

NK People Speak, 2011

The Daily NK

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Interview 1

Name: Hong Nam Hee

Sex: Female

Age: Late 40s

Area: Songcheon County, South Pyongan Province

Job: Trader

- What is your occupation?

I was a manager in a factory. There were a lot of coal mines so many workers lived around there. But now that my condition is bad, I'm not able to work. My husband is sick, too. There's no way to earn a living. I came out to find things to sell, but it's not working out as well as I had hoped.

- Is the factory currently idle?

In the past when I was working it was okay and production levels were good. But the machinery stopped in the late 1990s. Now, there is no work and no raw materials to work with.

- So what do the workers do all day?

They go out to work in society. From May, they go out to support agricultural activities like rice planting, and from June they do weeding. And then in autumn they go out and harvest crops.

- When did factory production really start to go bad?

At the time of the 'March of Tribulation' factories ground to a halt. Factories literally stopped one by one. So people took them apart and sold the parts because they were hungry. They even took machinery motors and cables. There is no way to recover these things, and there's no money. They couldn't give rations when the March started, and they still can't now.

- You don't receive any rations at all?

There are times when we get them; on national holidays, Kim Jong Il's birthday and Kim Il Sung's birthday.

- So if you're not getting rations, how do you live?

That's what I'm saying; women go out and sell things. If you don't do anything like that, you won't be able to survive even on porridge. It's all about going out to the jangmadang² and earning a living that way, just like that.

- What types of trade have you done?

A bit of this and a bit of that. I've sold clothes brought in from China. It wasn't a lot, but I did manage to sell a few.

- I've also heard that drug dealing is on the rise.

¹ The major famine of the 1990s

² North Korea's system of official markets

There are people who sell the materials for drugs. Mind you, many people use them as medicine. They help sick people with their ailments³.

In particular, people with bad backs often medicate themselves with drugs. People with cancer do the same. Smearing the drug on the skin and adding some heat is said to dissolve the cancerous cells. The doctor really did say that. It's also good for nervous disorders and inflammation, too. I tried it and it worked.

- Aren't those controlled substances?

We're not just smoking it; we're using it for medicinal purposes. It's unavoidable. Who's going to control that, anyway? If they control it then the government should help patients in need. The price of it is quite high, but those with money use it, at least just to try it once before they die.

- Are all your family members eating three meals a day?

It's still hard no matter what. Because I am trading things we generally do eat three meals a day, but people who are not like me have a hard time having three meals. They eat corn. Before, they got rations, but now that they don't give them out; some people only eat corn, I guess.

- How many people are just getting by on corn noodles or whatever?

Now that the market is not doing so well, noodle sellers are having a hard time. People who earn a lot can live for one month off one day's earnings, but those who don't; they can't even easily get sufficient noodles. They also eat porridge. The people with a lot of money sell high quality goods so they're ok. But the average seller who is not doing so well has to go out and gather greens, mix them up with corn noodles and eat that.

- And how often do you eat rice?

That's also a case of the well-to-do people eating well and the poor people having a hard time. Workers are getting at most 2000 won a month. But if the price of rice is 2500 won per kilo, then that means one month's earnings can only buy you one kilo. The average worker's pay is 2000 won. In Chosun, men must stamp their card at their place of work, and they're controlled that way. Women go out to trade and somehow eke out a living.

- May I ask you what you eat?

One meal of rice, two meals of corn-rice porridge.

- Why do you think things have gotten that tough?

Well, there's a food problem. It's because of damage done to farms by floods and drought. We need fertilizer but that's in very short supply.

- The North Korean government has said the 'Strong and Prosperous State' is going to be ushered in during 2012...

³ In North Korea, heroin is in use as a medicinal treatment. It's known to be effective at relieving the pain of fevers and migraines, and as an anti-inflammatory.

Nonsense. I don't believe that.

- Why not?

Isn't it only once a country develops that it can become a 'Strong and Prosperous Nation'? So how can it become one by 2012, all of a sudden and from absolutely nothing? Chosun people say that things are being done in China, and things are being done in Nampo to bring back rice, but I don't believe it. People say that money is coming in through foreign aid but people just talk. They're just saying that.

- Are you saying most North Korean people don't believe it?

Of course up front they say they believe it, but they really don't. However, they would never dare express their dissatisfaction. They say that the South Chosun Agency for National Security Planning⁴ agents are everywhere here in Yanji⁵. I didn't even know the word 'Hanguk' when I was in Chosun. We only hear what the Party tells us, so most people don't know anything. If you do say something with a little depth of thought in Chosun, you're in trouble ideologically and get banished to the countryside.

- What do you think of Kim Jong Il?

The average common man is conditioned. All the provinces can see is Chosun Central TV. From 5 till 8 in the evening half or even more is about the General and all the onsite inspections that he has done. General stuff is all they get; that he ate rice balls when visiting soldiers, managing to catch a nap in his car since he is too busy working tirelessly for the people...

So, average people see only that. But there are people who still think differently. Me too, now that I've come to China, have watched South Korean TV, and have seen that if the President does something wrong even he gets prosecuted. If lawmakers make errors, it's all reported in the media. But we don't have that freedom, you know. We simply can't do what we want.

- Well then; in your opinion, what type of person do you think Kim Jong Il is?

When I was in Chosun I wondered why our country was like that. It's because things are not working out. Why is it that tough? So, I didn't like Kim Jong Il. I thought, why is South Korea living well but we're living poorly? There are nice houses in Pyongyang but why am I like this? There are a lot of nice houses in Pyongyang, you know.

- A disturbance could arise if discontent and dissatisfaction about Kim Jong Il or about high officials boil over.

Oh, you mean like a demonstration? Let me tell you this; in Chosun, the ruling cadres have more complaints than the normal people. If they make a slip of the tongue it's big trouble, too, so they can't be reckless. National Security Agency agents are monitoring what they say, and their individual movements are being watched and recorded. Whoever doesn't show up to work is reported and dealt with.

- Do the people connect their poverty to Kim Jong Il?

The state knows we live badly. Why is this? We hear from those who frequently come and go

⁴ Now defunct South Korean intelligence agency

⁵ The interviewee was interviewed in Yanji

to foreign countries. And what do we think? A lot goes into the military and into the making of nuclear weapons and arms, so the people starve. But the government teaches us that we will have to live a colonial slave life if we don't advance our military capacity.

- Has anyone starved to death around you?

I haven't seen anyone myself.

- Any who committed suicide out of hardship?

There are people who commit suicide due to their struggles with everyday hardships. Even if they do commit suicide, though, it's not reported as suicide because the family would suffer harm if it were.

- How did life change after the currency redenomination?

The currency redenomination mostly ruined the people who had some money rather than the poorest ones. So, average people were totally shocked by it. Had they done it when life was alright, then the damage wouldn't have been this bad. But because they did it in a situation where there was very little, ordinary life got even worse.

- Please tell me about the situation at the time.

The way the government carried out the currency redenomination was that for every 100,000 won that was submitted per household, 1000 won would be given in exchange. For every 100,000 won, there was also a 500 won compensatory payment per head, so that means a family of 3 would get 1500 won extra. The people who had some money came out with not much remaining at all. The people who had more money were fine because they were holding it in dollars. So the middle sellers were the ones who caught the full force of the redenomination. These people moved a lot of stock and used a lot of currency; without that, money doesn't move in the markets.

- How about yourself?

At first, it was good. They were saying handover 100,000 won; but we didn't even have 10,000 won, and just a bit of rice. And so, as we didn't have money when the currency was being exchanged, we had nothing to worry about. But people with larger amounts of money who couldn't exchange all they had came to us and asked us to exchange it for them. They said they would give 200 won for the transaction. At first there were those who were doing it at a 20% commission, and then others came out saying they would do it for a 50% or even 70% commission.

- What do you mean, "At first, it was good"?

You give 100,000 won and 1000 won comes back. As a family of 3, we were given 1500 won in compensation, which meant that we had 2500 won. At the time, the state lowered prices in the new currency, so the price of rice went down to 15 won. If we had bought and stored a lot of rice at that time, the price would have risen and we would have benefited. Believing that the price would go down even more we waited, thinking that this could really be the dawn of a new life. However, the price shot up again and later recovered to 2000 won. And at that, the money we had just disappeared right before our very eyes.

- And how about now?

The people who have things live well, you know. It's like before. But poor people don't have things. So the well-off people live well. But lately, even the middle men don't have money, so trade has died off.

- What do you mostly hear from the authorities?

That they're implementing CNC technology, and that our standard of living is getting better owing to so much of this automated technology. But now I have come out here and heard that CNC has been around in China for 50 years. When I was in Chosun I thought that something would happen, but nothing really changed at all. And even if you have a complaint, you can't say so. People know nothing besides earning money to live and feed themselves somehow while parroting "it's all good". But where are the people who really mean it? Still, people do curse the state and cadres. Everyone does that now.

Interview 2

Name: Im Seong Tae

Sex: Male

Age: Mid 50s

Area: Shinuiju, North Pyongan Province

Job: n/a

- It is said that obtaining food in Shinuiju is easier than in other areas of North Korea. What is the situation right now?

In March the price of one kilo of rice was around 1300 won. At present I hear it is around 1800-2000 won. This is the standard for the spring lean season. The price of rice is expensive. We are trading and my son is a Party cadre, so the whole family gets food distribution from the state. Distribution has never been cut off, although it has been delayed at times. We get distribution 10 months out of 12.

- I am told that distribution is given to a very limited group...

'We' means the families of revolutionary patriots and the security forces. We come before the glorious soldiers. My wife, through the money she earned trading, funded our children's studies. She had a stall to trade from. Four years ago, traders each gave 40,000 won and built a new building, so they gave us a stall. We pay 500 won a day in stall fees.

- It would be a big problem if there were no market.

Chosun markets contain 85% Chinese products. If there were no Chinese products we would be walking around naked. The state no longer keeps its people alive. The individual is king now. I can raise and lower prices as I wish; deciding the price of products is the most important form of governance.

- What percentage of people has sufficient food?

Around 60%. Around 35% only eat 2 meals a day. In our apartment building there are 20 families, not many cannot eat. People with money live in apartments; people without live in single story houses. Almost nobody only eats one meal. If you say you live in an apartment, you are saying you are doing quite well. Those in the city can trade, but farmers cannot trade and have no time, either, so their lives are more difficult.

- What do the ones who eat only two meals a day have?

Life is very difficult for people living in farming areas. Once collective farms have collected the autumn harvest, first the state deducts military rations and then the remainder is distributed to farmers; enough for around 4 or 5 months. Those people also go to the city to sell rice and buy clothes and shoes to wear. In which case, there is not enough rice for farmers. Not enough nourishment.

In Chosun today, people who live hungry are treated as fools. Whether it be trading, theft, whatever the way, you must live somehow. This is the rallying cry of the Chosun people. If you can't live, you are a fool, and you can only end up in hell.

- Are there people dying in farming areas?

I haven't seen any. But there are in other regions. People are sharp now, so things are better

than during the March of Tribulation. Because the simple and honest people all died and the rest survived. They know how to survive.

- Why do you think Kim Jong Il went to China in May?

The Chosun economy has reached the bottom rung; all the facilities are from the 60s and 70s. He went to get aid. Chosun produces nuclear weapons so the United States will not help and Europe will not help, so the only country to get aid from is China, the ally.

- So why don't they just get rid of their nuclear weapons?

He won't.

- What do you think of life before and since the currency redenomination?

Following the March of Tribulation, life stabilized in around 2005. Until then we had lived with trust in the Party, but now there are many people who have no hope and commit suicide. People changed after the currency redenomination. Before it, they felt their lives were secure. They gathered money by trading; anyway, they gathered it somehow, bit by bit.

Speaking frankly, before the currency redenomination I was grateful to the state. However, afterwards I started to really dislike them. I lost a lot of money. When I think about it, my blood boils. Money earned with my blood and sweat was taken away, it makes me totally disgusted. Who could think well of their country after that?

- Do the people around you voice such discontent?

As a family we can discuss it, but you cannot voice such things publically. North Korean politics are controlled, and if you are caught by the National Security Agency that's the end. I am very careful.

- What do you think of Kim Jong Eun?

I don't have any interest in him. The third generation succession is feudalist. In 1964, Kim Il Sung said he would create a country where all eat beef soup and rice and live in tiled houses, but 50 years have passed and it still hasn't happened; so when will it? It took less than 30 years for China, so what is so what is wrong with us?

- What do you think of Kim Jong Il?

They say that during his onsite inspections, the General eats rice balls and sleeps very little, all for the happiness of the people. But I hear he imports delicious foods, so for what reason would he eat rice balls? The Party propagandizes to deceive the people. I do not believe it.

