not under a contract system, North Korean workers are still favored because their productivity is three times that of Russian workers. While Russian workers do 14,000-ruble worth of work over three days, North Korean workers finish it in one day. The owner of the house has no reason not to choose them. However, these working conditions, with no breaks and living at the worksite to save commuting time threaten the workers' health. In addition, workers from Uzbekistan and Vietnam will improve their skill and competence, so the future prospects for working conditions among North Korean workers are not all that bright.



Table 3-4. North Korean Workers in the Maritime Province (1990-2009)

(Unit: person)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
No. of total laborers	1,902	1,888	1,779	1,181	1,421	3,956	4,144	3,119	2,134	2,373
North Korean workers	706	429	358	180	362	1,218	1,268	861	440	558
Market share (%)	37.1	22.7	20.1	15.2	25.5	30.8	30.6	27.6	20.6	23.5
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
No. of total laborers	1,369	2,013	2,089	2,020	3,126	5,693	3,717	4,419	5,906	6,225
North Korean workers	171	274	292	263	555	951	1,082	897	1,169	1,270
Market share (%)	12.5	13.6	14.0	13.0	17.6	16.7	29.1	20.3	19.8	20.4



\* Source: Unpublished workshop data book of this research project (October 31, 2014).<sup>43)</sup>

43) Source: a. Statistics of 1990-1991: Far Eastern Commission, "Foreign Workers in the Maritime Region." In the section of sewing business, 1993 version, b. Statistics of 1992-2005: Larisa V. Zabrovskaya, "Economic Contacts between the DPRK and the Russian Far East: 1992~2005," c. Statistics of 2006-2009: Data on activities of foreign workers by the FSB Maritime Province division (an excerpt from materials for hosting APEC meeting) ※The recent increase in the number of foreign workers seems to be due to Russia's mitigation measures of visa issuance for the Chinese and Vietnamese. Especially, the construction workers were for construction work for APEC.

North Korean workers' expedient labor may raise issues, including protection of Russian domestic laborers and taxation on the Russian government's side. However, the Russian government indicates that what actually matters is the workers' "human rights." They already recognized the workers are under generally horrendous working conditions, including pressure from bribing managers and interpreters and individual quotas to pay, plus hygiene and fire protection in their living quarters. City governments also already know North Korean offices have understated their income, even though they generated much revenue from official and unofficial construction contracts. They governments, however, have overlooked their wrongdoing since they recognize North Korean workers are "living in severe hardship."<sup>44</sup>) But there is a possibility the Russian government will put pressure on North Korean offices and companies through the immigration office, the health department, or the fire department when the issues cause bigger problems.

## 5. Surveillance and Risks of North Korean Workers

North Korean offices in Russia have been most concerned about the workers being affected by capitalism. The office structure ostensibly appears similar to that of ordinary companies, but they actually have a military hierarchy structure. Workers have to go to work in a group of two to five so that they can keep watch on each other. Since they are responsible as a group, the whole group may be suspended for one member's mistake. On the other hand,

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44) An interview with one of high-level staff members working in a city of the Maritime Province.

movement as a group serves to protect workers from criminals who know they carry cash. In fact, the North Korean workers are subject to robbery or being run over by a car during their commute.

As mentioned above, North Korean workers often do not return to their quarters but stay over at worksites depending on the characteristic of each worksite. In this case the concerned company visits the site to “censor” workers. Censorship is carried out unexpectedly by vice managers, dispatched from the State Political Security Department, and the worksite head. They inspect the laboring status of the workers and the use of smartphones is the most important issue these days. The only cell phones allowed to North Korean workers are Chinese ones which cannot connect to the Internet. However many workers use smartphones to find extra work and this leads to opportunities to use the Internet, including sites unrelated to their work. When the vice manager and worksite head visit a site for a sudden censorship, workers’ smartphones are confiscated right away. The vice manager connects the phones to computers and examines thoroughly what websites the workers have visited. When he discovers any search records related to capitalist ideas like dramas, information about South Korea, or sexual content, the owner of the phone receives a disciplinary measure and this can result in repatriation to the North. When they fail to pass censorship, workers usually make excuses saying, “I tapped on it before I knew what it was,” but managers do not accept this. Sometimes they force the workers to take care of the managers’ own work, charging a higher commission in return for lenient treatment.

