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Perils of Refugee Life

As we argued in the introduction, our interest in the North Korean refugees is twofold: We are concerned about their material and psychological well-being—their experiences as refugees—as well as interested in the insights they might provide with respect to life in North Korea itself. This chapter takes up the first question, drawing primarily on the results of the China survey of 2004–05.

We first consider the reasons why refugees left North Korea and their living conditions in China. Despite the precariousness of their status and their preference for a decent life in North Korea, few plan on returning. Most envision themselves as temporarily residing in China before moving on to a third country. Yet there is evidence of considerable movement back and forth across the border, mostly people carrying money and food back to their extended family members in North Korea.

The refugee community in China is exposed to multiple sources of vulnerability, including not only fear of arrest but also the uncertainty of their work circumstances. We highlight the particular vulnerability of women to forms of abuse such as trafficking, which has recently received increasing attention (Hawk 2003, K. Lee 2006, Sheridan 2006, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea 2009, National Human Rights Commission of Korea 2010).

In the third section we extend this analysis of objective conditions to a consideration of the psychology of the refugees. A key finding, confirmed by more detailed clinical work in South Korea (Jeon 2000, Y. Lee et al. 2001), is that many North Korean refugees suffer severe psychological stress akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This distress is caused in part by the pressures of refugee life in China. As with refugees in other environ-

ments, the inhospitable nature of the initial host country is no doubt an important cause of the psychological problems we document.

In the fourth section we document how the refugees' distress not only is caused by their treatment in China but is also a result of the long shadow cast by the North Korean famine and abuses suffered at the hands of North Korean authorities, including with respect to the distribution of food. These traumas, in turn, affect the ability of the refugees to hold jobs in China and accumulate resources for on-migration. We also find some evidence that women are more vulnerable to psychological distress than men.

Who Are the Refugees? A Demographic Profile

Before turning to the substantive questions of interest, it is important to consider the demographic profile of the refugees we interviewed. Except for a few notable differences between them, particularly with respect to the share of women respondents, the characteristics of the two survey samples are broadly similar. They also roughly mirror what we think we know about the North Korean adult population as a whole with the exception of the two differences described in appendix A: Members of lower-income classes and residents of the northeast provinces were both overrepresented, as has been the case with previous surveys conducted in both China and South Korea.[1]

Most of the respondents were prime age adults; the median age of the respondents was 38 years in the China survey and 43 in the South Korea survey, compared with 45 in the most recent census data released by the North Korean authorities (United Nations Statistics Division 2009).[2] In the China survey, females slightly outnumbered males, 52 to 48 percent. This is a bit unusual insofar as females account for more than three-quarters of North Koreans entering South Korea, and 63 percent of the respondents in the South Korea survey were female. According to the North Korean

1. A smaller survey conducted in South Korea (Y. H. Lee 2007) is an exception; the socioeconomic profile of respondents is decidedly more upscale. The Lee sample may be unrepresentative (as might be inferred by comparison to a larger survey conducted by Chon et al. 2007), or it might reflect the fact that North Koreans from more advantaged backgrounds have the resources and connections (either on their own or through family connections in South Korea) to get to South Korea more expeditiously. The South Korean–based respondents in B. Y. Kim (2010) similarly do not perceive themselves as poor. Under this second interpretation, the socioeconomic profile of our China sample may reflect a sample selection issue: More advantaged refugees spend less time in China and thus escape counting in our survey. However, this would not be the case for the South Korea survey, which also asks the amount of time spent in China before on-migrating. See Harden (2007). Interestingly, the northeastern provinces are less overrepresented in our surveys than in Y. H. Lee (2007).

2. The veracity of North Korean official statistics, including demographic data, is questionable. See Eberstadt (2007, chapter 2) for discussion.

Table 2.1 Educational attainment of survey respondents and North Korean population (percent)

Level	China survey	South Korea survey	UN Census 2009
Elementary	43.9	1.1	5.3
Secondary	52.9	61.7	73.4
Technical school (3 years or less)	1.2	15.3	3.6
Tertiary or higher	1.2	21.6	17.7
Other	0.9	0.4	n.a.
Total (ages 15–64)	100	100	100

n.a. = not applicable

census, males make up 48 percent of the adult population and females account for 52 percent.

There are a number of possible explanations for this pattern. The conventional wisdom is that most refugees leaving North Korea in recent years have been female, reflected in the figures for those arriving in South Korea.[3] The comparatively higher share of males in the China survey may also reflect that it is the older of the two surveys and the conventional wisdom is that the female share has risen over the years, but given patterns of refugee settlement in South Korea it could be aberrant. However, it may also be that the patterns of exit, experiences in China, and on-migration via third countries are different for males and females. For example, if males tend to stay in China (and third countries) working and accumulating money, which is then transferred to their families or villages in North Korea, then even if the numbers of males and females leaving North Korea were equal, those entering South Korea would be disproportionately female.

North Korea's mandatory education includes a year of kindergarten, four years of primary school, and a six-year middle school; at that point (age 15–16), students come to the end of mandatory education and either exit the education system or are channeled into technical school (two to three years), college (four years) or university (four to six years), and from the latter on to postgraduate studies. The responses are self-reported, and if anything, the respondents would be expected to exaggerate their credentials. The China survey results appear to belie the regime's claims regarding the achievement of universal education goals (table 2.1). In the China survey, a slight majority of the sample reported high school education (53 percent), but 44 percent reported having only elementary

3. The average female share of defectors between 2000 and 2009 was 66 percent; the share has risen steadily from 43 percent in 2000 to 69 percent in 2005 to 77 percent in 2009 (see South Korean Ministry of Unification website, www.unikorea.go.kr [accessed on October 12, 2010]).

education (which would encompass junior high school in the US system). Educational attainment is somewhat higher in the South Korea survey, yet 62 percent reported having only a middle school education, approximately equivalent to graduating from high school in the United States. Another 15 percent reported that they had technical school training, with 22 percent having college training.[4] The higher rates of educational attainment among the South Korea–based survey respondents may reflect some selection bias. Those with higher education may either have access to more resources in North Korea or more efficiently accumulate resources in China, facilitating successful on-migration to South Korea.