- What do intellectuals like yourself think?

There are some people who talk about their discontent at the state. But about Kim Jong Il, and about Kim Jong Eun; this they cannot. They are stressed and prickly. I think that at heart they are not good. Outwardly they cannot express themselves. Because you can vanish overnight without a word, they can do nothing. They are scarier than German intelligence. Even if you want to say something, you cannot say it openly.

- What is the mental condition of the average people?

People get stressed in the battle for life, so they are nervy. Any way you look at it, people had their pockets picked; it brings stress. People are sensitive, so when they drink they get touchy and angry. Living is really quite hard; it makes you wonder how you are meant to live. There are lots of women with depression. Everyone uses alcohol to cope.

If there were press freedom, people would not be groaning in pain like this, but there is no press freedom in the North so people get depressed. The number of female alcoholics has increased a lot. Now, women are the masters of the house and men have become like the dogs which protect it. Life for men is now drinking at home, and doing the housework.

- How far has drug use spread in the North?

The number of people using 'bingdu' has increased. Rumor has it that taking it is good for people with blood clots in the brain. In the past most people took aspirin, but now they use bingdu. Young people smoke it; it's called 'snorting'. There are people who have died from addiction, too.

- Have you seen leaflets or graffiti criticizing the government?

I have seen many personal grievances. It's about taking revenge against government officials or the security services. When such cases are investigated, most of them are caught, though, and I haven't seen any leaflets of late. I have heard about leaflets flying over from South Korea. They say there are plenty so everyone sees them. When ordered to hand in the leaflets, lots of people don't; instead, they read and then burn them.

- Does everyone know what South Korea is like?

South Koreans live well. Everyone knows that South Korea has developed good electronics and cars. There are also people who have watched South Korean TV shows and people who have talked about it. There are some people who while away most of their time watching South Korean TV dramas.

- Have you watched any?

If you get caught watching a drama you go to prison, so it's better to listen to radio. Many young people have gone to prison for watching them. Kim Jong Il demands that people believe in him, but if you watch South Korean TV shows then you are focusing on the South; to stop that, people are forcibly imprisoned. But apparently people in the border areas all watch them secretly.

- What would have to be done to improve the lives of North Koreans?

For the Americans and other countries to help, we must get rid of the nuclear weapons. The world doesn't want Chosun to have nuclear weapons. South Korea too, Russia also; the whole world. If they are gotten rid of, then they will help Chosun. Second, the North should open up. We are not open, so we struggle to survive.

- Is it likely that Kim Jong Eun will open the North?

Like father, like son. The same. I have no hope. He is a four star general aged 28; it's a joke. When did he do his time in the army to get those stars? It's nonsense.

- What do you think of Jang Sung Taek?

I know him to be a reformer. He might do something. He's an arrogant man. Wasn't he doing so well that Kim Jong Il's sister fell in love with him? However, he's someone calling for opening. That's what I know about him.

- Can Kim Jong Eun take power?

I really don't know. He is dragging around a time bomb. We don't know when Kim Jong Il will die. If and when he does, Kim Jong Eun will probably become a puppet of China. China approved his appointment as successor. Without China the regime wouldn't survive. That's the deal.

- What do you think of the 'Strong and Prosperous State'?

It's never going to happen. It's like a kid's name⁶. When it becomes clear that it has failed, I'll be interested to see who dies. When they preach the 'Strong and Prosperous State', they see the people thinking, "With what are we going to make this 'Strong and Prosperous State'?" That's why Kim Jong Il is so busy. They are going to detach Hwanggeumyeong, too, and give it to the Chinese⁷.

- Do you have any belief or trust in the Party?

Almost none. All I think about is survival. Nothing else. I have to recite the slogans, but inside I am saying another slogan, "Making money is patriotism". You give it to the state, so the people who make money are the real patriots. So you gotta earn money! (Laughs)

- What is the situation in the army?

The loyalty of the Chosun People's Army is still strong. They accept that they work for the supreme commander. But they eat corn-meal and radish. Army life is tough and exhausting.

- Have you seen religious people in the North?

I have seen Buddhists. They are registered with the National Security Agency, and they are fakes. You will get arrested if you believe, and most people won't risk that. Believing in God is violating the law.

- Do you want unification?

60 years have passed, but if it happens everything will be good. The Chosun people must become one nation. (That Chosun is still divided) is shameful for the world.

- How do you see the Yeonpyeong Island shelling and the sinking of the Cheonan?

The outside say that it was us, but our Party doesn't acknowledge it. The 1987 Korean Air terrorist attack (KAL-858) and the Rangoon bombing (of 1983) are just the same. All were done by Chosun. A poster came out; it was a poster showing a South Korean battle ship being sunk by the People's Army. That was last September. That has to be seen as the Cheonan.

⁶ Koreans traditionally pick names that they, elders and/or fortune tellers believe will bring luck to the child

⁷ An island near Sinuiju which is being developed as a free trade area

Interview 3

Name: Kim Eun Hye

Sex: Female

Age: Late 30s

Home town: Pyongsong, North Pyongan Province

Job: Restaurant employee in China

(Editor's note: Kim used to run a trading business, but she lost her assets in the currency redenomination. She plans to work in a restaurant until she has enough money to try again)

-Where did you trade?

In Pyongsong Wholesale Market. With the exception of the wives of high ranking cadres, everybody trades in the market. Laborers and teachers alike. More than half the 30 households in each People's Unit work in the market, I reckon.

-What did you sell?

We'd go to the market at dawn and sell rice and eye glasses to buyers from Pyongyang. I made about 7000 won per day. People from Pyongyang with their I.D. card can travel to Pyongsong without a travel permit.

Including my monthly pay of 3000~4000 won, the household made about 15,000 won a month. We were pretty average, but not quite middle class. We ate three meals a day, but had problems because we had to give money to our kids.

-What was the effect of the currency redenomination?

I managed to save little by little before that. I sent my son to college, maintained the household and still saved up about \$2500. I was planning on buying a house with it. After the redenomination, less than \$200 was left. Everybody suffered the same way. People with bigger businesses lost more. Many people attempted to commit suicide because of that.

Also, many traders suffered. The money men were ok, but all the small businessmen lost out. They exchanged our money at a 100:1 rate up to 100,000 won, and said we would be living well within a month. They said not to burn the money, that national commerce would flourish and department stores would open. Traders trusted them and went ahead and lowered their prices.

After a month, Pyongyang No. 1 Department Store opened, but their prices were not marked at the 100:1 rate. They were close to the original prices. All the vendors had been watching the department store; they realized it was all wrong and quickly raised their own prices.

My hometown is Shinuiju. After my husband died, I sold everything I had and brought the money with me to Pyongsong, but it all turned into scrap paper.

After the currency redenomination, the people harbored a bitter grudge and should have protested, but North Korea is not that kind of place. People can't protest here in North Korea. Park Nam Ki was shot for rebelling against the Party. But people are not stupid, and now we don't trust the state.

-Since the currency redenomination, what do people think about the Party and the state?

They don't trust them. The people were even afraid of the word 'dictatorship' in the past but now they talk. The redenomination was nothing but a hoax. Now people don't even believe it when they tell us tofu is made with beans⁸. People have to look after themselves. They say foreign currency cannot be used and the market will be controlled, but the people don't go along with it. We go our own way.

-How interested do you think Kim Jong Il is in the lives of the ordinary people?

I saw on TV news that a 28-storey building with 5-room apartments was built near the front of Pyongyang Station. They said it was a 'gift' from General Kim Jong Il. Among the units, one unit was given to the National Orchestra and another to Enhasu⁹. We heard that the General gave direct onsite guidance for the apartments.

I felt so bad that I had to shut off the TV in the middle of it. I mean, scientists and engineers don't even have houses; they're even having trouble getting the food they need daily. 5-room apartments are an unreasonable luxury. The people feel deceived. They should build many more 2-room apartments instead, so that a lot more people can receive help.

-What's the currency used in the market?

US Dollars and Chinese Yuan. Prices rise and fall depending on the value of these foreign currencies. The price of rice fluctuates, too. My savings are only in foreign currency. Now we don't believe in the government and gather US Dollars. Even if the government says foreign currencies are prohibited, we only save US Dollars or Chinese Yuan.

We believe the US dollar will have value as long as the US stands. When I was in China, I sensed that the US won't go away. In North Korea, the people are bankrupt and trust has been lost. Between close friends, people sometimes say, 'The General listens to music and watches famous figures in shows. He rides his train and takes vacations; what good fortune!'

-Have you watched a lot of South Korean TV dramas?

Most young people watch them despite prohibition by the government. I have seen two; one at my mother-in-law's place in Wonsan. They had a video tape. Their son is young, so he brings them home. It was all CD's in the past, now USB memory. We watch them on a DVD player. Just about everyone who is awake to what is going on watches them.

-What happens if you get caught?

Even if they use a detector we can't be caught, because there is memory in the player. Young people watch as much as they want. Recently there have been more controls on young people; if someone gets caught, they are exiled from Pyongyang. We have to be careful. But they don't have enough people to send agents to every household. We watch all the latest dramas, too.

-Do you know any South Korean TV or movie stars?

Yes I know Hyun Bin, Kwon Sang Woo, Lee Beom Soo, Ha Ji Won etc. I remember the ones that I like. Im Hyun Sik is a good actor. He is very believable in his roles. Lee Beom Soo and Ha Ji Won also are good actors.

⁸ Something so obvious as to go without saying

⁹ A famous art troupe

I like Kwon Sang Woo better than Hyun Bin. I think he is very attractive. I have seen his dramas about 10 times. High cadres watch the dramas too. NSA agents and cadres go home at night and watch dramas. For them, there're no controls so they watch them freely. Since everyone knows that they watch them, even though they speak strongly they can't do very much.

-How is the military doing?

That's the hardest thing to talk about. I heard most average soldiers in Pyongsong are malnourished. Women serve in the military for 6 years. When I was at a military base last, I noticed that the soldiers all looked so pale. I asked one lady when she had come to the base. She said one year ago. There was almost no fat on her breast or behind.

Going into the military, there is something called the 'sandball period'. It means a period of malnourishment. Everybody goes through it. It seems that poor quality food together with extensive physical labor causes malnutrition. Outside Pyongyang, no soldiers have access to white rice. They mix corn flour and husks and eat that. A few pieces of potato and a couple of bits of sweetcorn. Maybe that's why they learn to steal in the military.

-Do soldiers die of malnutrition?

Yes it happens quite regularly. The military typically says the death occurred during training. If they informed the parents in time they would survive, but they say they will treat them and in the end they all die. They become weak, get tuberculosis or some other disease and then die.

-How are things between soldiers and civilians?

In the past they were called the People's Army, but not anymore. Soldiers steal things from the jangmadang; sometimes we capture them, other times they hit us. Even though they really bother us, we know however dire the military circumstances are so we don't normally make a big deal out of it.

-What's the approximate poverty rate in Pyongsong?

If you can't trade and have no money, are you not poor? Most workers' families live that way. One lady comes here from Pyongyang to find products, yet even she still worries about food for her family. Even in Pyongyang, when they say there will be distribution people line up from 1AM in front of the distribution center. Some even sleep there. If that is the situation in Pyongyang, don't even ask about Pyongsong. It's still better than most places, though.

-How about the lower classes?

In our neighborhood, we eat three meals a day as standard. There are many people who can't do that. Many people are not smart enough to survive.

-Have you seen anyone starve to death?

I went to Baeksong-ri last July; a child and her mother died there. Apparently they ate rat poison because they couldn't cope with continuously being hungry. The kid was smart but had no father. The mother worked in a munitions factory and that's all she knew. They lived off her income, and when she had no money, she couldn't trade. They relied only on the rations from the factory, and when they were stopped, that is what happened.

She was the head of the household so going to the factory was mandatory. It was so sad.

-Did you see this personally?

The rat poison wasn't enough. The mother died very soon after taking the poison, but the child was clinging to his classroom teacher crying "I don't want to die, I don't want to die." Apparently the mother said "Let's eat" and they ate, but she had put the poison in the food. The teacher took the child to the military hospital but it was too late. The son had no idea that it was going to happen.

The boy asked for help but he didn't make it. He was in his graduating year of senior middle school and was doing well; he was planning to go to a high school for good students. He wasn't in good condition for the military as his body was weak. His scores were high but he couldn't go to college because there was no money. When her pay was late and they had no food, the mother thought that was it and decided that they should give up.

- What do people say about Kim Jong Eun?