Besides smartphones, these workers have chances to watch TV in Russian homes during working hours, which helps them obtain new

information, totally different from what they had learned in the North. For example, they learn that North Korea actually started the Korean War, how South Korea has developed, etc. Through conversations with North Korean workers, we found out that they had much knowledge of South Korea.

Guide: This person is from South Korea...

C: Are you on a business trip?

Guide: A professor at a university in South Korea.

C: Which university?

Researcher: (redacted) University...

C: That's not in Seoul...

Lee: No, it's in Gyeonggi-do Province. Do you know any universities in Seoul?

C: Hanyang University, Sungkyunkwan University...

Guide: The latter was named after the learning institute of the Joseon Dynasty...

C: You must be a big figure since you are a professor in South Korea?

Researcher: How do you know they think highly of professors in South Korea?

C: You know, it's impossible to cover up things about that world... I mean the situation in South Korea. You must be an important figure there...

Lee: Professors are important figures in North Korea too.

C: Well...

Researcher: They are respected.

C: Of course. They're respected by students. But the salaries are not that special...

(Guide: A Korean resident in Russia who guided the researcher to North Korean workers' worksite/ C: a North Korean "contract" worker)

When North Korean workers fail to pass censorship by the Political Security Affairs Agency, their unpaid balance increases to an unbearable degree, or their offices are closed down due to poor performance, and the possibility of their being repatriated to the North gets higher. Then the workers often flee from their offices, and are called "rabbits." Sometimes workers who have developed a negative judgment of the North's ideology through the Internet or TV become "rabbits" too. Rabbits are "missing persons," but different from defectors. The "rabbits" are chased by the agents dispatched from the State Political Security Agency and Party organizations. To avoid them, they reportedly hide in rural areas or live with Russian or Korean-Russian women. It is hard to figure out how many "rabbits" exist in Russia. A source says there are approximately 5,000 "rabbits" in Ussuriysk, the Maritime Province alone.

One of the reasons why the number of "rabbits" increased sharply was North Korean workers' addiction to gambling and alcohol a few years ago. Drinking and gambling were such a fad among the workers<sup>45)</sup> that North Korean office executives had to stand at the entrance of gambling houses to stop them. Many of the workers who spent all their money and could not pay their contributions on time also ran away from their offices. However, except for these unusual cases, the number of "rabbits" does not seem to have

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45) It is reported that the red light area many North Korean workers visit is located in Chika, Vladivostok and there are several gambling houses they visit there. A source says the workers often gamble at their quarters as well.

increased sharply.

After staying in Russia for three to six months, most North Korean laborers get the hang of finding jobs and have a grasp of the outer world and capitalistic society through mass media such as the Internet and TV. Then they try to make the best use of these circumstances to earn more money. Since construction work require not only physical strength but also technique, construction workers are paid more than loggers or other workers. These workers are known to hardly ever try running away from worksites because their family member are still in North Korea. They decide to defect mostly when they are to be repatriated back home. They borrow money and even sell their houses to bribe those involved in the dispatching process. Therefore, repatriation to the North is a death sentence for them.

## 6. North Korean Workers Back in Their Homeland

North Korean workers who have worked in Russia are called *jaesosaeng* after the old name of Russia. They are not very rich and represent a kind of middle class. But they are known to be wealthy in the community, and often receive unfavorable responses such as, “Take some rest” or “Get out of the way.” They usually do business rather than become employed. Not many of them earn money from business, but they often become victims of fraud crimes.

That is why many *jaesosaeng* try to buy an executive title to go back to Russia. They find ways to become a worksite head through bribery or being promoted to an office head by purchasing “a name plate,” a forged university diploma on the black market. Being sent

to Russia second time is called *jaetang*, or “rehashing.” Even though they can do *jaetang* and are sent to Russia again, they cannot take their family, which causes family dissolution and even divorce. The North Korean government has strictly prohibited workers from bringing their families since 2007-2008.

A: Most *jaesosaseng* don't run a business. After they worked overseas, they try to improve their future with money. In other words, they bribe men in a higher position...

Researcher: In order to go to a better worksite?

A: Right... After making some money, they offer a bribe... then they become a worksite head. And they will buy a university diploma. Yes, they will go to Russia to earn some money as a worksite head for three or five years. They will later return and spend the money in the North. And then they have to deal with managers in the higher position. It should be that way. That's a system. Step by step they go up. That's how it works.

Researcher: They are promoted to assistant manager and go there.

A: Yes. If they can't be promoted, or they aren't able to do it, they have to keep returning back and staying for a year and then going to work there for three years. It's very common.