In terms of occupation, most respondents in the China survey were laborers (56 percent), with farmers (35 percent) the next largest occupational group (table 2.2). Other reported occupations included student, trader, professional or technician, administrator, soldier, party official, and government official, although some of these were quite small in number. In the South Korea survey, the occupational status of the respondents is complicated somewhat by the large number of women in the sample; 17 percent of respondents reported that they were housewives. Looking only at those in the economically active population—excluding housewives, students, and retirees (in combination, just under one-quarter of the sample)—the largest category among those in the workforce was laborers (40 percent), followed by government workers (19 percent), merchants (8 percent, with nearly two-thirds of these women), and professionals, farmers, office workers, soldiers, and others (each between 5 and 7 percent).[5]

In both surveys, the pattern of responses is highly correlated with those to a question about the respondents' fathers' occupation, suggesting little occupational mobility between generations. In the China survey, there is some intergenerational mobility into the "technical" class, yet the class structure is remarkably stable: More than 90 percent of those surveyed who were laborers also had laborers as parents. Virtually all farmers had farmers

4. In the South Korea survey, a question about the education of the respondents' fathers suggests at least some increase in educational attainment over time: 17 percent reported that their fathers had only an elementary education compared with fewer than 2 percent of the respondents in the sample.

5. The small share of farmers in the sample is unusual compared with past surveys. However, 14 percent responded that their work unit was a state farm or cooperative, and in an answer to a different question, 133 respondents—fully 44 percent of the full sample—answered that they worked on a state farm or collective. A closer inspection of this group reveals that 54 of them, just over 40 percent, self-identify as "laborers." For our purposes, it is useful to separate out this entire group as "state farm or collective employees," even though they reflect a variety of different occupational categories (in addition to farmers and workers, this group includes 34 housewives, 11 administrative staff [professional, government, office worker/teacher], 6 merchants, 6 students, 2 soldiers, and 2 "other"). Because of their involvement in state farms and collectives and their probable rural location, we would expect them to constitute a distinct group.

Table 2.2 Occupational profile of survey respondents and (economically active) North Korean population (percent)

China survey		South Korea survey		UN Census 2009	
Professional	1.6	Professional	7.1	Professionals, technicians, and associate professionals	11.3
Farmer	34.9	Farmer	7.1	Market gardeners and crop growers	28.1
Trader/merchant	1.7	Trader/merchant	7.9	n.a.	n.a.
Laborer	56.1	Laborer	40.1	Craft and related trades workers, machine operators and assemblers, workers in elementary occupations, forestry and fisheries	46.5
Politician	0.2	Office worker/government	18.9	Senior officials and managers	1.5
Administrative worker	1.4	Teacher	5.3	Clerks, service, and sales workers	7.1
Soldier	0.7	Soldier	5.7	Military	5.5
Occupation not specified	3.4	Occupation not specified	7.9	Occupation not specified	0.1
Total	100	Total	100	All occupation groups	100

n.a. = not applicable (no category comparable to "trader/merchant" category)

Note: Categories "student" (3.4 percent of the China survey and 7 percent of the South Korea survey) and "housewife" (17.3 percent of the South Korea survey) are excluded since only the working population is considered here. Some categories are not comparable due to differences in classification.

Table 2.3 Provincial distribution of survey respondents and North Korean population (percent)

Province	China survey	South Korea survey	UN Census 2009
North Hamgyong	57.1	50.0	10.0
South Hamgyong	18.8	14.7	13.1
Pyongyang	2.3	7.0	13.9
North Pyongan	6.3	6.7	11.7
South Pyongan	0.6	4.0	17.4
North Hwanghae	1.1	2.7	9.1
South Hwanghae	0.7	3.3	9.9
Ryanggang	4.9	5.0	3.1
Kangwon	0.8	4.3	6.3
Jagang	7.2	2.3	5.6
Other	0.3	n.a.	n.a.
Total	100	100	100

n.a. = not applicable

Note: The figure of North Korean population includes only the civilian population.

as parents. The number of farmers or laborers whose parents did not come from these classes was trivial. Similarly, in the South Korea survey, the two dominant categories with respect to father's employment were those whose fathers were laborers (41 percent) or government-employed (22 percent); we see little intergenerational movement from these categories either. Apart from policies to limit certain types of mobility, this stability could also be implicit evidence of the low rate of economic growth and a relatively stagnant composition of output in North Korea.

Residents of the northeast provinces were overrepresented in both surveys, as has been the case with most previous surveys conducted in both China and South Korea (table 2.3). There are two main reasons for this bias. The more obvious is proximity (see map at front of the book). The eastern end of the Tumen River is relatively narrow at points and freezes during the winter. It has become the main route for egress. Travel within North Korea has historically required approval, subjecting those engaged in unauthorized travel to punishment. Those living near the border are less likely to be apprehended and punished while escaping.[6]

The second reason for the overrepresentation of refugees from the

6. One implication of this is that there may be a certain sample selection bias at work in the results: Since it is comparatively easier to exit from the northeast than from other parts of the country, refugees from this region may have relatively distinct attitudes or life experiences. This possibility is explored in the subsequent chapters.

northeast is that these provinces were the worst affected during the famine period and have remained economically depressed since. These provinces include mountainous, traditionally food-deprived areas, which are more lightly populated, but also highly urbanized industrial population centers on the east coast. North Korea is surprisingly industrialized and urbanized for a country at its level of development. At the outset of China's reforms in 1978, about 15 percent of the workforce was in industry. Vietnam had 12 percent of the workforce in industry when the government initiated reforms in that country in 1989. Just prior to the famine in 1993, by contrast, fully 37 percent of North Korea's labor force was in industry (Noland 2000, table 3.7), the result in part of Japanese industrial investments, predominantly in the northern part of the peninsula during the colonial era, and in part of a Stalinist development strategy that placed particular emphasis on heavy industry.

As food shortages became apparent in the early 1990s, the working classes of the industrial cities in the northeast were particularly vulnerable to the declining ability of the public distribution system to provide adequate rations (Smith 2005; Haggard and Noland 2007, chapter 2). These traditionally food-deprived provinces were highly dependent on the public distribution system, and famine appears to have started there well before it hit the rice-growing western provinces. During 1994, the North Korean government reportedly stopped sending food shipments to North and South Hamgyong and Ryanggang altogether.

It is important to underscore, however, that while this overweighting of the northeast limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the sample with respect to the North Korean population as a whole, it does not necessarily present a problem for drawing inferences about the North Korean refugee diaspora, which almost certainly is similarly skewed. In addition, multivariate regression techniques can be used to control for region to some extent since all provinces in the country, as well as the privileged capital city of Pyongyang, were represented among the respondents.

