



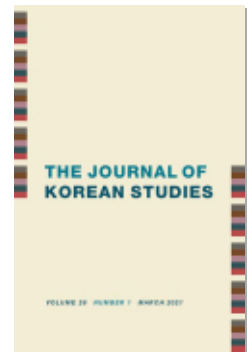
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The Geopolitics of Citizenship: Evidence from North Korean Claims to Citizenship in South Korea

Sheena Chestnut Greitens

North Koreans have a constitutionally guaranteed right to citizenship in the Republic of Korea and high coethnic communitarian affinity; as such, they are often described as having automatic citizenship in South Korea. This article demonstrates that portrayals of automatic citizenship are problematic. North Koreans have often struggled to acquire state recognition when making claims to citizenship from abroad, and acquisition of ROK citizenship remains an incremental and contingent process, one that requires a high degree of agency from North Koreans seeking resettlement. This article draws on analysis of approximately 120 North Korean memoirs published in Korean and English, as well as other documentary and interview evidence. It finds that although citizenship is typically thought of as membership within a political community, it is also an identity practiced, claimed, and negotiated externally. Moreover, extraterritorial negotiations over citizenship recognition can be strongly influenced by state geopolitical and security considerations.

Keywords: North Korea, migration, citizenship, geopolitics, security

What makes a citizen? What factors influence when and how states recognize claims to membership? Current conceptions of citizenship focus mostly on membership and rights contestation within the political community. In Korean studies, a robust body of scholarly work analyzes hierarchies of membership, both within

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the South Korean polity and transnationally, with respect to diasporic membership. Much of this literature, however, focuses on variation across different groups—an insight that, while valuable, cannot explain variations in state treatment of individuals that all belong to the same group.

This article probes the nature of citizenship in modern Korea by examining one such group: North Koreans who resettle in South Korea (the Republic of Korea, ROK). Scholars and journalists often describe North Koreans as having automatic citizenship in South Korea, especially compared to other groups (Korean Americans, Korean Chinese, etc.). Indeed, North Koreans have strong claims to membership on both contractual and communitarian grounds: they have a constitutional right to legal citizenship and high coethnic affinity. As the article demonstrates, however, “automatic citizenship” is problematic in three ways. (a) ROK recognition of North Korean membership is highly contingent: it has varied across individuals according to political context. (b) State recognition is also incremental: it accumulates during migration and resettlement, first outside and then within the polity. (c) Despite some policy changes over time, the South Korean state still requires migrants to demonstrate a high degree of agency in navigating migration and resettlement before a claim to membership can be successfully and fully recognized. This contingent, incremental, and agency-based acquisition of citizenship therefore presents a puzzle, both for scholars of Korean citizenship and for discussions of the foundations of citizenship more broadly.

Framing citizenship as an identity that is negotiated externally as well as internally helps resolve some of these puzzles. Outside the physical boundaries of the polity, states’ conceptions of security and geopolitical interest impact contestation over citizenship in significant ways, and explain much of the variation in individuals’ experiences described above.¹ To substantiate this argument, I analyze how the South Korean state treats citizenship claims made by North Koreans during migration to and resettlement in South Korea. I analyze over 120 narratives of migration and resettlement published by North Korean defectors in Korean and English and draw on evidence from immigration court documents, ROK citizenship curricula, interviews with officials and migrants, and participant observations in South Korea and in North Korean refugee communities in the United States.² I find evidence of significant intragroup variation shaped by ROK geopolitical and security logics. These logics, repeatedly invoked by state agents throughout the processes of citizenship acquisition, render North Koreans’ “automatic” citizenship much more fragmented, incremental, and contingent than classic approaches predict.

A clarification on terminology is necessary before proceeding. Different groups use different terms, in both Korean and English, to describe North Koreans who leave the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). Nomenclature in both languages can carry political, causal, legal, and moral connotations; for example, although the term *refugee* is widely used abroad to describe North Koreans who escape the DPRK, the South Korean government rejects the use of the term

because it claims North Koreans as citizens. This article uses *migrant* to describe North Koreans during the migration process, and *resettler* afterward, without intended political or normative connotation.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section situates the puzzle of North Korean membership in the context of Korean citizenship and citizenship more broadly. The second section introduces the data and methodological approach. The third section analyzes variation in ROK recognition of North Korean claims to membership across four stages of migration and resettlement, linking patterns of variation to state geopolitical aspirations and security concerns. The article concludes by exploring the implications of the article's findings for policy and future research.

THEORIZING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH THE KOREAN CASE

Citizenship, though a central concept in the study of political life, remains a contested, multivalent term. Often defined as membership in a political community, citizenship invokes rights (and obligations) such as welfare provision, participation, or protection.³ In democracies, citizenship is a status that, mutually recognized, confers “the right to have rights”;⁴ in autocracies, it outlines a relational set of expectations between the polity and its members, which may or may not include political rights.⁵ Recent scholarship conceptualizes citizenship as either a formal bundle of rights secured via contractual promises between individual and polity (a liberal contractual concept, grounded in law or policy), or an affective condition of belonging and inclusion (an identity-based communitarian concept).⁶

Debates over citizenship as formal legal status versus affective state of belonging matter greatly in contexts like the Korean Peninsula, where the two are not aligned—where patterns of colonialism, state formation, regime transition, and migration have generated ethnic-affinitive communities that span formal international boundaries, forcing states to grapple with and revise the meaning of membership, inclusion, and incorporation.⁷ In these contexts, citizenship defines not just who is included and how inclusion occurs but also the “who and how” of exclusion; it is a politics of rights denial alongside rights conferral.⁸ To claim (or even contest) the rights accorded to citizens, individuals must get the state to recognize their standing as citizens in the first place. Citizen standing is what enables them to occupy the political space where further contestation and rights claiming occur.

This article examines how individuals make claims to citizen membership in Korea from a (primarily) extraterritorial context, and how the state chooses to recognize or deny these claims. In practical terms, citizens' power to compel state recognition of membership is lower when they are based extraterritorially than when located within the polity, even if their formal status is identical across these two locations. Overseas claiming and negotiation of membership are

therefore useful for investigating citizenship as boundary making: it tells us how states adjudicate “who is in and who is out” when they are unconstrained by citizens’ physical geography, and the reasons they invoke to justify these decisions.⁹ It also allows scholars to examine how interstate interactions shape individual and collective identities, thereby reinforcing or undermining political communities.¹⁰

This treatment of citizenship focuses on state practice and citizen experience of that practice, rather than on formal policy. It draws on and extends a literature treating citizenship less as legal, regulatory, or bureaucratic policy and more as a concept “experienced, negotiated, and enacted in everyday life”¹¹ and constituted through state-citizen interactions. This approach acknowledges the state’s distinctive power to set borders and determine the terms of membership¹² without losing sight of citizens’ agency to navigate and sometimes challenge that power. It also reveals variations in citizenship acquisition and recognition, such as across individuals and over time, that can be otherwise overlooked.

Situating North Korean Claims to Citizenship

North Koreans have strong claims to South Korean citizenship on both contractual-legal and ethnic-communitarian grounds. In legal terms, the ROK Constitution operates together with the Nationality Act to define North Koreans as ROK citizens. Article 3 of the ROK Constitution states that the Republic of Korea’s sovereign territory consists of “the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands.”¹³ Article 2 of the 2010 Nationality Act, meanwhile, argues that South Korea extends citizenship at birth to anyone whose parents are ROK nationals or who were born in the Republic of Korea (if parentage is unknown); thus all persons born in the territory claimed by the ROK, not just territory presently controlled by it, are citizens. Interviews with South Korean officials parallel academic and media discourse in describing North Koreans as having “automatic citizenship” based on ROK law.¹⁴

Legally defining individuals from North Korea as ROK citizens creates several expectations for external practice. First, it confers specific rights on individuals and responsibilities on the state—among them, extraterritorial protection and free entry. The ROK Constitution’s Article 2(2) outlines a duty “to protect citizens residing abroad as prescribed by the Act”; Article 12(4) of the UN *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (to which South Korea acceded in 1990) specifies the right to enter the country of one’s citizenship.¹⁵ Moreover, in claiming North Koreans as citizens, the ROK removes their grounds for claiming asylum/refugee status in most other countries (the United States excepted, by special legislation).¹⁶ Under Article 1(A)(2) of the UN Refugee Convention, individuals with dual citizenship must be in danger of persecution in both countries to be considered refugees, and Western courts have increasingly used this standard to deny asylum to North Korean escapees.¹⁷ The ROK’s legal assertion of citizenship

for North Koreans, therefore, both makes them formal citizens of South Korea and excludes them from membership elsewhere.

