Appendix A
The Surveys: Implementation, Method, and Inference

This study draws on two surveys of North Korean refugees. The first survey was conducted from August 2004 to September 2005 in China by a team of South Korean researchers in collaboration with Chinese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and church groups. A total of 1,346 refugees were interviewed in Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang provinces.

The second survey of 300 refugees was conducted in Seoul, South Korea between August and November 2008 with assistance from two refugee organizations. This survey was administered under much more hospitable circumstances. It is reassuring that this survey largely confirms the results obtained in the earlier one in China. Nonetheless, both surveys are ultimately samples of convenience, as we have little information on the underlying refugee populations in either location, particularly in China.

The two surveys used different questionnaires. This was partly a result of a learning process; no matter how well crafted a survey instrument, information is always revealed in the process, which forces a revision of priors and opens new issues for analysis. Yet there are a number of common questions on both surveys so that results could be compared, and as noted the results of the two surveys are broadly consistent. Where there was divergence between the two surveys, we have attempted to devise tests that might explain it.

We begin with an explanation of how the surveys were conducted. We then turn to some particular methodological issues that affect the inferences that can be drawn from the surveys and necessary caveats with respect to this kind of survey work.

Implementation of the Surveys

The China Survey

The China survey was conducted under the auspices of the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (subsequently renamed the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea) through a grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation. The survey instrument was designed by members of the committee (including one of the present authors) in collaboration with Professor Yoonok Chang of Hansei University.

The survey was implemented by a team led by Professor Chang from August 2004 to September 2005 in 11 Chinese cities or counties across the three provinces constituting Northeast China: Shenyang, Dandong, Harbin, Changchun, Tonghua, Jilin, Helong, Hunchun, Tumen, Yanji, and Wangqing. For reasons of security the location of the interviews was not included in the questionnaire. The sites were selected on the basis of the presence in the locale of institutions and individuals who had worked with North Korean refugees, mostly Korean-Chinese churches and pastors, NGOs, and other sympathetic Korean-Chinese.

Forty-eight individuals were recruited from this network and trained by the South Korean team in Yanji before conducting the interviews. The interviewers were responsible for identifying and consenting refugees into the study on the basis of their networks. The purpose of the study was explained to the interviewees—that this was an academic research project, but one that sought to publicize the plight of the refugees—and they were assured that all answers would be held confidential. Those not wishing to participate were excluded. To avoid interviewing the same individuals, the refugees were not paid for participating. Given the use of multiple interviewers over an extended period, however, the possibility of a single individual having been interviewed more than once cannot be categorically excluded.

In a small number of cases, after consenting to participate in the survey, respondents indicated some anxiety in having their responses recorded on paper in their presence; in these cases the responses were memorized by the interviewer and recorded on paper ex post.

Obviously, surveys conducted under these difficult conditions cannot be expected to meet the normal standard of contemporary social science research. Because of tightened security in the border region, doing another such survey has become much more difficult if not altogether impossible. In part due to these concerns, with the support of the Smith Richardson Foundation, a second survey was conducted in South Korea in a more supportive legal environment. Nonetheless, we believe that the China survey—used primarily in chapter 2—in fact conveys important information about the refugee experience. Moreover, we are heartened by the fact that the results of the China and South Korea surveys are generally consistent.

The South Korea Survey

The South Korea survey was implemented with the cooperation of the Association of Supporters for Defecting North Korean Residents (ASDNKR), a quasi-governmental organization established to assist incoming North Korean defectors through services such as counseling and introducing the newly arrived North Koreans to academic or job opportunities.[1] A pilot survey was conducted in August and September 2008 of refugees who visited the ASDNKR for personal business. A central issue was to guarantee that the Korean-language survey instrument was fully intelligible to the refugees. Respondents in both the pilot and subsequent surveys were informed that their participation was voluntary, that the identity of respondents would be held confidential, and that the survey was part of an academic research project based in the United States. Participants in both the pilot and full surveys received modest gift certificates for their participation.