The North Korean regime has conducted a succession of classification exercises, and family background is a key determinant of life in North Korea (Hunter 1999).[7] The regime has divided the population into categories of reliable supporters, the basic masses, and the "impure class"; these are commonly called the "core" (*haek-sim-gye-cheung*), "wavering" (*dong-yo-gye-cheung*), and "hostile" (*juk-dae-gye-cheung*) classes.[8] In our sample,

7. "Core" supporters of the government, including party members, enjoy educational and employment preferences, are allowed to live in better-off areas, and have greater access to food and other material goods. Those with a "hostile" or disloyal profile, such as relatives of people who collaborated with the Japanese during the Japanese occupation, of those who went south during the Korean War, or of landowners, are subjected to a number of disadvantages, assigned to the worst schools, jobs, and localities, and sometimes sent to labor camps.

8. The North Korean classes are generally known to consist of "core group" or "core class"

the bulk of respondents were categorized as "wavering" (62 percent), with 11 percent "hostile" and 14 percent reporting that they did not know. Nonetheless, 14 percent reported being in the "core" group, suggesting that even privileged political status did not provide benefits adequate to deter migration. There is some evidence of a cross-generational downward drift in status, though the classification of respondents is statistically indistinguishable from that of their fathers. Taken as a whole, these indicators depict a relatively stagnant society. It is possible, however, that the relatively low education levels and lack of occupational or political mobility reflect the stunted opportunities for those who took the risk to migrate, including as a result of their political status.

A final set of demographic variables of importance are the date when respondents left North Korea, how much time they spent abroad before coming to South Korea, and how much time they have spent in South Korea. As noted in chapter 1, the date of exit is crucial in methodological terms, because it determines the relevant time frame for all of our retrospective questions, which are about conditions at the time they left North Korea. For some purposes it is useful to consider what we will call the pre- and post-reform subsamples, with those who left in 2003 and after being the postreform group; in both surveys these groups are of roughly equal size. In the case of the more recently conducted South Korea survey, we use a "four era" periodization: a "famine era" group (those who left in 1998 or before, roughly 25 percent of the sample), a "postfamine" group (1999–2002, again 25 percent), a "reform era" group (those who left between 2003 and 2005, 35 percent of the sample), and a "retrenchment era" group (2006 and after, 15 percent).

Duration outside North Korea, particularly time in South Korea, may also be important in shaping attitudes and perceptions. Those with the perspective of a long-time refugee in a third country or as a resident of South Korea may view North Korea very differently because of the tribulations of being a refugee (particularly in China) or socialization to alternative views of the country (particularly in South Korea). In the case of the China survey, the median length of time in China was two to three years, with nearly one-third of the sample having resided in China for more than

(*haek-sim-gun-jung* or *haek-sim-gye-cheung*), "basic group" or "wavering class" (*gibon-gun-jung* or *dong-yo-gye-cheung*), and "complex group" or "hostile class" (*bok-jab-gun-jung* or *juk-dae-gye-cheung*). Important to note is that these classifications are not communicated directly to citizens, although the most favored and disfavored classes are aware of their classifications by the treatment they receive. It has also been reported that the official terminologies used by the local police are different from the ones above; these terminologies are "basic group" (*gibon-gun-jung*), "complex group" (*bok-jab-han-gun-jung*), and "the remaining elements of the hostile class" (*juk-dae-gye-geup-jan-yeo-bun*). For the purpose of our analysis, we used in our survey the terminologies that are colloquially used and understood among the North Korean people: "core" (*haek-sim-gun-jung*), "basic" (*gibon-gye-cheung*), and "people needing reeducation" (*gyo-yang-dae-sang*).

three years. In the South Korea survey, the median time spent in China or other third countries before reaching South Korea was three years, and the median time spent in South Korea was four years and outside North Korea was six years. It is possible that the responses of those who have been outside North Korea for an extended period are less reliable due to faulty memories. However, our attempts to explore whether time outside North Korea or in South Korea had a significant impact on the pattern of responses, at least with respect to fact-based questions (as distinct from normative opinions), did not uncover systematic memory bias.

Leaving North Korea, Coming to China

The decision to escape North Korea is not a trivial one, particularly given the harsh penalties on both sides of the border. Refugees consider leaving their homeland for diverse reasons, some having to do with inclination ("push" factors), others with information on opportunities in the target country ("pull" factors). But even if there are good reasons to cross the border, migration requires resources and planning and is rarely done without some kind of support, be it from friends, family, or experienced traffickers motivated by financial gain, religious conviction, or political fervor. Such networks and connections enable refugees to leave in the first place and provide them with at least some hope of sustaining themselves on the other side of the border.

Legal Risks

Before turning to the push and pull factors that are generating this flow of refugees, it is important to understand the legal risks North Korean refugees face. Those who "illegally" cross the border or help others to do so face stiff penalties on their return. However, the severity of punishment has oscillated over time. Periods of greater accommodation—and milder punishment—have been followed by harsh crackdowns and increased punishment, including the death penalty.

Historically, unauthorized departure was regarded as an "act of treason" and put defectors at risk of capital punishment. Of necessity, these draconian measures were relaxed during the famine as the movement of refugees accelerated rapidly. Prior to changes in the North Korean penal code in 2004, a person who illegally crossed "a frontier of the Republic" nonetheless typically faced a sentence of up to three years in a *kwan-li-so*, the notorious political penal-labor camps where conditions are abysmal, torture is practiced, and death rates are high (Hawk 2003).

Several factors influenced the severity of the actual punishment meted out to North Koreans repatriated from China, however. These included the number of times the person had been to China, their background, and

whether their movement into China had a political motivation. Those who did not appear politically dangerous were sent to newly established labor training camps, where they would spend between three months and three years in forced labor (see chapter 4).

Those detained who are classified as "political offenders" face more severe penalties. The law criminalizes defection and attempted defection, including the attempt to gain entry to a foreign diplomatic facility for the purpose of seeking political asylum. Individuals who cross the border with the purpose of defecting or seeking asylum in a third country are subject to a minimum of five years of "labor correction." In "serious" cases, defectors or asylum seekers are sentenced to indefinite terms of imprisonment and forced labor, confiscation of property, or death. Because of the regime's emphasis on racial purity (Myers 2010), miscegenation is also treated brutally. Women who are suspected of having become pregnant in China are subject to forced abortions, and in other cases, infanticide is practiced.