North Koreans also meet typical communitarian standards for political membership, wherein ethnicity figures prominently.¹⁸ Ethnic nationalism is central to Korean citizenship: both states on the peninsula claim a singular Korean community defined by blood (*minjok*).¹⁹ The state's sense of ethnic community extends beyond the peninsula; South Korea "selects by origin" in offering ethnic Koreans preferential basis for citizenship.²⁰ Recent scholarship on ROK incorporation of non-Koreans (marriage migrants, guest workers, multicultural families, etc.) implicitly affirms ethnicity's long-standing centrality in defining political community.²¹ Even within South Korea's "hierarchical nationhood," where incorporation of coethnic migrants varies by class, gender, and other markers,²² North Koreans are considered privileged—possessing an automatic citizenship not granted to groups like Soviet Koreans or *Chosŏnjok* (ethnic Koreans with People's Republic of China nationality).²³ In 2014 the Ministry of Unification explicitly rejected the idea of applying the multiculturalism framework used for immigrant incorporation (*tamunhwajuŭi*) to North Korean resettlers, citing their special ethnic and constitutional status.²⁴ North Koreans are therefore not "outside the state, but inside the people";²⁵ from the standpoint of the South Korean state, they reside within both state and people. Classic theories, then, render the contingency and incrementality of their citizenship recognition all the more puzzling.

One additional explanation, advanced by scholars of ROK policies toward immigrants and overseas Koreans, is that a group's place in South Korea's hierarchical nationhood is determined by its ability to contribute to the state's developmental project.²⁶ What follows here does not contest the importance of developmental goals or the existence of class-based differentiation in state treatment of North Korean migrants. Indeed, the state's preferential policies and augmented financial support for elite defectors provide corroboration for this argument. These arguments, however, primarily serve to distinguish North Koreans from Soviet Koreans, Korean Americans, Chinese Koreans, and so forth; they explain variation by group rather than variation among individuals who all belong to a single category. Moreover, class distinctions alone cannot explain the range of variation exhibited in the state's treatment of non-elite North Korean individuals, who are the strong majority of migrants to South Korea since 1990. State geopolitical and security considerations, therefore, are an important complement to existing arguments.

This article contributes to our understanding of Korean citizenship in four ways. First, I show that citizenship can be constituted through external as well as domestic interactions. State-citizen contestation over membership begins outside the border—an experience that may well shape migrants' post-resettlement conceptions of citizenship in ways overlooked by current literature. Second, during the extraterritorial negotiation of citizenship claims, state recognition varies not just across group but within categories across individuals. Third, state recognition

of citizen standing is incremental: North Korean migrants do not instantly acquire fully formed, preexisting South Korean citizenship; they participate in extended rights-claiming negotiations that begin extraterritorially, progress across borders, and gradually strive to bring their citizenship into existence. Fourth, state geopolitical and security considerations are as important as developmental objectives in determining how the state responds to particular individual claims. North Korean migrants' initial contacts with the South Korean state are with embassy personnel and agents of the national security apparatus; these agents treat their citizenship as a contingent status shaped not simply by state-society interaction, but by a more complex interplay among the individual, country of citizenship (ROK), and the host country where the claim to citizen standing occurs.

DATA AND METHODS

As of late 2020 over thirty-three thousand North Koreans had resettled in South Korea.²⁷ A typical migrant might cross the Tumen River, spend a few weeks to years in China, and travel through a third country (Mongolia, Thailand, etc.) before transiting to ROK territory—a harrowing journey that exposes migrants to dangers and risks ranging from trafficking, economic/sexual exploitation, and violence to the threat of repatriation to North Korea, where they and their families are subject to harsh punishment.²⁸ Upon entering ROK territory, migrant-resettlers are debriefed by a security team composed of military, police, and National Intelligence Service personnel and spend three months at Hanawon (House of Unity),²⁹ a government rehabilitation center, before entering South Korean society. Thus, North Koreans encounter their purported ROK citizenship first, and formatively, in its extraterritorial incarnation.

This analysis draws on data from approximately 120 memoirs by North Korean defectors and refugees that have been published in Korean and English. Figures 1–2 show the growth of this genre over time. A full list of titles, along with author, publisher, and year of publication, appears in an online appendix to this article, available at doi.org/10.1215/07311613-8747746.

I use structured narrative analysis to allow subjects to tell stories about their own journeys, thereby revealing the cultural-political frameworks narrators consider relevant, relationships and events they view as important, and meanings they ascribe to particular choices and interactions.³⁰ Using narratives in a systematic fashion illustrates core concepts—the incrementality of citizenship acquisition and the importance of geopolitics and security therein—while retaining some of the richness and multivalence of lived experience.³¹

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, most of the published narratives appear after 1990. During this period, famine and social dislocation prompted increased out-migration from North Korea; unlike the Cold War's elite defectors, most post-1990 escapees were not recruited by the South Korean state. Instead, they

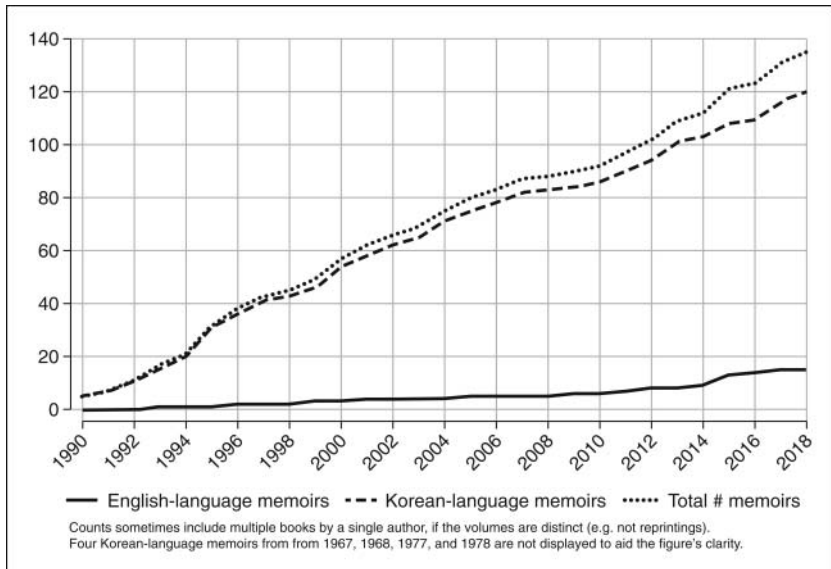


Figure 1. Number of North Korean memoirs published (cumulative).

had to actively seek resettlement, often in the dangerous conditions described above and under threat of repatriation from China or other countries back to the DPRK.³² For consistency's sake, I restrict the analysis that follows to memoirs from this post-1990 period. Where possible, I quote published texts so that readers can transparently evaluate the interpretation of these passages; quotations from interviews are identified separately.

In this article I focus specifically on North Korean migrants' claims to citizenship and the South Korean state's recognition or denial of those claims. This focus differs from media/advocacy groups, which portray hardships inside North Korea or dramatic stories of escape and rescue; it also differs from a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship on North Korean resettlement,³³ including social/political incorporation.³⁴ It focuses instead on the processes by which claims to citizenship are negotiated, first extraterritorially and then in the border-crossing procedures that extend temporally and spatially within the polity itself.³⁵ It examines four stages at which North Koreans who claim citizenship can have that claim recognized or rejected: (1) extraterritorially, in China and other third countries; (2) during the screening that occurs upon entering ROK territory; (3) at Hanawon's resettlement program; and (4) during initial resettlement in South Korean society.