Following the pilot survey, the ASDNKR facilitated contact with the Sung-ui Association, a private civic organization of North Korean defectors with about 7,000 members and 16 offices in South Korea, to recruit staff to conduct the full survey. The Sung-ui Association introduced seven defectors who agreed to administer the survey in neighborhoods with concentrations of North Korean refugees; the staff were compensated for their work.[2] Two training sessions were held for the survey administrators to explain the purpose of the research, the nature of the survey instrument, and the requirements of the research project. The survey was stratified on one dimension with respect to which there was some confidence about the underlying population: gender. An effort was made to contact defectors who had recently arrived in the South in order to capture changing views over time, but many refugees had left during the famine period, while others reached South Korea only after having spent months or years in third countries.

The full survey was administered from October to November 2008. First, the survey administrators contacted individuals in their neighborhoods to conduct face-to-face interviews, yielding about 100 respondents. Second, small groups were recruited to meet for a free lunch or dinner in addition to the gift certificate. Third, a final group was contacted directly through ASDNKR in order to reach the desired sample of 300.[3]

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1. Later, subsequent to the completion of the survey, ASDNKR was replaced by the Foundation for North Korean Defectors by the 2010 revision of the North Korean defectors law in order to improve and expand services for newly arrived North Koreans.

2. The seven administrators were residents of the Seoul area: two from Nowon-gu, a district in northwestern Seoul with a large defector population; two from Gangseo-gu; two from Yangcheon-gu; and one from Songpa-gu.

3. A total of 313 surveys were administered; 13 were invalid and had to be discarded.

Drawing Inferences

As observed in chapter 1, the two surveys are samples of convenience and pose particular problems of inference. First, they do not constitute a random sample with respect to the refugee population. Neither we nor anyone else knows the underlying characteristics of that group, and each sample might be subject to idiosyncratic forms of bias. The characteristics of those who were able to get to South Korea might have been somewhat different from those who remained in China. More generally, those who did not respond to questions may have been different from those who did. Nor do we have any way to control for the veracity of responses.

A second and arguably more important problem of inference has to do with sample selection issues and our ability to project any conclusions from refugee surveys onto the resident population of North Korea. Three important examples make the point about possible sources of bias and how it can be addressed.

First, relative to the actual population of North Korea, residents of the northeast provinces were overrepresented in both surveys, as has been the case with previous surveys conducted in both China and South Korea. In the China survey, North Hamgyong province accounted for most of the respondents (57 percent), followed by South Hamgyong province (19 percent). Similar biases were evident in the South Korea survey, where half of the respondents were from North Hamgyong province, with another 15 percent from South Hamgyong. These distributions actually make these provinces somewhat *less* overrepresented than in most earlier surveys (cf. Robinson et al. 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Lee et al. 2001; Chon et al. 2007), but these provinces do nonetheless account for only about 23 percent of the North Korean population (United Nations Statistics Division 2009). As we argue in chapter 2 in more detail, this bias is a result partly of proximity and partly of the uneven effects of the famine, which hit the northeast particularly hard.

A second example of the difficulty in drawing inferences about the North Korean population has to do with possible demographic or other socioeconomic sources of bias. Early defectors from North Korea were typically elites: higher-ranking party or military personnel. Many of them took strongly ideological positions vis-à-vis the North and were in some cases handsomely rewarded for doing so. Over time, however, the demographics of the refugee population have shifted dramatically, looking more and more like the population of North Korea as a whole. As we show in chapter 2, refugees reaching South Korea are now dominated by workers and farmers, many with only a basic education. Indeed, it is possible that our sample now underweights high-ranking officials and military personnel (even though we have some of the latter in both samples).

This overweighting with respect to the northeast provinces and with respect to the demographic profile probably does not present a problem

for drawing inferences about the North Korean refugee community, which is also almost certainly dominated by migrants from the northeast and has come to include more members of the working class and rural residents. Such biases do present a problem with respect to drawing inferences about the larger population. But as demonstrated in the text, we can use data on the North Korean population and multivariate regressions to control for these possible regional and demographic sources of bias and even to generate counterfactual projections of how a sample drawn from the entire population might have responded.

Third, and most importantly, it is likely that refugees differ from the remaining North Korean resident population in some unobservable ways. In particular, it is likely that the refugees are particularly disaffected with the regime; that is why they left. As a consequence, it is important to draw upon whatever experiential information we have (such as experiences during the famine period or at the hands of North Korean authorities) to control for observable life experiences in making inferences about the resident population.