Facilitating exit is also a crime. Under Article 118 of the criminal code, an official with the "frontier administration" who helps "someone to violate a frontier" faces sentences of between two and seven years in one of the country's political prison camps. Private "traffickers" also meet harsh fates, including summary execution.

These risks are compounded because of the stance of the Chinese government (Kurlantzick and Mason 2006). According to the South Korean Ministry of Unification, a secret agreement was signed between China and North Korea in the early 1960s governing security in the border area. In 1986, another bilateral agreement was signed calling for the return of North Koreans and laying out security protocols. As a result, North Koreans in China are denied their right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution. Although China is a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the 1951 Refugee Convention, for short), it is virtually impossible for North Koreans to access refugee determination procedures through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or be afforded protection as a group. According to several reports Amnesty International has received from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and contacts in Japan, South Korea, and the United States, China regularly returns North Koreans to their country of origin without giving them the opportunity to claim asylum and without even the pretense of an objective determination with respect to their fate once returned. Moreover, there are credible reports of torture in the Chinese detention facilities (Amnesty International 2000, 2001, 2004; K. Lee 2006, 53; Muico 2007). The Chinese government has also arrested and imprisoned NGO activists—most of whom are South Koreans or Japanese nationals—and others who have helped North Koreans seeking to leave China and reach South Korea or other final destinations.

The 2004 penal code appears to have codified the differential treat-

ment between economic refugees and those deemed political, who are still vulnerable to charges of treason (S. A. Kim 2006). A defector who is sent back to North Korea is subject to interrogation and investigation by the city- or country-level representative of the National Security Agency (NSA). If the NSA concludes that the defector crossed the border for economic reasons, the new code stipulates sentences of up to two years of "labor correction." The government even signaled the promise of a pardon under the 2004 penal code, and several NGOs operating in the region confirmed that punishments became less severe than in the past. Changes in the legal code relaxed treatment for pregnant women, though in practice these protocols are breached, and forced abortions continue to be reported (K. Lee 2006).

Although coming after the date of exit of most of the refugees in our sample, the government began much tighter surveillance of the border beginning in 2008, conducting a number of sweeps and localized campaigns to identify traffickers and those involved in illicit cross-border trade. The most dramatic signal in this regard was the public execution of 15 people, 13 of them women, in Onsung on February 20, 2008 on charges of trafficking. But sentences have also been increased; single border crossings not related to South Korea or having political overtones that were previously overlooked now carry sentences of three years. Those found guilty of multiple crossings—even if not political—receive sentences of up to ten years. These efforts only accelerated following the currency reform of November 30, 2009, which wreaked economic havoc and once again increased incentives to emigrate, trade, and gain access to foreign exchange (Demick 2010).

Unfortunately, Chinese authorities appear to have cooperated in these recent efforts to limit border crossing, no doubt from their own concerns about how deteriorating economic and political conditions in North Korea would influence the influx of refugees. Chinese authorities have recently built border patrol stations and cooperated with North Korean authorities in tracking down refugees who have moved beyond the border areas, including through monitoring of cell phone usage (Y. K. Kim 2010).

Push Factors

Over the years, the predominant motivation for North Koreans deciding to cross the border into China has fluctuated somewhat. Early interviews with refugees from the famine period and immediately after found not surprisingly that hunger and the search for food was a major push factor (Good Friends 1999, 14). By 2002, however, a Human Rights Watch report found that hunger was just one of the motives for flight; others included loss of status, frustration over lack of opportunities, political persecution due to family history, and the wish to live in similar conditions as North Koreans living outside North Korea (Human Rights Watch 2002).

Table 2.4 Main motive behind leaving North Korea
(percent)

Motive	China survey	South Korea survey
Economic conditions	94.7	56.7
Political freedom	1.8	27.0
Religious freedom	0.2	1.0
Fear (afraid of doing anything wrong)	1.8	8.0
Other	1.6	7.3
Total	100	100

Following others who had already left was yet another motive cited by refugees debriefed in South Korea (K. Lee 2006, table 1).

The refugees in our China survey were asked whether they left for economic, political, religious, or "other" reasons (table 2.4). For them, the economy was the overwhelming reason for leaving North Korea (95 percent). Political reasons were a distant second (less than 2 percent), with only 0.2 percent citing religion. This pattern of responses would appear to confirm the Chinese government's claim that the North Koreans are "economic migrants" rather than refugees fearing persecution. However, as economic circumstances in a state socialist regime such as North Korea are closely tied to political characteristics of the regime and restrictions on private activity, we should be cautious in drawing a sharp line between "economic" and "political" motives. Indeed, nearly 10 percent of the respondents reported having been incarcerated, and as we show in chapter 4, there is a correlation between participation in the market and arrest and confinement. Moreover, the fact that the regime penalizes exit and incarcerates returnees raises the question of whether North Koreans in China have a prima facie case for refugee status; we take up this important legal issue in chapter 6.

The question about motivations was one of the few common questions in our surveys that generated quite disparate responses between the two samples. In the South Korea survey, economic conditions still dominated as a motive, with over 57 percent reporting that as the dominant factor in their decision to leave, but 27 percent of respondents cited political motives and another 8 percent listed fear, which no doubt encompasses concerns about the risks of repression (table 2.4).

What might account for these differences between the two surveys? One explanation may be differences across the two surveys in the respondents' dates of departure. A larger share of the respondents in the earlier China-based survey left during the famine period and its immediate aftermath, when economic conditions were quite naturally a dominant consideration. This interpretation is consistent with the South Korea–based survey, in which the share citing political motives rose monotonically

across the four eras of departure: lowest in the famine era and spiking in the most recent retrenchment phase.

Sample selection effects represent another possible explanation. The South Korea survey had a higher share of respondents from relatively elite backgrounds, and such respondents may have been more likely to both cite political as opposed to economic motivations and have the wherewithal to actually make it to South Korea or other democracies. Those staying in China, by contrast, may have been more motivated by economic than political or religious concerns (religious motivations did not figure prominently in either sample).

A third possibility is that the location of the refugees may have influenced their responses. Those living in South Korea may have retrospectively put marginally more weight on political calculations because they came to have an enhanced appreciation for how badly their rights were suppressed in North Korea, because such political motives are regarded as more "politically correct" in their new environment, or because citing such a motive could be regarded as a face-saving way to avoid admitting their poverty in North Korea. Those who remained in China, by contrast, remained economically vulnerable as we will see and may therefore put more weight on those factors. Ultimately, the two responses may not be entirely distinct if bad governance causes economic decay.