The interactions analyzed here are performative in two senses: performative governance, in that both sides enact their understanding of roles of either citizen or state agent;³⁶ and performative because they are recounted in published memoirs that have an intended audience.³⁷ In this case, however, the performativity of these narratives is what makes them useful source material. They reveal how

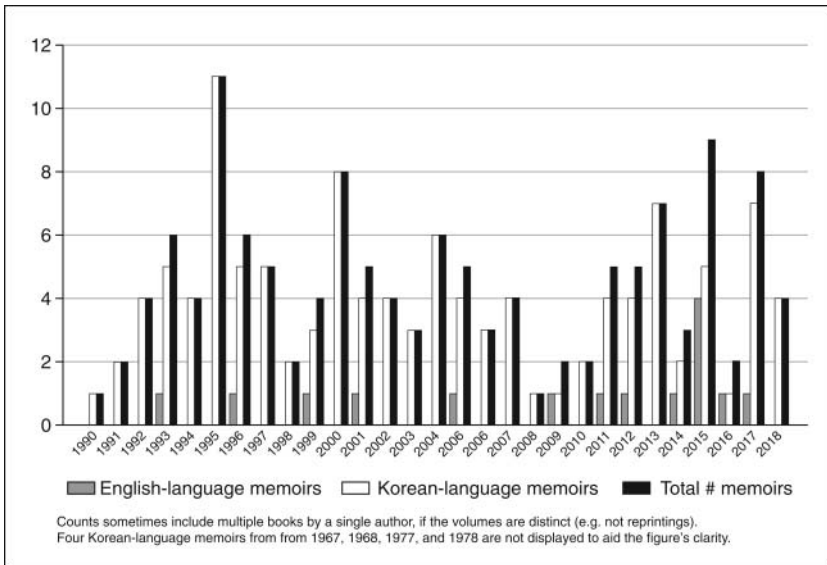


Figure 2. Number of North Korean memoirs published (annual).

participants understand the meaning of citizenship, including expectations citizens have of the state in which they claim membership and the capacity and grounds on which state agents believe they can recognize or deny those claims. They allow scholars to examine how facets of citizenship—status, identity, participation, rights—intersect in practice.³⁸

Four additional sets of sources help cross-check, contextualize, and interpret the narratives: (1) legal documents from North Korean asylum claims in third countries, which often explicitly consider ROK citizenship; (2) ROK government resettlement/citizenship curriculum materials; (3) interviews with ROK officials involved in resettlement; and (4) interviews and participant observations with North Korean defectors/refugees who resettled in South Korea and the United States.³⁹ Interview and ethnographic data were collected in South Korea and the United States from 2012 through 2019. Owing to the importance of establishing trust with individuals from North Korea, this part of the project primarily employed snowball sampling and semistructured interviewing, drawing on relationships established during my previous research on North Korea.⁴⁰

GEOPOLITICAL CITIZENSHIP: TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FROM NORTH KOREAN NARRATIVES

Analysis of North Korean narratives suggests two central arguments: that citizenship is constituted incrementally during migration and resettlement and that

geopolitics and security significantly shape (and incrementalize) negotiations over citizenship acquisition during that process. Progression through four different stages of migration and resettlement illustrates the incrementality and contingency of state recognition of citizenship. The first and fourth stages most strongly emphasize the importance of geopolitics and interstate relations, while the second and third stages highlight the importance of state security considerations at the border, where migrants transition from extraterritorial to domestic citizens.

North Koreans begin their journeys in North Korea, where the Republic of Korea claims but does not exercise sovereignty over territory or people, and the future claimant is therefore in a location and polity that is both inside and outside of membership.⁴¹ Migrants often exit North Korea without an active intent to claim ROK citizenship; many are unaware that they have this right, and it would be extremely dangerous to make such a claim inside North Korea itself, because doing so would challenge the legitimacy of the DPRK and of the Kim family's rule. The article's framework therefore treats DPRK residents as beginning with a deactivated form of South Korean citizenship: neither actively claimed by citizens nor recognized in practice by the state.⁴²

Contingent Citizens: North Koreans in Third Countries

Many North Koreans first encounter the South Korean state when they seek to enter the ROK from a country like China, Mongolia, or Thailand. In those third countries, their claims to citizenship and right of entry have sometimes been denied, and state response has varied according to diplomatic relations with the country in which the claim is made. Extraterritorially, then, North Korean defectors often learn that their citizenship is incomplete and contingent on geopolitical factors.

North Korea-born individuals seeking entry to South Korea from China—at the ROK consulate in Shenyang, in China's Northeast, or the ROK embassy in Beijing—have commonly been rebuffed. Multiple narratives and interviewees describe seeking assistance from South Korean diplomatic facilities via phone, by intermediary, or in person and being rejected.⁴³

I had hoped that the consulate would be willing to hide and protect us, but that, it turned out, was out of the question. The diplomat gave us a bit of pocket money, wished us luck, and bid us to come see him in a couple of weeks. In the meantime, he would see what he could do. . . . Returning two weeks later, we were once again counseled to have patience. I felt more and more alone, and realized that my life shouldn't depend on anyone, *not even a representative of the country I wished to join*.⁴⁴

I stayed in [city redacted] for several months. I could survive by eating food that Chinese people threw away. I waited outside the [South Korean] consulate, and I would

try to follow the staff home and ask them to help me. Eventually I gave up. . . . When I got to Thailand, then, I decided to come to the US.⁴⁵

Note that the narrator in the first quotation understands himself as seeking to *join* South Korea rather than already belonging to it. He does not know, nor does the state communicate, that any membership or associated rights already exist. Interview evidence also indicates that the nonavailability of assistance from ROK personnel or facilities in China is now taken for granted among defectors, brokers, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that assist with escape.⁴⁶

Data from both narratives and interviews suggest that at the extraterritorial stage migrants seldom frame their claims in terms of constitutional rights. More often, they express communitarian expectations: that shared ethnicity generates an obligation for other Koreans to help.⁴⁷ Migrants who receive assistance often explain it in their writings with reference to *minjok* (shared ethnicity/bloodline) or *tongp'o* (“compatriots,” but connoting siblingness or ethnic brotherhood).⁴⁸ One woman wrote, “I was Korean and so were they. In China, however fluent my Mandarin, however official my ID, I would always be, at heart, a foreigner. . . . South Korea is at least Korean.”⁴⁹ In other narratives, when migrants are rejected—by Korean businesses, individuals, churches, or officials—it is rejection by fellow Koreans that evokes an intense response.⁵⁰ One wrote of his rejection, “But we were both Koreans, he and I! . . . Surely the man I had spoken to was a South Korean consulate employee, speaking our language”; he compared the feeling to the impact of a bullet.⁵¹ Another wrote, “These were my people, and yet they were filled with contempt for me. I retreated to a couch, my emotions—resentment, anger, confusion—released in quiet tears.”⁵² Another memoir blames the embassy for not helping fellow Koreans (*tongjok*).⁵³ Migrants, therefore, often do not differentiate between coethnics and state agents: in their minds, at this point in their journey, it is shared ethnicity, not state policy, that generates the obligation to assist—and the rejection they perceive is not an invalidation of a legal status to which they are entitled but an experience of exclusion from a community defined by shared ethnicity.

The South Korean state, by contrast, has tended to frame rejection of North Korean claims in geopolitical terms. Since normalization, both the ROK government and the South Korean public have seen Beijing’s support as necessary for unification, an approach that President Roh Tae-woo called “opening the North Korean door by opening the Chinese door.”⁵⁴ PRC-ROK normalization talks in the early 1990s do not appear to have addressed DPRK defectors, who were rare at the time and seldom defected via China. As a result, with a few high-profile exceptions,⁵⁵ the South Korean government has believed that the geopolitical realities of the PRC’s role compel them to treat North Koreans in China as something less than full ROK citizens, even when North Koreans explicitly appeal for that standing. As one memoir recounts: “In Seoul, many years later, I ran into the same diplomat who had treated me so coldly. ‘You must realize,’ he began by way of

apology, ‘that establishing our burgeoning diplomatic relations with China had taken us a very long time and required enormous efforts. We simply could not allow ourselves to act in a manner that would place China in an embarrassing situation vis-à-vis its ally in the North.’”⁵⁶

Over time, South Korea’s stance became common social knowledge among networks that assist with escape and resettlement, and migration pathways were adjusted accordingly. Missionaries and brokers advised escapees that South Korea “wanted to avoid anything that might cause conflict with China” and avoided ROK diplomatic facilities in China.⁵⁷ Instead, migrants embarked on long, arduous, often dangerous journeys via Central or Southeast Asia. South Korea’s geopolitical imperatives vis-à-vis the PRC overrode both ethnic affinity and constitutional-legal rights, resulting in frequent denial of extraterritorial citizen status to North Korea-born escapees in China.

Other third countries reveal similar patterns. Escapees in Mongolia spoke and wrote positively of their treatment by ROK representatives in Mongolia, recalling their time with phrases like “our brethren from the South [took care]” of us.⁵⁸ At the same time, narrators expressed disbelief that “the same South Korean government could behave so differently in Beijing and here”⁵⁹ and wrote of their belief that Mongolia calibrated its treatment of North Korean refugees “to reflect the relative importance of each relationship [with North Korea, South Korea, the United States, and China] at any given moment.”⁶⁰ Even in cases when state recognition has been granted, North Korean narratives often perceive it as geopolitically contingent.