We say what can a young man like him do? We often reminisce about the period under Kim Il Sung. Things were good back then. Kim Jong Eun has the appearance of Kim Il Sung at the time of the liberation of the motherland; but he is too young. He has never suffered, and people wonder whether he can keep power. Kim Jong Eun knows nothing of suffering. He also knows nothing of our suffering.

On the bus or in restaurants, people talk about how someone who has studied capitalism should run the country. They criticize the current political situation. They say there are too many traitors. It's not just traders, everybody expresses their own opinion. At least now we have enough freedom to speak accurately.

- I heard people don't think highly of Jang Sung Taek?

We are not interested in Jang Sung Taek. He is the Director of the Ministry of Administration, but we only know him as Kim Kyung Hee's husband. He is known as someone who takes care of himself. Kim Kyung Hee's role seems big. She is the sister of Kim Jong Il, and as such often accompanies him.

The General¹⁰ once said there are many spies and anti-revolutionaries around and we can't trust anyone, so family members should help each other. Well, Kim Kyung Hee's role seems pretty big.

- Have you heard of the graffiti incident (criticizing Kim Jong Il)?

That seems to happen once or twice a year. Last March there was also graffiti criticizing the Party. They caught the person who did it; it was a college student. After that there was one talking badly about Kim Jong Il on the wall of a revolutionary historical site in Pyongsong. Whenever such incidents occur rumors spread like wildfire.

- How do people react to such stories?

On the surface, not much. Between people who know each other, they do say how true the graffiti is, though.

¹⁰ Kim Jong Il

- Why are there no protests in North Korea?

If anyone leads or participates in a riot, then three generations of the family will be exterminated.

- I heard Pyongsong can receive South Korean TV?

There is a small size TV that's about as big as my palm. It's a South Korean satellite TV, and can show 36 channels. With an adjustable antenna, you can watch any South Korean channel. Someone showed it to me too but I told him to get lost. It's too risky. I heard these TV's are brought in by people going to and from China.

- Do you think Kim Jong Il will ever embrace reform and opening?

It'd be good if he did, but he won't. They just keep pouring out anti-South Korea stuff. I reckon something serious will happen next year.

- What do you think about food aid from other countries?

Aid doesn't come to the people. I believe it comes with a cross on it. If just 10% of the rice going to the military went to the people, it would be a big improvement, but is that likely?

- What are government cadres lives like?

They live well and have fancy homes. Their apartments use separate electric power lines so they don't lose their power much. Their lives are so much better than ours.

- How about those who are well off in Pyongsong?

All wealthy people use South Korean products. All the cosmetics they use are South Koreans too. This is typical of people with power and those earning lots of money from trade; they all have their funds. NSA agents and cadres too; because they have power, they have wealth.

They buy the best things from the jangmadang, too. They buy wool coats and 'skinny jeans'. Despite the controls, they cut their hair in the South Korean style and speak like South Koreans.

-South Korean dialect is popular?

We hear "Oppa¹¹" sometimes here. My kids use quite a lot of South Korean style spoken language. Particularly in Pyongsong, because it catches trends fast, you commonly see South Korean clothing styles like dresses. Hairstyles too; people follow the styles from South Korean movie stars or TV drama characters. Women let down their hair long and men make theirs pointy on top like Hyun Bin. Some dye their hair and some wear short skirts too. The country calls it "The cheap South Chosun wind" and tells us not to do it.

¹¹ Used by females to indicate a younger male friend or boyfriend

Interview 4

Name: Im Bae Chun

Sex: Male

Age: Late 50s

Area: Yeonsan County, North Hwanghae Province

Job: Farm worker

- Yeonsan County in North Hwanghae Province is in the vicinity of Pyongyang, so please tell us about the reduction in the size of the overall Pyongyang City region.

Seungho district was taken out of Pyongyang. Sangnam and Gangnam districts became part of North Hwanghae Province.

A long time ago, they said even the birds in Pyongyang would chirp "Pyongyang, Pyongyang," but now, even Pyongyang doesn't have proper food rations...

- Did you receive your cooperative farm food distribution last year?

Yes, but they didn't give particularly much; about 150kg. They gave us beans, too; about 20kg that we had planted between rows. The beans were soybeans, which we made into soybean paste; we ate the bean curd. Usually around 110kg of rice is given per year. For a family of four, it lasts about 2-3 months.

When you can't eat, you can't work, so every day there's a shortage of food. Farmers plant their own vegetables, but the state takes them. So, the farmers distribute vegetables in secret... but it's the same as stealing.

- Is it enough?

The food we get given lasts a few months, so when it's time for rice threshing, people are forced to steal. In the past, the army would guard the fields but now farmers do it. We do it a few times per season. During harvest season I stole about 220kg to eat.

When we go to the jangmadang to buy pork, oil, red pepper powder and such like, we have to sell rice. This year the rice price was around 2000 won. From the perspective of the seller, that is good. That is how a farmer sees it.

- So it seems like even though you prepare for the year, it's not enough.

In about 5 or 6 months, the rice is down to ground level. So you go to the farm to steal vegetables to sell, you also go fishing at night and sell what you've caught to survive. You catch carp and catfish with a net- something that looks like an umbrella.

When it rains, you catch a few dozen kilos of fish. In the spring and fall you plant potatoes, but it's twice the work since you plant once in the fall and again in the spring. We also plant them in the vegetable fields.

- What do farmers do, then?

We plant wheat, then barley and potatoes, and after that, we plant rice.

The growth period we have allotted is 60 days, which is short. It doesn't grow well and tastes bad. Stuff planted in early June should be harvested in October. It should take about four

months.

- Are there hungry people around?

Not so much where we live. Most eat three meals a day. However, there are people who live on two meals a day. Wealthy people, approximately 30%, are able to eat rice for all three meals. Loggers or farm cadres; people who trade well; even if you are just the head of the work team you can live well. About 20% of people take the husks of wheat and barley and eat that. Most people live without state distribution, although it may only be two meals.

- How much money were you given as part of the currency redenomination?

Farmers were not given anything for free.

- Did you hear that people with money went bankrupt during that time?

Nobody from the village went bankrupt. In rural areas people do not have a lot of cash.

- What are they telling you about Kim Jong Eun?

There is one lecture a week and one study session about Kim Jong Il. Overall, this kind of thing happens two to three times a week or so. You have no choice but to go and sit there. You don't get in serious trouble for missing it, but you should go. They say Kim Jong Eun looks like Kim Il Sung.

- Do you think Kim Jeong Eun will do well?

I doubt it. He doesn't seem to be much use. A young person with his belly sticking out looks lazy.

- Do people in rural areas watch South Korean dramas?

Yes. Someone I know went overseas and saw one. Little by little we are watching them. We have recordings on video and CD. There are also some foreign ones that have been translated. I've only seen one.

- Do young people watch a lot of dramas?

It's hard to watch them on video in rural areas, but they do from time to time. People gather with friends to watch.

- How much do you know about South Korea?

Chosun people all know that South Chosun lives well. In the past, we thought South Chosun people were lazy and didn't live well, but now we all know. Most people know but won't say it. Out of 100 people, it would be hard to find five people who think South Chosun isn't doing well.

- Why is there such a huge difference between North Korea and China?

Chosun has a lot of controls but China does not. That's the difference. Just to go into town here requires you to pass ten security checkpoints. China doesn't care about that. In Chosun the state owns your labor so people aren't motivated to work. In China and South Chosun people reap what they sow, so they are inclined to work harder.

- What do you think about the provision of aid to North Korea?

I've never received rice but I've received fertilizer. It is sold in the jangmadang. I've used fertilizer and manure from South Chosun and China, but that was 7-8 years ago. I haven't used any since then. Aid might have arrived, but it has never gotten this far. It might have just been a special case. But last year, we received some fertilizer from China so I used it.

You need to fertilize the land 3-4 times a year; now, for 3,000 pyong you need to spread around 600kg. But I couldn't spread more than a few tens of kg. Grain uses a lot of fertilizer, so now I can't grow any. If aid were given to me directly it would be great, but in reality it isn't, so it doesn't matter. It's strange. Does it go to cadres? Where does it go?

- Do you think the strong and prosperous state will ever come?

Not likely. If it could be built in a day, everyone would be doing it.

- Do you think reform and opening is likely?

Even when Kim Jong Il dies and Kim Jong Eun is in power, it's unlikely that anything will change significantly. Do you think he'll think about the torment of the people? If Kim Il Sung was alive, he might have created the Koryo Federation and we might've even been able to vote for the next president. There would've been the possibility of reform and opening. I never thought Kim Il Sung was bad.

- Is there any dissatisfaction at the current system?

Three years ago, I heard there was graffiti on a wall. Middle school students criticized Kim Jong Il, but they were caught.

- Is there religious freedom?

There seem to be believers in the church. There's talk that Christianity helps you live well and puts you at peace. There's this kind of talk between friends. However, there is no religious freedom in Chosun. I've heard that there are people who've been caught in Pyongyang for being Christian. There is no freedom.

Interview 5

Name: Park Yong Hwa

Sex: Female

Age: 74

Area: Jian, Liaoning Province, China

Job: Aiding defectors in China with religious group

(Ethnicity: Ethnic Korean)

(Editor's note: Park used to be a teacher in a junior high school, but now she offers a place for people from North Korea visiting Jian to stay)

- Do many North Koreans come here?

Yes, sure. They have difficulty finding a place to stay given their tight budget. Most inns are too expensive for them, and they also want to find some work during their visit no matter how short it is, so they come to me to get help. They find out about me by word of mouth.

- I think that North Koreans coming here wouldn't want to go back to North Korea.

Once they come here, they don't want to go back, but most have no choice since they have family back home. Some come to earn money and end up over-staying, though. They have to be careful, since the North Korean police go around looking to arrest those not returning on time. But they still do it. Once they do go back, they are investigated and get sent for labor re-education or imprisoned.

- What is the situation in North Korea for the people who come here as visitors?

Many don't go to their official workplace and don't get any rations. The wives earn some money from the market, but there isn't enough food so life is hard. Little kids cry of hunger, and sometimes people can't stand it and kill each other. North Korean men get angry very easily.

- Have you heard this directly, from someone who has seen such an incident?

Sure! In around February of this year my brother said he saw the inside of the home of a man who had killed his family. My brother is Chinese-Korean, living in Chosun. When he came here, he told me the story. The father killed his family with a knife and then hung himself.

You have no idea how many whole families kill themselves in Chosun. My brother has seen it all. Manpo in Jagang Province has a certain degree of connection with the outside world, but this still happens there, too.

- Among North Korean people visiting family, or doing business, why are there a lot more women?

In Chosun, men cannot leave easily. If men come out and their ideology changes then internal society could be altered. More so than with women. A woman with a big family can get a passport and get let out quickly. Young people aren't let out much, either. Young people adapt to the outside world much faster. So, anyone over 50 gets out more.

I'm interested in doing business with North Koreans and am looking for some young people, but there aren't any. As long as you work with young people, you can do many things, but because Chosun won't let them out there is no way. Women too; the youngest women coming

here is about 45 years old. Young people should be the ones coming and going, or that place will never change.

- How do the North Koreans feel these days?

Since the currency redenomination, Chosun people have been devastated. No strength remains. The only ones with positive energy and able to laugh are the cadres.

Older people have it the hardest in Chosun. As a result, many commit suicide. Their sons and daughters have trouble making a living, so the elderly have to look after themselves. Children sometimes ask their parents to leave the house. Everybody is hungry; it's helpless. Some bad sons abuse their elderly parents. The elderly are so unfortunate, and they can't even talk about it.

- What's the initial reaction of North Koreans visiting China for the first time?

First they find out what freedom is. Yeah, that's it. But they get disoriented and scared, like patients. Having to deal with the different environment here overwhelms them. Seeing people jog in the morning along the river front, eat dumplings and look free and do things freely affects them.

But after about a month, they get more used to it. The many cars on the streets overwhelm them and they don't know what to do. They say they feel like they are in a dream. They say they can't believe what they are seeing, like a dream. They ask how it came to be like this.

- Do North Koreans help each other once they come here?

No, they don't. They don't like communicating with each other. They can't trust each other.

- I heard that the awareness of North Koreans has changed.

In the past, I couldn't even talk to Chosun people. Back then they worshiped Kim Il Sung, so there was not even religion in Chosun. However, after the March of Tribulation and currency redenomination, they suddenly changed. They tell people North Korea is paradise on earth but then people see deaths so it's disturbing and confusing. People come to realize that they were lied to only when they leave North Korea. They ask why their country is like that and you hear them saying "We've been living like fools".

- What do North Korean intellectuals mostly say?

I had a chance to talk to a college professor. The educated know that Chosun is under a dictatorship with a family dynasty and a feudal system. They say there's no future under such a political system. It's already proven and the proof is visible. The educated people understand how serious the political system is in North Korea. They say that a family dynasty is not socialism.