These questions about motives for departure cannot be resolved definitively, in part because the overwhelming share of those citing economic motives in the China sample makes it difficult to model responses in that survey. The South Korea sample, however, shows more variance and thus allows us to model the propensity to cite political motives as a function of other factors. In Haggard and Noland (2010b) we reported multivariate probit regressions that show that apart from those classified as politically hostile or having been detained by the political police (*bo-wi-bu*), respondents identifying political reasons for departure are disproportionately college educated and from Pyongyang—in short, members of the elite. (We return to the issue of elite disaffection in chapter 5.) Statistically, the evidence is mixed about whether time spent outside North Korea or in South Korea matters; the influence of "socialization" appears modest at best. If another survey of refugees were now conducted in China, the results might indicate a greater propensity to cite political motives.

Pull Factors

How did North Koreans hear about opportunities and conditions in China? Historically North Koreans have suffered under near total state control of information flows and suppression of information either about or from the outside world, although as we show in chapter 5 this informational barrier is eroding. The tuners in domestically produced radios and televisions are set to receive only officially sanctioned frequencies, although a lively black

market exists in retrofitting these with new, more flexible tuners. Refugee testimonies indicated that North Koreans who own radios or television sets are often monitored to ensure that they do not listen to South Korean or Chinese radio broadcasts or see "illegal" foreign television programs. News stories in the official radio and television broadcasts obviously reflect official positions and propaganda efforts and no doubt limit any information that might encourage emigration, such as images of foreign prosperity.

We asked the refugees in the China survey what their source of information was about China prior to departure: word of mouth, media, books and videos, or simply that they didn't have information. It is not surprising that for a vast majority of the refugees (89 percent) "word of mouth" was their primary source of information, no doubt including a mix of actual experiences, rumor, and myth.[9] Remarkably, 5 percent admitted that they had little information on China before launching on such a life-changing exodus.

The Mechanics of Escape

How, precisely, do people get out of North Korea? In the China survey, respondents were asked whether they received help getting out of the country, and three-quarters said they did. Of these, slightly more than half (52 percent) reported that they had paid for assistance—suggesting that bribery of officials and/or the emergence of a group of brokers or "coyotes" plays a large role in escape. The presence of corruption and of an underground engaged in such politically risky business is suggestive of broader changes in the North Korean political economy, as we show in more detail in chapter 3, although the recent crackdown has made these activities much more risky.

The second most frequent response for sources of help was "other" (46 percent), presumably family or friends who assisted in the escape. Although it is often thought that missionaries and NGOs are playing a major role in the underground railway getting out of North Korea, only 2 percent—a total of 17 respondents—reported that these groups helped them directly in getting out of North Korea. But once in China these groups play a larger role in the refugees' lives as demonstrated below.

Vulnerability

An important question is the stability of the North Korean community in China and their intentions with respect to staying, moving to third countries, or going back to North Korea. Nearly one-third of respondents in

9. According to K. Lee (2006) some refugees from Pyongyang and Hamheung debriefed in South Korea reported watching South Korean television via satellite dishes installed on top of high-rise apartment buildings. These cases would appear relatively atypical, however.

Table 2.5 Length of time in China (percent)

Period	China survey (at time of survey)	South Korea survey (total time in China, approximate)
Less than 6 months	5.2	20.3
6 to 12 months	11.5	
1 to 2 years	15.4	25.0
2 to 3 years	35.9	10.0
More than 3 years	32.0	44.7
Total	100	100

the China survey had been there for three years or more (table 2.5). Here interpretation of the data is complicated by the fact that the demographics of the migrants (and perhaps their motivations, capacities, and expectations) have changed over time. For most migrants, residence in the border region, where our China survey was conducted, is not their ultimate goal: It is a temporary residence until they can accumulate the resources to continue on to some preferred location for permanent settlement.

Yet while most migrants do not want to reside permanently in China, their "transitional" stay prior to on-migration may be protracted. Refugees who have been in China for a long period may simply have integrated successfully, or they may have dependents such as small children or disabilities that have impeded their on-migration out of the border region. These considerations underscore the complexity of the migration process.

When asked whether they were holding a job, only 22 percent of the refugees in China said that they were. Low levels of employment reported by the refugees may stem from a multiplicity of factors, including lack of skills and language. But the low level of employment and exploitative conditions among those who are employed are related to the vulnerability of the refugees with respect to the public authorities. To be able to work in China, one needs a *hukou* (residence permit) or a *shenfenzheng* (ID card), which North Koreans do not have. The lack of papers and vulnerability to arrest and deportation place the North Koreans at the mercy of employers willing, for whatever reasons, to employ them illegally. In addition to the risk of arrest during regular "cleanups" by the police or denunciation by unhappy neighbors, refugees are also vulnerable to private exploitation. The refugees' vulnerable status has pushed them into low-wage "dirty, difficult, and dangerous" work, a common circumstance for refugees (Lankov 2004, K. Lee 2006). There is some evidence that women on average receive higher wages than men, but this may be due to involvement in the sex industry and there is ample evidence of trafficking (K. Lee 2006, 40).

Not surprisingly, it has been reported that North Korean counterfeiters now forge these Chinese identity papers.[10] Our surveys asked whether the respondent was receiving a fair wage, and only 13 percent said they were; 78 percent reported receiving meager wages and 9 percent reported receiving none. (A well-known example of the last case is farm workers, who are denied wages after being promised that they would be paid after the harvest.) Admittedly, fairness is a subjective concept. Nevertheless given that real wages and their purchasing power are unquestionably higher in China than in North Korea, the finding that 7 out of 8 respondents believed that they were being treated unfairly is a strong suggestion that vulnerability invites exploitation.

At the same time, we have evidence that refugees also received assistance from Chinese nationals. The survey asked whether people received help from Korean-Chinese, missionaries, non-Korean Chinese, or others. The overwhelming majority (88 percent) reported receiving help from the Korean-Chinese community directly, and three-quarters reported living with Korean-Chinese. The second most frequently cited places of residence were shelter provided by missionaries and mountain hideouts.[11] This pattern probably reflects the posture of Chinese authorities. Missionaries face the most severe punishments and fines because their activity is seen as having a political character. Punishments meted out to missionaries harboring refugees include beating, long-term sentences, and deportation. Korean-Chinese by contrast are given lighter sentences, and refugees have greater opportunity to simply blend into that community.

