



forced labour

in North Korean Prison Camps

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Anti-Slavery International 2007

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many courageous North Koreans who have agreed to be interviewed for this report and shared with us their often difficult experiences.

We would also like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their input and assistance: Amnesty International, Baspia, Choi Soon-ho, Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR), Good Friends, Heo Yejin, Human Rights Watch, Hwang Sun-young, International Crisis Group (ICG), Mike Kaye, Kim Soo-am, Kim Tae-jin, Kim Yoon-jung, Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), Ministry of Unification (MOU), National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK), Save the Children UK, Tim Peters and Sarangbang.



The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation kindly funded the research and production of this report as well as connected activities to prompt its recommendations.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Background	2
2. Border Crossing	3
3. Surviving in China	4
Employment	4
Rural Brides	5
4. Forcible Repatriation	6
Police Raids	6
Deportation	8
5. Punishment upon Return	8
<i>Kukga Bowibu</i> (National Security Agency or NSA)	9
<i>Yeshim</i> (Preliminary Examination)	10
Living Conditions	13
The Waiting Game	13
6. Forced Labour in North Korean Prison Camps	14
<i>Nodong Danryundae</i> (Labour Training Camp)	14
Forced Labour	14
Pregnant Prisoners	17
Re-education	17
Living Conditions	17
Food	18
Medical Care	18
<i>Do Jipkyulso</i> (Provincial Detention Centre)	19
Forced Labour	19
Living Conditions	21
<i>Inmin Boansung</i> (People's Safety Agency or PSA)	21
Formal Trials	21
Informal Sentencing	22
Released without Sentence	22
Arbitrary Decisions	22
<i>Kyohwaso</i> (Re-education Camp)	24
Forced Labour	24
Food	24
Medical Care	25
7. Return to China	25
Reasons for Returning to China	25
Fear of Re-arrest	26
Refugees <i>sur Place</i>	26
8. Conclusion	27
9. Map of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)	28
10. Endnotes	29
11. Glossary of Terms	32
12. Case Studies	33

Executive summary

The flow of undocumented North Korean migrants into China started in the mid-1990s and continues today. The great majority of these migrants are not fleeing political oppression, but rather food shortages and economic crisis in North Korea. In the interviews carried out by Anti-Slavery International for this research 93 per cent of the North Koreans cite food shortages and economic hardship as the main factor for leaving North Korea.

In March 2007, the Government requested assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) to address the issue of food shortages. The WFP estimated at this time that between one-third and one-half of North Koreans face a daily struggle to find enough food to eat. While food insecurity remains a critical issue, the cross-border migration of undocumented North Koreans into China will also continue.

This is an issue of concern to Anti-Slavery International because those North Koreans who are caught while crossing the border or who are deported by the Chinese authorities are subject to forced labour in North Korean prison camps. In the course of this research, Anti-Slavery International interviewed 30 North Koreans, all of whom were caught border crossing and imprisoned in North Korea. The majority of the interviews were with women from the North-eastern province of North Hamgyeong and most were incarcerated after 2003. The interviews took place in Jilin Province, China in the cities of Yanji, Wangqing and Antu (January 2007), and Seoul, South Korea (February 2005-2007).

The overwhelming majority had to perform forced labour while in detention before they were tried for the crime of border crossing. Most of the border crossers interviewed for this report worked 10-12 hours a day with no rest days. Forced labour usually takes place on State-run projects and includes farming, mountain logging, road works, stone quarrying, brick making, coal mining and construction.

Prisoners were beaten for various reasons (e.g. lying or being suspected of lying, not working fast enough, forgetting the words to patriotic

songs, etc.). More than 90 per cent of the interviewees either witnessed beatings or were hit themselves while in detention.

Interviewees were also subject to other forms of degrading treatment and punishment (e.g. forced exercise as a form of punishment, being forced to sit without moving for prolonged periods of time, being denied access to toilets, public criticism, etc.).

The overcrowded and unhygienic facilities, combined with inadequate food, water and medical care and the arduous nature of the forced labour that prisoners have to perform mean that deaths in the labour camps are not uncommon.

Given the fact that the vast majority of border crossers are simply trying to exercise their right to freedom of movement in order to sustain themselves and their families, Anti-Slavery International believes that the arrest and imposition of forced labour on border crossers is not acceptable under any circumstances.

An analysis of data provided by those interviewed shows that in 70 per cent of cases, those arrested received no judicial decision, formal or otherwise. These unconvicted detainees were compelled to perform forced labour for an average of about 50 days, in direct contravention of international conventions such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the International Labour Organization (ILO) *Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour* (Forced Labour Convention), as well as North Korea's own domestic standards.

In light of the above, Anti-Slavery International calls on the North Korean Government to amend their Criminal Code so that leaving the country without permission does not constitute a criminal offence, to take immediate action to prevent unconvicted detainees from performing forced labour and to abolish the use of forced labour in prison camps.

Anti-Slavery International strongly urges the North Korean Government to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on North Korea to monitor human rights conditions in the country and in particular to carry out a thorough review of

conditions in prison camps.

Anti-Slavery International is also renewing its call on the Chinese Government to stop the forcible repatriation of undocumented North Koreans from China, to recognise these North Koreans as refugees *sur place* and to grant the UNHCR access to these people in China, so that it can assess their individual circumstances and seek a safe and permanent solution to their situation.

1. Background

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) has largely mountainous terrain which is poorly suited to agricultural production, but following the end of the Korean War (1950-53) its leader, Kim Il Sung, considered self-sufficiency to be crucial to national security. Energy-intensive farming methods were consequently introduced that relied heavily on chemical fertilisers, pesticides and electricity for irrigation and these could only be sustained through subsidised imports from its Cold War allies.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of diplomatic ties with South Korea by both the Russian and Chinese Governments in the early 1990s signalled an end to favourable trade and energy subsidies for the DPRK. The resulting sharp decline in food production, coupled with a series of natural disasters¹ and the breakdown of daily food rations through the government-run Public Distribution System (PDS) in 1995, triggered widespread famine in North Korea.

In 1995, the North Korean Government acknowledged the crisis by appealing to the international community for help. Meanwhile, it actively encouraged its citizens to forage for alternative food sources such as roots, grasses, stalks and tree bark, which are poor in nutrition and lead to severe digestive problems, especially among children and the elderly. By 1996, alternative foods accounted for some 30 per cent of the North Korean diet.²

The famine prompted an exodus of tens of thousands of North Koreans into neighbouring China in search of food and work. The ongoing

food and economic crisis has meant that this migratory flow continues despite the grave dangers posed to those who risk unauthorised travel.³

Estimates of the number of undocumented North Korean 'border crossers' living in China vary from source to source, but there are at least 50,000 North Koreans.⁴ The majority settle among the ethnic Korean communities in the north-eastern provinces of Jilin, Liaoning and Heilongjiang, but recent information suggests that a growing number of North Korean migrants are dispersing to other parts of China.⁵ Women make up the great majority of the border crossers due to a high demand for rural brides⁶ and opportunities for work as domestics, nannies, carers or cleaners. Irrespective of their ties to China, all undocumented North Koreans - women, men and children - face arrest and deportation if caught by the Chinese authorities.

The focus of this report is the recent phenomenon of the mass migration of undocumented North Koreans into China and once arrested their experience of forced labour and other human rights abuses in North Korean prison camps. In this report the term 'prison camps' refers to all detention facilities in North Korea that subject their prison population to forced labour, including *nodong danryundae* (labour training camp), *do jipkyulso* (provincial detention centre), *kyohwaso* (re-education camp) and *kwanliso* (political prison camp). Political prison camps are not addressed in any detail in this report because the vast majority of border crossers are not sent there.

The issue of border crossing is more relevant than ever, as the North Korean Government publicly admitted in March 2007 that it is facing food shortages and has made a plea for assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP).⁸ According to the WFP, having enough food to eat is "still a daily struggle for one-third to one-half of all North Koreans".⁹ As the food insecurity and economic hardship of the past 12 years continue, so too will the cross-border migration of undocumented North Koreans into China.

In the course of this research, Anti-Slavery International interviewed 30 North Koreans, all of whom were caught border crossing and imprisoned in North Korea. Most were

incarcerated since 2003. The interviews took place in Jilin Province, China in the cities of Yanji, Wangqing and Antu (January 2007), and Seoul, South Korea (February 2005-2007).

The majority of the interviews were with women from the North-eastern province of North Hamgyeong so the findings of this report should be considered with this in mind. To protect the identity of the North Koreans, their names and some personal details have been omitted.

2. Border Crossing

The flow of undocumented North Korean migrants - both short and long-term - into China has continued since the mid-1990s. The majority of the migrants are not fleeing political oppression, but rather food shortages and economic collapse in their home country. South Korea's Ministry of Unification (MOU) survey shows that over 60 per cent of 'new settlers' (North Koreans who are now living in South Korea) who went to China between 2003 and 2006 attribute 'hardship of living' as the prime motive for crossing the border (see Table 1).¹⁰

In line with the findings of the MOU survey, 93 per cent of the North Koreans who were interviewed for this report cite food shortages and economic hardship as the main push factor for leaving North Korea. The interviewees shared similar experiences of hunger and food insecurity resulting from the collapse of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and job losses due to factory closures. Many of the interviewees also

spoke of additional hardship caused by illnesses, deaths and family breakdown.

Like tens of thousands of other North Koreans, the North Koreans interviewed by Anti-Slavery International fled to China for survival purposes. China played a key role not just in their own survival but also in the survival of family members still living in North Korea. When the famine was downgraded to a food crisis in the late 1990s, conditions in North Korea were still so critical that migration to China continued.

For the vast majority of North Korean border crossers, the Tumen River is the point of entry into China. The river serves as a natural frontier for more than a third of North Korea's 1,300 kilometre border with its Chinese neighbour, separating China's Jilin Province from North Korea's North Hamgyeong and Yanggang provinces. Parts of the river are shallow and narrow, thus facilitating a short and relatively easy journey. North Koreans either waded through it in the warmer months or walk across the ice in the winter.

At the height of the food and economic crisis in the late-1990s, there ensued a mass migration of undocumented North Koreans into China. Faced with the fallout of the famine, both the Chinese and DPRK authorities tolerated the cross-border movement. In fact, in 1999, North Korean officials began relaxing the punishment for border crossing and in a significant departure from the past, made a clear distinction between those simply going to China for survival purposes and those who were more politically motivated

Table 1: Reasons for leaving North Korea, 2003 to June 2006

Year	Hardship of living	Fear of penalty	Political system	Followed family	To live in China	Family feud	Other	Total
2003	774	80	123	194	46	53	11	1,281
2004	1,125	104	156	401	12	87	9	1,894
2005	849	81	96	308	7	36	6	1,383
06/2006	543	39	19	208	4	24	17	854
Total	3,291	304	394	1,111	69	200	43	5,412

Source: Ministry of Unification 2006



A North Korean guard post along the Tumen River.

(e.g. in contact with South Koreans or Christians or caught en route to South Korea). In general, the former were sent to a labour training camp (*nodong danryundae*) or a re-education camp (*kyohwaso*), while the latter were incarcerated in a political prison camp (*kwanliso*).

When the flow of migrants continued despite the improving access to food in the early 2000s, both governments introduced new policies in an attempt to reduce the flow of migrants across the border.

Good Friends, a Seoul-based South Korean humanitarian aid organisation, reported that there are now multi-layered checkpoints on both sides of the border, which are heavily patrolled by armed guards.¹² In October 2006, China erected a barbed wire and concrete fence north of Dandong, along more than 20 kilometres of the Chinese-North Korean border.¹³ This was followed by raids in November and December 2006 by the Yanji police in Jilin Province on homes suspected of harbouring North Koreans.¹⁴

On the other side of the border, the North Korean authorities have been closely monitoring those at risk of flight, namely previous offenders and families who have missing members (presumed to have gone to China). As part of their surveillance operation, the police have solicited the aid of civilians to spy on their neighbours. On occasion, the police have even travelled to China to arrest border crossers. In an attempt to deter further illegal crossings, families of known offenders living in the border areas were reported to have been removed from their homes at the beginning of 2007.¹⁵

North Koreans who cross the border into China

by themselves normally have some knowledge of a safe route either through previous trips or information given to them by third parties such as Chinese merchants or returning border crossers. Those without prior knowledge are less willing to venture out on such a dangerous journey on their own. Instead, they seek assistance from a guide, acquaintance, friend or family member who knows the way.

The fee for a guide can range from 200 yuan (US\$26) to 1,000 yuan (US\$130) depending on the level of service provided.¹⁶ One interview indicates that bribing a border guard is not as straight-forward as it used to be. A 27-year-old man from Pyongyang noticed a change from the first and second time he went to China:

Back in 1999, it was easy to bribe the North Korean soldiers. This time [in 2004] there was tighter border control and the soldiers were not so willing to take your money. In the end, I had to cross at night at a spot where there weren't any border guards.¹⁷

3. Surviving in China

Employment

These attempts to deter people from border crossing do not appear to have had any impact on the numbers willing to risk severe punishment by travelling to China.

Although some of the long-term North Korean migrants in China are men, the great majority are women.¹⁸ This is understandable given the lack of work opportunities available to men. Men tend to travel to China on a short-term basis to procure food and other supplies before returning home. Those who remain longer look for cash in hand jobs as day labourers on farms, construction sites, mines, quarries or factories.¹⁹ One 27-year-old man from Musan, for example, was paid 70 yuan (US\$9) to rip out an *ondol* (Korean under floor heating) floor in one day.²⁰ These men tend to move from one job to another - staying no longer than a month in one place in order to avoid arrest and deportation.

North Korean women invariably find it easier to settle in China because they can seek employment in sectors that are less visible, for

example as domestic workers, nannies or carers in private homes or as cleaners, cooks or dish washers in restaurants.

Rural brides

Over 70 per cent of the women interviewed for this report married a Chinese man, often a *Chosun Jok* or Korean-Chinese (a Chinese citizen of Korean descent) farmer. In a country with a significant shortage of women, brides go for a premium, especially in rural areas where the shortfall can be as dramatic as 13 to 10 and to make matters worse, many of the eligible Chinese women opt for more financially secure, urban husbands.²¹ What this shortage ultimately means for the North Korean women is that they fill a demand for wives from Chinese men who are essentially undesirable to the local women. As a 63-year-old woman from Kyongsong noted, "North Korean women only marry Chinese men who have some kind of defect such as old age, disability, poverty, etc."²²

Many of the interviewed women who married Chinese men felt a great sense of responsibility for maintaining the family household in North Korea. One 38-year-old woman from Hoeryong expressed how it influenced her decision to go to China:

I first came to China in May 2003 because my mother had died of hunger in the 1990s and the food situation was getting desperate. I was married and had one daughter. I felt responsible for my family. I had two younger brothers who needed to marry and my father's 60th birthday was coming up. It would have been impossible to manage all those things without money. I worked in the market and through my work, I met Chinese business colleagues who told me that I could earn well in China.²³

Like the 38-year-old, many women who travel to China have aspirations of finding a job and sending money to their families. But once they arrive, they realise that earning money in China is not as straightforward as they previously believed. Their relatives or people with whom they stay inform them that it is dangerous in China and the best way to survive is through the protection of a man. From that point on, the women are easily convinced that they would be better off getting married to a Chinese man. They



The kitchen of a rural farming household in Jilin Province.

are then introduced to a relative or friend - usually a rural farmer - and their marriage is arranged. Such an agreement can take place with or without money exchanging hands.²⁴ As these de facto marriages are not legally binding, the woman's illegal status remains unchanged. They are just as vulnerable to arrest and deportation as any other undocumented North Korean.