In Southeast Asia, North Korean migrants’ experiences with the South Korean government have varied by country. Narrative evidence shows that ROK facilities in Vietnam and Laos have commonly rejected North Koreans seeking resettlement; both countries maintain strong relations with Pyongyang and have repatriated escapees and asylum seekers back to North Korea. In 2009 the ROK vice consul in Hanoi explained the state’s logic in the presence of a reporter: “It is the policy of Korean consulates not to antagonize host countries with actions contrary to their interests”; he cited a need to avoid diplomatic embarrassment before President-elect Lee Myung-bak’s visit.⁶¹ By contrast, ROK personnel in Cambodia and Thailand are often described as more helpful.⁶²

North Korean narratives express both comprehension and criticism of the geopolitical reality that shapes their reception by the South Korean state.⁶³ Hyeonseo Lee, who sought consular assistance when her mother and brother were imprisoned and her ROK passport was confiscated by Laotian authorities, wrote critically of the ROK on both moral and legal grounds: “When I later learned that embassies have an obligation under international law to protect and support their citizens, I found the attitude of the South Korean embassy in Vientiane very hard to understand.”⁶⁴ Others expressed a more communitarian sense of failure, lamenting a geopolitically impotent South Korea unable to care for its own: “Impoverished North Korea, surviving on Chinese aid, could afford to send its

agents on the rampage with the cooperation of the Chinese authorities. But South Korea, an economic ally of China that invested in Chinese reform, seemed to have no will or authority to rescue one of its own. Did I have a homeland at all?"⁶⁵

Following complaints about inconsistent policy and public controversy over the repatriation of nine North Koreans from Laos in 2013, the ROK shifted toward providing earlier, consistent, and more substantial assistance to North Koreans seeking to enter South Korea. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued new protocols and established a "National Community Overseas Cooperation Team" within the ministry to "unify the protection and transfer of North Korean defectors."⁶⁶ By this time, however, brokers, NGOs, and defector networks had already redirected migrants toward Thailand, which does not formally recognize North Koreans as refugees but maintains good relations with the ROK and uses migrants' ostensible ROK citizenship as justification to send them onward to South Korea.⁶⁷

Finally, ROK recognition of North Koreans as citizens remains incomplete during their time abroad, even when the state provides protection and transfer to South Korea. North Koreans awaiting resettlement in extraterritorial detention are not provided regular state-issued identification, and their right of entry depends on first passing an interim security screening and on the ROK's ability to negotiate exit paperwork with the third country's government. (Once entry is approved, they fly to South Korea under escort with specialized paperwork.) Combined, these factors render tenuous a right theoretically guaranteed under international law, the right to enter the country of one's citizenship.⁶⁸ Throughout extraterritorial negotiations for citizenship, therefore, ROK state recognition of North Korean claims is incomplete and contingent on the geopolitical context where migrants make their initial claim.

"Precitizens": Security Screening

Upon arrival on South Korean soil, North Koreans are typically met by teams composed of ROK security and intelligence personnel and are detained for a ninety-day screening at an interrogation and protection center.⁶⁹ A stay in a group dormitory is usually followed by individual investigation in solitary confinement; applicants for resettlement are prompted to draw a map of their hometown and asked detailed questions (often repeatedly, to identify any inconsistencies). Most narratives describe interrogation as intense, though some taper toward cordiality as investigators gain confidence in interviewees' truthfulness.⁷⁰

Although this stage of resettlement has received relatively little scholarly attention, narrative evidence confirms that government recognition of claimants' ROK citizenship remains incomplete and that the state explains and justifies its policies during this part of the process by reference to the security threat North Korea poses in terms of terrorism, espionage, and infiltration. Screening procedures are led by the National Intelligence Service, the descendant organization of the

Korean Central Intelligence Agency, which managed domestic and foreign intelligence (including counterintelligence and counterinfiltration) throughout the ROK's military-authoritarian period (1961–87).⁷¹ The stated purpose for the screening is to identify two groups: spies or infiltrators sent by the DPRK, and ethnically Korean PRC citizens who are not entitled to ROK citizenship (*Chosŏn-jok*; *Chaoxianzu* in Mandarin).⁷²

During interrogation, rights provided to full ROK citizens are circumscribed or withheld (freedom of movement, the right to have counsel, etc.).⁷³ The stakes are high: suspected spies face trial and imprisonment, and Korean Chinese individuals whom the authorities decide have misrepresented themselves as North Korean can be deported to China.⁷⁴ Moreover, in November 2019 the South Korean government took the unusual step of repatriating North Koreans back to the DPRK itself; the Ministry of Unification called them “serious criminals” (allegedly for killing their fellow fishermen before fleeing to South Korea) and said it could not trust their “intention of defection.”⁷⁵ The case made it clear that not all North Koreans who arrive in South Korea are automatically granted citizenship, entry, and residency.

The South Korean state can therefore withhold or grant citizenship and its attendant rights of entry and protection depending on its assessment of an individual claimant's background. Theorists note that the need to prove one's identity—as North Koreans entering South Korea must—raises thorny questions about democratic citizenship, because it strips citizens of natural rights prior to that proof, “invert[ing] government by consent of the people into a regime of citizens' praying for privileges to be granted by permission of the government.”⁷⁶ Indeed, scholars highlight the risk that uncoupling territory from jurisdiction, as has occurred on Korea's divided peninsula, will lead to rights disaggregation and withdrawal of protections to which citizens should be entitled—the outcome faced by North Koreans, whose citizenship and protection are in abeyance until the territorial/jurisdictional discrepancy is resolved.⁷⁷

One narrative in particular articulates this discomfort plainly. The author recounted protesting to a South Korean official, “If I don't have my identification papers, will I be denied asylum? I'm speaking Korean right now. Is that not proof enough that I'm one of you? If we don't have our papers, do we all have to die like [my friend]?”⁷⁸ In this passage, the narrator articulates a sense of unfairness and outrage that his protection and membership depend on someone else's determination of his citizen status; he feels keenly the vulnerability of being what scholars have termed (in other contexts) an “undocumented citizen” who is “evidentially stateless.”⁷⁹

Even if an applicant proves North Korean identity and is granted permission to enter and resettle, the state (via a twenty-three-agency Consultative Council on Residents Escaping from North Korea, led by the Ministry of Unification) can opt to withhold protection and support benefits, which at present include housing, education, and settlement subsidies; vocational training; and eligibility for other

support, including community-based counseling and police protection programs.⁸⁰ The 2019 North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act specifies conditions under which claims to protection/support may be withheld, denied, or revoked.⁸¹ Articles 9 and 27, for example, list offenses including drug trafficking (common along the DPRK-PRC border), murder, terrorism, “disguised escape,” intentional provision of “false information contrary to the interests of the State,” and attempts to return to the DPRK; Article 9 also contains a provision, rarely applied, in which extended third-country residence can render one ineligible.⁸²

As of 2019 approximately 280 “nonprotected” North Koreans had resettled in South Korea (~1.5% of those resettled). Around three-quarters of these were denied protection and support because they applied after having been in South Korea for over a year, rather than declaring their status and applying for resettlement before/upon entry; in 2019 the deadline for declaring and applying for protection was extended to three years after arrival.⁸³ Until early 2017, children born in third countries to a North Korean parent, though typically admitted to the ROK, were also ineligible for financial support; in 2016 this included 1,317 (52%) of 2,517 DPRK-heritage refugee youth.⁸⁴

The ROK government has provided inconsistent information on whether individuals denied protection/support benefits will still be granted citizenship. In 2010–11 the ROK stated to Canadian and UK courts that the government could deny nationality on Article 9 grounds but told an Australian court both that citizenship was “automatically and immediately granted” pending identity confirmation and that citizenship procedures were “more difficult” in Article 9 cases.⁸⁵ In 2015 a UK court found that DPRK spies are prosecuted but not repatriated, that failing the protection procedure did not condemn individuals to repatriation, and that Article 9 appeared to provide grounds for withholding resettlement benefits rather than denying citizenship.⁸⁶ These rulings suggest that “failed” screening was more likely to compromise rights typically accorded with citizenship than to nullify citizenship itself, but the November 2019 repatriation of the North Korean fishermen (described above) raises the more serious possibility of citizenship status being denied altogether.