- What do those people say about Kim Jong Eun?

Prior to General Kim becoming the official successor, cadres quietly expressed their doubts and skepticism. They asked, "Would they do that?" On the surface, they talk about the honor of working for the Youth Captain etc. but privately they think it won't go well.

The intellectuals don't believe in Kim Jong Eun. They say, "What is a baby like him going to do?" They don't believe in him. Many people say his age and experience will be a big problem.

Some people say once Kim Jong Il is gone, there will be problems and things will change. Kim Jong Eun will have a hard time opening up the country, so he is likely to just mimic the way Kim Jong Il governed the country without any positive changes.

- What has public opinion been like since the currency redenomination?

Right afterwards, people thought the strong and prosperous state was really coming. They said that for three days it was paradise on earth, because on the first day, the state rice price was around 25 won. People said they saw communism for 3 days, but after that, things regressed back to feudalism.

- Do the people believe in the strong and prosperous state?

Of course not. They feel deceived by the government so they don't believe it any more. There is a process to becoming prosperous and powerful, and by seeing the situation now we can see the future. No electrical power, no water, and things are only getting harder, so who would believe North Korea is becoming a strong and prosperous state?

- Why do you think Kim Jong Il came to China?

There isn't any food. It's a strong and prosperous state with no food, that's why. 1kg of rice costs 1750 won. Wages are 2000 won per month. Pay is meaningless. They can't give rations. That's why.

- How do North Koreans look?

They look like they are lacking something. Everyone is having a hard time. One interesting thing is that there are a lot of people on the streets. Seems like more than here in Jian. They are all supposed to be working in factories, so I don't understand where they come from. They all look busy rushing here and there constantly. They must be busy trying to survive, finding food sources. The actions of people trying to live.

- What do North Korean intellectuals think of nuclear weapons?

They seem proud on the surface but it doesn't give them any food, so they don't really see it that favorably. I'm sure some truly do, though.

- Any changes in North Korea you've seen lately?

Take a look and compare Jian and North Korea across the river. Jian has changed a lot, but North Korea has been the same for a few decades now. The young people in Chosun sometimes wear Chinese-made hats; I guess that means they are following us a little. I hear young people also now use electronic gadgets.

- I heard North Korean soldiers are very harsh on civilians?

The soldiers have a bad attitude. No respect and no manners. They talk rudely; instructing and forcing people do things, and talk down to the elderly. Society is extra hard for the elderly. The elderly are treated poorly and have difficulty making a living. Chosun people are very unhappy inside; full of complaints. They don't express them, however. They don't talk about it. They're afraid to do so. If it was just he or she being penalized for it, it would be ok, but they have to care for the sake of their family. I really hope things change there soon.

- What would you say is the biggest social problem in North Korea?

I would say use of bingdu.

- It is that serious?

Three years back, I met someone who was selling it. My brother says Chosun people have had enough, and this makes them look for things like 'bingdu', as we call it. I go there once every year to visit my relatives. I hear even cadres do it. I saw people doing it myself. With white powder.

- Do some North Koreans come here to China to sell it in secret?

This is a small town, so no. In 2003, the Chief of Police in Dandong got arrested and sentenced to death for smuggling drugs. Many other people involved in it got arrested and punished, too. It was all because of crystal meth. They tried to bring it in to China from North Korea. It was a huge case. I heard they had been selling it for 20 years. One of them was the police chief. So they pulled out all the roots of the problem there.

- Have you ever been asked to sell it by anyone?

I was once asked to help establish a channel in China. There's very high demand for drugs in China, but if you get caught with more than 100g, you will be shot. In 2007 a guy from Chosun smuggled drugs into Dandong. He smuggled 10 tons of drugs made in North Korea. He was caught sending them on to Congo.

- How do the drugs get out of North Korea?

Military bases on the North Korean border are involved with cadres in drug smuggling. Without help from the military bases, drug smuggling is impossible. My brother-in-law is a Chinese policeman. He said to be careful of drugs. They say tons of drugs are smuggled by North Korean military units.

- How risky is it to get involved?

My brother-in-law knows that I deal a lot with Chosun people, so he tells me to be careful. It's known that the demand for bingdu is high and many North Koreans want me to help supply it.

Interview 6

Name: Cho Sook Hee
Sex: Female
Age: Late 40s
Area: South Pyongan Province
Job: Factory worker

(Editor's note: Cho Suk Hee is a factory cadre, and was careful to appear broadly loyal)

- What is your job?

I work for a machine factory.

- I have heard that factories are not operating well.

Exactly. We are almost at a standstill. We work eight-hour shifts, but that usually amounts to one hour in the morning and two in the afternoon of actual work. Blackouts happen at all hours, so we work when we have power.

- Do you get food or materials from the state?

(Laughing) No. Basically we know that production units (factories and plants that actually produce things) get comparatively better distribution. The smaller the output of a factory, the less distribution it gets. It depends on the work of the factory manager and his management skill. Distribution varies according to production volume.

- You're saying that factory bosses decide distribution levels?

No. The factory boss follows state regulations. He is basically a trader: if he does well and production happens then the state gives him money accordingly. So the workers there can get distribution.

- How is the food situation?

Food is in very short supply. Most make do with three meals of corn rice per day. Some also make noodles and eat them for dinner. It's three meals, but it's not enough. It's difficult to get by.

- Isn't it hard just working in a factory?

I make time to do some volunteer work, making noodles, say, or grinding corn or wheat into flour. I'm not going into the market.

- Are there starving people too?

(In a whisper) A lot. But there are many more people who live on one meal a day. So there are people who die of malnutrition.

- How does it compare to the March of Tribulation of the late 1990s?

Things seem worse now. Especially since the currency redenomination things have been worse than during the March of Tribulation. Before that we got distribution from the state and were given the things we needed to live. Wages were also as normal. We relied on the

state and lived normally, but then the March of Tribulation began.

Back then we didn't know how to trade, how to sell things and how to make money. Because of that, many died. That time has passed now, and because we have experience we don't work in factories to live, we do other things.

- What do you think of the currency redenomination?

I think that had the state permitted the spread of the market after its introduction, it would have been successful. We were also hopeful following the currency redenomination. But things have gotten difficult now.

- How is life for cadres?

It's OK. But if you listen to what Chinese people say then our cadres allegedly live really well; however, this isn't true. If they want to go up the ranks they have to study and work hard. So there are people in a bad situation; not getting anything from the state, doing illegal stuff on the side.

- Cadres also loan money to people, or so I have heard.

That's not just cadres; normal people do it too.

- How do people survive?

Most trade. Things like pigs, dogs and chickens are reared and sold. If we want to live, we have to do our jobs, some trading and a few side-jobs, too.

- What is the price of pork?

Around 2,500 won per kilo.

- I hear the price of rice is going up.

Non-glutinous rice is around 2,500 won a kilo. Price rises mean trade is going well. It means that a lot of people are buying it.

- What is public opinion of Kim Jong Eun?

I don't know what public opinion of the leadership is. And he has yet to become leader...

- What do the people think of Kim Jong Il?

The common view of Kim Jong Il is good. It is said that our country's current state is the fault of mid-level cadres. I agree with this, of course. Having never met General Kim Jong Il, I cannot say whether he is bad or not. I just think that some workers are distorting things a lot, and so our lives are difficult.

- Aren't you saying that lower level cadres must manage the situation better?

Actually that's right. People lower down have to take more interest.

- The people must be discontented with the cadres.

The cadres have distorted industry in many ways. Because of them, the Party and the people and the Suryeong¹² and the people cannot act together.

- Are you saying that Kim Jong Il's reputation is good?

When the Suryeong was alive, the state was doing fine. There were no problems with production. After his passing, production began to deteriorate. From then, because of problems with production our lives worsened. So, if you ask me, things are now much worse now than under Kim Il Sung. What are lower level workers supposed to think of the leaders of the people?

Because people don't work properly, much damage has been done. We must farm for the good of all, but instead they take what they want and there is not much left. The remainder is what we have to live on.

- Aren't you accusing mid-level cadres of corruption?

No, no. How could I do that? However... I often go to farming areas, so let's use that as an example. If you want to grow crops you need oil. You need tractors, and there isn't enough oil. They need 10 drums, but can't get more than 5. So they can't really farm. But even so they need to farm, so they must borrow the oil from somewhere else.

And there is also no fertilizer, because the state doesn't give them any. Plus, people need to eat enough to work don't they? If you want to farm, then you need fertilizer, there isn't enough so when it comes time to harvest in the autumn the harvest is no good. So in order to fertilize the soil, you use whatever you can. And you underreport the amount produced to the state. Because of all this the farm managers work like crazy.

- Do people feel dissatisfied with Workers' Party members?

Well, I don't know what you mean by that. Absolutely not about Party members. Our ideology is really good. We are hungry now, yes, but the state is in difficulties so we must overcome this, and they are leading.

- What of the reaction of the people to the currency redenomination?

Not good. Discontent exploded. Because the state did it, we couldn't say anything. I was really disappointed. Before, I was doing this and that, then the currency reform happened. The state just stopping us from living.

- If so, surely the people must have been bursting with discontent. Wasn't there any dissenting graffiti?

I haven't seen it. If you say discontent, that's a difficult feeling. You can't express it, and among close friends it comes out.

- Do you know of South Korean food aid?

I know. I have received it directly. I think it was in the early 2000s. The sack had the words 'Republic of Korea' written on the side of it, so I knew it was a rice aid from the South. At the time I also received corn and wheat flour. The corn was 100% American and the rice Korean.

¹² Kim Il Sung

- I have heard that people in the northern regions never received any rice.

The way the state gives distribution is that it goes first to those areas with big state construction industries; core production units, coal mines and power stations. Its unavoidable, we have to earn money to survive. The Chosun army is not at fault, it doesn't all go to them.

My child is in the army; that place, what it must be like... My child has to eat, and has to have a home. All countries need an army, and well... food must go to the army, too. The fact that they don't get more food is worse.

- Do you want to keep receiving aid from the international community?

Of course. It's good.

- Do you know about 'bingdu'?

Drugs. No.

- Since the emergence of Kim Jong Eun have there been any notable changes?

How can the normal people know such things? What could have changed?!

- Have there been any campaigns to idolize Kim Jong Eun or any political slogans?

No special slogans, but he is called the 'Young General'. I have heard he is good with CNC technology. He's just been unveiled as the successor; it's not time for propaganda yet.

- Have you seen him in the flesh? Do you have any expectations?

He looks just like the Suryeong. He looks very much like him, so I am expectant. I'm not sure whether our lives will stabilize, but are we not at the start of the 2012 'Strong and Prosperous State'? I am not sure what that means, but we hope for that and that alone. We aim for it, to do justice to the 100th birthday of the Great Leader; we will see what happens.

- Do you think things will improve in the ways that the authorities say in the propaganda?

Like the slogan, the only road is the one you make for yourself. I don't expect things from the state. That said, people don't say they think the strong and prosperous nation cannot happen. Just that life is so difficult; we worry that it may not be possible.

- How do you think people will react if it does not happen?

Before now people didn't speak about their misgivings. Speaking politically was a solitary activity. If two people spoke and were caught that was the end, so people didn't. But after the currency redenomination, people would meet in twos and threes and mutter to each other. So, if it all comes to nothing, I worry maybe whether that two or three will become twenty or thirty.

Of course we must create the strong and prosperous state, but things are just too difficult for us right now. Making ends meet is a constant trouble. In a word, this is our darkest night. Like the darkest of nites, without a moon in the sky. But on a dark nite, we must light a lamp with joy and go forward to the new dawn! If the state doesn't light this lamp, then there is a big problem.

In the end, it's all about whether we fall into a pale full of dung, fall off a cliff, get mired in thorns, live painful lives... Obviously, a new day will dawn; we just have to sleep for a few nights while it comes. Nothing to be sad about.

- I hear the number of wandering orphan children has increased.

We are not without them. But not just orphans, even families are going that way. People are getting really poor. It's disturbing.

- What is needed most?

Food. We need things to eat.

- Can discontent develop into riots?

It's pretty difficult.

- Aren't people much more open about their discontent than before?

Even so, it's not to the level of rioting yet. The ideology is too strong.

- What do you think of people who have chosen to flee to the South?

I think it's bad. Of course there must be many reasons for it, but aren't those people betraying our country? Of course there are people who are smarter than normal people so they go. Even so, I will stay here and contribute to the construction of a better society. I have a family, what would happen if I just threw them away and went south? I have parents, kids and a husband, what would happen if I went down there?