In Chinese-North Korean households, the women play an integral role in family life. They not only help with daily work on the farm, but also improve living conditions by increasing the family's earning power and taking care of family members, including children, stepchildren or ageing in-laws who may otherwise be neglected by the husband. A 42-year-old woman from Hoeryong illustrates this desire to strive for a better life:

I have worked hard and helped my husband get out of debt. We recently bought a new house. It has a modern roof and not a thatched one. We have also bought a cow for ploughing. I am able to send some money to my son in North Korea. He is also a farmer.²⁵

Many interviewees indicated that their married lives in China represented an improvement in their circumstances and offered the possibility for them to support themselves and assist their families in North Korea.

Marriage between Chinese men and North Korean women brings to light the issue of the growing number of stateless Chinese-North Korean children who are born from these marriages. They are denied Chinese citizenship, as these marriages are not recognised by law. It is possible to bribe an official to register the child's name onto the Chinese father's *hukou* (household registration) but at a price tag of up to 5,000 yuan (US\$650), it is beyond the means of most rural households. Without a *hukou*, stateless children may be able to access education by paying off a school official, but their grades cannot be officially registered. However, interviews for this report have revealed that some local authorities have been allowing parents since January 2007 to register Chinese-North Korean children onto the father's *hukou* for a nominal fee of 500 yuan (US\$65).²⁶

4. Forcible Repatriation

Police Raids

In order to clamp down on illegal migration of North Koreans into China, the Chinese authorities have periodically engaged in police raids on people's homes, places of employment, Internet cafés and church gatherings. Many of those interviewed for this report were arrested during crackdowns on irregular North Korean migrants, which often take place after a politically sensitive incident such as an attempt by North Koreans to seek asylum at a foreign mission.²⁷

The police raids are well-organised and can directly involve the Chinese military border police, especially in rural areas. It is often through one arrest that the police gather information on the whereabouts of other North Koreans living in the area. A 43-year-old woman from Chongjin was arrested when two teenage boys whom she had helped were forced to report her to the police:

On the evening of 10 December 2005, the Yanji police came to our house and arrested us. They knew where we lived because of two teenage North Korean boys. I had felt sorry for them so I let them stay with us for 10 days. They were later caught at an

Internet café and the police made them tell where other North Koreans were hiding.²⁸

Another woman, aged 36, from Yoosun recounted how she was arrested:

In February 2003, the Chinese military police came from Longjing to arrest North Koreans in our village. They captured a North Korean man and his daughter. The police told them that they would be released if they gave information where other North Koreans were hiding. My house was the closest one so the police came to mine first.²⁹

In this political climate, North Koreans living in cities fear exposure from being reported by their Chinese neighbours, so they keep to themselves and avoid venturing outside their apartment. But this isolation makes them long for contact with other North Koreans. As many of the case studies indicate, this contact brings its own risks.



A North Korean woman married to a *Chosun Jok* farmer with her daughter.



A rural neighbourhood in Jilin Province.

Rural residents, on the other hand, do not have the luxury of anonymity. Villagers know exactly where North Koreans live. One 28-year-old woman from Onsong was arrested three times by the same police because “all the villagers knew I was North Korean so when there was a crackdown, the police knew where to go”. After the third arrest, she and her husband finally decided to move out of the rural village:

[...] it was too dangerous to remain there. If we had stayed, it would have been only a matter of time before the city police returned and arrested me for the fourth time.³⁰

Those who have been arrested and repatriated told Anti-Slavery International how they were afraid of noises in the middle of the night, especially of cars. Some even have a plan of escape for the next time the police come calling.³¹ Most of the returnees share the opinion that they would live reasonably well in China if they could live in peace without the constant fear of arrest.

It is interesting to note that the local police in certain areas are protecting the North Korean women residing in their jurisdiction by giving them prior warning of police raids from the cities or border areas.³² This is consistent with the decision made by some local officials to allow children of Chinese and North Korean parentage to obtain *hukou*. Both actions indicate a more flexible response towards North Koreans from the local Chinese authorities and possibly recognition of the valuable role they play in supporting families in China.

When North Koreans are arrested, they are normally taken to the local police station before being transferred to the nearest border detention centre operated by the Chinese military police. This is where they await deportation. Most are processed for deportation at Tumen, but other border centres include Dandong, Helong, Hunchun, Longjing and Sanhe. At the detention centre, the military police take down the personal details of the North Korean prisoners and ask them general questions on their activities in China.

Most of those interviewed by Anti-Slavery International said that they were never hit or treated badly by the Chinese police. In fact, one 58-year-old woman from Mayang remarked on the high quality of the food served at the Tumen detention centre and how new and well-heated the facility was.³³ This facility is a new wing that the Chinese authorities have had to build due to the growing number of border crossers passing through Tumen.³⁴ Another 30-year-old woman from Kyongsong who was also detained at Tumen remembers how she regretted not having eaten more in China after she was repatriated to North Korea.³⁵

In general, the period of incarceration for undocumented North Koreans at these border facilities is brief. Their deportation, however, can be delayed because they are too sick to travel or have to wait either for more North Koreans to arrive or for the conclusion of a trial involving them and a Chinese citizen. One 32-year-old woman from Kilchu was arrested at the Yanji bus station in July 2006 as she was about to board a bus for Shenyang (en route to South Korea).



The Tumen border detention centre.

She was transferred to the Tumen border detention centre where she was detained for over a month until the broker who helped her was tried and convicted. During her incarceration at Tumen, she witnessed North Korean border crossers being deported on a bi-weekly basis.³⁶

Deportation

Despite being party to the 1951 *UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which prohibits the forced returns of refugees (*non-refoulement*), China continues to repatriate undocumented border crossers. The Chinese Government maintains that all undocumented North Koreans are illegal economic migrants, not refugees, and thus denies the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to them. China's stringent adherence to a policy of arrest and deportation originates from a bilateral treaty it signed with the DPRK in 1961 under which both sides are obligated to prevent the illegal border crossing of residents and to repatriate any citizens without proper travel documents.³⁷ This agreement took effect during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) when 10 to 40 million Chinese died as a result of widespread famine. During this period, many *Chosun Jok* or Korean-Chinese sought refuge with relatives living on the other side of the border in North Korea.

Thirty years later, a reversal of fortune sees North Koreans seeking help from their Chinese neighbours. At the onset of the famine, many *Chosun Jok* were sympathetic and quite willing to help North Koreans who had fled their country in search of food and work. But their goodwill has gradually worn off, as most *Chosun Jok* have few resources to share and many feel that the North Koreans have overstayed their welcome. The Chinese authorities have also played a role in sowing seeds of discord among ethnic Koreans by offering rewards for turning in North Koreans and fining or arresting anyone caught aiding them. Signs written in Korean and Chinese along the border in China are stark reminders of the North Koreans' *persona non gratae* status. One reads "Illegal border crossing is punishable by law" and another warns that "It is strictly forbidden to harbour, help or employ border crossers".

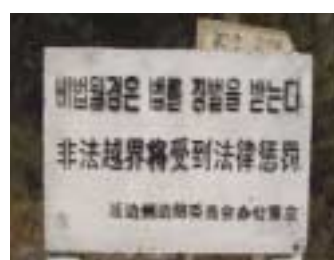
5. Punishment Upon Return

At the core of the forcible repatriation of border crossers debate is the individual's right to travel. The right to leave and return to his or her country is enshrined in Article 13b of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Freedom of movement is also guaranteed under article 12 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (CCPR) to which the DPRK is a signatory. Paragraph two states that "Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including their own".

Yet DPRK law requires that its citizens obtain a 'traveller's certificate' for travel abroad (and within the country). The process of obtaining a traveller's certificate is long, prohibitively expensive and a request can be refused without any reasonable justification. For example, an application to travel to China, which usually requires a letter of invitation, can take months to process and cost up to US\$300 in fees and bribes.³⁸ This is not an option open to many North Koreans so most travel to China without permission, but in so doing, they risk arrest and deportation.

Article 62 of North Korea's revised 2004 Criminal Code punishes its citizens for travelling to another country without state permission:

Any citizen who defects, surrenders, or gives secrets to a foreign country or to the enemy in betrayal of the country and the people shall be sentenced to a re-education through labour institution for not less than five years. In cases where the person commits an extremely grave offence, he or she shall be given life imprisonment in a re-education through labour institution, the death penalty or have his or her property confiscated.³⁹



This sign along the Chinese-North Korean border reads: "Illegal border crossing is punishable by law".

Under article 62, border crossing is considered a serious political crime, similar to treason, and its punishment is therefore particularly harsh. However, in 1999 there was a shift in policy which recognised that not all those who travelled to China were politically motivated and the punishment for border crossing was subsequently reduced to three years. This was further reduced in 2004 under article 233, which stated:

A person who unlawfully crosses the frontier of the Republic shall be sentenced to a labour training institution for up to two years. In cases where the person commits an extremely grave offence, he or she shall be committed for up to three years in a re-education through labour institution.⁴⁰

Significantly, article 233 introduces a separate prison facility, the labour training institution (*nodong danryundae*), for less serious offences. This camp has a less harsh regime than the re-education through labour institution (*kyohwaso*).

***Kukga Bowibu* (National Security Agency or NSA)**

Even with such changes, however, forcible repatriation still has extremely serious consequences for those caught border crossing.

Their arduous journey through the North Korean penal system begins when they are transported from the Chinese border detention centre to the nearest *kukga bowibu* (National Security Agency or NSA). In the case of those incarcerated at the Tumen detention centre, they make a brief stop at Namyang, the North Korean town on the other side of the Tumen Bridge. Since so many border crossers come through Tumen, the North Korean authorities have set up Namyang as a processing centre where the personal details of repatriated North Koreans are first taken. The prisoners are then transferred to the National Security Agency in Onsong.

Their personal details are registered again followed by a humiliating body search. Guards engage in a very thorough and invasive search because prisoners go to great lengths to hide money, either by wrapping it tightly in plastic before swallowing it or inserting it in their vagina or anus. The reason so many hide money is because they need it during their incarceration to buy food or medicine or to bribe guards (e.g. for better treatment or early release). Prisoners are told to undress, put their hands behind their head and squat and stand repeatedly with their legs spread wide while a guard watches for any money to drop from their private areas.



The Tumen Bridge.

A 47-year-old woman from Hoeryong described the humiliating body probe she had to undergo at the National Security Agency in Sinuiju during her fourth arrest in 2004:

The first thing they did was check our bodies for money. A female guard searched all the female prisoners. She wore rubber gloves and checked our vagina for any hidden money. After each prisoner, she put her gloved hand in a bucket of disinfectant and searched the next prisoner.⁴¹

Stools from prisoners are also checked for money, a process sometimes induced by the use of laxatives. Anyone caught hiding money or even suspected of hiding it is beaten by the guards. Half of the confiscated money is usually returned to the prisoner at the end of their incarceration. Some interviewees explained that the amount retained was for the cost of feeding the prisoner while in detention.⁴²

Yeshim (Preliminary Examination)

An important aspect of the DPRK criminal procedures is the use of *yeshim* (preliminary examination), which takes place while a suspect is detained and before he or she has been formally charged with an offence. It is conducted by special agents from the National Security Agency and its purpose is to investigate the facts and details of crimes considered politically sensitive. In the context of border crossers, the aim is to determine whether there was any element of political wrongdoing in their migration. If the agents are convinced that they went to China for purely economic reasons, their case is then turned over to the *inmin boansung* (People's Safety Agency or PSA). There is no forced labour at this stage of incarceration.

The average pre-trial detention of border crossers interviewed for this report was over two months⁴⁴ and most of these spent between one and four weeks at a National Security Agency⁴⁵ during which time they were interrogated two to four times. One 27-year-old man from Pyongyang, however, was incarcerated for one year. He was held at the Chongjin Provincial National Security Agency in 2003 where the agents suspected that he was planning to defect to South Korea because his father was once a high-ranking Party member who had been sent to a political prison

camp (*kwanliso*).⁴⁶

In its 2001 concluding observations on North Korea's compliance with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee stated that preliminary examinations unduly prolonged the duration of a prisoner's pre-trial detention and thus, were incompatible with article 9, paragraph 3 of the CCPR,⁴⁷ which states:

Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release.

At the onset of the mass migration into China, there undoubtedly was a great deal of sensitivity on the part of the North Korean authorities regarding the issue of North Korean women marrying Chinese men and the children born from these marriages. This was previously considered a reason for harshly punishing someone,⁴⁸ but today this issue barely raises an eyebrow. Interviews indicate that the agents often assume North Korean women are married to Chinese men, especially if they were living in rural areas, and appear to have some understanding that marriage is an act of survival. As a 35-year-old woman from Soongam put it:

I told them that I married a Chinese man and had a daughter. I thought that I could earn money but when I arrived in China, I wasn't able to. I had to get married. Having a Chinese husband and children is alright but meeting South Koreans or attending church is not.⁴⁹

Indeed, the national security agents are more interested in their daily activities in China, such as when and why they went to China, what jobs they held and in particular any contact they may have had with South Korea (people, radio, TV and films) and/or churches. One 36-year-old woman from Onsong was interrogated by the Saetbyul NSA in 2005 on these issues plus whether she had met any Americans or CIA agents. She was even asked whether she had spoken about her experiences with any foreign journalists.⁵⁰

The use of violence is deliberate and pointed, aimed at extracting information from prisoners.⁵¹ Agents hit prisoners when they think prisoners are lying or hiding something. In 2006, a former telephone operator from Chongjin was hit by NSA agents because she denied having any contact with South Koreans or the church. Convinced she was withholding evidence, the agents tried to force a confession out of her and pulled her in for questioning seven times.⁵²

Another Chongjin native was beaten by agents in Onsong in 2004 until she confessed the truth about her church affiliation:

One of the female prisoners saw me praying and recognised the church songs so she told on me. During my next interrogation session, the agents asked if I attended church in China. When I said no, they slapped and kicked me on my back. When I confessed, they didn't hit me any more, but just asked details about it. I said that there was nothing wrong with going to church - it wasn't an act against the North Korean State. It was a good place where good things were done.⁵³

Interviewees also reported that people died during their detention as a result of beatings received from guards at the NSA.⁵⁴ However, many interviewees also said that they were never hit at the National Security Agency because they told the truth or properly answered the questions, but they did concede that male prisoners were hit more than females.