As illustrated so far, those dispatched to Russia who worked as migrant laborers there are included in a kind of migration cycle where workers upgrade their social status when returned home and then go to Russia again. During the process chains of bribery and worker exploitation are formed and constantly regenerated in the course of the migration cycle.

## 7. North Korean Overseas Workers' Human Rights and Future

As discussed so far, the initial stage of dispatching North Korean workers overseas may be considered as based on a “voluntary” decision. However, even at the stage the process was strictly limited to workers of certain social circumstances and background. Besides, after they have been sent and assigned to a worksite, the workers cannot escape from harsh working conditions and strict surveillance.

So far, the Russian government has overlooked North Korea's human rights violations against its laborers, considering the unique characteristics of the North. But these issues are highly likely to be controversial at the international level as Russia has more businesses requiring international cooperation. Furthermore, as the number of workers from different countries, including Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and China increases, intensifying competition, it seems difficult for North Korean laborers to maintain an advantage in the overseas laboring market by depending on their excessive working methods.

International migration work is a complex matter, involving more than just the workers' homeland and the residing country. Therefore the North Korean government must improve the basic human rights of its laborers and develop proper worker dispatching policies, meeting international criteria so that it can have a long term and sustainable dispatch program.



## IV. Conclusion

The Maritime Province saw a huge influx of immigrants with the promotion of development policy after the Convention of Peking in 1860, which forced the province to be incorporated into Russia from the Qing Dynasty, and is now growing as a center of economic cooperation and development of Northeast Asia, especially for South Korea, China, and Russia, requiring more immigrant workers. North Korean workers deployed overseas satisfy such conditions and needs for Russia while at the same time contributing significantly to their country's foreign policy and economic development. Given that North Korea's economic base has in fact eroded since the serious structural economic downturn of the mid and late 1990s, the country's only feasible option to attract foreign capital is to send its workers overseas.

For North Korea, however, which has so far pushed forward with extremely closed policies regarding its people, the foreign assignment of its workers could be a new challenge and a risky choice that might bring about changes in its regime. Therefore, the North Korean government's current policy of dispatching its workforce overseas is being implemented under state control, not allowing individual choice. Separation from family, mandatory payment to the authorities of one's income from a planned portion, and surveillance system for workers by government managers are in effect. In the eyes of international society, which has voiced concerns about human rights in North Korea, these issues cannot but be considered as additional human rights violations.

Since most reports regarding human rights and human trafficking

in North Korea have been based on universal legal regulations, these issues are usually described in formal and legal terms which are not efficient for elaborating on North Korean workers' specific awareness and experiences. Therefore we need to understand the situation that North Korean overseas workers manage to make a living even in a harsh environment and conditions from the viewpoint and context of North Korean society. The following is the overview of the scheme of sending and maintaining North Korean workers abroad in the context of and from the viewpoint of the North Korean society.

First, North Korea's export of workers is, superficially, voluntary labor migration, rather than a completely compulsory one, and more intensive examination reveals that it is in fact a combination of compulsory and voluntary choices. To be sent and work abroad, the country's citizens have to offer a huge bribe to officials of related ministries, demonstrating that the initial step in the foreign labor program is voluntary. However, once such workers arrive in Russia, they are included in North Korea's business system and have to toil under a gun and under surveillance to meet their quotas. Once they accomplish their assignments to a certain degree, they can find another work to do on their own, which is extra voluntary labor that serves them as a larger source of income.

Second, the payment that exported workers have to make for their state-planned quotas is regarded as a duty rather than as exploitation from the perspective of the workers. Planned quotas or state-planned quotas, which are often pointed out as one of critical factors of North Korea's human rights issues, are a sort of improper "contributions" from the points of view of capitalism. However, in the North Korean society based on planned economy, these can

be considered as a matter of course.

Third, North Korean laborers suffer from their government's tight surveillance system, while forming a new local social network. Being under strict surveillance by official managers dispatched by their government to maintain their regime is more severe problem to the workers than fulfilling planned quotas. Vice managers, party secretaries and general directors are not proper workforce to maintain offices, but rather have become a hotbed of corruption exploiting the workers because they are solely sent to keep a close watch on the workers. They also build relationships with natives and local Koreans, including Korean Russians and Korean Chinese, as well as colleagues, even under the government's surveillance and regulation systems. Such a relationship offers the workers an opportunity to find another work and allows them to compare the two societies and think about alternatives.