It is interesting to note, however, that the share reporting residing with missionaries (5 percent) is multiples of the percentage citing assistance by missionaries in leaving North Korea. Missionaries play a much larger role in China sheltering refugees after their escape than in assisting with egress. This may simply reflect the greater social "space" for religion in China than in North Korea.[12] Among the "word of mouth" North Korean refugee lore is the advice that once in China one should approach buildings displaying a cross to receive assistance.

In other settings, including across the US-Mexican border, a number of migrants choose not to emigrate permanently but rather to move back and forth. Is North Korean migration intended to be permanent or temporary? Do migrants plan to return to North Korea or move on to third countries?

On the issue of whether North Koreans living in China intended to

10. "After Two Years, Professional Counterfeiters in Pyongsung Finally Arrested," *North Korea Today* 348, July 2010.

11. Seventy-six percent reported living with Korean-Chinese, 5 percent with missionaries, 5 percent in the mountains, and 1 percent on the streets, with 13 percent reporting "other."

12. In May 2010, 23 missionaries dispatched from China were arrested in North Korea. Three were reportedly executed (W. W. Lee 2010).

return to their homeland permanently, the answer was a decisive "no": More than 97 percent expressed no intention of returning to North Korea. This reluctance to return is particularly striking since an overwhelming majority of respondents—more than 90 percent—reported still having family in North Korea. The North Koreans' well-founded fear of persecution appears to be a fundamental impediment to return. This simple fact is extremely important. It contradicts Chinese claims of purely economic motives and thus constitutes prima facie evidence to support their status as *refugees sur place* entitled to protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Yet many do go back—at least temporarily, in some cases on multiple occasions. Among our respondents, one-fifth had returned temporarily of their own volition. But the slightly more common pattern is forced repatriation; more than a quarter of the sample had been repatriated. Of those repatriated, 26 percent (86) had been repatriated twice and another 15 percent (49) had been repatriated three or more times. In these cases, even imprisonment did not deter them from trying to escape again upon release. This pattern is consistent with a substantial minority of respondents reporting multiple border crossings in a previous survey (Y. Lee et al. 2001, table 1).

As for their motivations for returning, nine out of ten respondents crossing the border reported playing the role of couriers bearing food and/or money. Comparatively smaller shares returned to do business (5 percent) or because they found prospects in China bleak (2 percent).

Trafficking of Women

A disturbing finding of our China survey is the particular insecurity among women refugees. Following the onset of acute food shortages and the decline of the public distribution system, women found it increasingly difficult to find daily necessities for their families, and many left their homes in search of food or work, including to China. Almost from the moment they cross the border—and sometimes when they are still in North Korea—refugee women are tapped by marriage brokers and pimps involved in human trafficking. Marriage brokers provide North Korean women as wives, particularly in the rural areas of China, where the historical preference for male babies and the exodus of younger women to employment opportunities in cities has led over time to an acute shortage of marriage-age Chinese women. Having a Chinese husband, however, does not guarantee a North Korean woman's safety, as she is still subject to repatriation. Moreover, women sold into Chinese families where they suffer physical, sexual, mental, and emotional abuse have very little recourse because of their status. Many women resort to prostitution as a source of income (Human Rights Watch 2002, 12–15; Amnesty International 2004, 28; Muico 2005; K. Lee 2006; Committee for Human Rights in North Korea 2009; National Human Rights Commission of Korea 2010). In addition, North

Korean women also suffer abuse from Chinese guards along the border and North Korean officials upon repatriation (Faiola 2004).

We asked respondents if they knew of women being trafficked in China and a majority responded affirmatively. Prices vary depending on the age of the woman and whether she is encumbered by dependents, with young, single women fetching the highest prices. These findings are strong testament to both the desperation of refugees and the multiple insecurities they face in the Chinese environment. However, the crackdown on both sides of the border and growing fears of repatriation, together with better information on the dire situation of women trafficked in China, have begun to attenuate the numbers of North Korean women willing to go to China. Anecdotal reports suggest that the price for women has risen in response to dwindling supply (Kato 2006, T. H. Lee 2010).

Psychological Condition of Refugees: Prevalence of Distress[13]

A growing clinical literature has established that the particular difficulties faced by North Korean refugees have been associated with major psychiatric disorders, including PTSD (Jeon 2000, Y. Lee et al. 2001). Controlled clinical studies by doctors working with North Korean refugees in South Korea found few of their patients to be free of psychological disorders, with rates of PTSD ranging from 30 percent (Jeon et al. 2005) to 48 percent (Baubet et al. 2003) to 51 percent partial PTSD and 26 percent full PTSD (Kim, Yoon, and Han 2007).

Table 2.6 provides an overview of the responses to questions about psychological state derived from the China survey, grouped into three clusters of questions: those dealing with anxiety and fear; those dealing with other psychological issues, particularly anger and capacity to concentrate; and those related to refugees' perception of the future. Table 2.7 displays the mean responses[14] to these questions and the standard deviation.

The responses indicate that a majority of survey respondents exhibit significant psychological distress, findings consistent with those obtained by Lee et al. (2001) for a smaller group of subjects. Among the questions asked, mean scores are highest for those relating to the anxiety of their status: "usually anxious," "bad things will happen," and "fear for family." The descriptive statistics also suggest differences between men and women on this cluster of questions, with women showing greater incidence of fear and anxiety.

13. The following draws on Chang, Haggard, and Noland (2009a).

14. The responses to these questions were on a 1-5 scale, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The mean value is an arithmetic mean of these responses.