It appears that prisoners can avoid punishment for acts that they have committed or acts of which they have been falsely accused if they deny it consistently and to the very end.⁵⁶ For example, many interviewees had some degree of contact with a church in China (because the church is active in assisting undocumented North Koreans), but most denied this during the interrogation process.

Moreover, a border crosser's confession to a minor 'offence' - like marriage to a Chinese - may aid in building up their credibility when they are accused of other more serious offences. One 41-year-old former railway worker from Chongjin was arrested at Yanji Airport in June 2004 as she was

about to board a plane bound for South Korea. When she was interrogated by the agents in Onsong, she admitted to marrying a Chinese man because otherwise she "couldn't have survived", but denied the more serious charge:

During my interrogation, I denied trying to go to South Korea. I said that I was at the airport because I was saying goodbye to a relative who was going to study in Japan. I denied it to the very end.⁵⁶

She was not charged with attempting to defect to another country (article 62 of the revised 2004 Criminal Code) and was eventually released after four and a half months without being tried or sentenced. Similarly, the 27-year-old man from Pyongyang who was held at the NSA in Chongjin for one year on suspicion of trying to defect to South Korea was released after the agents were unsuccessful in extracting a confession from him.⁵⁷

Prisoners invariably undergo a more intense and extended interrogation process when they are caught at a Chinese border area with a third country (e.g. with Mongolia or Vietnam), as it is assumed that they are seeking to defect to South Korea via a third country. A case in point is a 21-



A North Korean interviewee.

year-old man from Musan who was caught in 2002 during his second attempt to reach South Korea - this time near the border of Mongolia. He spent four months in two different National Security Agencies where he was beaten until he confessed to trying to enter the South Korean Embassy in Ulan Bator. He managed to escape before he was sentenced at the People's Safety Agency.⁵⁸

A preliminary examiner does not take lightly any act that could be interpreted as an assault on the moral fabric of North Korean society. Marriage to a Chinese is no longer considered serious or 'unpatriotic' because eking out a humble existence from the toil of the land is seen as 'honest', that is, hardworking, agrarian and poor. By contrast, 'comfortably' serving drinks to customers at a karaoke bar would not pass the moral litmus test of the National Security Agency.

During the interrogation of a woman from Kyongsong, the national security agents checked her hands to see if she had been "living in comfort", which she interpreted as being employed at an entertainment establishment like a karaoke bar. With some degree of pride, she recounted how they clearly felt her rough hands and knew she had been working on the land, and hence, did not have an easy life.⁵⁹

Another woman from Hoeryong who solicited the help of a high-ranking Chinese police officer at the Tumen detention centre before being deported to the Onsong NSA realised only too late that this help actually worked against her. The agents were incensed by her audacity in requesting help from a Chinese:

They hit me and yelled, "Who do you think you are for asking such help?" They were suspicious that I was involved in lots of bad activities in China. One day I was blindfolded with five others and taken to a secret place. I think it was a *kwanliso* [political prison camp]. This was the place where all the prisoners served a life term. I spent two months at this facility where I was subjected to a very intense and severe interrogation. They asked me about every little detail and re-interrogated me on any inconsistencies. I had to write out multiple confessions until they were satisfied.⁶⁰

An integral component of the preliminary examination is to uncover a border crosser's *sasang* (political ideology) and motivation. The 21-year-old man from Musan who was caught near the Mongolian border related how the agents in Sinuiju were interested in his political ideology and motivation for wanting to go to South Korea and prompted him to reveal whether he genuinely wanted to betray his country. The agents from his hometown continued this line of enquiry by asking him why he wanted to go to South Korea, what he thought of his own country and what he had against it.⁶¹

Even when national security agents have evidence that a border crosser tried to flee to South Korea or attended church, this does not automatically condemn him or her to a political prison camp (*kwanliso*). This is where their political ideology and motivation can swing the decision in their favour. For example, a 68-year-old woman from Suhsangdo was arrested in 2004 with seven other North Koreans, in Weihai, Shandong Province on their way to Southeast Asia (and eventually to South Korea). She was repatriated to the NSA in Onsong where the agents, having received the arrest documents from China, had solid proof of her attempt to flee to South Korea. The gravity of her situation was further heightened by the fact that this was her second arrest for border crossing yet she successfully convinced the agents that her political ideology was sound and her motivation beyond reproach:

The crime that I had committed was severe but I told the agents that the Chinese authorities were bad because they didn't just repatriate us but tricked us with a sting operation. They also lied about not sending the arrest documents (with information on trying to escape to South Korea) to the North Korean authorities. I told them that I wanted to go to South Korea not because I liked the country or hated North Korea, but because of the desperate food situation.⁶²

The agents did not hit or even question her further. She was not tried and was eventually released after serving a month at a provincial detention centre (*do jipkyulso*).

Living Conditions

When prisoners at the National Security Agency are not being interrogated, they have to sit in rows in their assigned rooms. During crackdowns when the agency is overflowing with prisoners, there is so little room that prisoners spill out onto the aisles and have to sit with their back in between the legs of the person directly behind them. They are expected to sit without moving or talking from morning to night with the exception of mealtimes and a daily 10-minute exercise break. Anyone caught talking or moving is hit by the guards. Interviews reveal that people found sitting still far more difficult to endure than being interrogated. A Suhsangdo resident was caught falling asleep and as a punishment was forced to "hang on to the cell bars for 10 minutes using my arms and thighs".⁶³

There is a toilet at the facility either without a door or with a very low one. As one woman remarked "You could see people's heads. There was no privacy but everybody was suffering so much in this facility that nobody cared about modesty."⁶⁴ There are also set times to go to the toilet, which could be as little as once a day and is strictly enforced, as one Musan resident experienced firsthand:

I was hit once because I asked one of the guards if I could go to the toilet. He wouldn't let me, but I was so desperate that I went anyway. I got caught and was hit in the head with a gun cleaning rod. I was bleeding, but received no medical attention. They just put cigarette ashes on my wound to stop the bleeding.⁶⁵

Prisoners were unable to wash regularly and what little water they were given had to be shared by many people. A 47-year-old woman from Hoeryong explains how water at the Hoeryong NSA in 2004 was used and re-used:

The prison guards gave us one bucket of water a day to share amongst 25 women. There was a hierarchy in place where people who had been there longer had access to the water first. Only after they washed were we then able to wash. The dirt just fell off our bodies. We had to rinse our towels in the same bucket after wiping our bodies with it. You can imagine how dirty it was. Some of the women were

going through their menstrual cycle. After we cleaned our bodies, then we had to use the same water to clean the floor of the room. Then finally the water was used to flush the toilet.⁶⁶



A North Korean train station near the Chinese border.

The Waiting Game

Once border crossers complete the interrogation process at the National Security Agency, they are technically ready for sentencing. As the overwhelming majority of border crossers face sentences for non-political crimes, the People's Safety Agency (PSA) takes over from this point on and decides on their punishment. But the decision can only be made by the PSA from their hometown. What this means is that unless the border crossers' hometown is the place where they underwent preliminary examination, they have to wait for transfer to their next destination. Either due to a lack of will or resources for transporting prisoners, unconvicted border crossers spend one to three months on average in various prison camps before reaching the PSA in their hometown where they can finally be sentenced.

It is of small consolation that the penal authorities often take into consideration time served. Those who live further away from the border area are logically worse off. In 2001, it took one 35-year-old resident of Orang, a town about 50 kilometres south of Chongjin, five months to reach her hometown PSA. After leaving the NSA in Hoeryong, she was first transferred to the Hoeryong labour training camp for a month and then to the Chongjin provincial detention centre where she was held for four months. No consideration was given to the time served when she was finally sentenced at the PSA in Orang to six months in a labour training camp (*nodong danryundae*).

6. Forced Labour in North Korean Prison Camps

In North Korea, there are various types of prison camps; each facility is designated for specific types of crime. Broadly speaking, a *nodong danryundae* is a labour training camp that incarcerates the majority of border crossers, as well as other petty criminals. A *do jipkyulso*⁶⁸ is a provincial detention centre that serves as a holding centre for prisoners in transit on their way to a People's Safety Agency in their hometown. Finally, a *kyohwaso* is a re-education through labour camp (re-education camp from herein) holding felons, including border crossers, who have been convicted of serious but non-political crimes. All three penal facilities adhere to a system where prisoners are compelled to 'work off their crime' through forced labour and re-education.

Nodong Danryundae **(Labour Training Camp)**

After their preliminary examination, most border crossers will be sent to at a *nodong danryundae* (labour training camp). The prison population of a labour training camp varies depending on the facility and on a variety of circumstances (e.g. whether there has been a recent police crackdown in China), but on average they hold about 100 or more prisoners, mainly border crossers.

There are two types of border crossers incarcerated at a labour training camp. The first are unconvicted border crossers who are on their way to the People's Safety Agency in their hometown. From our interviews, the average time spent at a labour training camp for those in transit is 33 days. The second are convicted prisoners, mainly border crossers, who have been sentenced by the People's Safety Agency in their hometown for relatively minor offences.

Irrespective of whether a border crosser has been convicted or not, all prisoners at a labour training camp are subject to forced labour. This contravenes article 22 of North Korea's

Regulation on Administration of Detention Chamber, which clearly states that unconvicted detainees held at a detention facility "shall not be subject to labour".⁶⁹ The DPRK Government further maintains that it "has no legal institution of imposing compulsory labour upon the people who are under detention or confinement or released on conditions".⁷⁰

Forced Labour

By and large, prisoners work longer hours at the labour training camp than at other prison camps. The day for prisoners begins as early as 4am and continues as late as midnight when they are finally permitted to sleep.⁷¹ Prisoners are forced to work very long hours; most of the border crossers interviewed for this report worked 10-12 hours everyday with no rest days. A common response was that they worked "until it got dark".

Labour is seen as a tool for reform and re-education. Through the punishment of labour, prisoners work off their crime. Prison guards enforcing this punishment show very little compassion for those in their charge. This is illustrated by the treatment of a 38-year-old Orang native by labour training camp guards in her hometown when ill health impeded her work in 2005:

Once I was not feeling well and didn't work fast enough. A guard kicked me and although he hurt my back, I still had to continue working. He yelled at me saying how I had to work off my crime for going to China and to stop pretending to be sick or tired.⁷²

Prisoners are expected to work very hard and if they do not, they are beaten. Even if prisoners fall "from exhaustion", they "still have to get up and continue working".⁷³ The type of forced labour varies depending on the facility, season and the labour needs of the local authority. Work is done outside the labour camp facility on State-run projects including farming, mountain logging, road works, stone quarrying, coal mining and construction. A 42-year-old former middle school teacher from Hoeryong described the nature of forced labour at the Onsong labour training camp in 2003 and the toll it had on the prisoners:

We were sent to the mountains to carry stones on our backs or heads. Because of the friction, the skin on my back peeled

and bled. We had to load the stones onto a truck, which was then taken to a building site. It was such hard work that people fainted. Guards were always yelling and hitting the prisoners. When we worked on this project, we didn't come home until 11pm. It took us over an hour to walk back to the prison camp.⁷⁴

At the labour training camp in his hometown in 2004, a Musan inmate was forced to log in the mountains:

It was my responsibility to take the logs that other prisoners had cut and carry them 200 metres down the mountain using wire strings. My hands would bleed because the wire strings cut into my skin but I still had to continue working. I wasn't hit by the prison guards but others were when they didn't cut or carry down enough logs.⁷⁵

One interview reveals how prisoners are also forced to work in illicit activities for the North Korean State. A woman, aged 35, gives an account of how she had to cultivate opium poppies at the Soongam labour training camp in 2001:

[We] were taken to a poppy field where we had to make an incision on the poppy bulbs and collect sap from them. The prison guards explained to us that we were helping to produce opium, which would be sold abroad. The foreign currency that we would get would help support our country and our people.⁷⁶

This is consistent with the information in a 2000 Hardcash Productions documentary, entitled *Children of the Secret State*, that interviewed a North Korean farmer who was forced to grow opium to fund the army.⁷⁷ The North Korea State's involvement in the production and trafficking of heroin can be traced back to 1976, but more recently in April 2003, Australian police seized 50kg of high-quality heroin from the North Korean vessel *Pong Su* on the coast of southern Australia. Several of the arrested crew members were members of the ruling Korean Workers' Party (KWP).⁷⁸

Prisoners' work is supervised by prison guards as well as *banjang* (team leaders) who are

selected from the prison population. Team leaders are generally male and chosen primarily because they are healthy and strong. The responsibility of the work output in labour training camps is often delegated to them. Depending on the camp, prisoners can be hit by the guards or the team leaders or both.

All but one of the 23 interviewees who were subject to forced labour at a labour training camp said that they were hit or saw other prisoners being hit by a guard and/or a team leader. Several said that only male prisoners were hit or that they were hit more than female prisoners. One thought this was because women prisoners worked harder and did what they were told.

A farmer from Musan explained how a fellow male prisoner found it too difficult to quarry stones and carry them down a mountain on an empty stomach. While the prisoner took a moment to rest, he was caught sleeping by one of the guards who:

[...] had all the team leaders punished by making them move heavy rocks from one place to another - about 100 metres apart - until he said stop. The team leader responsible for the sleeping prisoner was so angry that he took a stick and beat the prisoner's back and legs. The prisoner couldn't walk for three weeks. He suffered a fracture in one leg.⁷⁹



A North Korean interviewee.

At the labour training camp, prisoners function as a unit. They wake up, exercise, wash, work, eat, go to the toilet, study, sleep, etc. at the same time. This collective behaviour is extended also to the administering of punishment when one member 'lets the others down'. For example, if a member fails to memorise the prison rules and regulations, the whole group is deprived of sleep until everyone has memorised them. If one prisoner is not pulling his weight in the fields, then everyone in his work assignment is beaten. Or if a prisoner escapes then everyone is forced to squat and stand one hundred times as punishment. A Chongjin native related how her work team was punished at the Onsong labour training camp in 2006:

There was a competition between the team leaders over how much work each team produced. If you produced less than the other teams, you received less food. The leader of the losing team singled out the ones who were slow. They had to stand up and the leader yelled at them saying that because of their lack of effort, the whole team suffered by getting less food. Then they were hit.⁸⁰

Prisoners who try to escape are severely punished. Prison guards ensure that the team leaders punish those responsible in the presence of other prisoners to serve as a warning and deterrent. A Hoeryong resident detailed what happened during her 2003 incarceration when one female inmate was caught trying to escape:

One time five prisoners - two women and three men - escaped from the prison camp. One of the women was caught and brought back to the camp. She was beaten by the team leaders. They kicked her in the stomach, her back and head. They did this in front of all the prisoners to deter us from attempting to run away. We then had to criticise her until 2am.⁸¹

As this and other interviews in this report illustrate, the use of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment is endemic throughout all prison camps, despite the fact that their practice is strictly forbidden under article 7 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as

articles 37 and 39 of North Korea's *Regulation on Administration of Detention Chamber* and article 29 of the *Regulation on Reform Administration*.⁸²

Some prisoners are exempt from forced labour because of an illness, disability or infirmity, but the findings from the interviews show that the treatment of the 'elderly' (those over 50 years old) varied greatly between the labour camps.