North Korean narratives, on the other hand, consistently and clearly interpret screening as a process in which the state has discretion to grant or withhold citizenship. One narrator wrote, “I was not yet a South Korean citizen; to become one, I had to go through the screening process.”⁸⁷ Two other memoirs describe hearing that the right of entry was conditional on “passing” and that one could be deported if he/she failed.⁸⁸ Still another described this stage as “the last test, a test to decide my future,” adding, “if I passed, I would be eligible for South Korean citizenship.”⁸⁹ Narratives describe this stage with varied emotions: excitement, relief, exhaustion, terror, anxiety, nervousness, confidence.⁹⁰ Interview evidence reveals similar perceptions of the process: citizenship is not automatic or taken for granted, and resettlement in South Korea is likely but not guaranteed.⁹¹

Many defectors also perceive the state's security rationale as legitimate but object to specific procedures; female narrators are more likely to describe the process as dehumanizing.⁹² Throughout screening, therefore, although North Koreans possess formal juridical citizenship, the state's security concerns render recognition of their citizenship claims incomplete; North Koreans' success in claiming citizen status is fundamentally contingent on resolving the state's security concerns.

Citizens in Training: Hanawon

After screening, North Koreans move to Hanawon, a secure, isolated facility established in the late 1990s to prepare defector-refugees for life in South Korea. Hanawon classes teach practical logistics and social norms, offer transitional education and vocational training, and (re)teach Korean history. Published narratives describe its ninety-day program as a "crash course" and "halfway house between the two Koreas," preparation for a society that narrators describe by turns as capitalist, "modern," and democratic.⁹³ At Hanawon, North Koreans are citizens in training, working toward formal ROK recognition of their citizenship at the end of their stay. The citizenship taught at Hanawon, however, is very different from the citizenship that North Koreans have experienced thus far in the resettlement process.

Some of the courses taught at Hanawon focus explicitly on teaching residents "democratic citizenship" (*munju simin*)—a term not used in North Korea.⁹⁴ South Korea's name also differs: North Koreans call it *Nam Chosŏn*, whereas South Koreans use *Han'guk*. At Hanawon, therefore, North Koreans must accomplish two politically significant tasks: rename the country they belong to, and redefine their role as members in its political community. Hanawon's curriculum focuses on both formal participation and informal social membership: the constitution, government structure, democratic procedure (elections, rule of law, etc.), and tolerance and diversity (age, income inequality, religion, culture); it also warns of social challenges that can ensnare resettled North Koreans, such as bribery, financial scams, and domestic and other violence. Follow-up classes taught by Hana Centers—regional facilities that support post-Hanawon resettlement—emphasize local integration and "democratic civic-mindedness," including etiquette in public facilities, standards of neighborliness, and potential responses to discrimination and prejudice.⁹⁵

The South Korean state's pedagogical approach to citizenship suggests that it views North Koreans as incompletely developed *simin*, or citizens in training: curricular study and mastery are necessary to qualify for full membership. The state's teaching about citizenship also emphasizes legal-contractual conceptions and sociocultural belonging—with little attention to the geopolitical factors that have shaped state treatment of North Korean "citizens" thus far in their journey.

Although Hanawon emphasizes ethnic unity, it is also a stage during which North Koreans experience "differential exclusion," wherein legal citizen status

fails to confer full social membership.⁹⁶ One instructor observed, for example, that disease-fearing South Korean staff used separate bathrooms from North Korean residents, creating de facto segregation among a Korean community that they were simultaneously attempting to portray as unified.⁹⁷ Other signals of incomplete social membership are more subtle; in both interviews and published accounts, Hanawon graduates interpret instructors' attempts to realistically portray the competitiveness of South Korean society as lack of confidence in North Koreans' abilities to become valued members.⁹⁸ Some residents describe experiencing bitterness, disillusionment, or discouragement at the magnitude of the transition and array of choices they face.⁹⁹ Others use rhetoric learned at Hanawon to assert claims to membership; one boy told his teacher, "I am also originally a Korean person," using the South Korean term *Han'guk saram* rather than North Korea's *Chosŏn saram* to stake his claim to belonging.¹⁰⁰

Finally, formal recognition of citizenship through the provision of documentation (typically the Resident Registration Card [RRC], *chumin tŭngnokchŭng*) is delayed until the end of an individual's time at Hanawon.¹⁰¹ Practically, RRCs provide access to welfare benefits, government services, and other components of T. H. Marshall's "social citizenship,"¹⁰² but to most North Koreans their deeper significance is symbolic. Documents certifying membership matter greatly to individuals who were previously undocumented and vulnerable. One narrator described this condition as being "unable to breathe"; another explained wanting to go to South Korea "not because of the government's settlement funds, but because I wanted my ID card . . . an ID with the three syllables of my name, the most wanted thing in the world."¹⁰³ A third writer recalled that having her ID photo taken "finally felt like I was really going to become a citizen. . . . [It] was an important milestone."¹⁰⁴ Other narrators recalled:

For the first time, I no longer had to live in hiding! It was such a burden lifted off my shoulders. Even if, in the moment, I didn't quite realize everything it represented.¹⁰⁵

My heart felt like bursting, because I had been recognized as one among a nation of equals, rather than a subject.¹⁰⁶

After getting the ID, I felt that I finally became a citizen [*kungmin*] of the ROK.¹⁰⁷

In an interview, one recalled the moment when she got her (American) driver's license: "When I held the card with my photo on it—it was the first time I felt like a country was telling me I belonged."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, documentation carries such significance for many North Koreans that some do not believe they are citizens until they have it physically, permanently in their possession.

Both state practice and migrant understanding, therefore, converge on the interpretation that North Koreans' ROK citizenship is incomplete while they are at Hanawon. Although their citizenship has existed in theory and by law from birth, and

resettling North Koreans have been on ROK soil for as much as six months by the time they leave the resettlement facility, Hanawon graduation is when the state formally recognizes them as citizens and allows them to claim standard citizen rights. Until June 2007 RRCs listed Hanawon as the birthplace of all North Korean resettlers—literally suggesting that North Koreans are born as citizens from the Hanawon process.¹⁰⁹

Resettled Citizens of South Korea

The external and geopolitical dimensions of citizenship come back to the fore soon after North Korean resettlers leave Hanawon, in two ways. First, North Koreans interpret ongoing experiences of differential exclusion by reflecting on their place not just in South Korean society but in a global environment. Second, the empowerment that ROK citizenship provides abroad becomes highly salient, especially if family members remain outside South Korea.

North Koreans' emphasis on communitarian aspects of membership can lead them to weigh ethnic and identity-based dimensions of incorporation heavily in their self-assessments of integration in South Korean society. Many feel strong disillusionment when formal citizen status does not produce social equality with other South Koreans.¹¹⁰ "Because of a single brotherhood shared between North and South Koreans," one scholar explained, North Koreans feel "betrayal by their blood brothers' discrimination."¹¹¹ Some also feel that Korean ethnicity makes them more deserving of assistance and membership than non-Korean immigrants.¹¹² Narrative evidence reflects individuals' grappling with what qualities—legal, communal, behavioral—make someone a member of a polity, often employing global frames of reference:

Am I North Korean? That's where I was born and raised. . . . Or am I South Korean? I have the same blood as people here, the same ethnicity. But how does my South Korean ID make me South Korean? People here treat North Koreans as servants, as inferiors. . . . There was no country I could say was mine.¹¹³

Some South Koreans don't like that we, the defectors, benefit from the system, thanks to government aid. And yet I have a South Korean passport and I have the right to vote. I am just as much a citizen as everyone else here. But some people, both young and old, don't think of me as an equal. They treat me like they treat immigrants from Southeast Asia, the Philippines, or Cambodia: the "poor people" they despise so much.¹¹⁴

Although I am a citizen [*kungmin*] of the ROK, the North Korean refugee [*t'albukcha*] label follows me all the time.¹¹⁵

For some, the domestic context heightens North-South cleavages whereas a global context reduces them: "If we were in China, we would become emotionally

attached to the granting of South Korean citizenship. Here, we're all Korean . . . so I don't have a strong feeling about South Korean citizenship."¹¹⁶ Another interviewee explained coming to the United States in similar terms: "In South Korea I would be a *North* Korean; here I can just be Korean American."¹¹⁷ Others use provinces or hometowns to describe their origins, which allows them to situate their distinctiveness inside a pan-Korean sense of communal inclusion: "Like Pusan or Seoul people, I am a Hamgyōng-bukto person," or a "Pyongyang *simin*," or a "Seoul *simin*."¹¹⁸