Even if I am hungry, I want the best for my country; above all I want to be with my family. 70% of the people who go don't fit in here; do they really think they will fit in there? Scientists and engineers who go probably do well for themselves but I don't see normal people doing well. If you go to South Korea, you get money, house and resettlement funds, but the question is, how can you make good use of all that?

- What do you think of reform and opening?

Reform is good. Opening would be great. Everyone around here wants opening. We look at what we produce here and we are surprised by how bad it all is, and we look at things made abroad and in China and see good it is.

- What do you think of reunification?

Basically total reunification would be best. If exchanges between the North and the South started then Chosun's resources could go down and thus the economy of Chosun could go up; how good that would be.

- What do you think is the reason why you can't open?

Isn't it because if we open, nobody will live in Chosun anymore? Because Chosun doesn't even have food, and there is so much to eat in China, surely everyone will up and go. We don't open because if we did, there'd be nobody left here.

I have no idea what I would do if we opened. All I do is work to live, I get nothing from the state and the state isn't supporting me, I have to do things for myself. Doing it for yourself is the way things are going.

But in the case of many counties, they produce food and send it to the military, but then that lot of food goes somewhere so we have to send more. My children are in the military so if they ask, I send them food. All parents are the same in that regard.

- I have heard that many say a war would be best.

Yes, some do. It's a case of, "Just get it over with." Die of starvation or die in a war, like that. South Korea has so much, so they don't want it. We have nothing. One of our party's slogans is 'do not fear war', but it's not something I hope for. Cadres don't want it, either. They have a lot to lose.

- Are there people who blame Kim Jong Il for their situation?

Indirectly, yes.

- Did you know about Kim Jong Nam or Kim Jong Eun's lineage before you came to China?

I didn't know about Kim Jong Nam, and I didn't know anything at all about Kim Jong Eun.

- What were you most surprised about when you came over to China?

I heard a lot about Kim Jong Il's family, it was very surprising. Kim Jong Il has many wives, and I heard about his sons, Kim Jong Nam, Kim Jong Chol and Kim Jong Eun. I remember I wondered at the time whether this was true or just some childish talk on the part of South Koreans. It was because I thought at the time that South Koreans lie a lot.

But if you don't believe them, Chinese people would say words to the effect, "You are still like that? Why can't you see the truth? Pitiful." I began to realize the truth. I didn't know that Kim Jong Il had so many women. I thought it wasn't my business to know about the president's situation, but I couldn't understand how he could have so many women.

- Have you seen leaflets before (sent over from the South to the North)?

Yes, a long time ago, in the 1980s I think. Even if the leaflets come over, the army is mobilized to gather them up.

- Nowadays they are attached to balloons so they fly over.

I know. However I think that's a rather childish method. Nothing will be achieved like that.

- Does everyone have a DVD player now?

Yes, everyone watches DVDs here. If you watch South Korean stuff you can get into a lot of trouble, so I watch a lot of Soviet and Chinese films, but can't watch South Korean things.

- I have heard though that only cadres have DVD players.

No, there are so many, everyone has one. Traders smuggle them in and sell them to normal people. I don't know how much they cost, but they are expensive. Traders can name their price.

- If they are expensive why do you buy them? Surely buying food would be better?

There are people with the means, and there are people with curiosity for something new. So, wanting to get something new, they buy it. Watching DVDs is a trend, you try not to follow, but if you have just enough money to, you end up buying it. We use batteries to watch.

- Power is unreliable?

Yes, so every household has portable batteries.

- You mean a car battery?

Yes, we use car batteries, and smaller ones too. We recharge them when the power comes back on.

- When is that?

At home, from 8 to 10 in the evening when the TV news is on. Because factories produce goods, they get power. So when a factory is running, people plug in their batteries to charge when they work, and unplug them when they leave.

- Did you hear anything about the South when you went to school in the North?

Nothing.

- I hear that young people are imitating things from South Korean culture?

Yes. They wear trousers that are tight around the bum. Young people take so much care of their hair style, hair color and appearance. Most youngsters are like that.

- I hear students just play South Korean songs without the lyrics?

They want to dance, so they play them that way, yes.

- If you have a recharger, I guess you could watch DVDs whenever you want.

Yes, with a recharger you can watch both TV and use recording devices.

- How do cadres live?

The state gives the same amount to cadres as to workers, so how do you think cadres could be living so well? People with the wherewithal to do so live well. What percentage of people is that?

- I hear that there are stores of military supplies.

Yes.

- Are there any unique trends among young people?

Clothing and such go in trends. My generation liked to wear baggy clothes, but younger people mimic the South Korean style, liking tighter clothes. If I buy my daughter baggy clothes she'll tell me they are old-fashioned. There are many clothes in the market and there

are also places that can make clothes tighter.

The tailor does what he is told, fitting the clothes to the demands of the customer, so patrols cannot stop it. They try to enforce the regulations, so some people avoid them by bypassing main roads. My daughter hasn't worn that kind of clothes enough yet to be caught. Young men also wear clothes with English writing on them. I suppose if they knew what it said they would try and stop it, but they don't, so they can't.

- Do lots of people have cell phones?

No, only people who are doing really well. You can only connect using a Chosun-made phone. I have heard of the brand Samsung Anycall.

- How did you learn of these trends?

I hear a lot from my own generation. The clothes the young wear come from China. I learnt about it whilst buying things at the market. South Korean makeup and medicine is very expensive. And there is also Japanese stuff.

- There must be lots of old people living alone.

Loads. It's very rare to see them amusing themselves in the village or park, because as long as they can move then they sell things like seasonings or sunflower seeds. It isn't much, but they want to give their children a little money or some food. There are many old people who commit suicide, too.

If there is no money, because there is no other way, they commit crimes, and if they are caught they just say 'let's just die'. Because of the way things are, people divorce, they also steal and kill themselves; it's not clear why, but there are so many things that make you sad.

- Is patriarchy still strong in the North?

Yes. Women work hard and obey their husbands at home.

- It's very different to South Korea.

Even though things are tough, there is the idea that you should obey your husband. And spousal violence is not even a big deal. People believe that what happens in the home is not one else's concern.

- If you compare Kim Il Sung with Kim Jong Il...

Kim Il Sung is our loving father. At New Year's celebrations he would hug each child in turn and ask them what their wish was, they would say they wanted him to do his all for the country. He would go to city, village and beach; if there was hard work to do or someone desired for something he would fix it there and then, but Kim Jong Il is not like that.

20 years of anti-Japanese struggle, even though we constructed socialism for 20 years, we still live so badly, we don't know why. This is frequently said.

- How does Kim Jong Eun resemble Kim Il Sung?

In every way.

- Things are bad between North and South right now, what do you think is the reason?

It's difficult to assess the situation, but it's just two governments fighting. When parents fight, kids try to avoid it, don't they?

- Do you know about the sinking of the Cheonan?

Kim Jong Eun is being idolized as the successor and it was propaganda to show what a good leader he is.

- And the Yeonpyeong Island incident?

I believe that was an accident.

- Do you know about the past battles between North and South in the West Sea?

Yes, I have heard a lot about that.

- What do you think about relations between men and women in South Korean TV shows?

Compared to the elegance of love in Chosun, South Korean lovers in TV shows seem rather messy. There are no kiss scenes in Chosun shows; the government stops that kind of stuff ending up in TV shows, so love appears to be quite different in the South. North Koreans, once they meet one person, they stay with them forever, but South Koreans meet one person, then another, it changes in an instant.

In Chosun, films are to teach us how to act; it seems that South Korean films teach the people how to love, too. In Chosun, if you love someone, no matter how bad things get, you stay together. It's a beautiful kind of love.

- What do you think having watched South Korean TV dramas?

The South Korea of my thoughts has conscience, morality and loyalty. There are many things that should be emulated. Until now I have been taught that South Korean's lives are very hard and lots of murders occur, but having seen South Korean films, there is conscience, morality and loyalty. And the people seemingly live comfortably.

- Do you know of North Korea kidnapping Japanese people?

No.

What do you think of Japan?

I think it's a bad country.

- Do you know about nuclear weapons tests?

Yes, I am proud of that.

- But haven't things gotten worse economically because of nuclear weapons?

I think we must keep our nuclear weapons. I think I must protect my country. We must go down the path set down the 1991 path to unification; neither should wither, and we should manage the stubbornness that exists.

- Do you think things will improve with unification?

Yes. Chosun resources and South Korean agricultural products will circulate, so we surely will have better lives. Chosun has better ideology and South Korea's economy is good. The bad thing is that Chosun has no freedom at all, and the South has too much.

- In what ways is South Korean ideology bad?

Their freedom is excessive. Too open and free. By only looking to the world and letting many foreigners come and live there, they are losing their sense of identity aren't they?

Interview 7

Name: Jeon Gi Taek

Sex: Male

Age: Mid 40s

Area: Chongjin, North Hamkyung Province

Job: Factory electrician

- How is your factory doing?

Provincial factories in Chosun do get electricity part of the time, but there are not enough raw materials so very few are actually operating. And even if they say they'll guarantee those things, the facilities often go down, making operations very difficult. Monthly electricity consumption for a given factory is also decided in advance. First it goes to military factories, and then the rest goes to normal factories. My factory is also not functioning at the moment. We go to work but there is nothing to do, so we work on farming instead.

- In that case, is there any point going to work?

You have to go to work, even if the factory is idle and there's nothing to do. If you don't stamp your time sheet, there's trouble. So you stamp the timesheet and leave again. You have to follow the state's plan. The state expects you to achieve 100 won per day, and so whether by going to a farming area all day to trade corn or in some other way, you have to go out and earn 100 won to give to the state. Fulfilling state plans make people really tired. Earning a living, Party life for members, school etc; it's really intense.

- Do you get any distribution?

Except workers in military factories, soldiers and the security forces, distribution to workers has ceased. But we still have to offer grain to the state and workplaces in order to fulfill the plan. It's unreasonable, but we can't say anything. If we do, we'll get in trouble.

- How do people live, then?

We trade. I go to farms or other factories to buy corn cheaply and take it to the jangmadang. I profit as the middleman. In Chosun, women trade to make a living, carrying corn around by bicycle, breaking down and carrying tools and fixing it themselves. But in China women seem to live pretty well.

- Have you ever seen a South Korean drama?

I enjoyed 'Stairs to Heaven'. Many people thought that one was funny. I've also seen 'Jumong', about the Koguryeo. People can watch them on CD in Chosun, too. But if you are watching one when the power goes out the disc can break, so nowadays we use USB memory, which you can just take out even if the power goes out. I've watched things like Jumong and Korean dramas on a computer the size of a book.

- Tell us about Jumong.

I saw it last year. Everyone knows South Korea is well developed. Chosun films like 'Bomnaleui Nunsokim' and 'Eunbinyo' were made in Japan, and because of this only Party members can watch them. Whereas in this film there are South Korean people; they look affluent. So, sharper people realize that South Korean people live really well.

- Which of the actresses was the most beautiful?

All of the actresses in Jumong are beautiful, but I guess Han Hye Jin was the most beautiful.

- When do you usually watch dramas?

- Day or night, any time when there is electricity. But you have to be careful; if you are caught you go to jail. But when you are released you watch them again, although they tell you not to.

- How did you get hold of a DVD player?

There is the Chosun Joint Venture Company in Pyongyang; they make the kind of DVD player that the authorities allow. Besides that, we buy DVD players from smugglers; as long as you register the player it is not illegal, because the Chosun authorities allow the watching of translated Russian and Chinese discs. Although people do it to watch other things. Now many people use USB memory to watch stuff.

- Is the USB memory smuggled in?

By smuggling or trading. In Chosun carrying USB memory is not allowed, it is illegal. So not many people have it yet. A lot of students and soldiers. They have computers in the military.

- How do you hide all these things; Korean films, USB memory, DVDs...?

They are not ours; we borrow and watch them, then pass them on. Nobody knows who owns them, in many cases.

- Do people listen and dance to South Korean music?

Frequently; there are a lot of 'trot'¹³ songs. In Pyongyang they use cassette recorders to play South Korean songs a lot. Again in Pyongyang, girls dance and sing. It's a really trivial thing but they still try to regulate it; we are really unhappy with that. So we get rid of the lyrics and just dance to the music.

- What is the difference between you when you were young and the youth of today?

A lot. Today's young people are sensitive to the world outside, so they care a lot about their appearance. We couldn't have imagined doing that in Kim Il Sung's time.

- In China you can watch South Korean dramas and news on satellite TV. What difference can you feel between here and Chosun?

China and South Korea have free presses. Not in Chosun. You can even criticize the president openly here.

- Did you know that Chosun was not free when you were living there?