Fourth, the workers who have experienced the migrant labor program in Russia are integrated into the so-called migration circle, in which after returning home they are sent to Russia again through a rise in social position or identity forgery. In this process, a connection between bribery and labor exploitation naturally emerges and is consistently reproduced in the cycle of migration.

Until now, Russia has turned a blind eye to the human rights abuses of exported North Korean laborers, considering the unique situation in North Korea. But as Russia increasingly faces the need for business alliances with foreign countries, the human rights abuse problem is likely to become a major international issue. Furthermore, the existing labor export program including long working hours cannot any longer set North Korean workers above the competition in

international labor markets. Therefore, North Korea will have to establish a labor dispatch policy in accord with global standards to make its labor export program sustainable and to gradually improve the basic human rights of its workers.

International migration has been operating globally and North Korea cannot be excluded. The North will find it more difficult to prevent its laborers overseas from having an open view towards the world. North Korean workers overseas have become accustomed to capitalist culture while doing a side job, but in the absence of capitalistic norms for them, deviant behavior including murder cases between colleagues have increased. Therefore, it is imperative for the North to seek proper and detailed policies for this matter. South Korea also needs to acknowledge North Korea's dispatching workers overseas as a "different" cultural system and try to invite and cooperate with the North to participate in the South's business in Russia. At the same time, it is necessary for South Korea to maintain a humanitarian approach toward North Korean workers. It seems that seeking measures to help North Korean workers overseas suffering from human rights violations, discrimination and labor exploitation, instead of waiting for the North Korean leaders and government and its policies to change, will provide the workers with opportunities to realize what human rights are and what living as a human being means.

Based on the findings in this study, a few implications can be suggested. First, the South and the North are required to actively develop businesses they can cooperate with a third country including Russia. It is, of course, important to try to improve and develop the relationship between North-South Korea through inter-Korean consultation. But when the situation is unfavorable, it is necessary

to develop and promote related businesses because cooperation between two Koreas and a third country possibly creates positive circumstances and conditions for establishing favorable inter-Korean relations. Especially, some synergy effect is expected when North Korea's cheap labor force, South Korea's financial strength and technology, and a third country's land and materials are combined through mutual cooperation. Multilateral businesses between the two Koreas and Russia or China also accord with the diplomatic strategies such as Eurasia Initiative and Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative the Park Geun-hye administration has been promoting.

Second, it is necessary to carry out further studies to investigate the status of North Korean laborers sent to other areas than the Maritime Province in order to figure out the North's policy on dispatching its workers abroad and prepare measures for this. This study has implication as the first specified research on actual conditions of North Korean overseas workers. However, it has covered only a few cases related to the status of North Korean workers dispatched to foreign countries. Considering the North has sent its workers to various countries besides the Maritime Province of Siberia, more practical studies need to be conducted on other areas. Especially, in order to comprehend North Korea's policy and prepare counting measures, in-depth field research should be carried out in three provinces in Northeast China including Yanbian where a number of North Koreans are reported to be sent, Sakhalin of Russia and Mongolia.

Third, as findings of this study show, North Korean overseas workers toiling under harsh working conditions tend to consider their planned quotas as a duty but they are suffering more from the state's

surveillance system. When the North Korean government's surveillance system is found excessive compared to the regulations based on the recipient country's related law or acts, South Korea may seek ways to relieve the overseas workers' pain from the severe surveillance through cooperation with the concerned country and international organizations. According to a recent report, Qatar's government repatriated some North Korean workers to their country for North Korean authorities' violations of health and safety policies on worksite by enforcing the workers to work more than twelve hours a day. In order to seek responding measures for this issue, it is essential to grasp the reality North Korean overseas workers are faced and conduct further studies on the actual conditions of them in major areas including the Maritime Province. It seems that based on these further studies South Korea and international communities will be able to deeply comprehend the status of North Korean overseas workers' human rights and find fundamental countermeasures for this issue.

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## Appendix

1. An agreement of a temporary employment between the Russian Federation and North Korea (Moscow, August 31, 2007)
2. List of North Korean workers dispatched through Songgong Company (partial)
3. Introductory document of Korea Songsan Economic and Trading Group
4. Certificate of the DPRK Chamber of Commerce for Korea Songsan Economic and Trading Group
5. Certificate of Credit of Foreign Trade Bank of the DPRK for Korea Songsan Economic and Trading Group
6. List of laborers who returned to North Korea (September 12, 2013)

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