For example, a Chongjin resident who was 51 years old when she was imprisoned was exempt from work at the labour training camp in Onsong.⁸³ She spent her days sitting quietly and attending re-education classes in the evening. Other elderly prisoners had to work, but less than the younger prisoners or they were given light work in the kitchen or as cleaners.⁸⁴

At the other end of the spectrum, some elderly prisoners are not only forced to work but are beaten and verbally abused when they fail to keep up with the others. A woman from Kyongsong, who was 57 years old at the time of her incarceration at the Hoeryong labour training camp in 2001, recounted how she found working in the fields physically draining because she was old and hungry:

One time while I was sowing, I was so tired that I stopped for a rest. A young guard caught me and grabbed me by my neck. I pleaded with the guard and begged for his forgiveness, but he just cursed at me and kicked me on my back and head. He said how I could dare to be tired when I had been eating so well in China. Because of that beating, I suffer from chronic back pains and headaches still today.⁸⁵

An Onsong resident confirmed this lack of consideration for the elderly, as she recalled how an old woman failed to weed fast enough in the rice paddies:

The usual punishment was to squat and stand for 100 times. One 70-year-old woman couldn't keep up so she was punished. There is no respect for the elderly in prison. She couldn't do the punishment, so she yelled at the guards to just kill her instead.⁸⁶

Pregnant Prisoners

Thirteen interviewees spent some time with pregnant prisoners during various stages of their incarceration from 2001-2006.⁸⁷ Most of the interviews indicate that pregnant women are exempt from forced labour and spend their days inside the camp with the elderly and sick. This indicates a significant improvement in their treatment since 2000, before which pregnant women were particularly singled out for punishment and there were regular reports of infanticide, forced abortion and other grave human rights violations.⁸⁸ The interviews in 2005-2007 did not identify any cases of infanticide and only one case of forced abortion although those interviewed seemed to be aware of the ill treatment of pregnant border crossers in previous years.

Women in their first trimester are more likely to work than those further into their pregnancy who are often exempt. If pregnant prisoners are forced to work, it is usually less than the others or they are given lighter work at the camp such as cleaning, kitchen duty or feeding animals. Pregnant prisoners are sometimes even sent home, as a woman from Onsong observed:

There were two pregnant prisoners. They didn't have to work. They just had to sit quietly in the prison camp. Both were released early and sent home after signing a document stating that they would not return to China. The treatment of pregnant women has changed. Now they don't make the pregnant women abort their babies.⁸⁹

Re-education

Prisoners at all prison camps are required to attend re-education classes generally held after dinner, which can go on for two to four hours. The purpose of these classes is to change the prisoners' way of thinking by teaching them how to be good citizens and obey society's rules and regulations. One 34-year-old former coal miner recalled how they "learned patriotic songs, studied about North Korean politics and basically were told never to go to China again".⁹⁰

On top of re-education classes, prisoners also have to participate in self-criticism sessions where prisoners are forced to criticise their own behaviour by telling the others what they did

wrong - even if they did not do anything wrong. If they refuse, they are hit. It is the responsibility of the team leader to decide which prisoners speak. During these sessions, prisoners also have to sing patriotic songs and dance. Equally, if they do not know the words to a song or the movements of a dance, they are hit.⁹¹

Living Conditions

Prisoners live in cramped and unhygienic conditions in labour training camps. There are roughly 20 prisoners to a room who sometimes have to sleep "sitting up" or "on top of one another" because there is not enough space.⁹² Water is a precious resource of which prisoners are given only enough to wash their face and sometimes to brush their teeth. The amount is certainly inadequate for their health and cleanliness. A 43-year-old woman from Hoeryong explains how sparingly water was used at the Onsong labour training camp in 2005:

There was a container of water that all the prisoners had to share to clean in the morning. We had to queue and get a bucketful between many people. We dipped our towels in it to wash our face. There wasn't enough water to wash our body. The water became dirty very quickly. The quantity of water was often not enough so those not fast enough didn't get any.⁹³

Prisoners who are fortunate enough to work in the fields during the summer months are occasionally permitted to wash their bodies in the streams.⁹⁴ Due to such unhygienic conditions, most prisoners are infested with lice. One 35-year-old woman from Eundok remembered how "everyone had lice because there was no washing facility at the prison camp. We could only clean our faces in the stream near the corn fields."⁹⁵

A particularly difficult time for female prisoners is during their menstrual cycle. Although the *Regulation on Administration of Detention Chamber* stipulates that all detained persons are provided with "personal hygienic tools", the reality is very different. Without proper sanitary napkins, the women are forced to improvise by using their underclothes. This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of washing facilities, as one Hoeryong resident explains:

Female prisoners used strips taken from their underclothes to use as sanitary napkins during their menstrual cycle. They sometimes had to use the strips again without washing them.⁹⁶



A North Korean interviewee.

Due to the harsh working and living conditions in the labour training camp, it is not unusual for prisoners to die in custody. One woman from Kyongsong witnessed several deaths during her incarceration at the labour training camp in Hoeryong in 2001:

I saw three female prisoners die during my incarceration. One collapsed at work in the fields, another died in her sleep and the last woman died of intestinal problems.⁹⁷

Food

Inmates throughout the various prison camps are not provided with enough food to sustain their health and strength. Drinking water is also in short supply and not made readily available. Meals are fairly standard with some minor variations. Prisoners are fed three times a day, half an hour each, on a below-subsistence diet consisting of some form of corn - either served in kernels, steamed (like rice), powdered (including the husk and the cob) or in gruel - accompanied by salty watery soup with some cabbage leaves. The food at the labour training camp is of such poor quality that one prisoner likened it to "the kind that Chinese farmers feed to their animals".⁹⁸

Because of the insufficient diet, prisoners seek ways to supplement it by foraging, stealing crops from the fields, purchasing food or through family visits. Those with family members living nearby benefit considerably from these visits. A 38-year-old woman from Hoeryong, who sometimes received extra food from her family at the labour training camp in her hometown, commented on how the elderly prisoners who had no family members to help them became sick and malnourished.⁹⁹ Given these conditions, it is not surprising that many prisoners suffer from malnutrition, diarrhoea and digestive problems. Another Hoeryong resident suffered multiple effects of the poor diet at the labour training camp in Hoeryong in 2002:

Because I wasn't eating properly, my hair fell out in lumps - I still have bald patches today. Due to malnutrition, my nails were so weak that they would turn over.¹⁰⁰



Corn kernels being dried in the sun.

Medical Care

Labour training camps lack the proper medical facilities needed for a prison population that is underfed, overworked, and subject to beatings and unsanitary living conditions. In such an environment, prisoners are highly susceptible to illnesses and diseases. As one former inmate of Hoeryong labour training camp in 2001 observed:

The problem wasn't any particular sickness, but the hard labour itself combined with terrible living conditions, inadequate food

and dirty water. For example, prisoners were so thirsty that they would drink water they knew was dirty just to quench their thirst.¹⁰¹

Many labour training camps do not have a medical clinic on their premises so those who are sick are given some substitute medicine or in extreme cases a doctor is called in from an outside hospital. Camps with a medical clinic are just as ineffective, as they are not equipped with medicine. Those who need medicine have to buy it. A Soongam resident described the ways in which prisoners procured medicine at the labour training camp in Onsong:

There was a doctor at the *danryundae* [labour training camp] but he didn't tend to cases like diarrhoea. Really sick prisoners were taken to the hospital because there was no medicine available. You had to buy medicine from other prisoners or arrange for someone to buy it for you outside. Once I had very high fever and diarrhoea. A male prisoner was kind enough to trade his cigarettes for some medicine from another prisoner, which he then gave to me.¹⁰²

Without the ability to dispense medicine, the only role of the camp doctors is to diagnose the illness. Nothing more can be done for the patients except to allow them some days rest. But even this is very difficult to obtain, as several interviewees remarked how unsympathetic camp doctors were. The doctors feel that prisoners need to work off their crime so unless prisoners are very ill, they are not relieved from their work assignment. To avoid processing a death, very sick prisoners are released and sent home.

***Do Jipkyulso* (Provincial Detention Centre)**

The *do jipkyulso* (provincial detention centre) in North Hamgyeong Province is located in Chongjin. It acts as a holding centre where prisoners who live roughly south of Chongjin are kept until they are transferred to a PSA in their hometown or to a prison camp closer to their hometown.¹⁰³ So with the exception of Onsong and Hoeryong residents, border crossers who are repatriated via the Onsong National Security Agency would normally pass through the Chongjin provincial detention centre. The

Chongjin provincial detention centre's function as a regional holding centre means that it receives transfers of prisoners from facilities throughout the region. The prison population at Chongjin is therefore much higher than at a labour training camp. It holds on average about 200 or more prisoners, but the number can be as high as 1,000.¹⁰⁴

The average period of incarceration at the Chongjin provincial detention centre for unconvicted border crossers interviewed for this report is 37 days - longer than the stay at a labour training camp. This is mainly due to the fact that all provincial detention centre prisoners are in transit and thus, are waiting for the police from their hometown or a town/city closer to their hometown to come and escort them to the next prison facility. Depending on the will of the local police and their available resources, this can take a long time, as one Chongjin inmate explained:

Prisoners who live far from Chongjin have to wait at the *do jipkyulso* [provincial detention centre] until the *boansung* [PSA] from their hometown comes to pick them up. This usually takes a long time, so the prisoners' family sometimes give food and money to *boansung* officers in their hometown so that their loved ones could come out of the *do jipkyulso* faster.¹⁰⁵

Forced Labour

Like the labour training camps, the Chongjin provincial detention centre subjects its prisoners to forced labour. Several interviews described the work as being more gruelling at the provincial detention centre. Perhaps to compensate, prisoners work slightly less hours and are fed marginally better, as one woman from Kilchu noted during her imprisonment in 2006:

It was mid-September so we had to harvest the corn. The work was much harder and we were in the fields for about eight to nine hours per day. I was never hit but the guards would hit you if you didn't work hard. [...] Because the work was so hard, we were given better food. We ate corn rice with some side dishes and soup.¹⁰⁶

An Orang resident confirmed that the “food was relatively better” because they were “working hard” and recalled how the prisoners in 2005 “were given snacks such as biscuits, rice cake and bread in between work” at the water plant where they worked. Not all former inmates, however, shared this opinion. An inmate in 2002 recounted how a female prisoner was so desperate to supplement her diet that she caught a rat and asked a guard if she could roast it. In response, the guard “verbally abused her and as punishment, told her to draw water from a nearby stream ten times. The poor woman fainted from exhaustion.”¹⁰⁷

The work assignment given to prisoners at the provincial detention centre is similar to that of a labour training camp and ranges from farming, mountain logging, brick making and construction. A 47-year-old woman from Musan described the type of labour she was forced to perform for two months in 2003:

It was planting season, so we were sent out to the State farms to sow and weed. There were so many weeds to pull out - it was back-breaking work. The guards would check your work and if you missed some, they would make you do that row again.¹⁰⁸

Along with a more taxing workload, prisoners at the provincial detention centre also endure more beatings. Out of the 94 per cent of the interviewees who were either hit or saw others hit at a labour training camp, only 44 per cent actually experienced beatings themselves.¹⁰⁹ In sharp contrast, over 70 per cent of those who performed forced labour at the provincial detention centre were hit by guards and 100 per cent witnessed other prisoners get hit. The experiences of a 41-year-old Chongjin native, who spent a month at the Chongjin provincial detention centre in November 2004, were typical of those experienced by other prisoners:

We were sent to building construction sites where we carried, in pairs, stones and cement. I was hit a lot - all over my body - because I was not walking fast enough. My legs hurt a lot so I couldn't keep up with the others. Only the prison guards hit us, not the team leaders. I also weeded in the cabbage patch. I was hit for various reasons



A North Korean interviewee.

- because I didn't work hard enough, I was too slow or I had missed a weed.¹¹⁰

The comment that only guards - not team leaders - hit the prisoners was echoed by other interviewees.¹¹¹ In the provincial detention centre, the main responsibility of the team leaders is not to supervise prisoners' work output, but to ensure that they do not escape. Interviews with those who served time at the Chongjin provincial detention centre show that attempts by inmates to escape are a common occurrence.¹¹² In order to deter such behaviour, guards make the team leaders assemble all prisoners and publicly inflict punishment on those who are caught. One woman from Soongam remembered one incident:

During my incarceration, two female prisoners tried to escape. When they were eventually caught, the team leaders gathered all the prisoners and in front of us, the team leaders pulled the women's hair and kicked their bodies. I saw them the next day and they both had bruises and swollen faces. They were forced to work that day without shoes.

The Soongam resident also noted that during her incarceration in 2002, guards tried to prevent escapes by only allowing female prisoners to work in the fields.¹¹³

In addition to being forced to work hard, prisoners are also expected to run continuously while they work. This embodies the very core of the re-education culture entrenched in the North Korean penal system. The inmates are subject

to a constant level of physical pain and suffering so that they may work off their crimes. For example, one Musan inmate always had to run when he was working. He was never allowed to walk. If he did, the guards hit him with a shovel.¹¹⁴ Another inmate described a similar experience:

We did brick work because it was winter so there was no farming. We had to make bricks and run while carrying 50 kg of bricks to a designated deposit area. If you didn't run, you were hit.¹¹⁵

Living Conditions

The living conditions in the Chongjin provincial detention centre are similar to those of a labour training camp. Prisoners live in cramped, squalid quarters where 20 prisoners on average share a room. Water is equally scarce and prisoners are seldom - if ever - allowed to wash their body. Lice are a common problem among the inmates and female prisoners suffer greatly during their menstruation. Medical facilities are either non-existent or very rudimentary. Medicine is not readily available and in the absence of medicine, the only 'remedy' that a doctor can provide is a couple of days relief from forced labour.

Inmin Boansung (People's Safety Agency or PSA)

The *inmin boansung* is the local police force under the jurisdiction of the People's Safety Agency (PSA) who handles all non-political crimes. In 1998, it replaced the *sahwe anjunbu* (Social Safety Agency or SSA), but many North Koreans still colloquially refer to this agency as the '*anjunbu*'. The People's Safety Agency in the border crossers' hometown is where the prisoners are detained whilst the judicial decision is made. There are two types of judicial procedure: the first is a formal trial, which means that you will be sent to a re-education camp, and the second is an informal sentence for those who will be sent to a labour training camp. There is no forced labour at this stage of incarceration.