Officially there is freedom of the press; however, we know that Chosun is a dictatorial state. No real press, either; all other countries have freedom of the press, but Kim Jong Il doesn't follow them. Everyone is aware that there is no free press.

¹³ A style of South Korean music dating from the 1960s and 70s, roughly analogous to country music in the United States

As the proverbial frog in the well, we know we are being controlled, but since complaining is dangerous we don't say anything. Every week we must attend lectures and self-criticism sessions, and failure to attend will bring ideological criticism. Surveillance from above is thorough, and they don't give us any time to do anything different, so people all know they have no freedom.

- Do you eat three meals a day?

I usually don't eat breakfast and do eat lunch, so I eat two meals a day. I eat wild herbs mixed with corn. Back in 1997-8 we just ate pine mushrooms and flour, and even today there are people doing that. In farming areas people pick wild herbs and medicinal plants to sell, too.

- What do the people around you eat? Does anyone eat white rice?

There is South Korean, Chinese and Chosun rice in the jangmadang, but there is none in my house. My wife trades in the jangmadang, so we do eat just a little rice. She sells South Korean medicines and clothes coming in from China, and she is regularly caught in crackdowns. We can't live on my monthly wage. My wage is 2000 won, whereas rice is 2300 won, corn is 1200 won, and pork is 5000 won. Since the state has no money, they also don't always pay us on time. Sometimes it is one or two months late.

- Are there many people eating three meals a day?

People who are doing well in the market eat three, but people who lack the capital to trade well cannot do it. They say that if Chosun gave the people just 2% of the food that goes to the military then it wouldn't be this hard to provide distribution. When I came to China, I tried eating Pollack. Even in Kim Il Sung's time it was hard to eat that because it was too expensive.

- How has public opinion been since the currency redenomination?

At first we had high hopes that the state would change our money and then we would be able to live well, but now complaints are growing. But nobody will say anything even though they are upset, since that would get you sent to Yoduk prison camp.

- You know that political prison camps exist, then?

Yes. They make drugs there, too.

- Which period do you think was more difficult: the March of Tribulation or after the currency redenomination?

Now is more difficult. Before the currency redenomination, the price of goods was stable, but afterwards prices destabilized. The state created a policy for that, but it made no difference. In Pyongyang and Nampo prices in dollars and Yuan are unstable, so every situation is difficult.

- Did you ever hear the rumor that at the time of the currency redenomination people were so shocked that they tore up their money and threw it away?

Yes. The state broke its promise to the people, and that is wrong.

- Is the number of people starving now smaller than the number which starved during the March of Tribulation?

In 1997 during the March of Tribulation, adults and children lived on rations and believed in the Party and Suryong alone, then rations were suddenly cut and people starved because they didn't know what to do. The market played the role of seed, and from that time smuggling from China began to increase. If I spent 100 won importing something then I sold it for 200 won in Chosun. But when the currency redenomination happened, people couldn't find a way to live.

- It seems that people don't trust in or rely on the state any more.

Right. In the past, Kim Il Sung was the best, but we get nothing from the state now, even on Kim Jong Il's birthday which is meant to be the biggest holiday of all. Now we don't trust the state, and just live to avoid hunger.

- Have you seen critical graffiti or similar?

Not yet. I hear that there has been some in other areas, though. I heard it about three years ago; they said that the PSA caught them.

- We keep hearing that drug addiction is getting serious.

Drugs are a big problem. There aren't any young people in my family so we don't have any drug problems. There is a scene with bingdu in a Hong Kong movie, so maybe kids see that and do it...

- Young people do bingdu and then don't do any work, they say.

In Chosun, you go to work in the morning and stamp your time card, and the PSA checks up on you that way. If someone doesn't go to work, they investigate and if they catch you, it's dangerous. Even though Chosun people do bingdu, it is not at that level. We are under complete control, so if you don't go to work they come to look for you.

- Do people commit suicide?

Sure. Three generations of a family around me committed suicide with Chinese rat poison. Two parents in their 50s, two children and a grandson. They did it because life was hard. If you work for the state and there is no money then starving to death is inevitable.

- How do cadres live?

Military factories, the NSA, the PSM etc all get rations.

- Do people complain about Kim Jong Il?

It would be strange if they didn't.

- Do people speak ill of Kim Jong Il?

In the past they couldn't. However, now they do. Kim Il Sung gave us food to eat and let us live. Kim Jong Il is his son, so I wonder why his era has been so hard. So, we Chosun people have the saying that just because a father is smart doesn't necessarily mean his son will be smart, too.

- It means that Kim Jong Il is not as good as Kim Il Sung, right?

Kim Il Sung put the people first. However, now Chosun is a military-first state and the military is scary and strict. Ordinary people are watched by the NSA. They don't allow anything that defames the General in Chosun.

- Do you have any expressions to refer to Kim Jong Il?

We do, but we don't say them and they don't come up.

- Is the idea of respecting Kim Jong Il still strong in people?

On the surface, yes, but in reality no, people have a lot of complaints. Because they don't even have porridge to eat. It's just saying what you are told to say on the surface, you can't express your dissatisfaction.

- Have there not even been small expressions of this unhappiness?

Behind the scenes there are a lot, but the NSA told us not to gather in groups of three or more after the currency redenomination. If they see us gathering, then they come and ask why.

I wanted to feed my family in Chongjin, so I and my brother prepared the food and everyone gathered together. I don't know who had been watching, but at the very moment we planned to eat, the NSA hammered on the door. I was so shocked to learn that even giving delicious food to your family is being watched.

- Since when have you been forbidden to gather in three or more?

After the currency redenomination.

- Have you ever heard South Korean radio broadcasts?

Not at home. I used to have this thing from South Korea that picked up shortwave radio relatively well. But if you are caught with it in an inspection then there's trouble, so I threw it away. Having South Korean products isn't good.

- What broadcasters do you remember?

There was KBS, I know. In Chosun the radio frequency is fixed. If it is not and you are caught listening to it, you have to pay a fine. If you have a TV you have to register it for sealing by the NSA so you can't listen to South Korean broadcasts. If you don't register it, you get punished.

Interview 8

Name: Kim Young Ho and Lee In Suk (married)

Age: Mid 40s

Occupation: Farmer (male), trader (female)

Area: Hunchun, Jilin Province

(Editor's note: In cases where respondents need to be distinguished, Kim is indicated as (M) and Lee as (F))

-When did you come here?

M: We crossed the Tumen River in January this year, bringing one son.

-Where did you live in North Korea?

Saebyeol County in North Hamkyung Province. But it's called Kyongwon now¹⁴.

-Do you have family remaining in Kyongwon County?

F: I have a nephew, and if I only could we would bring him out... But it's not as if we're living in a stable situation; we're always uncomfortable so the circumstances aren't good for that. I don't have enough courage yet to bring him out.

-What was your occupation while in North Korea?

My husband graduated from Railways University and worked as a railway gauge inspector. He worked on the tracks, sold tickets, and put some of the money away in a different pocket as earnings for himself as that work is really terrible. Just before we came over, he was a farm worker.

-What's the co-operative farm situation?

Living just on what is given is hard. Chosun farms, wherever they are, are all the same. How much 'bunjo'¹⁵ one has done, living according to how hard you work on your private plot. So there are some richer people, and some poorer people.

It's hard for the elderly or those who live on their own, no matter what. It means that because rations are not really happening, living is tough. The army used to take its cut and then we would get a few months-worth, but even that stopped.

Farm cadres and team leaders live well though, regardless. The rich share their food with the poor under a lending system of high interest rates, and the poor get stuck in a vicious cycle of having to continuously pay off debt to eat. If the state gave enough we could get by even if we had to cut down, but because that's not happening it's difficult.

-After the harvest, how much do you receive from the state?

Women work 260 days on the farm, and men 300. Rations depend on how much 'bunjo' has

¹⁴ The area was renamed Saebyeol as part of the idolization of Kim Il Sung in 1977, only for it then to be returned to its former name, Kyongwon, in 2005. It lies at the northeast tip of North Hamgyung Province, close to Hunchun

¹⁵ The basic organizational production unit of a co-operative farm.

been achieved and how much voluntary 'bunjo' work one has also done. A bit is taken from here and there, and we eat the rest. Our original share¹⁶ is 200kg.

We receive our rations after the subtraction of provisions for children in kindergartens and nurseries. A child's original provision is 80kg, subtracting about 40kg, the ration given is 40kg. Original provision of 40kg is to last a year for that child. This is the level if the state gives a lot. So, there's no way you can survive on that. In the countryside you can't trade either, so people have to either steal from each other after harvest, or set up their own separate plots.

-Are other farms in a similar situation?

Poor farms' basic provisions are 20kg of un-hulled rice and 50kg of corn, and there are even many places where it has stopped. Because those people work without eating, they can't work well from the start. In the end they accumulate nothing but debt and enduring the day becomes work itself.

- Does much have to be given to the state?

In the group 'bunjo' we plant potatoes on state land and put in all our own seeds. As there are well-to-do people in every neighborhood, the people without much go to them and exchange corn and potatoes for potato seeds. Every once in a while we had to submit pork and meat for the people's army. Each person has to submit 6.5kg so two people meant 13kg. For the households which raise pigs its fine, but for others who don't, it costs them money.

Our child went to elementary school so we had to give a lot of things. Production brought no rations to teachers, either, and workers didn't earn much, so that is how we lived. Regardless of that, because we wanted to send our kids to school, we were prepared to tighten our belts a bit to get them there. When they had a sanitation drive we had to hand in soap, toothpaste and such, and once a year we would also have to give in rabbit. They said we also had to submit money for the making of some sculpture or other at school.

-How big was your private plot?

We didn't have any mountains nearby, only the river. We'd have to walk about 30-ri to get to a mountain. We had our own vegetable patch, the standard size the state gives; 7m in length, 2m in width. All we had was what was produced on this small patch. Because it was quite far and prone to theft my husband had to go out, build a small hut and live there.

My older brother came out of the army anticipating that he'd live better, but upon coming out and starving, he had to dig roots, cut trees and branches, and till the land. Doing this, neighbors came out requesting that he cut their land. In whatever way, one must endure. Work a few years and the land makes you strong. One knows one's land very well. If there are any irregularities about its border, you put up a rope or somehow indicate that that land is yours.

-How did you survive on scarce state rations?

M: Spiders don't spin cobwebs around people's mouths. Living depends on one's ability. When without, people borrow and eat; whether they earn or steal, or have to walk vast distances to trade to eat, they get by. We traded and got by to the extent that we could endure, and then came out.

¹⁶ Before processing

-What did people do when the factories stopped?

Even if the factories aren't in operation, you still have to show up for work. If you're absent from work without permission, you are in trouble. You go to the factory and get your attendance stamped, then, since there's nothing to do, the ones with ability are told to go out, earn money and give it to the factory. So the ones left at the factory become a laughing stock. A factory usually means working and making a living from that, but rather, now that we're having to do other work to earn money for the factory... this is the August 3rd Measure. We're supposed to be solving the problems of the daily necessities of life, but this work has become going out and earning money for the factory.

- Is there electricity?

It all depends on the hydroelectric station, so apart from in summer, it doesn't come properly. And because thermoelectric stations need coal, oil and other raw materials, the turbines don't turn. In the early evening, even if against our will, we must sleep. The time that people go home is the time when a lot of electricity is used, so it never comes. But during the summer when the hydroelectric station functions, we tend to get a bit of a supply.

We know that electricity is available for about 2~3 hours when we're asleep. And in the day, it comes only in short bursts. Still, when it does come, we charge the batteries to be able to use them when we need, which is a bit of a relief. Watching TV is indeed not easy.

-How do cadres live?

Officials live well. The people with a bit of capital lend it out at high interest.

-Aren't they discriminated against for doing that?

F: The people who lend also need to do it, so why shouldn't they? How can you stop lending and receiving money by law? Doing it too expensively and coping complaints is not an issue. Even if it is expensive, you simply can't do anything about it.

M: Cadres appear different. At first glance, when you see them, the 'bunjo' group leader is the lowest official. But the 'bunjo' group leader directs the farming. There's a lot you must give if you do 'bunjo' group farming. After giving to the top, the remaining biggest lot is the 'bunjo' group leader's share. Originally the 'bunjo' group leader couldn't take it, but avoiding people's attention they amass for themselves. So there's this saying; Party members eat grandly, administrators eat without a trace of administration, Safety Ministry agents eat safely and National Security people eat in secret and without being seen. We all know, but all we can do is complain in our hearts.

F: Even though we all know the truth, the 'bunjo' group leader falsifies our food production levels. Doing that gets them a bigger share. I've also seen problems arise as a result of making these wrongdoings known.