Table 2.6 Indicators of psychological distress: China survey (percent)

	Males		Females		Total	
Indicator of distress	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
Fear and anxiety						
Usually anxious	45.0	22.6	48.0	35.0	46.6	29.1
Bad things will happen to me	68.9	27.0	58.9	39.0	63.7	33.3
Fear for my family	70.6	26.2	54.9	42.8	62.5	34.9
Always in fear	56.6	21.0	52.7	35.2	54.7	28.4
Other psychological problems						
Get angry easily	28.5	12.3	40.2	15.7	34.8	14.0
Hard to concentrate	57.1	13.5	53.1	18.6	55.1	16.2
Hope for the future						
Not sure of future	29.3	10.3	36.6	12.2	33.1	11.2
Not able to reach goals	34.3	10.1	39.9	12.4	37.3	11.2
Current situation is hopeless	25.7	11.5	32.1	14.1	29.0	12.9

Table 2.7 Mean scores of responses on psychological state: China survey

	Males		Females		Total	
Psychological state	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Fear and anxiety						
Usually anxious	3.9	0.79	4.2	0.73	4.0	0.77
Bad things will happen to me	4.2	0.56	4.4	0.54	4.3	0.56
Fear for my family	4.2	0.53	4.4	0.56	4.3	0.55
Always in fear	4.0	0.74	4.2	0.70	4.1	0.73
Other psychological problems						
Get angry easily	3.3	1.01	3.5	1.04	3.4	1.03
Hard to concentrate	3.7	0.89	3.8	0.93	3.7	0.91
Hope for the future						
Not sure of future	3.3	0.92	3.4	0.95	3.4	0.93
Not able to reach goals	3.4	0.88	3.5	0.97	3.4	0.93
Current situation is hopeless	3.3	0.92	3.4	1.04	3.3	0.99

Table 2.8 Reported reasons for anxiety: China survey (percent)

Reason	Males	Females	Total
Arrest	57.1	77.2	67.1
Hunger	1.5	0.3	0.9
Home	21.5	9.5	15.5
Family in North Korea	19.7	12.6	16.2
Others	0.3	0.3	0.3
Total	100	100	100

Clearly, the sources of this anxiety are multiple and encompass events in North Korea that pushed refugees across the border, the stresses associated with the trip itself, as well as conditions in China once refugees arrived. To get at the immediate causes of stress, the respondents were asked the main reason for their anxiety; the answers are reported in table 2.8. The regugees' lack of status in China was an overwhelming source of anxiety. Approximately 67 percent identified fear of arrest and repatriation as their biggest concern, while another 16 percent identified the related concern over uncertainty about their residence ("home"). The second most reported reason for their anxiety was for their family in North Korea (16 percent).

There is some evidence of differential responses according to gender. Almost from the moment they cross the border—and sometimes when they are still in North Korea—refugee women are subject to multiple sources of trauma. Respondents in one survey of 100 female refugees in China conducted between August 2001 and October 2003 reported experiences including arrest (44 percent), extradition (34 percent), human trafficking (24 percent), rape (20 percent), and prostitution (9 percent) (C. Kang 2006). Indeed, as shown in table 2.8, women are more likely to trace their anxiety to fear of arrest than men, who showed more concern than women with respect to their residence. While our surveys did not probe directly into whether women had been involved in trafficking or prostitution, respondents were asked if they knew of women being trafficked in China, and 53 percent answered affirmatively. Interestingly, hunger was not a widely reported source of contemporaneous concern, at least among North Koreans who had made it to China.

However, it cannot be assumed that the sources of psychological distress are related only to the immediate experiences of refugee life in China. The respondents were also asked a battery of questions about their experiences in North Korea, including whether they lost family members to the famine, whether relatives were arrested, about separation from their families, whether they had been incarcerated, and about their experiences while in prison.

Table 2.9 Family members arrested or whereabouts unknown: China survey (percent)

Have any family members been missing or arrested?	
Yes	22.8
No	77.3

If yes, what are the reasons?	Share of those who replied affirmatively	Share of all respondents
Speaking against the regime	2.2	0.5
Traveling without permission	13.7	3.1
Crossing the border to China	54.7	12.4
Stealing food	1.8	0.4
Don't know	20.1	4.6
Unspecified	7.6	1.7
Total	100	22.7

These experiences are harrowing. More than 23 percent of men and 37 percent of women reported having had family members die of hunger. More than 40 percent of the respondents were unaware of the international food aid distribution effort; of those who were aware of it, less than 4 percent believed that they were beneficiaries. When asked about the distribution of the aid in a question allowing multiple responses, 90 percent believed that the aid went to the military and 27 percent believed party and government officials were beneficiaries.

Twenty-three percent of the respondents reported separation from adult family members. In 55 percent of these cases, the disappearance was associated with family members crossing the border into China; the second most cited reason was disappearance after traveling without permission (table 2.9). Disappearance for speaking out against the regime was relatively rare (2 percent). Seventy-nine percent of the sample reported separation from children. In 66 percent of these cases, the children were left behind in North Korea; in nearly 19 percent of the cases, however, children had died due to hunger or illness.

More than one-quarter of the sample reported having been arrested, and nearly 10 percent of the respondents reported having been incarcerated in political detention facilities. While there were no statistically significant differences in self-reported arrest rates across genders, males were significantly more likely than females to report incarceration in political detention facilities. Among those incarcerated in political detention facilities, 90 percent reported witnessing forced starvation, 60 percent reported witnessing deaths due to beating or torture, and 27 percent reported witnessing executions. Pregnant women thought to be carrying

children of Chinese paternity have allegedly been subject to forced abortions or infanticide; 5 percent of the respondents indicated that they had witnessed these practices.[15]

Modeling Psychological Distress

Further insight into the sources of psychological distress can be gained by modeling the survey responses as a function of the respondents' demographic characteristics and self-reported personal experiences. Chang, Haggard, and Noland (2009a) report multivariate regressions on the indicators of psychological distress shown in table 2.6; we discuss only those findings that meet standard tests of statistical significance. A number of demographic markers are statistically correlated with the responses to the psychological questions. But their impact is dwarfed by correlates relating to personal experiences in North Korea, including knowing of food aid but believing that one was not a beneficiary; incarceration in a political detention facility, which also captures in part the previously discussed experiences in the prison system; arrest; knowledge of human trafficking; and death of a family member due to hunger. Refugees' stresses appear related not only to their refugee status but also to the underlying experiences in North Korea that no doubt pushed them to migrate in the first place.

The most basic demographic variable, age, is negatively correlated with psychological health/status in most of the regressions. This is particularly true with respect to the questions dealing with orientation toward the future; not surprisingly, advancing age is correlated with a greater sense of hopelessness and despair about reaching life objectives.

Education tended to be associated with increased fear and anxiety but did not have effects on other psychological problems noted nor on orientation toward the future. Occupational status (trader, student, farmer, other job) is frequently correlated with psychological state. Traders showed a significantly higher level of psychological distress, and across all questions, than workers (the reference point or benchmark occupational category against which the responses of the other occupations are measured). Farmers—perhaps because of their lack of other skills—did show a more despairing outlook toward the future.