Formal Trials

Formal trials of border crossers take place within the PSA facilities. Unlike the long and meticulous process of the preliminary

examination at an NSA, which can take up to two months, a trial is over in a matter of hours or less. Border crossers are not tried individually, but in groups and the trials are normally closed to the public. There are usually five or six officials present: two judges, a defence lawyer, a public prosecutor, a PSA supervisor, and the PSA director. The role of these officials is ambiguous, as they all seem to share the same function, that is, to build up a summary case against the defendants.

A 27-year-old man from Musan who was tried in 2006 said that his "defence lawyer did not defend me - he just asked me questions like the other officials".¹¹⁶ This procedure appears to violate article 14 of the CCPR that guarantees a fair and public hearing and article 173 of the revised 1999 Criminal Procedures Act which states: "The legal defence counsel should correctly reveal the truth according to the law and guarantee the rights of the accused."¹¹⁷

Questions asked by the officials cover reasons for the border crossing, activities while in China, contact with South Koreans or other foreigners, church attendance and any exposure to South Korean TV or radio programmes. A 36-year-old Onsong resident was tried with four others in 2005 for border crossing. She recounted the futility of trying to defend her actions:

They asked me why I went to China. I told them it was because I had to earn money. They said my act of border crossing was a betrayal of my country. They accused me of being a sexual toy for my Chinese husband. I told them that I didn't do things like that. I defended myself by saying that I was just trying to survive. I had to find help in China. My husband helped me so that I could support my family in North Korea. The court members ruled that this was not a justifiable defence, as I had clearly broken the law.

She received a 14-month sentence at a re-education camp. After the sentence was announced to the five of them, one of the judges informed them that they could appeal within seven days, but they all declined.¹¹⁸

Some proceedings can be even swifter without questions regarding the border crossing being



A North Korean interviewee.

asked. During a 40-minute trial in 2005, a woman from Kyongsong, aged 30, was only instructed to read out loud her confession. After she confirmed the validity of the statement, the officials sentenced her to six months in a re-education camp. She was released for time served.¹¹⁹

Informal Sentencing

In comparison to the trials, the informal sentencing of border crossers to a labour training camp shows even less regard for due process. Border crossers are simply told by the police at the PSA that they will serve a certain amount of time at a labour training camp. Consequently, some interviewees are not even aware that they have been sentenced.

For example, an Orang native spent three days at her local People's Safety Agency in May 2005 where she was interrogated on her activities in China and then told that she would spend six months at the Orang labour training camp for illegal border crossing into China.¹²⁰ This is a clear case of informal sentencing, yet during the interview with Anti-Slavery International, she was unaware that she had been sentenced.

Released without Sentence

Although the North Korean authorities go to great pains to process, incarcerate and interrogate border crossers, in practice only half of these interviewed by Anti-Slavery International reached their hometown PSA and a third of those were released without a trial or informal sentencing. The 30 North Korean border crossers interviewed

for this report were arrested on 50 separate occasions; 19 were arrested once, five were arrested twice, four were arrested three times, one was arrested four times and another was arrested five times.

Out of the 50 arrests, only 15 resulted in some form of judicial decision, which means an overwhelming 70 per cent of cases received no sentence, formal or otherwise. The North Korean authorities were directly responsible for releasing almost half the cases without any form of sentencing. The other cases were not processed because of escape, bribery, illness or amnesty (see Table 2).

It is surprising that while the State imposes severe restrictions on its citizens, including the prohibition of unauthorised travel abroad, its penal and judicial system operates in such an arbitrary manner. In many ways, this makes the arrest and detention of border crossers, not to mention their subsequent exposure to forced labour and other forms of harsh and degrading treatment, a matter of even greater concern.

Table2: 35 Cases without Judicial Decision

Reason	Number of cases
Released without sentence	14
Escape	7
Bribery	5
Illness	5
Amnesty	3
With infant	1

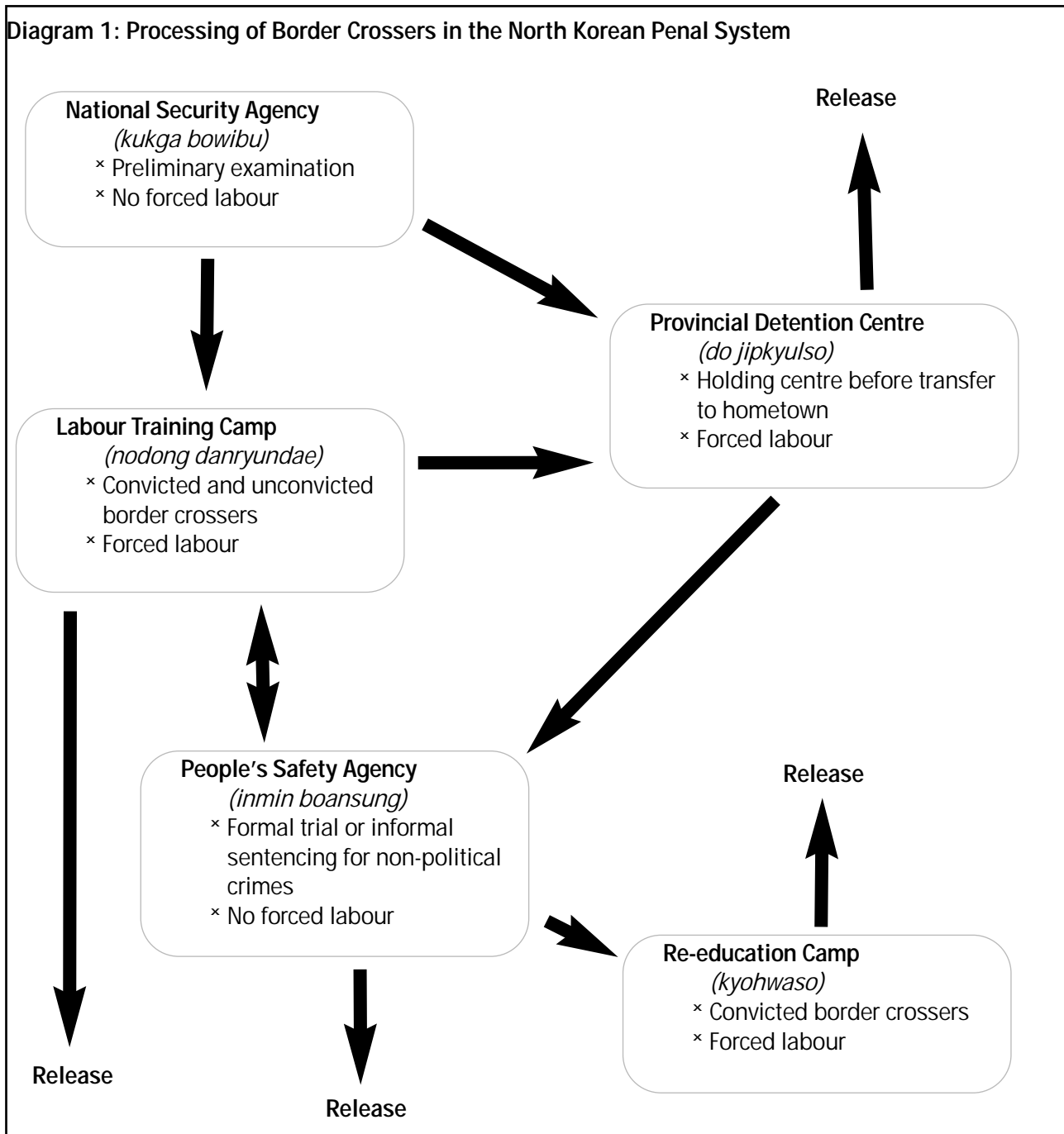
Arbitrary Decisions

A disturbing aspect of the preliminary examination and the subsequent judicial process is the arbitrary nature of the decisions. It is not clear what criteria the NSA and PSA use to judge the severity of a border crosser's crime. Some interviewees who had confessed to seemingly serious crimes (e.g. attempting to enter South Korea or attending church) were not sentenced to a prison camp, but released (see Diagram 1).¹²¹

Moreover, cases with similar circumstances can result in drastically different judicial outcomes. For example, a 42-year-old woman from Hoeryong and a 36-year-old woman from Onsong were both arrested for the first time in April and May 2005 respectively. Both are married to Chinese farmers and have one child. During the preliminary examination at the NSA, they admitted to having married a Chinese, but only the Hoeryong native said she had a son. They were not beaten by the agents. Both cases seem to be straightforward, non-political border

crossing and yet the Hoeryong resident was released without sentencing while the Onsong resident was tried and sentenced to one year and two months at a re-education camp. The only discernable difference between the two is that the Hoeryong resident had a missing right arm, but that should not have had any bearing on the outcome of the case. In fact, the woman herself did not attribute the release to her disability. Instead, she felt that it was due to her having "told them the truth from the very beginning".¹²²

Diagram 1: Processing of Border Crossers in the North Korean Penal System



Kyohwaso (Re-education Camp)

Border crossers can only be incarcerated at a *kyohwaso* (re-education camp) under the judgment of a court, that is, if they have been tried and convicted at the People's Safety Agency in their hometown. Under article 233 of the revised 2004 Criminal Code, the prison term for border crossing cannot exceed three years. In fact, the sentences received since 2004 by those interviewed for this report range from six to 14 months, which is significantly less than prison terms given in the late 1990s.¹²³ A re-education camp is not only for border crossers but for convicts who have been sentenced for activities that would be illegal in most countries. Therefore, the prison population is much greater than in other prison camps, typically holding over 1,000 inmates. Upon arrival, inmates are first registered then given uniforms and a haircut. Female prisoners have their hair cut short to 5cm in length and male prisoners have their head shaved.¹²⁴

Forced Labour

According to the North Korean State, punishment at a re-education camp is "aimed at making offenders repent of their sins and go back to the society to lead a law observing and independent life".¹²⁵ What this essentially means is that through labour and re-education, prisoners not only work off their crime but also endure such hardship in the process that they become less likely to re-offend. A typical day at a re-education camp begins at 6am. After breakfast, the prisoners are sent to their work assignments. The length of the workday depends on the work and the facility. During planting or harvest season, prisoners are forced to work in the fields until sunset with only a 30-minute break for lunch. After dinner, they are required to attend a re-education class that is at least two hours long. They are then allowed to sleep around 10pm.¹²⁶

Forced labour at re-education camps is more intense than at any other prison camp. Prisoners who do not work hard enough or meet a daily quota are beaten by the guards.¹²⁷ In 2001, a woman from Orang, aged 35, was given a one-year sentence at *kyohwaso* number 55 in Yongkwang, South Hamgyeong Province. She had originally been sentenced to six months at a labour training camp but was given a double



A North Korean interviewee.

sentence and transferred to a re-education camp when she was caught trying to send a letter to her Chinese husband expressing her desire to return to China. When she arrived at the new facility, she observed certain differences:

Life at the *kyohwaso* [re-education camp] was much harder. During the day, we worked long hours in the fields. We had to farm and put fertiliser in the corn and bean fields. I wasn't hit - you were only hit when you didn't do your work. We ate corn rice and salty soup. It was impossible to survive on the food they gave us. Some people died of malnutrition.¹²⁸

Food

Prisoners find it difficult to survive on the meagre portions of food given the amount of work they have to do. A frequently expressed sentiment from several interviewees is that they were always hungry. Many are forced to forage for alternative foods such as grass, pine tree leaves and tree bark, which only aggravate their already fragile digestive systems. As the Orang native noted, it is not unusual for prisoners to die of malnutrition while in custody, especially those who cannot find a nutritious means to supplement their diet. One 36-year-old Onsong native described her desperate food situation at the re-education camp in Joongsan from 2005-2006 and her attempts to survive:

During mealtimes, we ate tofu beans, cornhusk rice and rotten cabbage soup. That was never enough food for the amount

of work we had to do. I had to supplement my meals with other things. In prison, nobody could be picky about hygiene or food. We ate everything - grass, frogs, etc.¹²⁹

Medical Care

Re-education camps are equipped with medical clinics and doctors, but the facilities are so poor that they cannot meet the needs of the prison population. Like other prison camps, doctors do not have any medicine to dispense to their patients. So in the absence of treatment, very sick people are simply relieved of work. The Joongsan inmate observed:

There was a medical clinic at the *kyohwaso* [re-education camp], but there was no medicine, so all the doctor could do was diagnose your illness and if it was serious, he told you to lie down. He might give you some scorched rice to eat but other than that, nothing more could be done for you.¹³⁰

7. Return to China

Before border crossers are released from the penal system, they normally have to sign a declaration promising never to return to China. They are then sent home where they are assigned a probation officer from the People's Safety Agency. The officer's primary task is to keep tabs on the movements of the border crossers. This entails making daily visits to their home and ensuring that they do not return to China. Border crossers wishing to go back often have to either bribe the officers or wait for a public holiday (when the officers are not working) to re-enter China.¹³¹

Reasons for Returning to China

Upon release, border crossers face a number of problems in North Korea. Most pressing are the economic issues, which led them to leave in the first place. Food is still scarce and many feel that they are a drain on their family's already limited resources. Some have no family left in North Korea who can help to support them and this is especially worrisome for the elderly.¹³² In addition to the normal difficulties associated with finding work in a country with very high unemployment, border crossers are also the subject of discrimination.

There is a strong negative attitude toward border crossers who are considered by most to have 'defected'. This manifests itself in prejudice, harassment and public humiliation.¹³³ One woman went back to her old job selling food at the market but nobody would buy from her because she was an illegal border crosser.¹³⁴ A Hoeryong resident who was released from the Hoeryong labour training camp in December 2005 described the public humiliation she had to endure:

At first, I tried to live in North Korea with my daughter [...] but I couldn't due to the constant public humiliation I received for border crossing. I was forced to participate in self-criticism sessions, which were held in the town centre. They made me go in front of everyone so that people could openly criticise me. It was so humiliating. In March 2006, I took my daughter and returned to China.¹³⁵

An Onsong woman who couldn't find a job and had nothing to eat at home saw no point in staying in North Korea. She found out later the consequences of her actions for her family:

After I had left, the Onsong townspeople began to harass and humiliate my mother because I had gone back to China. My mother found it so difficult to stay that she moved out and now lives with my younger sister in Kangwon Province.¹³⁶

Another woman from Mayang decided to return to China in August 2005 where she found work as a domestic worker and carer for a *Chosun Jok* family. Her decision also had negative repercussions for her children:

My children get harassed in North Korea because I am in China. When they wear nice clothes, the neighbours taunt them because the clothes are from China. [...] None of my children can leave because if one leaves, then the others will get into trouble because I am registered as an illegal border crosser.¹³⁷

Other border crossers feel compelled to return to China because they have a family there and do not want to abandon them, especially their children.¹³⁸

Fear of Re-arrest

A common concern that interviewees in China expressed is the fear of re-arrest. Although they have enough to eat, life in China is still difficult because of the constant threat of arrest and deportation. Many say that this unease is always with them and that they never feel entirely safe. A 34-year-old woman from Onsong who was released from the labour training camp in her hometown in April 2001 returned to China in October 2001. Since then she has never stepped outside her village because she is too scared. Her account illustrates the constant anxiety in which many undocumented North Korean migrants live:

I always keep our doors locked. When I hear a noise especially at night, I get scared. It really affects my nerves. If it weren't for the insecurity, I'd gladly remain in China, but in South Korea you are safer and can live in peace.¹³⁹

This fear is well justified; as the 25 undocumented North Koreans interviewed in China for this report have already been caught at least once, they are likely to face harsher punishment the next time they are arrested and deported. One Onsong woman who was released from a re-education camp in July 2006 fears the worst the next time she is repatriated:

I would like to stay in China but I am afraid of getting arrested again. I might be killed for my crime the next time I get caught. I can't stop thinking about it. I know if I get caught again, I will have to kill myself.¹⁴⁰

Most interviewees were by and large still content to continue living in China, as they are in close proximity to North Korea where many of their family members still reside. Some, however, find living in China too stressful because of the insecurity and the need to constantly guard their behaviour. The South Korean Government's policy of extending citizenship to North Koreans offers these border crossers in China something they have longed for: legal status. Through regularisation, border crossers would be able to "live without fear and have peace of mind". As a Kyongsong resident pointed out:



The city of Yanji, capital of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China.