- How do you really feel about that?

I say the king of thieves is sitting in the palace.

-Are these jokes made behind their backs?

Before, we couldn't openly say these things but now we're frank with our criticisms. Many do

that. Before, if anything was to come out it would be big trouble... but now in the market while selling things, if an incident occurs with security or defense agents we would say "Hey, how am I supposed to live? You'll feed me?" Expressing our discontent. What can we do? We're about to starve to death. People are asleep.

- Many people are said to commit suicide in North Korea. Are there any around you?

My father-in-law committed suicide. He originally lived in Pyongyang, and for 1 year my mother-in-law was away from him in hospital. During that 1 year, he committed a mistake with another female. But what sort of big mistake is that? It's not a big thing. But at that time in the 1970s, it was when a lot of noise was being made about Kim Jong Il becoming successor, and so discipline was strict. To deal with that situation, he was banished from Pyongyang.

So, he came down to the provinces and was living somewhat okay, but then got ill. You see, when the Pyongyang Metro was being constructed he worked on it, but a tunnel collapsed and he hurt his head, needing brain surgery. During the March of Tribulation he suffered the after-effects, so we had to nurse him.

But as the food situation got tougher and we were busy trying to fend for ourselves, we couldn't take care of him as much. He became depressed and when we went out to work he hung himself. We're always busy trying to keep our heads above water. So we couldn't take care of my father-in-law...

-Are there people in your area who have committed suicide like this?

Even if it is suicide they don't say it up front. After all, it's not a good thing. But in terms of the state, if you commit suicide you become a traitor and your family pays the consequences. So they say they died from illness. But still, rumors fly.

-Have you ever known someone to die of starvation?

When you become busy, it gets hard to take care of things. Because I'm busy like this, everyone is. So, with this type of elderly person, they end up dying outside on the street. Also there are cases where they go into a building hallway just to rest for a while and end up freezing to death. While at the market you see those who have starved to death because no one could take care of them. That was the situation before the currency revaluation (November 2009). After it, everyone was affected dramatically.

-There are those who say that it was more difficult for some after the currency revaluation than during the famine period.

Suddenly we were hit with a huge shock. We believed the state, you know, they said that all our problems would be relieved. We thought finally we would be able to live well. Our only wish was simply to be full, even if it was on corn rice. They also said that the supply of commodities would ease and that we would get 500 won free for each person. 100,000 won became 1,000 won. Even still, I thought that the new money would be a big amount.

-It must've been good straight after the currency revaluation.

We felt good. But it wasn't as if we had a lot of things in front of our eyes, and it wasn't as if there was an improvement to our lives, either, so we thought we had better use the money wisely. We came to have hope. But after only a few days, the situation went wrong.

Things didn't appear and prices in the city went up. Farmers joined together to distribute goods, but doubts arose so they did not sell them cheaply. Prices rocketed later, becoming whatever the seller said they were. There was nothing being sold cheaply by the state. In the end you couldn't make any transactions in the market and prices were set at whatever level an individual declared.

-What did the state say after the currency revaluation?

Now that the state was going to ease up supplies, we said we'd not spend much and hold out for that. So we held on to our money real tightly. We had a meeting in our People's Unit, where they said that since goods were going to come down, not to spend money. They also said the same thing in factories and mines. So we'd always go down to the store in the morning to see what was on offer, but there was never anything.

At times, oil and such came in, but the price was the same as in the market. So in the end we were deceived by the state. Didn't we get all our money taken from us by the state? I couldn't sleep knowing that what little I had worked for was all being taken away from us. Everyone was up in arms and even cursed. At that time the People's Safety Ministry agents watched us carefully.

Now, people only believe what's in front of their eyes. They don't trust the state anymore. Well, people are somewhat still holding onto their hopes for this 'Strong and Prosperous State' campaign, but in the end it won't happen. They all know, but are still just holding on to the dream.

-The state continuously issues propaganda that the 'Strong and Prosperous State' is coming, when you were in North Korea what did you think of this?

Before the currency redenomination, we believed in it. After it, cadres started coming out and saying in lecture meetings that the 'Strong and Prosperous State' is coming. People don't believe it though, they just laugh. Oh no, they actually always say "The 'Strong and Prosperous State' came up to Pyongsung. Came up to Chongjin," or "The 'Strong and Prosperous State' only came as far as the front door." They say this and laugh.

(She sings the song. The lyrics are as follows)

"I'm excited. I'm excited. That sound is thanks to Juche steel. It's beautiful, following the General's march in our own country, it's the sound of the stars and the new creation of the heavens and earth. Oh~ Sing~ Oh~ Be proud~ It's the order of Baekdu, the star (Here, they sing 'problem' not 'star') of the military-first policy, of my country."

-What's the evaluation of Kim Jong Eun?

I think it was about two years ago, children were singing a song around the time of Kim Il Sung's birthday. There was a song a big kid sang, it was Footsteps. Listening to it, we knew straight away that it was about Kim Jong Il's successor. It went all around North Korea, and it was made known that this song was for Kim Jong Il's successor, so we knew exactly. We also heard last year that they were making a Kim Jong Eun research room. They said that January 8th was Comrade Kim Jong Eun's birthday, so there was a summons from the Party to put on performances that day. But then they re-ordered us not to do anything, so some places went on with it, while others didn't.

-Did you ever hear word that it was Kim Jong Eun who initiated the currency revaluation?

I never heard of that. Not even once. I just see propaganda of him, saying that he looks and seems exactly like Kim Il Sung. They said he is exactly the same type of personality that cares for the workers.

-What was the reaction like when Kim Jong Eun was first revealed to the public?

There was not really any reaction. If those above say "Ah," we say "Ah." That's us. We are systematically taught that way.

- Do people make any quiet or secret references to Kim Jong Il or Kim Jong Eun?

You can't talk about that openly. There are many of those people. They say something along those lines and then they disappear and you don't know what happens to them. I heard the saying that if the General is a genius then Comrade Kim Jong Eun is off the charts.

-Have you ever seen any graffiti cursing Kim Jong Il?

No.

-Did you know that Kim Jong Il has two older brothers?

No.

-What about the fact that South Korea has given rice as aid?

I know that a lot of fertilizer came in. It said 'Republic of Korea' on it, on the sack. So I knew. But I've never received Republic of Korea rice. I saw sacks going around with 'ROK rice' written on them, so I thought they must be giving something. I saw the sacks but not the rice.

The U.S. is blockading our economy so we cannot enter the international market, and the UN too is blocking this, but going into the 1990s we openly received assistance from the UN. We learn that Comrade Kim Jong Il's cunning plan is to attract food. We also learn that "According to the General's guile, it will come."

I heard word that Chung Ju Young came to North Korea with a cow. But I also heard that foot and mouth disease has broken out. There never used to be FMD in North Korea, but word got around that it was because of the cow that Chung brought to our country that pigs started to get infected. At the time, we thought it was because South Koreans do all sorts of unhygienic things.

-What do you think of (South) Korea?

We all know that South Korea's economy is highly developed. So we think that because our country's army is strong and South Korea's economy is strong, that when we reunite, our people will all live really well. Even when compared to China, we're nothing. At the end of the day, we come home to a little firefly-like kerosene lamp...

M: We have been taught a lot of ideology. North Korea has a lot of mountains and many resources. Because we are a divided nation, because we have a history of foreign invasions, if we don't strengthen our army we will fall prey again. So we are strengthening our military capability. We learned that because we are single-handedly facing the world's strongest nation, America, we cannot lower our military capability and strength for even a moment, and so, only after we rid South Korea from the foreign presence, will we be able to live together.

-What's the thing most needed in North Korea?

We need food. Even if it does not have rice, if it is just corn rice, we want to eat a lot. Life is really hard.

-If the people's dissatisfactions accumulate, do you think they might protest?

They can't. They're too busy trying to feed themselves. They want a war to just hurry up and break out. We think that if a war broke out, we would definitely win. And there are many people who think that the reason we live poorly is not because of the General's wrongdoings, but because of the people in the middle. They believe that mid-level cadres are not doing their jobs properly so we live like this.

- They want war because they think you can win it?

That's not it. I think it is just that if reunification comes, we win and get out of this wretched situation... Life is just too miserable now, and they think that if a war was to suddenly break out, then this life would end. We are saying we want this life to end more than that we want to win it. We don't have any expectation that this situation will get any better, so whether we live or die, something has to end. That's it.

-They say the number of people doing drugs has increased.

F: There are people who do that. Children don't seem to do it, but adults around me do bingdu¹⁷. They do it very quietly. Officials do too.

M: I know about 'bingdu'; rather than actually doing it, there are many people who sell it. Someone even came up to me once asking me to buy. But because I'm not interested in that I took no interest. I don't know much about it, but I didn't want anything to do with it.

-Is it difficult to believe those around you?

Of course. How are you supposed to know who is who. We have exercises. This person selling bingdu comes up to us disguised. If you don't report them you're taken away.

-How did you two meet?

F: I met him where my sister's husband worked.

- Do young people go out on dates much?

M: Because it's a farming area, it's still kind of awkward. We don't think much of romance. I guess they do it secretly. They're really embarrassed, they don't do out outwardly. It is done sometimes in front of others, but they usually go where there aren't people. But I don't know how they meet.

F: Even if they want to date they can't because there're no cars. They can't meet in another place. If they meet in the same place, then they can meet for a while. These days it seems some are meeting at construction sites. That never used to happen.

-What has been good about living in China?

¹⁷ Methamphetamines

It's really good to eat well. Kids love it. Say to them let's go back to the North, then they don't like it. Because they won't be able to eat well. Now that they eat well, they want to go outside and play, and study. And here, you get paid for exactly what you do. With that money we're doing fine. We don't receive much, but we're getting by.

-The longer you stay in China, the harder it generally is to go back. You don't miss your home at all?

I just miss my parents. We eat well now, and I wish that for my parents, so that's my main sadness. When we crossed, when we crossed the water, we prepared for their deaths. It was because we couldn't bring them. I miss my mother.

Interview 9

Name: Pak Young Min
Sex: Male
Age: Mid 40s
Area: Yanji, Jilin Province, China
Job: Trader
(Ethnicity: Ethnic Korean)

-What kind of trade do you do with North Korea?

Trade that makes money! I bring medicinal herbs or mushrooms from the mountains in North Korea. I send rice, fertilizer, electric goods and what have you to North Korea. Trade is ok, but other costs are high. I also help hospitals and places like that with a little food and medicine.

- What are domestic traders in North Korea asking for these days?

It seems to be electronics. For young people, even if they are going hungry they are still watching movies and listening to music, so they are buying a lot of MP3 players. Lots of people are studying Chinese, so there are some asking me for Chinese teaching materials, and paper and electronic dictionaries, too. Of course, since they have to study in the Chosun language, they study with South Korean dictionaries.

Word is that the Korean-made electronic dictionary 'Nurian' is good. But it isn't great for me, so I don't really do it. If people ask me privately, I get it for them. Mostly I supply air-cons for hotels or fax machines, water machines etc. I also repair them.

- The Nurian is quite expensive, I heard.

I dunno. Party cadres spend their money really well. Administrative cadres not so much, but trade company managers and those passing themselves off as upper class have only the best. If you go to their homes, you find a lot of Korean items. There is nothing they cannot buy.

- Explain the procedure for trading with North Korea.

First give the customs officials on this side 10 Yuan, then the hygiene and quarantine officials 25 Yuan, then cross into North Korea. Then go to the North Korean customs. Go with the soldiers, and first get a physical inspection. They take your temperature; if it is more than 36.7 degrees they send you back. They inspect your mouth, too, and record name, address, transit pass number, reason for entry etc. They take temperatures automatically with machines.

- Seems pretty similar to other countries. No?

In North Korea they have political screening, too. It's really annoying. They ask all kinds of questions about what company your partner is with, this and that. If you are denied you cannot enter, so you have to answer well.

And they also look at your merchandise. They look at the things in your bag one by one. They even check in your wallet. In this case, it takes three hours.

- Why do they spend so long on those checks?

From what I've seen, it is coz they spend most of the day sitting around with nothing to do. They can make it seem like they have something to do. They also want to find a way to take things from us. It is clear that they will take at least something.

They say they have to take electronics that cannot be recharged. It costs 200 Yuan to get them back. But the problem is not items or money. Sometimes they just get up and go for lunch in the middle. Lunch is from 12 to 3! Three hours! You just wait there.

- Is that the end of the process, though?

At the end of the political screening there are more customs checks of our belongings. It's the formal customs check. When leaving a Chinese vehicle to cross to a Chosun vehicle, at this point they check baggage. After that, your North Korean partner comes and you leave. They feel bad for us because of that. But workers are weak while the security forces are strong, so they cannot complain.