The experiences of the relatively small number of traders may reflect more idiosyncratic, specific, and personal experiences. Trading is often illicit and thus highly vulnerable in North Korea and is subject to a variety of idiosyncratic risks in China as well. Stories of deals gone bad are not uncommon. A typical scenario involves an individual North Korean trader cheated by his or her Chinese counterparty and left in limbo, unwilling

15. It has also been claimed that North Korea conducts medical experiments on prisoners (Demick 2004, Cooper 2005); 55 percent of the respondents believed (but did not necessarily witness) that this had occurred at the facilities in which they were incarcerated.

or unable to return to North Korea to face retribution from creditors. In contrast, one can imagine that farmers' migration was driven by broadly deteriorating conditions and that they might have tapped more effectively into networks of similarly situated rural refugees. Conversely, students had the most hopeful future orientation, even controlling for their youth.

Despite apparent differences in the responses of men and women, once other correlates are taken into account, gender is statistically significant in only a minority of the regressions. Women experienced significantly higher anxiety and fear for family members than men, again reflecting their particular vulnerabilities.

An important finding, however, is that experiential variables dwarf the impact of demographic ones. Death of a family member due to hunger and knowing of the food aid program but believing that one was not a beneficiary are strongly correlated with all seven adverse psychological states. Incarceration in political detention facilities and knowledge of trafficking in women—an experiential variable that captures knowledge of a particular risk—are statistically significant with respect to six of the seven psychological state variables. Arrest is significant in four of seven cases, including both questions relating to future orientation.

But perhaps the most compelling finding is the magnitude of the psychological effect of famine-related experiences in North Korea and exposure to the North Korean penal system. In all seven models of psychological state, the experiential variables with the strongest impact are famine-related. In six of the seven cases, the belief that one was not a beneficiary of food aid has the strongest estimated effect of any of the experiential variables (though not always by a statistically significant margin), consistently larger in magnitude, for example, than the effects of being incarcerated in a political detention facility. The only case in which beliefs about food aid are not the most significant factor is the model of the ability to concentrate, in which the largest effect comes from having family members die due to hunger. The famine and the government's mismanagement of it continue to reverberate through North Korean society and appear to remain important determinants of psychological distress long after the famine had passed and the individuals in question had left the country.

Moving On: Experiences in China

The vast majority of North Korean refugees in China do not want to return to their country of origin. This reluctance to return to North Korea is particularly striking given the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents—90 percent—reported still having family there and that many have returned, in some cases on multiple occasions. Among our respondents, 20 percent had returned to North Korea of their own volition, and more than a quarter of the sample had been repatriated.

When asked if they planned future returns, the only group with a

markedly higher propensity to return was students (31 percent), although "student" may be a proxy for age and physical condition. As noted above, the dominant reason for returning to North Korea was to bring money (80 percent) or food (11 percent) back to North Korea. At least among this sample of refugees, the phenomenon of return appears to be largely limited to short-term visits by young people bearing remittances.

Most refugees in China do not seek to reside there permanently (only 14 percent do). It should be observed that all these responses are based on existing conditions in China. If the Chinese government were willing to regularize this population in some way, the share of North Koreans willing to permanently reside in the border region and integrate into the Chinese-Korean community could be much higher. But under current Chinese policy—one of refusal to enable asylum claims and of forced repatriations—the refugees must make arduous journeys through third countries to achieve permanent legal resettlement elsewhere.

For many this means seeking employment in China to accumulate resources for on-migration, yet as we have seen, only 22 percent of the refugees reported being employed. One would like to understand what determines the ability to secure employment in China, and, implicitly, the ability to subsequently accumulate resources and on-migrate. The problem immediately arises that anxiety, inability to concentrate, and despair all potentially hinder the ability to secure and maintain employment, yet lack of employment may itself cause psychological distress—which in turn is exacerbated by the refugees' lack of legal status in China.[16]

The modeling work reported in Chang, Haggard, and Noland (2009a) indicates that psychological distress strongly impedes employment in China. Indeed, it is one of only a handful of variables strongly correlated with employment. Although difficult to tease out in a statistical sense, the data are certainly consistent with the interpretation that adverse circumstances in China and psychological state are mutually reinforcing. Vulnerability creates psychological problems, which in turn magnify the problems refugees face in coping with their difficult environment. These findings in turn have important implications for the refugees' adjustment challenges in their new environment, as well as the prospective costs of Korean unification.

Interestingly, length of time in China is negatively associated with

16. Statistically, this means that right-hand-side regressors may be determined endogenously or that the regression is subject to reverse causation. In principle, this can be addressed through the use of instrumental variables—namely variables that are highly correlated with the regressor in question but that cannot independently causally explain the left-hand-side variable, often because they are chronologically predetermined. In the case of the jobs regression, we use events in North Korea (knowing of food aid but believing that one had not received it and separation from family members, which cannot influence one's employment in China except through psychological impact) as instruments for the average psychological score derived from the seven indicators reported in table 2.6. This two-stage probit regression is reported in Chang, Haggard, and Noland (2009a).

employment. There are at least two possible interpretations. One is that we are sampling from a subpopulation that for whatever reason (unrecorded physical disability, for example) has essentially become stuck in the border region, unable to hold down a job, accumulate resources, and move on. (Or conversely, those with better education, skills, and networks have already moved on.) The other interpretation is that this group has become integrated into the Korean-Chinese community and does not need employment to survive, perhaps in part because of marriage. The two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive. In contrast, having child dependents encourages employment, presumably because of greater need for income.

Conclusion

The two surveys document that refugees face a particular set of vulnerabilities that range from their insecure legal and personal status, risks of deportation, to difficulties in securing livelihoods. The survey conducted in China also provides evidence that refugees—and particularly women—are additionally vulnerable to predatory behavior and trafficking.

That these vulnerabilities would have a pronounced effect on the mental health of refugees is not surprising; an overwhelming number of those interviewed struggled with anxiety and fear. However, the multivariate regressions indicate that the psychological problems facing refugees are not simply a result, or even primarily a function, of their vulnerability in China. Rather they point to the significance of their experiences in North Korea prior to exit and treatment by North Korean authorities. These include, first and foremost, perceptions of unfairness with respect to the distribution of food aid, death of family members during the famine, and incarceration in the North Korean prison system. Before returning to these questions in more detail in chapters 4 and 5, we explore refugee insights into the changing North Korean economy in the next chapter.