Leaving Hanawon also brings geopolitical contestation over citizenship back to the forefront—on new terms. Traveling abroad as a "normal" citizen is the last step in progressing to full citizenship, and ROK policy on this has evolved over time. Originally, the ROK did not allow North Korean migrants to obtain a passport until six months after they left Hanawon; it then granted single-use rather than five-year, multiple-entry passports.¹¹⁹ For a period, then, the South Korean state limited resettlers' ability to project their ROK citizen identity extraterritorially and to act as ROK citizens abroad, even though they were recognized as full citizens when based inside the polity itself. After resettled North Koreans petitioned to end the policy on grounds of discrimination, the restrictions were lifted; today, there are no time limits or differences in the passport issued to resettled North Koreans who have become ROK citizens.¹²⁰

Narrative evidence reveals that, once travel abroad becomes possible, individuals both embrace their new citizen status and question whether it will actually be recognized beyond ROK borders. For many, travel abroad indicates that one is a "true South Korean," as one narrator described honeymooning in Europe as an ROK citizen (*Taehan Min'guk kungmin*).¹²¹ For others, the freedom and value of citizenship rest in the ability to return safely to China to visit loved ones, with the protection conferred by an ROK passport. One narrator's mother, for example, told a friend living illegally in China that once she resettles and obtains a South Korean passport, "You can travel anywhere without fear! You'll be free."¹²² In the minds of many former North Koreans, ROK citizenship means freedom not just at home but abroad as well.

Other narrators and interviewees expressed worry that third countries will not honor their ROK citizenship and fear for physical safety if they travel, especially to China. In the mid-2000s the PRC embassy in Seoul indicated that it could identify ROK citizens of North Korean origin using the Resident Registration Number listed on passports; the PRC embassy threatened to deny former North Koreans a visa to enter China, but many feared that even if the embassy granted them a visa, travel to China risked involuntary repatriation to the DPRK.¹²³ Afterward, South Korea changed the RRN process, making it harder to identify citizens of North Korean origin.¹²⁴

This episode highlights the continued impact of geopolitics (particularly Sino-Korean relations), including on domestic negotiations over citizenship between the South Korean state and its North Korea-born members. North Korean

resettlers advocated for and obtained changes to citizenship procedures because of these procedures' external ramifications. This episode also emphasizes the ongoing salience of the geopolitical nature of citizenship for North Koreans, even after resettlement. For those whose citizenship has been brought into being through transnational migration and repeated border crossing, the ability to have one's citizen status recognized and validated externally by other countries, and to cross their borders legally and safely, is a significant and often foundational component of political membership.

CONCLUSION

North Koreans who migrate to South Korea progress incrementally and unevenly into full ROK citizenship. Despite possessing a shared communitarian identity and strong constitutional-legal basis for claims to membership, individual North Korean migrants' claims to citizen status have historically received widely varying recognition by the ROK state, and their citizenship has accumulated gradually and asynchronously as a result. This process of citizenship claiming and recognition is geopolitical in its origins, constitution, and meaning: the external and interstate constitution of citizenship is most apparent when citizens are located or can travel extraterritorially, while the state's security imperatives appear especially prominently in the border-crossing stages during which migrants move from extraterritorial claimants to domestically based citizens. Approaching citizenship as a geopolitical identity (a) helps excavate intragroup variation in hierarchies of membership, (b) demonstrates that citizenship as negotiated practice occurs internationally as well as domestically, and (c) outlines how changing configurations in the international system can shape state recognition and treatment of citizens, creating ripple effects in the relationship between state and society.

These findings have implications for South Korean resettlement and unification policy and suggest important areas for future research. In Korea, North Korean integration is seen as a vital component of future unification, but state focus has remained largely on improving domestic resettlement processes and assistance programs.¹²⁵ If, however, resettled North Koreans' perceptions of membership are shaped by prearrival experiences abroad, then the ROK's foreign and unification policies must more fully and carefully account for this.

Moving beyond specific questions of Korean citizenship, the experiences of North Korean migrants suggest that citizenship is a status not just shaped by internal state-citizen contracts or a polity's internal communal identity but also generated by the shifting contours of world politics and a particular country and people's place in a global context. By systematically incorporating geopolitical and security factors, scholars of citizenship may be able to shed additional light on not only the meaning of citizenship but also the importance of how it is contested and constructed on the Korean Peninsula and around the world.

NOTES

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1. Longo, *Politics of Borders*; Mann, "Ruling Class Strategies and Citizenship"; Andreas, "Mexicanization of the US-Canada Border"; Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.

2. University of Missouri Institutional Review Board approval nos. 2004769, 2002674.

3. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development*; Leary, "Citizenship, Human Rights, and Diversity."

4. Benhabib, "Transformation of Citizenship"; Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*.

5. Distelhorst and Fu, "Performing Authoritarian Citizenship"; Mann, "Ruling Class Strategies and Citizenship"; Perry, "Chinese Conceptions of Rights"; Pinto, "'Everyday Citizenship' under Authoritarianism"; Yashar, "Institutions and Citizenship," 431.

6. Yashar, "Institutions and Citizenship"; Sassen, "Citizenship Destabilized." See also Conover, Crewe, and Searing, "Nature of Citizenship"; Bosniak, *The Citizen and the Alien*; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, 31–53; and Sobel, *Citizenship as Foundation of Rights*.

7. On Korea, see Suk-young Kim, *DMZ Crossing*; and J. Kim, *Contested Embrace*. For comparison, see Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship*; Brubaker, "Migrations of Ethnic Unmixing"; Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society*; Flynn, "Reconstructing 'Home/lands' in the Russian Federation"; Colton, *Transitional Citizens*; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, *Communism's Shadow*; Herbst, "Creation and Maintenance of Borders in Africa"; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, "Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa"; Liu and van Dongen, "China's Diaspora Policies"; and Gamlen, Cummings, and Vaaler, "Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions."

8. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood*; Brubaker, "Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism"; Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*; Isaac, "Boundaries."

9. Walzer, "Exclusion, Injustice, and the Democratic State," 55.

10. This point about individual and collective identities is made in J. Kim, *Contested Embrace*, 11. Those who have studied abroad will recognize this phenomenon: overseas experiences shape not just individual identities but understanding of what it means to be American, Canadian, Korean, or Chinese. Historically, diasporic nationalism during the colonial period not only contributed to construction of Korean ethnic identity but also helped define Korea to the United States; the Chinese diaspora shaped not just overseas Chinese communities but China itself. Turner, "Outline of a Theory of Citizenship"; L. S. Park, *Consuming Citizenship*; N. Kim, *Imperial Citizens*; R. Kim, *Quest for Statehood*; Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland*.

11. Nyers, "Why Citizenship Studies," 2.

12. Suk-young Kim frames inter-Korean border crossers in terms of "emotional citizenship" precisely to engage "diverse modes of relationship that an individual enters into

with a wide range of communities, which may include but are not necessarily equated to the state” (*DMZ Crossing*, 9). On citizen agency versus state power, see Conover, Crewe, and Searing, “Nature of Citizenship”; Turner, “Outline of a Theory of Citizenship”; Bloemraad, “Who Claims Dual Citizenship?”; and Korteweg, “Construction of Gendered Citizenship at the Welfare Office.”

13. Government of the Republic of Korea, *Constitution of the Republic of Korea*. See also C. Lee, “South Korea”; and C. Lee, “How Can You Say You’re Korean?”

14. ROK *Nationality Act [Gukjeokbeop]*, Act No. 16851 (2010/2019). Corroborated by author’s interviews with three officials at the ROK Ministry of Unification/Institute for Unification Education, July 2013, May 2014, and May 2016.

15. UN Human Rights, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

16. The US North Korean Human Rights Act (Pub. L. 108-333, 118 Stat. 1287), passed in October 2004, allows North Koreans who have not acquired South Korean citizenship to come to the United States as refugees. See www.congress.gov/108/plaws/publ333/PLAW-108publ333.pdf.

17. UN General Assembly, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*; Wolman, “North Korean Asylum Seekers and Dual Nationality”; Wolman, “South Korean Citizenship of North Korean Escapees in Law and Practice.” For a contrasting view, see Government of the Netherlands, *Pronunciation 201404877/1/V2*.

18. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, 44.

19. Miyoshi-Jager, *Narratives of Nation-Building*; Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*; Grzelczyk, “New Approaches to North Korean Politics.”