- Do the maritime customs do the same thing?

Rasun Customs House is a bit open, so it is easier. If you go often and know the people, it gets better. But those on the Tumen River, that is Namyang, Hoiryong and Musan, they are really hard to deal with. People waiting in North Korea say the same. They see you and laugh, saying, "It's tricky, isn't it." Everyone knows it is a really tough time.

- How would you characterize the attitude of the soldiers manning the customs house?

Those guys are not joking around. The people who come out to meet me are cadres from the provincial Party trading bureau, so pretty strong. They have power over people. Imagine if the head of the Liaoning Province trade bureau came along; the Chinese police wouldn't even be able to look at them. And yet even if the head of that bureau came out personally, the border guards, who are just kids, would tell them "turn around, get out, what is this?" very rudely. That's what the Military-first policy has made, as far as I can see.

- Who have you met in North Korea?

The trade bureau head, but an NSA agent was with him. These people always come out to meet people in groups of 3 or 4, absolutely *never* alone. People from the relevant enterprise or administrative officials come, too. And they drink constantly, from morning onward; sleeping, waking, always drinking.

- Even though you can meet them, it must be hard to speak your mind.

Everyone is wary of everyone else, so it is impossible to speak easily. We just talk about trade and share jokes. When North Korean people meet us they come to eat and drink. They don't go home; they sleep in the next room.

- What can you feel when you communicate directly with North Korean people?

You have to treat everyone there exactly the same. If you get friendlier with one person, the others hate it. And everyone is watching everyone else, so if a bad report goes out then that can get dangerous. Therefore, treat everyone the same; no jealousy, no trouble.

- What do these people want?

To do a lot of trade. And when Chinese people come, they want to make money any way they

can. They try to earn money or attract investment. They constantly ask what they can do in Chosun to sell more to China. When they make money, they pay some to the state and share out the rest.

- Have they suggested any particular business to you?

Mining. It's really profitable. So the Chinese are really greedy, too. But if you want a certain purity or quantity you have to get together with someone powerful; if you don't, it's no good. Even if you fail three or four times before getting it right once, that is still a good number. There is plenty of money left over. In the past, Chosun people used to cheat a lot, but nowadays it is better. Private trade in ice cream is also good, so they ask to do that a lot.

- What kind of mining is it?

Copper and zinc. Oh, and aluminum. I've heard about charcoal, too. But that trade is for companies because the products are bulky. Nowadays they also talk about North Korean paintings.

- Have you heard about plans to lure investment?

I'm Korean-Chinese, so they emphasize the 'one people' thing a lot. While talking about the construction of things like fertilizer or toiletries factories, they offer cheap electrical installation equipment and workers. With this kind of PR, they try to attract investment. However, the conflict between traders and customs officials is serious. The traders just want to get the investment in one way or another, but the soldiers or NSA agents want to get in the middle and feed together, just making problems. But nobody can complain about it.

- Any private demands?

When it is just the two people, they do. "China makes good sneakers, so next time bring some please"; bread, too. If it is not too much, I do it; if it makes business comfortable, it is good for me, too.

- You don't talk about North Korean society?

It's not a common conversational topic. "The year 2012 will open a path for our homeland to become strong and prosperous. Believe in Chosun. The day when our homeland prospers will certainly come. Along with General Kim Jong Il, we shall fend for our country together," these are the words that are loudly proclaimed. Even though it's obvious that the people struggle to make a living, they are told that they will be able to lead better lives from next year onwards. We just listen. Yet deep down inside we wonder if they aren't just empty words, and when we drink, we talk and laugh about it.

- What kind of changes can you see between now and when you first went to North Korea?

It's the same. The things I see have not changed. It's really exactly the same. But people have changed. They used to be pure and innocent but nowadays that is not the case.

-Have you been to the jangmadang?

They won't let me go by myself. That's why when I go out briefly at night I try to do a lot of trade. I just bring a few things out and do it. A bit of pork, a bit of artificial meat and other stuff like that; I bring them out little by little and do business.

Some do their business 'on paper'. Since inspectors might suddenly appear, they leave the goods at home, write what they have down on paper and do business like that.

But when the patrols appear, everyone grabs their stuff and runs for it. Some go home, others to nearby alleys.

- Are there many buyers as well?

If I go out at 6pm there are more sellers than buyers. There are not many buyers.

-Don't they ask you to buy things as well?

Once they see that you are Chinese, they don't normally approach you. The people there all have dark faces. It's because they drink too much and do not get enough nourishment.

- Have you seen slogans about Kim Jong Eun?

No I haven't. The inn where I stay doesn't have them either. Even when I meet with the cadres we don't talk about politics. We both avoid it. One wrong word and you could get arrested immediately, which is why we never talk about it.

-How are the ordinary people?

They are not the least bit interested in anything but being able to eat and survive. You can tell from the goods they bring out to sell, such as 2kg of food, 3kg of corn, things like that. They only seem to care about how to make a living. Nowadays it's the rice-planting season, so I've seen them going collectively to the farms.

- Has there been an increase in the number of homeless children?

I think I saw about two this time. I saw them while riding the train and they appeared to be waking up by the side of the tracks. They were wearing dirty padded clothes smeared with grease.

-What did the people with you say about South Korea?

I say it like this, "Since the opening of China we have been living well. It's the same for South Korea. Whether because of foreign goods, culture or whatever, we are living well." They are able to talk about South Korea now.

If we talk about the stream of culture within China's development and during its liberalization process, how it has developed quickly due to the many things it has bought and sold, those people too will agree. Even the North Korean cadres say "Comrade Kim Jong Il will soon reform and liberalize." However they don't say anything concrete regarding the exact nature of these reforms.

- Do you think North Korea will ever change?

Who knows! But seeing as it has not changed so far, it's hard to see that it will change a lot in the future. Look at the roads and streets. They are uneven, bumpy and sunken. They're not even able to repair them properly. No matter whether it is roads, houses or buildings, nothing has changed. Whereas China has already transformed so much.

Interview 10

Name: Oh Gil Tae
Sex: Male
Age: 33
Area: n/a
Job: Border guard

- Do you get distribution as a border guard?

At the beginning of the 2000s, the majority of rations were given in corn but these days there are also small amounts of rice. This rice comes from Southeast Asian countries. In the middle of the decade, many more food bags were delivered by the Red Cross. This aid no longer comes, and we eat corn mixed with rice. About 700g plus a snack allowance of 200g.

- Does your unit receive full rations?

Usually a platoon has 27 members, but this extends to 40 members in places of importance. A normal aluminum rice bowl holds one full scoop, which is 500g of uncooked rice. We, as a platoon, are given 3 or 4 of these at one time. When you consider that one platoon has 27 people, this leaves each member with less than 100g. Of course we are hungry.

- Is that enough to fill you up?

One hundred grams of non-sticky rice is a large amount once it swells up. We don't just scoop the rice from the pot as normal; it is puffed up in advance so that there appears to be more. If it is done like this, it makes it look like the soldiers are getting more.

- How do raw conscripts survive on so little?

Border guards have many ways of making money through smuggling channels. The soldiers who make money well don't eat with the rest of the unit. However, if these people take advantage of their position too heavily, they face investigation and many are forced into a period of reeducation.

There are two methods of reeducation. The first and most frequently administered is dishonorable discharge with a term of civilian reeducation. The second form is for more severe criminals who are refused discharge and sent to an army prison for reeducation. These special facilities exist at Haechang in South Pyongan Province on the west coast and on the east coast in Geumya County in South Hamkyung Province. North Hamkyung Province is in the east area, so offenders are sent to Geumya.

Petty smugglers will be there for 1 or 2 years before release. For working with the enemy South Korea, punishment is much more severe. Geumya is like a concentration camp. Yodok Prison Camp is around there, as you know.

- How are border guards interrogated? It's been pretty tough of late, I hear.

First, a statement is collected then a soldier faces one-to-one interrogation for 1 or 2 days. This interview process happens again and again. The investigator eats and sleeps within the company. If one discrepancy is found amid the daily testaments, a more forceful investigation is conducted.

This search for information is extended to the civilian population surrounding the unit, since

civilians may be in collusion with the soldiers. Their accounts should be matching. Many people on the fringes who have received smuggled goods or profited from the activities can be caught during the course of the investigation.

- Where do the inspectors come from?

The strongest are from the 'anti-socialist activities' investigation team. If the Party in Pyongyang sends people then that is serious. Then there are divisional or regimental investigations. Because we are not under the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, nothing comes from them. Sometimes Defense Security Command sends out armaments checks.

I heard about big problems for one commander who sold ammunition and pocketed the money. They say he sold it to Russia. So we hear of troops having nothing to eat so selling their ammunition. They just say the bullets were spent in training.

- Are there many cases of such commanding officers being punished?

Many. There is a lot the commanders know, but a lot they do not, and they get punished for that, too. In the world of smuggling there are goods, drugs and even people being sent on to China. The border guards say "No matter how much you joke about it, don't sell people;" however, guards do that too, sometimes. It's all work. But if caught, they will be taken out and shot.

- Do those who get executed receive a formal trial?

That commander I mentioned, he was working near Hoiryeong. The trial itself and the execution were all done in front of Hoiryeong Market, right there. Because he was a public figure and it was a conspiracy charge, they did it like that. If it had been done on-base then nobody would have known and they couldn't have instilled any fear.

The trial I saw involved the judge sitting there while the arraignment became the judgment. There was no legal representation. And then he was shot, just like that. A few guys saw it and word got around, so the atmosphere on-base went really quiet.

- Are many people caught crossing the river by guards?

Sure. The majority are small time crooks who *claim* to be escaping temporarily in order to make money in China. They say this because the offence is minor. There have been whole families of NSA agents caught doing this; they are thrown in a political prison camp. It is an NSA agent trying to go to South Korea, there is no choice.

- How do you handle those who are caught?

If low-level soldiers catch a river-crosser, they must be escorted to the guard post. If the commander or political commissar is present then the prisoner is subjected to preliminary investigation. If these figures are not present, the next in command will conduct the investigation. Most basic searches consist of questions like name, age, reason for attempting to cross, are you hiding anything on your person etc.

When the first round of preliminary investigation is over, the detainee is escorted back and left in the washing facilities or shower room. When we are told to transfer the prisoner to commanding officers, we do so immediately.

- Is the offender beaten?

Beaten heavily. First, they are forced to kneel and they are hit in the face. From the off, female prisoners are usually very scared and their fear... you can see urine on their clothes. They are so scared. It's from the beginning; their heads are stamped on to make them scared.

During the investigation process, if a lie is so much as felt by the investigator, the prisoner is hit hard across the face. The 1958 automatic rifle does not break easily but the '68 version does, the butt of the rifle snaps off completely. They are hit that hard. And that's not all. People cower because they are being dealt with inhumanely.

- Are the National Security Agency people the most vicious?

The National Security Agency is not the most vicious; it depends on the individual. There are many really cruel guys amongst captains and commanders. Maybe they are trained for it, I don't know, but National Security Agents use their voices instead of their fists. Spending a few years in the army will bring out the cruel side in all people.

- These days, do many people attempt to cross the border?

Many fewer than before. Those who have crossing experience continue to use their know-how. But the number of people caught red-handed has decreased.

- Does the border patrol have its own base?

If we reclaim a mountain, it becomes our paddy. Because the area along the border is quite empty, we cut the weeds and make fields to grow beans and corn.

- The army's use of pretty bad behavior with civilians is widely documented...

In North Korea, when you wear the military uniform, you are wearing the skin of a tiger. You should make the people scared.

If you want to build a farm, you must ask to borrow the shovel and things that you need from a neighboring house. But if the lender is not there, and you see those things, you have to take them anyway because there is no choice. They can't say anything, and they cannot tell us to return the things.

If you want to take their livestock you have to threaten them, of course. If the owner tries to come out, we block his door with a shovel and shout. We say we'll only take one. While they are trembling, they say nothing.

They often talk about relations with local people, so we have to be careful, but nevertheless soldiers can basically do what they like.

- If there is a conflict within the leadership of North Korea, is it possible that the military will rise up?

If the nation were in chaos, obviously the border area would be in a mess. And so, I guess the border guards too would have to move. With lots of escaping and smuggling going on, it is uncertain whether they would remain loyal to Kim Jong Il.

- As far as you can see, is Kim Jung Eun doing well?

He is following in his father's footsteps. As far as I know, Kim Jung Eun is preparing

everything for his father's onsite inspections. They say he is innovating with CNC. Is it being done properly...? I don't know. I don't have particularly high hopes.

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And the people of North Korea. May they all one day get a chance to read it.