I live better in China than I did in North Korea, but sometimes I think going to South Korea would be better because I would then have South Korean citizenship. In South Korea, I would be able to speak my mind freely without watching what I say all the time.¹⁴¹

Refugees *sur Place*

Regardless of the fact that the majority of North Korean border crossers left the country for food and economic reasons, the serious consequences of unauthorised travel from the DPRK means those North Koreans residing in China have a legitimate reason to fear persecution upon return to the DPRK. For this reason they are entitled to international protection as refugees *sur place*.

This is acknowledged by Vitit Muntarbhorn, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK. In his 2007 report to the UN General Assembly Human Rights Council, Professor Muntarbhorn, conceded that North Koreans leaving their country because of "hunger and other deprivations" would generally not be considered refugees, but:

[...] many of the hunger cases can be seen as refugees *sur place*, because there is a threat of persecution/punishment if they are sent back to the country of origin, on the basis of their having left the country without the required exit visa.¹⁴²

This is undoubtedly the case and evidence in this and many other reports documents the fact that deported border crossers will be subject to forced labour, beatings and other degrading treatment and punishment in prison camps.

8. Conclusion

North Korea has softened its approach to border crossers in recent years in recognition of the fact that not all those who travel to China are politically motivated. Punishment for border crossing was consequently reduced to a maximum of three years in prison in 1999 and then to a maximum penalty of two year in 2004.

Despite this positive shift in policy, Anti-Slavery International believes that the arrest and imposition of forced labour on border crossers as a punishment because they left the country without state permission is not acceptable under any circumstances. This law directly undermines the right of North Koreans to freedom of movement and is particularly inappropriate as the vast majority of border crossers are only migrating to try and ensure their survival in the face of severe food shortages and economic crisis.

The use of forced labour as documented in this report is in contravention of commitments undertaken by the North Korean Government and set out in both international and domestic standards.

The ILO defines forced labour as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily". Forced labour is also prohibited under article eight of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which North Korea has ratified. It is only permissible to use compulsory labour in prison facilities when it is "in pursuance of a sentence to such punishment by a competent court" or "in consequence of a lawful order of court".

These exceptions do not apply to the vast majority of cases involving border crossers as they are incarcerated and subject to forced labour without being convicted. Interviews for this report show that unconvicted detainees were

compelled to perform forced labour for an average of about 50 days. The conditions in which this forced labour is carried out - in terms of long working hours, the arduous physical nature of the work and the inadequate food, water and medical treatment provided - also put the lives of detainees at risk.

In view of the above, Anti-Slavery International calls for:

- × The DPRK Government to amend its Criminal Code so that leaving the country without permission does not constitute a criminal offence and to abolish the requirement for travel certificates for travel internally and abroad.
- × The DPRK Government to stop the use of forced labour in prison camps and to take immediate action to prevent unconvicted detainees from performing forced labour, in line with its international and domestic obligations.
- × The DPRK Government to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on North Korea to visit North Korea in order to monitor human rights conditions in the country and in particular to co-operate with him so that he can carry out a thorough review of conditions in prison camps.
- × The Chinese Government to stop the forcible repatriation of undocumented North Koreans from China and to recognise these North Koreans as refugees *sur place* until the North Korean Government amends its current treatment of border crossers as outlined above.
- × The Chinese Government to grant the UNHCR access to North Koreans in China, so that the UNHCR can assess their individual circumstances and seek a safe and permanent solution to their situation.
- × Governments in the region and internationally to raise the above issues at all appropriate meetings with the governments and inter-governmental agencies responsible in order to resolve this situation in the shortest period of time possible.

9. Map of the DPRK



10. Endnotes

- ¹ In 1995, North Korea suffered from heavy rains and floods. The country was previously hit by heavy flooding in 1990, a bitter cold winter in 1993 and hailstorms in 1994.
- ² Andrew S. Natsios, *The Great North Korean Famine: Famine Politics, and Foreign Policy*, USIP, 2002, p. 81 and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), *Special Report: FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, December 1996, p. 93
- ³ Leaving the DPRK without permission is a crime that can carry the death penalty. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.
- ⁴ For a range of population estimates, see International Crisis Group (ICG), *Perilous Journeys: The plight of North Koreans in China and beyond*, 26 October 2006, p. 10.
- ⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with a South Korean NGO, 30 January 2007.
- ⁶ China has a shortage of women due to its one-child policy and a cultural preference for boys. Many men, particularly in rural areas, have difficulty finding a wife. See Norma Kang Muico, *An Absence of Choice: The sexual exploitation of North Korean women in China*, Anti-Slavery International, 2005.
- ⁷ For evidence of this, see Human Rights Watch, *North Korea: Border-crossers harshly punished on return*, March 2007; ICG, *op. cit.*, p. 3; and Ministry of Unification (MOU), *Audit Report of National Governmental Agencies Conducted by the National Assembly*, MOU, 2006, p. 50 (in Korean).
- ⁸ Tony Banbury, WFP's regional director, said that there was a shortfall of one million tonnes or 20 per cent of the food needed by DPRK each year to feed its 23 million people. See "North Korea Admits Food Shortages", *BBC News*, 28 March 2007.
- ⁹ "WFP's Pyongyang Chief Warns of Food Crisis in N. Korea", *Yonhap News*, 29 March 2007.
- ¹⁰ MOU, *op. cit.*, p. 50 (in Korean).
- ¹¹ The revised 1999 North Korean Criminal Code makes a clear distinction between the two groups in articles 47 and 117 (to be discussed in chapter four). See Korea Institute of National Unification (KINU), *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea*, KINU, 2006, p. 283-4.
- ¹² Anti-Slavery International interview with Good Friends, 8 February 2007.
- ¹³ "China erects barbed wire fence along border with North Korea", *International Herald Tribune*, 16 October 2006.
- ¹⁴ Koichi Furuya, "North Koreans Risking All for Greener Pastures in China", *Asahi Shimbun*, 7 March 2007.
- ¹⁵ Good Friends, *North Korea Today*, 58th Edition, Research Institute for North Korean Society, February 2007.
- ¹⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 2, 11 and 12, January 2007.
- ¹⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 15, 12 February 2007.
- ¹⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with Good Friends, 8 February 2007.
- ¹⁹ Sarah Buckley, "Escaping North Korea", *BBC News Online*, 28 July 2004, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3932591.stm>
- ²⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 5, 28 January 2007.
- ²¹ Melanie Kirkpatrick, "The New Underground Railroad", *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 May 2006 and Justin McCurry and Rebecca Allison, "40m Bachelors and No Women... the Birth of a New Problem for China", *The Guardian*, 9 March 2004.
- ²² Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 26, 29 January 2007.
- ²³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 3, 23, January 2007.
- ²⁴ There are also cases where North Korean women are trafficked into marriage. See Norma Kang Muico, *op. cit.*, p. 3-5.
- ²⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 16, 27 January 2007.
- ²⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 1, 8, 9, 11, 18, 25 and 27, January 2007.
- ²⁷ In late July 2004, for example, 468 North Korean refugees were airlifted from Vietnam to South Korea. In protest, the North Korean Government broke off diplomatic relations with the South. The Chinese Government also reacted with more frequent police crackdowns on undocumented North Koreans and greater tightening of security around border areas and foreign compounds in China.
- ²⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 2, 22 January 2007.
- ²⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 18, 26 January 2007.
- ³⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 21, 29 January 2007.
- ³¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 16 and 27, January 2007.
- ³² Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 1, 9 and 27, January 2007.
- ³³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 24, 23 January 2007.
- ³⁴ Lee Keumsoon, *The Border-Crossing North Koreans: Current situations and future prospects*, KINU, 2006, p. 52.
- ³⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 11, 29 January 2007.
- ³⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 1, 26 January 2007.
- ³⁷ The treaty was later reinforced by the *Mutual Co-operation Protocol for the Work of Maintaining National Security and Social Order in the Border Areas*, signed by the DPRK Ministry of State Security and the Chinese Ministry of Public Security on 12 August 1986. This document was obtained by a Japanese NGO, Rescue the North Korean People Urgent Action Network (RENK), in 2002 and is available at: <http://www.bekkoame.ne.jp/ro/renk/Protocol.htm>
- ³⁸ ICG, *op. cit.*, p. 10 and KINU, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
- ³⁹ "Criminal Code of the Democratic people's Republic Korea", *NK Chosun*, February 2007 (in Korean), available at: http://nk.chosun.com/law/law.html?ACT=detail&law_id=198&mode=list&type=&keyword=&page=
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 14, 11 February 2006.
- ⁴² Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 1, 7, 16, 23 and 28, January 2007.
- ⁴³ Kim Soo-am, *The North Korean Penal Code, Criminal Procedures, and the Actual Applications*, KINU, 2006, p. 38.
- ⁴⁴ This figure only includes those who reached the People's Safety Agency in their hometown.
- ⁴⁵ Although the preliminary examination for a crime subject to a labour training sentence should technically conclude in 10 days, it can often last as long as two months with the possibility of an additional two-month extension. *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.
- ⁴⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 15, 12 February 2007.

- ⁴⁷ *Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee: Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, CCPR/CO/72/PRK, 27 August 2001, paragraph 18.
- ⁴⁸ See David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag*, US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003, p. 56-69.
- ⁴⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 26 January 2007.
- ⁵⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ⁵¹ This is despite the fact that the use of force is prohibited under article 93 of the revised 1999 Criminal Procedures Act, which states that a preliminary examiner cannot force a prisoner to confess and any such confession is inadmissible in court.
- ⁵² Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 2, 22 January 2007.
- ⁵³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 12, 29 January 2007.
- ⁵⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 13 and 22, January 2007.
- ⁵⁵ Lee Keumsoon, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- ⁵⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 12, 29 January 2007.
- ⁵⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 15, 12 February 2007.
- ⁵⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 4, 21 January 2007.
- ⁵⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 26, 29 January 2007.
- ⁶⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 3, 23 January 2007.
- ⁶¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 4, 21 January 2007.
- ⁶² Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 13, 28 January 2007.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 12, 29 January 2007.
- ⁶⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 5, 28 January 2007.
- ⁶⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 14, 11 February 2006.
- ⁶⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 8, 21 January 2007.
- ⁶⁸ 'Do' means province in Korean so *Chongjin do jipkyulso* translates into Chongjin provincial detention centre.
- ⁶⁹ *Second Periodic Report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on its Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, CCPR/C/PRK/2000/2, 4 May 2000, p. 21.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁷¹ Even before breakfast, prisoners are often assigned various jobs such as collecting firewood, feeding animals or weeding. Others have to run while singing patriotic songs or study North Korean political ideology.
- ⁷² Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 10, 22 January 2007.
- ⁷³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 2, 22 January 2007.
- ⁷⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 16, 26 January 2007.
- ⁷⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 5, 28 January 2007.
- ⁷⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 27 January 2007.
- ⁷⁷ Hardcash Productions, *Children of the Secret State*, first broadcast on 19 October 2000, available at: <http://www.hardcashproductions.com/recent02.html>
- ⁷⁸ Richard C. Paddock and Barbara Demick, "N. Korea's Growing Drug Trade Seen in Botched Heroin Delivery", *Washington Post*, 21 May 2003.
- ⁷⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 5, 28 January 2007.
- ⁸⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 2, 22 January 2007.
- ⁸¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 16, 27 January 2007.
- ⁸² *Second Periodic Report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on its Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, CCPR/C/PRK/2000/2, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- ⁸³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 20, 25 January 2007.
- ⁸⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 11 and 16, January 2007.
- ⁸⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 26, 29 January 2007.
- ⁸⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 7 and 27, January 2007.
- ⁸⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22 and 24, January 2007.
- ⁸⁸ See David Hawk, *op. cit.*, p. 59-72: Human Rights without Frontiers, *Baby Killings: Fact-finding Mission by Human Rights Without Frontiers*, 28 February 2002, available at: http://www.hrwf.net/north_korea/nkhtml/nk_press_services_feb_28_2002.html and Norma Kang Muico, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ⁸⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ⁹⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 27, 25 January 2007.
- ⁹¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 16, 21, 23 and 27, January 2007.
- ⁹² Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 11 and 25, January 2007.
- ⁹³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 9, 25 January 2007.
- ⁹⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 16 and 22, January 2007.
- ⁹⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 25, 25 January 2007.
- ⁹⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 9, 25 January 2007.
- ⁹⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 26, 29 January 2007.
- ⁹⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 14, 11 February 2006.
- ⁹⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 3, 23 January 2007.
- ¹⁰⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 14, 11 February 2006.
- ¹⁰¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 26, 29 January 2007.
- ¹⁰² Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 26 January 2007.
- ¹⁰³ Musan residents are also processed through Chongjin even though it is slightly north of Chongjin. This may have something to do with the rail routes, as prisoners are transferred via trains.
- ¹⁰⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 8, 21 January 2007.