20. Joppke, *Selecting by Origin*; J. Park and Chang, “Contention in the Construction of a Global Korean Community”; N. H. Kim, “Flexible Yet Inflexible.”

21. This literature treats citizenship in varying ways, from formal rights to informal communal inclusion to affective commitment. Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*; Sohn and Lee, “Study on the Attitude of South Koreans”; Choo, *Decentering Citizenship*; N. H. Kim, “Naturalizing Korean Ethnicity”; Campbell, *South Korea’s New Nationalism*; Hundt, Walton, and Lee, “Politics of Conditional Citizenship in South Korea.”

22. Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship*; Shklar, *American Citizenship*; J. Song, “Smuggled Refugees”; Choi, “North Korean Women’s Narratives of Migration”; Choo, “Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship.”

23. Seol and Skrentny, “Ethnic Return Migration”; E. Kim, *Adopted Territory*; S. Lee and Chien, “Making of ‘Skilled’ Overseas Koreans”; Hur, “Adapting to Democracy”; Denny, Green, and Ward, *New Values, Old Orders*; cf. B. Kim, “Are North Korean Compatriots ‘Korean’?” For survey data, see Kim Sanguk et al., *Han’guk chonghap sahoe chosa 2007*; Chōng and Yi, *Han’gugin ũ kungmin chōngch’ēsōng*; and Kim P. et al., *Han’guk ũ tamunhwa sanghwang*.

24. The Ministry of Unification argued that although North Koreans have lived in a different culture, “it is difficult to regard them as multicultural families,” and they “need to be essentially distinguished.” Government of the Republic of Korea, *Manual for Resettlement Support*, 6. See also Government of the Republic of Korea, *Pukhan it’al chumin chōngch’ak chiwōn silmu p’yōllam*.

25. Shain and Barth, “Diasporas and International Relations Theory,” 469.

26. Seol and Skrentny, “Ethnic Return Migration”; Chang, “Developmental Citizenship in Perspective”; Draudt, “Multiculturalism as State Developmental Policy.”

27. Government of the Republic of Korea, “Policy on North Korean Defectors.”
28. See, e.g., H. Y. Lee, *Lives for Sale*.
29. While this article generally adheres to McCune-Reischauer romanization, certain terms like *Hanawon* follow current official English language spellings.
30. Patterson and Monroe, “Narrative in Political Science.” I exclude non-memoir texts by North Koreans (fiction, poetry, social commentary, etc.).
31. Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*; Polkinghorne, “Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis,” 10; Jeong-hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*; McCormack, “Storying Stories.”
32. Byung-ho Chung, “Between Defector and Migrant,” separates North Koreans into six cohorts; I focus on the post-1990 cohorts (cohorts 4–6). Figures 1–2 contain some pre-1990 accounts from “elite defectors,” who entered through very different resettlement processes, but these accounts do not appear in the qualitative analysis.
33. E.g., Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise”; Go, *Resettling in South Korea*; A. Lee, *North Korean Defectors*. This literature is extensive; a bibliography is available from the author upon request.
34. A. Lee, *North Korean Defectors*; Hur, “Adapting to Democracy”; Denney, Green, and Ward, *New Values, Old Orders*; Soo-Am Kim et al., *Study on North Korean Defectors’ Perceptions*.
35. Matthew Longo calls this a “deep border,” in which border processes extend beyond and within the state. Longo, *Politics of Borders*, 13.
36. Tilly, *Contentious Performances*; Distelhorst and Fu, “Performing Authoritarian Citizenship”; Isin, “Performative Citizenship.”; Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*; Suk-young Kim, *Illusive Utopia*.
37. I analyzed both English- and Korean-language memoirs to assess the effect of audience. I found relatively few differences, as it relates to citizenship, in texts that appear in both languages.
38. Bloemraad, “Theorising the Power of Citizenship as Claims-Making.”
39. Song and Denney, “Studying North Korea through North Korean Migrants”; Schatz, *Political Ethnography*.
40. On qualitative research with vulnerable populations and the importance of trust, see Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau, “Doubly-Engaged Ethnography”; and Liamputtong, *Researching the Vulnerable*.
41. Some human rights activists, including defectors, believe the ROK should advocate more for its North Korean constituents. Interviews with two individuals from North Korea, Seoul, May 2016; interview with two human rights activists, Washington, DC, spring 2018; Padden, “North Korean Defectors Worried.”
42. On variations in state unification policies and their impact on defectors, see Chubb, *Contentious Activism and Inter-Korean Relations*.
43. KY09:137–45; JJS14:220–21; KHD97:54–55.
44. KCH01:206; emphasis added.
45. North Korea–born individual, interview by the author, United States, 2019.
46. Interviews with two North Korea–born individuals and two NGO employees, Seoul, June 2013 and May 2014. Two narratives describe encounters with people that they think are—or who present themselves as—agents of ROK intelligence. The assistance offered is covert rather than consular, and it isn’t clear that the interlocutors are representing themselves accurately. HK05:172–74; KY09:126–27.

47. In one notable exception, a DPRK diplomat-defector convinces the ROK embassy to accept him by reminding counterparts of their constitutional commitment. Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea*, 223.

48. JHA11:333, LCM18:42; LYP00:108; KCH06:178; JHN04:221.

49. HSL15:174, 185.

50. JJS14:194–96; JK15:224; SDH12:155–57; JHN04:206, 210.

51. JJS14:220–21.

52. JK15:224.

53. KHD97:54–55.

54. Roh believed that normalization would lead other socialist countries to follow, paving the way for inter-Korean dialogue and unification. Quote from H. Kim, “Establishment of South Korean-Chinese Diplomatic Relations,” 34; see also E. Kim and Cha, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place.” On public opinion, see Yonhap News Agency, “Half of S. Koreans Pick China as Key Help in Unification.”

55. Cho, “Nine-Year-Old Girl Who Fled North Korea Faces Repatriation.”

56. KCH01:207; see also KHD97:54–55.

57. KY09:137, 45. For similar findings in academic work, see Lankov, “Bitter Taste of Paradise”; Wolman, “South Korean Citizenship of North Korean Escapees in Law and Practice”; and Cathcart, “Evaded States,” 430.

58. ESK15:166–70; LJ14:273.

59. The author noted that he received more protection than his female companions and credited this to his higher intelligence value. KY09:152–53.

60. YMP15 (English): 204.

61. Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea*, 230; see also KHD97:67; and H. J. Lee, *Crossing Heaven's Border*, 258–59.

62. Both countries have diplomatic relations with Pyongyang but strong economic ties to the ROK. Thailand has an immigration detention center where North Koreans have contact with UN High Commissioner for Refugees and ROK government staff while they await screening/resettlement. Today it is the largest transit point for North Koreans, and most choose to resettle in South Korea. The ROK's overseas preliminary investigation, outlined in the *North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act* is usually done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but can involve an interagency Coordinating Council with representatives from the Ministries of Justice and Unification, National Intelligence Service, and Korea National Police Agency. HK05:178–88; HSL15:246, 257–58, 268–71; CGH07:200; KINU, *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea (2013)*; Wolman, “South Korean Citizenship of North Korean Escapees in Law and Practice,” 239; Fifield, “She Fled North Korea.”

63. Some learn to use these dynamics: SDH12:157–58 and JJS14:298–307 describe entering ROK diplomatic facilities in China by first leveraging their stories' appeal to journalists.

64. HSL15:270–71.

65. JJS14:222.

66. Government of the Republic of Korea, *Regulation on the Establishment and Operation of the National Community Overseas Team*; see also Y. H. Park, “Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” Protections for North Koreans seeking resettlement from third countries were further strengthened in January 2019 through revisions to North Korean Refugees

Protection and Settlement Support Act. The changes specified that the director of the ROK National Intelligence Service must (a) report to the Minister of Unification after taking necessary actions for North Koreans who register or notify the state of their intention to resettle and (b) establish and operate temporary protection facilities for North Koreans. (The amendment does not specify whether these facilities will be in South Korea, abroad, or both.) See Government of the Republic of Korea, *North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act*, Article 7.

67. Yang, “South Korea’s Challenge”; Ministry of Unification official, interview by the author, May 2014; two North Korean defectors, interviews by the author, Seoul, May 2014; US-based North Korean refugee, interview by the author, 2017.

68. Chông and Yi, *Han’gugin ūi kungmin chôngch’esông*; Wolman, “South Korean Citizenship of North Korean Escapees in Law and Practice.”