- ¹⁰⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 12, 29 January 2007.
- ¹⁰⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 1, 26 January 2007.
- ¹⁰⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 26 January 2007.
- ¹⁰⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 17, 29 January 2007.
- ¹⁰⁹ This is due to the fact that most of the interviews in this report were with women and many have said that male prisoners get hit more and harder than female prisoners.
- ¹¹⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 12, 29 January 2007.
- ¹¹¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 1, 17 and 23, January 2007.
- ¹¹² Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 1 and 8, January 2007.
- ¹¹³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 26 January 2007.
- ¹¹⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 4, 21 January 2007.
- ¹¹⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 26 January 2007.
- ¹¹⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 5, 28 January 2007.
- ¹¹⁷ "Criminal Procedures Act of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", *NK Chosun*, February 2007 (in Korean), available at: http://nk.chosun.com/law/law.html?ACT=detail&mode=list&law_id=236&nsflag=N
- ¹¹⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ¹¹⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 11, 29 January 2007.
- ¹²⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 10, 22 January 2007.
- ¹²¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 12 and 13, January 2007.
- ¹²² Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 7 and 9, January 2007.
- ¹²³ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 29 and 30, 17 February 2006 and 23 January 2007.
- ¹²⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ¹²⁵ *Second Periodic Report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on its Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, CCPR/C/PRK/2000/2, 4 May 2000, p. 22.
- ¹²⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 7, 29 and 30, January 2007 and 17 February 2006.
- ¹²⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 30, 23 January 2007.
- ¹²⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 8, 21 January 2007.
- ¹²⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹³¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 11, 12 and 13, January 2007.
- ¹³² Since the breakdown of food rations through the Public Distribution System (PDS) in the mid-1990s, North Koreans have been largely left to fend for themselves.
- ¹³³ Lee Keumsoon, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ¹³⁴ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 23, 26 January 2007.
- ¹³⁵ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 3, 23 January 2007.
- ¹³⁶ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ¹³⁷ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 24, 23 January 2007.
- ¹³⁸ Anti-Slavery International interview with case studies 9 and 16, January 2007.
- ¹³⁹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 27, 25 January 2007.
- ¹⁴⁰ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 7, 27 January 2007.
- ¹⁴¹ Anti-Slavery International interview with case study 26, 29 January 2007.
- ¹⁴² Vitit Muntarbhorn, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, A/HRC/4/15, 7 February 2007, paragraph 20, p. 9.
- ¹⁴³ Article 2(1) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) *Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour* (Forced Labour Convention), available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C029>

11. Glossary of Terms

1. *Banjang*: a team leader chosen from the prison population who supervises the prisoners' work and ensures that prisoners do not escape.
2. *Chosun Jok*: an ethnic Korean-Chinese or Chinese citizen of Korean descent.
3. *Do Jipkyulso*: a provincial detention centre that acts as a holding centre for prisoners in transit on their way to a People's Safety Agency (*inmin boansung*) in their hometown.
4. *Hukou*: an official Chinese household registration that functions like a residence permit. It documents the personal details of an individual, as well as the details of all his or her family members including their births, deaths, change of residency, marriages and divorces.
5. *Inmin Boansung* (colloquially referred to as '*boansung*'): the local police under the People's Safety Agency (PSA) whose jurisdiction is non-political crimes. In 1998, it replaced the *sahwe anjunbu*, but many North Koreans still refer to this agency as the '*anjunbu*'.
6. *Kukga Bowibu* (colloquially referred to as '*bowibu*'): the National Security Agency (NSA) whose jurisdiction is political crimes. Any cases deemed non-political are handed over to the People's Safety Agency (*inmin boansung*).
7. *Kwanliso*: a political prison camp.
8. *Kyohwaso*: a re-education camp for felons convicted of non-political but serious crimes.
9. *Nodong danryundae*: a labour training camp where labour is used for re-education and a means to work off a prisoner's crime.
10. *Yesim* (preliminary examination): the interrogation process where the National Security Agency (*kukga bowibu*) builds a case against a suspect. For border crossers, this process is always done while they are detained. When the preliminary examiner determines that a case is not political, it is turned over to the People's Safety Agency (*inmin boansung*).
11. *Sahwe Anjunbu* (colloquially referred to as '*anjunbu*'): the local police under the Social Safety Agency (SSA) whose jurisdiction is non-political crimes. Although it was renamed '*inmin boansung*' (People's Safety Agency) in 1998, the term '*anjunbu*' is still used to refer to the local police.
12. *Sasang*: a political ideology.

12. Case studies

Case study 1

Gender: female

Age: 32

Hometown: Kilchu, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2006)

Interviewed: 26 January 2007 in China

In North Korea, I worked at the railway station with my father. Later I changed jobs and worked in a restaurant in Shinchung for two years. My mother was a teacher. My younger brother was a miner who died in a mining accident. I also have one younger sister. Food rations from the Public Distribution System (PDS) had stopped so we had to fend for ourselves. On 6 April 1998, I left for China because of food and economic hardship. I was 25 years old then. I went with a woman whom I had met at a market in Hoeryong. We crossed the Tumen River together and went to Longjing. The woman knew people there. They suggested that I marry and introduced me to one of their *Chosun Jok* relatives who was a farmer. We soon got married.

In 2006, I made a decision to go to South Korea. I arranged the trip with a broker and in July, I went to Yanji to take a bus to Shenyang. I was arrested at the station with four other North Koreans while trying to board the bus. The Chinese broker who had organised the trip had apparently been arrested. He told the police where to find us. I had given the broker 2,000 yuan (US\$250) as a deposit (the rest was to be paid once I arrived in South Korea) but of course that money was lost. I spent one night at the Yanji police station before being transferred to the Tumen border detention centre, which is located in a military base. I was there for a long time - over a month - because I had to wait until the broker's trial was over. The Chinese police asked me general questions surrounding the nature of my arrest. For meals, we were given white rice with soup. During my incarceration, I saw North Korean prisoners being deported on a bi-weekly basis.

When the broker's trial was finished, I was repatriated to the Onsong *bowibu* via Namyang. I was held at the *bowibu* in Onsong for two and a half weeks. There were 60-70 prisoners in total. I was strip-searched. When the agents find money on your body, they give it back to you before you leave - minus the cost of the food. After the search, I was called in for the preliminary examination (interrogation) by the agents. They wanted to know where I lived in China, how and why I was arrested, who I knew and with whom I spent my time. Fortunately, the Chinese authorities did not send the arrest documents to the North Korean authorities. The documents would have clearly stated that I was caught trying to escape to South Korea. I told them I married a Chinese man. They don't care about that because so many North Korean women nowadays marry Chinese men. They hit only when the prisoner lies or they think he or she is lying. The prisoners were divided into groups. Each group was in a different room where we had to sit in a row. For food, we were given corn rice and soup.

I was transferred to the Onsong *anjunbu* (*boansung*) where I waited transport to my next destination. There were about 50 people at this facility. I was there for three weeks and during my stay, I had to work in the nearby fields weeding for six hours everyday. It wasn't very hard work. There were four pregnant women at the *anjunbu*. They didn't have to work in the fields. Instead, they were given lighter work to do indoors. They were never hit or verbally abused. During our free time, we could sit and talk quietly with other prisoners.

I then spent five weeks at the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* with about 60-70 other prisoners. It was mid-September so we had to harvest the corn. The work was much harder and we were in the fields for about eight to nine hours per day. I was never hit but the guards would hit you if you didn't work hard. The team leaders (chosen from the prison population) didn't hit. They were mainly responsible for making

sure that no prisoner escaped. Because the work was so hard, we were given better food. We ate corn rice with some side dishes and soup.

The *anjunbu* (*boansung*) police in Kilchu, my hometown, came to pick me up. I spent four days at the *anjunbu*. I was the only person there. I was re-interrogated on my activities in China. I was asked the same questions again. They didn't hit me. I was released early because I was sick. I was physically very weak and suffered from digestive problems. I didn't receive any judicial sentencing, but before they sent me home, I had to promise never to return to China. I spent one month at home with my parents and younger sister before returning to China in December 2006.

I have a nine-year-old son who recently got *hukou* (household registration). We paid 500 yuan (US\$65). When he didn't have *hukou*, he still went to school, but was not registered so he couldn't receive official grades or school reports.

When I was in prison, I missed my husband and son very much. I am afraid to continue to live in China even though we get protection from the local police when there is a planned raid from the cities. I would like peace of mind so I think it would be better to go to South Korea. South and North Koreans speak the same language and they are the same people.

Case study 2

Gender: female

Age: 43

Hometown: Chongjin, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2005/2006)

Interviewed: 22 January 2007 in China

My father was a postal worker who delivered newspapers. I also worked at the post office as a telephone operator. My older sister worked at a department store in Pyongyang and married a man who was a party member.

After I got married, I moved to Chongjin. My husband died when I was 28 years old so I raised my son and daughter by myself. I earned money by working at the market. We were able to get by on that, but in January 2005 our house burned down. The State did not compensate us for the loss so I had no way to support my children. I had no choice but to leave them with a neighbour and go to China.

On 30 July 2005, I went with a North Korean guide who took me to a place where I worked for three months picking pears. I was paid 1,000 yuan (US\$130) in total, out of which I gave the guide 200 yuan (US\$26) for his fee. In October 2005, my son who was 18 years old at that time went to South Korea via Mongolia. He went with a former soldier who was caught smuggling people out of North Korea. The soldier escaped from the military and went to China because he knew that if caught, he would be executed. He came into contact with some South Koreans who agreed to help him escape to South Korea. I was able to persuade the South Koreans to include my son on this trip.

I left for Yanji where I found work as a domestic worker. I was paid 600 yuan (US\$78) per month. My 15-year-old daughter joined me in Yanji. On the evening of 10 December 2005, the Yanji police came to our house and arrested us. They knew where we lived because of two teenage North Koreans. I had felt sorry for them so I let them stay with us for 10 days. They were later caught at an Internet café and the police made them tell where other North Koreans were hiding.

My daughter and I spent three days at the Yanji police station and then one month at the Tumen border detention centre. My deportation was delayed because I suffered from heart problems and had to be hospitalised twice.

On 8 January 2006, I was repatriated to North Korea where I spent the first month at the Onsong *bowibu*. My daughter was sent back earlier in December and was released because she was a minor. There were about 30-40 women at the *bowibu*. I was interrogated on my activities in China - whether I met any South Koreans, wanted to go to South Korea or went to church. I was hit when I said no to the questions. They thought I was lying so they tried to force a confession out of me. I was pulled out for interrogation seven times. The rest of the time I spent sitting on my knees very still on the floor with my head bowed - like everyone else. If you moved, they would call you and hit you on your hands with a stick. The hygiene was so poor that we were all infested with lice. We didn't have any facility to wash. Women had to use their own socks in place of sanitary napkins. There were also set times to use the toilet. If it wasn't time, you either had to urinate on yourself or risk getting hit by the guards by asking permission.

I was then transferred to the Onsong *anjunbu (boansung)* for a month. I was interrogated again on the same questions and hit again. The *anjunbu* and the *bowibu* are from different departments so they don't exchange information between them. I was pulled out for interrogation five times. Their theory was that the more they hit, the more we will tell. Similar to the *bowibu*, we ate corn powder with some noodles (200g) and cabbage soup. I was told at the *anjunbu* that I would be sentenced to six months at a *kyohwaso* for illegal border crossing.

On April 2006, I was sent to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* where there were about 150 prisoners and five guards. I was in poor health. My knees hurt and I couldn't see well. Due to my heart condition, my face was swollen. Our daily routine was like this. We woke up at 6am and had breakfast at 7am. Work would start at 8am and after a short lunch break at 11am we would resume work until 4pm. We exercised for an hour and ate dinner at 5pm. At 6pm, we had re-education class where we had to say why we wouldn't go back to China. We were then given an hour to wash our clothes and then we slept at 9pm. Because I was sick, I was allowed to work in the kitchen. The others had to work outside the prison camp. They collected human fertiliser. The male prisoners went to villages and collected it from houses, schools, outhouses. Because it was winter, they first had to break the ice in order to get the fertiliser out. Then the female prisoners would work in pairs carrying it in a wooden carrier - one woman in front and the other in the back - to a site where it was mixed with grass. The fertiliser would then be used for the next planting season. When they were working, they could never walk, they always had to run. The work was so difficult and intense that their hands and feet were torn and blistered. Everyday, prisoners were hit by the team leaders who were chosen by the guards because they were strong. Everyone had to work. If you didn't you were hit. Even if you fell from exhaustion, you would still have to get up and continue working. There was a competition between the team leaders over how much work each team produced. If you produced less than the other teams, you received less food. The leader of the losing team singled out the ones who were slow. They had to stand up and the leader yelled at them saying that because of their lack of effort, the whole team suffered by getting less food. Then they were hit. Children never worked at the *danryundae*, they attended re-education classes instead. I went to the hospital outside the prison twice to get medicine and injections. I was hospitalised for two days both times. I was finally released after one and a half months partly because I was sick and partly because my sisters gave some money to the prison.

If I had not been released due to illness, I would have gone first to the Chongjin *jipkyulso* then to my hometown *anjunbu (boansung)* in Chongjin where I would have been sentenced to a six-month term at a *kyohwaso*.

I spent a month at my sister's house in Onsong. On 25 June 2006, I came back to China with my daughter. She went on to South Korea in October 2006 thanks to the help of the former soldier (who went to South Korea with my son). He arranged for my daughter to meet a broker who eventually helped her to get to South Korea. Both my children paid about 5,000 yuan (US\$650) to their broker after their arrival in South Korea.

I want to go to South Korea not only because my children are there but also because I can't live in a

prison-like environment here in China. I still have heart problems, swollen face and bad circulation. It's difficult to access the hospital here because I don't speak Chinese. I went once with someone from the church and the doctor told us that my heart was very weak. I'm taking traditional Korean medicine because I can't afford the medicine prescribed to me by the hospital doctor.

Case study 3

Gender: female

Age: 38

Hometown: Hoeryong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2005)

Interviewed: 23 January 2007 in China

I first came to China in May 2003 because my mother had died of hunger in the 1990s and the food situation was getting desperate. I was married and had one daughter. I felt responsible for my family. I had two younger brothers who needed to marry and my father's 60th birthday was coming up. It would have been impossible to manage all those things without money. I worked in the market and through my work, I met Chinese business colleagues who told me that I could earn well in China. They gave me information on how to cross the border safely. One day, a man approached me and asked me to take him safely to China. If I did that, he said he would find me a job. He had just been released from prison for border crossing. I agreed and we travelled together to Yanji where he had lived for six years. He introduced me to an elderly woman who took me on as a domestic worker. I was paid 200 yuan (US\$26) per month. I took the job temporarily but knew that I had to find a better paying job. I couldn't save any money on that salary. I then found a better job as a cleaner at a South Korean sports club in China where I earned 900 yuan (US\$117) per month.

I missed home and wanted to go back but during a phone call with my uncle, he strongly advised me against it because there was apparently a crackdown in North Korea on missing family members.

In Yanji, I never associated with other North Koreans because it was dangerous. But in September 2005, I met an old childhood friend at the local public bathhouse. I was so glad to see her again. She wanted a photo of her niece that a messenger from North Korea had brought with him. The messenger called her to meet in front of a pharmacy in Longjing. She told the man what she would be wearing. We went together by bus to the meeting place. When we got off the bus stop, we didn't see any pharmacy. It was then that the Chinese police noticed my friend and grabbed both of us. She had been set up. We were taken to the Longjing police station where I was for three days. I gave the police a false name. They took my money, jewellery and handbag. We were then sent to the Tumen border detention centre. During the questioning, I confessed my real name. The head of the police said he knew the people at the Onsong *bowibu*. I pleaded with him to give them a good word on my behalf. He agreed.