69. In 2014 the Joint Interrogation Center became the Defector Protection Center. Before 2010 screening lengths were unspecified; from 2010 to 2018 it was less than 180 days; in 2018 it was reduced to 90 days. Information found in extraterritorial investigation can lengthen or expedite screening. Yonhap News Agency, “S. Korea Reforming N. Korean Defector Interrogation System.”

70. One memoir recounts an intense week plus another six months (KCH01:220–22); another says “about a month” (SDH12:159); a third describes just twenty-four hours (JK15:295–99).

71. Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police*, chapters 5 and 8.

72. Interview with a South Korean official, Seoul, May 2014. For interrogation of an admitted North Korean agent, see KHH93:141–71.

73. Following mistreatment claims and scrutiny by advocacy groups, closed-door interrogations ended and female attorneys were provided. Yonhap News Agency, “S. Korea Reforming N. Korean Defector Interrogation System.”

74. Moreover, PRC authorities may conduct their own investigation of an individual repatriated to Chinese territory; if PRC authorities decide that the individual in question originally came from North Korea, that individual could be repatriated to the DPRK itself.

75. BBC, “North Korean Fishermen ‘Killed Sixteen Colleagues.’”

76. Sobel, *Citizenship as Foundation of Rights*, 8. For work on “undocumented citizenship” and “evidentiary statelessness” in which administrative process rather than law denies individuals effective proof of nationality, see Hunter, *Undocumented Nationals*.

77. Benhabib, “Borders, Boundaries, and Citizenship”; Glover, “Radically Rethinking Citizenship.”

78. JJS14:305.

79. Hunter, *Undocumented Nationals*.

80. These benefits are summarized in English at Government of the Republic of Korea, “Settlement Support for North Korean Defectors.” See also Choe, “North Korean Defector Is Spurned.”

81. Government of the Republic of Korea, *North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act*.

82. Government of the United Kingdom, *KK and Others*; Wolman, “South Korean Citizenship of North Korean Escapees in Law and Practice,” 243.

83. Article 7 of the 2019 North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act states that North Koreans who wish to make their way into South Korea must “register”

(신청) their intention directly to either South Korean embassies and consulates or other official establishments (e.g., customs/border personnel). J.-S. Lee, “Piboho t’albukcha.”

84. *UniKorea Blog*, “Tto tarūn t’ongil ūi sijak.”

85. Government of Australia, *Refugee Review Tribunal 0909449*, para. 80; *Kim v Canada*, 2010 FC 720, June 30, 2010, para. 15; Government of the United Kingdom, *KK and Others*, para. 15.

86. Government of the United Kingdom, *GP and Others*, 2, 21–23, 28, 66.

87. KSY00:99.

88. YMP15E:209. Guards at the screening center warned one group that “physical fighting was a criminal offense and would hinder progress toward South Korean citizenship.” HSL15:199–203.

89. ESK15:173–75. She also recounted her belief that if she and her mother had been Korean Workers’ Party members, “the interrogators would have been suspicious that we were spies sent by the north” (ESK15:175).

90. KY09:157; JK15:296–99; KCH01:222; ESK15:173–75.

91. Two North Korean-born individuals, interview by the author, Seoul, May 2016.

92. On security justification, see ESK15:166. On dehumanizing procedures, see Jin-hee Park, quoted in Bell, “Manufacturing Kinship in a Nation Divided,” 241; YMP15E:208–11; and CGH07:207–8.

93. HSL15:208–10; YMP15E:213; ESK15:178. Memoirs by those who arrived before Hanawon was established don’t address it, but only one post-2000 account (ESK15:194) mentions bypassing Hanawon.

94. While both North and South Korea use *minjok* to refer to Koreans as an ethnic people, DPRK residents use *inmin* (Chinese cognate *renmin*) for public/collective reference and comrade/friend (*tongmu*, or Sino-Korean *tongji*) interpersonally. The ROK Constitution refers to *kungmin* (nationals) and *in’gan* (human beings); other rhetoric uses *kongmin/kungmin* (public/collective “the people”), and Hanawon uses *simin* (originally “city-dweller,” as “citizen” is in English). Interview with Hanawon instructor, Seoul, July 2014; Cho and Kim, “Study on Settlement Services for North Korean Defectors.”

95. Instructors are coached to focus more on civic obligations and civic responsibility than on democratic formalities. Hana Foundation, *Him naera! chŏngch’ak sŏnggong*, 18–19; Hana Foundation, *Him naera! Ch’wiŏp sŏnggong*.

96. Castles, “How Nation-States Respond”; Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making”; Holston and Appadurai, “Cities and Citizenship.”

97. Kim 2009:184–85; see also KY97:310.

98. Interviews with two North Korean defectors, Seoul, July 2013, May 2014. In memoirs, this reaction to the presentation of South Korean competitiveness appears in HSL15:211; and YMP15E:217.

99. Interview with a North Korean defector, Seoul, July 2013; see also HSL15:211; and YMP15E:217.

100. Quoted in Y. Kim, “Making National Subjects,” 170–71.

101. Interviews with three officials at the Ministry of Unification Resettlement Support Division and Institute for Unification Education, July 2012 and May 2016; interviews with two defectors, South Korea, May 2016. See also ESK15:179–81; and HSL15:212.

102. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development*.

103. HEM15:216; YMP15E:220.

104. ESK15:179–81.
105. ESK15:179–81. See also G. H. Song, “North Korean Migrant Integration,” 113; KSJ17:29; and KSK2015. One memoirist was provided a “green booklet” to travel from Mongolia to South Korea but did not realize it was a passport; only later did she learn “the significance of what I was given that day” (ESK15:169).
106. JJS14:309.
107. LHY04:305.
108. Interview with a US-based North Korean refugee, United States, February 2017.
109. Under the Act on Registration of Family Relations (Act No. 14963, Oct. 31, 2017), most cards list one’s paternal hometown. Y. Kim, “Making National Subjects,” 140–41; G. H. Song, *North Korean Migrant Integration*, 133. For the full text of this Act, see elaw.klri.re.kr/kor_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=45910&type=part&key=8.
110. Communitarian identification socialized in North Korea has been found to remain important to North Koreans after resettlement in the South. Hur, “Refugee Perceptions”; Nasr, “(Ethnic) Nationalism.”
111. G.H. Song, “North Korean Migrants’ Integration into South Korean Society,” 141.
112. This appears to be a minority view. ROK officials explain it as a lingering effect of DPRK socialization; defectors are more likely to refer to the importance of Korean bloodline in entitling them to citizenship in the first place. Interview with a Hana Center employee, Seoul area, May 2014; interview with the head of a resettlement NGO, Seoul, May 2016; Denney, Green, and Ward, *New Values, Old Orders*.
113. HSL15:216–17; see also YMP15E:224; and JJS14:309.
114. ESK15:198; see also CGH07:213.
115. LCM18:198.
116. Quoted in G. H. Song, “North Korean Migrant Integration,” 140.
117. North-Korea born individual, interview by the author, United States, April 2017.
118. CGH07:237; LI17:66, 118; LI05:232; similar comments made by three North Korean defectors, interviews by the author, Seoul, May 2014.
119. *Hankyoreh*, “6-kaewöl isang kungnae kõju t’albukcha poksu yõkwõn palkũp” [Issue of multiple passports for defectors residing in Korea for more than 6 months], 30 March 2004, legacy.www.hani.co.kr/section-003000000/2004/03/003000000200403301918576.html. See also KMD17:100.
120. Two South Korean officials, interviews by the author, January and February 2020.
121. LI17:66/118; LI09:184.
122. YMP15EK:228; see also ESK15:191.
123. Three North Korean defectors, interviews by the author, Seoul, May 2014; Y. Kim, “Making National Subjects,” 140–41; YMP15E:227. In one relatively high-profile narrative, Hyeonseo Lee recounts that for this reason she uses her PRC ID in China; though this places her back in illegal status, she perceives it as less risky than identifying herself as a North Korea–born ROK citizen. In Southeast Asia, however, she uses her ROK passport to obtain consular assistance from the ROK government. HSL15:225, 47.
124. In 2007 RRNs began using a numerical code based on resettlers’ first place of residence, rather than Hanawon. This ameliorated, but did not remove, defectors’ fears. Y. Kim, “Making National Subjects,” 140–41; G. H. Song, “North Korean Migrant Integration,” 133.

125. Soo-Am Kim et al., *Study on North Korean Defectors' Perceptions*. Ironically, state policies intended to increase chances of future unification can deter and compromise today's "small unifications" of individual resettlement and integration.

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