I was deported and after a brief stop in Namyang, I was taken to the Onsong *bowibu*. The interrogation was very tough. I realised that the help that I had received from the Chinese policeman was actually working against me. The *bowibu* agents were clearly angered by my audacity to solicit the help of the Chinese. They hit me and yelled, "Who do you think you are for asking such help?" They were suspicious that I was involved in lots of bad activities in China. One day I was blindfolded with five others and taken to a secret place. I think it was a *kwanliso*. This was the place where all the prisoners served a life term. I spent two months at this facility where I was subjected to a very intense and severe interrogation. They asked me about every little detail and re-interrogated me on any inconsistencies. I had to write out multiple confessions until they were satisfied. When I wasn't being interrogated, I was forced to work in the fields with the other prisoners. It was harvest season so we harvested corn, cabbage and radish. While we were working, male prisoners were hit but I wasn't.

At the end of October 2005, I was returned to the Onsong *bowibu* for a week. I was interrogated again on my activities in China. The agents beat me again. I had thin summer clothes so I was very cold.

I was sent to the Hoeryong *nodong danryundae* in November 2005. I knew someone here so I was able to skip the sentencing process at the Hoeryong *anjunbu (boansung)*. I spent two months at the *danryundae*, but I didn't know how long it would be before my release. Through my connections and also because I was suffering from mental illness, I was given light work as a cleaner. I was still hit when I didn't clean well or when I said I was too sick to work. They hit me all over my body. The situation improved slightly when I got to know the team leaders and received family visits. The visits made the team leaders respect me more. For food, we ate corn powder gruel. Sometimes I would get extra food from my family. The elderly prisoners who couldn't supplement their meals because they had no family members to help them became sick and malnourished. Even I got sick. I suffered from periodic diarrhoea. There was a doctor in the prison but you needed to pay for medicine.

The other prisoners who worked outside the camp did logging work in the mountains. The work day began at 5am and ended when it got dark. Dinner was at 5:30pm and from 6-10 pm we had re-education class. In one room, there were about 30-40 women. All of our bodies were infested with lice. There was a toilet in our room as well as one outside. Normally, the prison guards didn't hit us. The team leaders did. They would hit prisoners for not working hard enough or talking back. Money can solve all problems in prison. If you gave them money, they would treat you better.

When I was at the *bowibu*, I heard from some of the female prisoners who had been sent back several times that before they were forced to get an abortion during a previous incarceration. When I was there, I didn't witness anything like that. There was a 23-year-old pregnant prisoner who had been sold into marriage in China. I thought it would be better not to take any chances, so I gave her my food and told her to hide her waist by cinching it with a rope. There were lots of spies among the prisoners so you had to be careful.

I was released in late December 2005. I went to stay with my younger brother in Hoeryong. Because I was not properly registered as a Hoeryong resident, I was in limbo. At first, I tried to live in North Korea with my daughter who was 13 years old at that time, but I couldn't due to the constant public humiliation I received for border crossing. I was forced to participate in self-criticism sessions, which were held in the town centre. They made me go in front of everyone so that people could openly criticise me. It was so humiliating.

In March 2006, I took my daughter and returned to China. I am currently living with a *Chosun Jok* man. I still work at the same sports course as a cleaner. When I first came to China, I was happy to live here peacefully, but now I feel repressed. I can't speak my mind or shout when I'm angry. I no longer want to live here. Living in North Korea is out of the question because of the severe punishment for multiple border crossers. I would like to go to South Korea because we speak the same language. I would go if the journey wasn't so dangerous. It would be nice to study in South Korea. I would like to live without fear and have peace of mind. It's very stressful living in China. When my daughter was in North Korea, I couldn't sleep because I worried about her and couldn't talk about my problem with anyone. But now that she's here with me in China, I worry that she'll get arrested. I don't let her go outside except when she has to go to her tutoring session.

I would like it if the North Korean Government would allow North Koreans with family ties to China to work legally in China. The Chinese Government should be more understanding.

Case study 4

Gender: male

Age: 21

Hometown: Musan, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 4 (2005, 2003, 2002 and 1998)

Interviewed: 21 January 2007 in China

My parents worked at a TV station. The first time I went to China was in 1995 when I was 10 years old. I was there briefly with my father. Then I returned in 1998. I was arrested and sent back to North Korea four times. In 1998, I left for China when I was 13 years old because of the food shortage. People were starving and life was very difficult. My mother had already died and I didn't know where my father was. My older sister lived with an aunt. My younger brother and I wandered around the streets looking for food. My brother didn't want to come with me to China so I went with a friend. We sneaked onto a coal train in Musan and got off at Heungam. We then walked to the border and crossed the Tumen River. Once we were on the other side, we walked through the mountains until we arrived at Helong where we took a train to Yanji. We met a *Chosun Jok* in Helong who told us how to avoid being detected by the Chinese police.

First arrest:

One month later, I was captured in Yanji. I was caught while begging on the streets. After two weeks at the Yanji police station, I was sent to the Longjing border detention centre where we were only given garlic to eat. Then I was repatriated and sent to the Hoeryong *bowibu* where I was searched for money from head to toe and then interrogated on my activities in China. Because I was a minor, I was sent to a juvenile detention facility in Yoosun (similar to a 9.27 camp). Prisoners had to cut and carry logs on our shoulders and carry them down from the mountains. If we didn't work hard, we were hit by the guards. We were given barley rice and salty soup. After one month, I escaped while we were working in the mountains.

I returned to China in 2000. I found out that my father was in China - in Helong - so I joined him. We worked on a farm. I went to school in Yanji from March 2001 to April 2002.

Second arrest:

After the storming of a foreign embassy in Beijing by North Korean asylum seekers in 2002, there was a crackdown on North Koreans living in China. I didn't feel safe so I decided to go to South Korea. There were seven of us - three girls, two boys and two Chinese guides. We went as far as Yunnan Province. The other boy and I were caught with one of the guides. The Chinese police sent us to the Tumen border detention centre. Then I was repatriated to the Onsong *bowibu* where I stayed for one month. I was afraid because I had been caught at the Chinese-Vietnamese border. They accused me of trying to defect to South Korea. I denied it but then documents arrived from China saying that I had been caught in the border area. They asked me why I lied and I said that it was because I didn't want to die. I was 18 years old then, but said that I was 16. I confessed everything to the officials. No one told me anything about my sentence or how long I would spend in prison.

I was then sent to Onsong *nodong danryundae* where I spent 27 days. There were about 180 people. I was officially a minor and minors are normally not sent to a *danryundae*, but because I had been caught trying to go to South Korea, I was sent there. They made us do road works - repairing potholes and carrying sand and gravel in pairs. Others worked in the mountains farming. We were starving but we still had to work. If we didn't, we were hit. We were only given small amounts of corn and potatoes. People with some money were allowed to buy food in markets.

I then went to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* for one month. It was much bigger. There were about 500-800 people there. We worked in the fields planting corn and potatoes. The work was more difficult. About fifty male prisoners were taken into town where we had to work on building sites. In the evening we returned to the prison. I worked from 9am to 5 or 6pm. When we were working, we always had to run

- never walk. If we didn't, the guards hit us with a shovel.

I was interrogated again at the Musan *boansung* because the Chongjin *jipkyulso* had lost my documents. Because they no longer had my original documents, I lied and said that I was caught in Yanji. I was released after three days. I lived in Musan for one year working in construction. I wasn't paid but was given some food.

Third arrest:

I decided to go back to China in 2003. I walked from Bekam in Yanggang Province in North Korea to Yanji which took about two weeks. In Yanji, I found work picking pine nuts for one month. At the end of the month, I was paid 300 yuan (US\$40). I was caught again in 2003 in Yanji. I was repatriated via the same route as last time. I knew someone at the Musan *boansung*, so I was released after three days.

Fourth arrest:

In 2004, I returned to Yanji and worked as a waiter. I pretended to be a *Chosun Jok*. I worked for three months but wasn't paid the last month. I got into a fight with my employer and left. In 2005, after a series of crackdowns by the Chinese police, I decided to make another attempt to get to South Korea. This time the destination was Mongolia. I travelled with six other people but the Chinese police caught us near the border on 29 July 2005. I spent three days at the detention centre there, six days at the detention centre near the border of Mongolia and three days at the Dandong border detention centre before being repatriated to Sinuiju *bowibu* where I spent two months. I wasn't asked a lot of questions, just basic ones because I was not from this province. They were more interested in my political ideology or motivation, that is, whether I really wanted to betray my country. I was verbally and physically abused. At first, I lied about trying to go to Mongolia. I said that I was wandering around China and was caught in Yanji. They didn't believe me so they swore at me and hit and kicked me. I had bruises on my body from the kicks.

I was then transferred to the Musan *bowibu* where I was for two months. I was asked why I went to China, how I lived there, why I wanted to go to South Korea, what I had against North Korea and what I thought of North Korea. They didn't hit me here even though at first I had lied about my age - I said that I was 17 not 20. I was going to be sent to the Musan *boansung* where I would have been sentenced but I managed to escape with a woman who was married to a Chinese and had a child back in China. We returned to China on 4 October 2005.

In the previous arrests, I was given a break because my aunt had fought against the Americans during the Korean War. She received a special commendation for her efforts. But this time, I wouldn't have received any special treatment. If I hadn't escaped, I would have been sent to a *kyohwaso* for seven years. I heard that a friend who was with us got a seven-year sentence.

My father passed away in 2006. I now have no family. I still want to go to South Korea because I'm always afraid of being sent back to North Korea. In China, I can't speak my mind freely when I'm angry. It's frustrating. I want to learn from living in a rich country. Even if the authorities didn't repatriate us, I still wouldn't want to live in China.

Case study 5

Gender: male

Age: 27

Hometown: Musan, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 5 (2005/2006, 2004, 2003, 2002 and 2000)

Interviewed: 28 January 2007 in China

I was a farmer in North Korea. My father died of a blood clot in the brain. One of my younger brothers died of polio at a young age. I have one younger sister who is now living in South Korea and one younger brother who was arrested and repatriated to North Korea in January 2007. I came to China in October 1998 because of the financial and food difficulties. I took my mum and younger brother. We didn't know anyone in China. I found a job logging in Longjing. I stayed at this job for only a month because I was afraid that somebody might report me to the Chinese police. My family decided to move to Antu where I found work doing various odd jobs from digging holes to working at a ginseng farm. I moved from job to job so I wouldn't get caught.

First arrest:

I got arrested in June 2000 when I went to pick up my pay at one of the farming jobs I did. I was held at the Antu police station for two days and then sent to the Helong border detention centre for one week before being deported to North Korea.

I was incarcerated for 20 days at the *bowibu* in Musan. I was lucky because the eighth of July was a public holiday - the day commemorating the death of Kim Il-Sung - so I was given an amnesty and released. I returned to China the same month and joined my family in Wangqing. They had moved there since my arrest.

Second/Third arrest:

The next two arrests happened in October 2002 when the Chinese police came to my home and arrested my entire family and in the spring of 2003 when I was arrested at work. The route for both arrests were the same: I was first taken to the Wangqing police station then to the Tumen border detention centre before being repatriated to the Onsong *bowibu*. From there I was transferred to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* and then to the *boansung* in Musan where I was sentenced to serve time at the Musan *nodong danryundae*. On both occasions, I escaped while incarcerated at the *danryundae* and returned immediately to Wangqing. During the 2002 imprisonment, I ran away after serving two months of a six-month sentence. Then in 2003, I escaped after five months. I was meant to serve a 10-month sentence (six months plus four months of time not served from the previous 2002 arrest).

Fourth arrest

In the spring of 2004, I got arrested again at work. I was held at the Wangqing police station for two to three days and one week at the Tumen border detention centre. I was deported back to North Korea with many other prisoners. I spent 25 days at the Onsong *bowibu*. There were over 200 prisoners. I had no money on me but they strip searched me anyway. I was interrogated twice and each session lasted about one and a half hours. The *bowibu* agents asked me what I did in China, if I went to church, saw any South Korean films or TV programmes. When I wasn't being interrogated, I had to sit completely still. The guards hit you when you moved or talked. I was hit once because I asked one of the guards if I could go to the toilet. He wouldn't let me, but I was so desperate that I went anyway. I got caught and was hit in the head with a gun cleaning rod. I was bleeding, but received no medical attention. They just put cigarette ashes on my wound to stop the bleeding. The prisoners ate corn noodle gruel and were given a bit of water.

I was transferred to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* where I was incarcerated for 10 days. There were about 60 prisoners. We were forced to work planting seeds and spreading fertilisers on the corn and bean fields. I wasn't hit but I saw one male prisoner get hit because he tried to steal some food. For food, we were given corn rice and pickled radish.

I was then sent to the Musan *boansung*. I was no longer interrogated. Another prisoner and I just sat there and waited for two days. They didn't hit us. I was sentenced to one year and one month to be served at the Musan *nodong danyrunda*.

There were about 25 prisoners at the Musan *nodong danryunda*. This time I served the full sentence. We were forced to log in the mountains. It was my responsibility to take the logs that other prisoners had cut and carry them 200 metres down the mountain using wire strings. My hands would bleed because the wire strings cut into my skin but I still had to continue working. I wasn't hit by the prison guards but others were when they didn't cut or carry down enough logs.

We also quarried stones and carried them down the mountain. One young man in his early twenties couldn't do the work because he was so hungry and the work was too much for him. So, he hid in one area and slept. He was discovered by one of the guards who then had all the team leaders punished by making them move heavy rocks from one place to another - about 100 metres apart - until he said stop. The team leader responsible for the sleeping prisoner was so angry that he took a stick and beat the prisoner's back and legs. The prisoner couldn't walk for three weeks. He suffered a fracture in one leg.

During mealtimes, we ate corn rice and tofu soup. We were allowed to drink as much water as we wanted. Sick prisoners were relieved from duty, but if a guard told them to work, then they had to whether they were sick or not. There was no medical facility at the *danryunda* but if prisoners were really sick, they were sent to a clinic outside the camp.

Fifth arrest:

In July 2005, I was released and returned to Wangqing. Five months later in December, I was arrested at my mother's house in Wangqing. I was sent to the same prison facilities - Wangqing police station, Tumen border detention centre, Onsong *bowibu*, Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* and Musan *anjanbu* (*boansung*). At the Musan *anjanbu*, there were about 100 prisoners. During my incarceration, I was put on trial with two other prisoners. There were five officials present - a judge, public prosecutor, defence lawyer and two others. I sat down and they asked me what my crime was. I said border crossing. Then all five officials took turns asking me questions like what I did wrong, how many times I went to China, what I did in China, whether I went to church, saw South Korean TV programmes or met foreigners. The defence lawyer did not defend me - he just asked me questions like the other officials. Then they convicted and sentenced me to two years in a *kyohwaso* in Jongsung, North Hamgyeong Province. I was able to avoid the prison term because I got help from a *Chosun Jok* friend in Yanji who paid 8,000 yuan (US\$1,040) to one of the *anjanbu* officials. When they released me, I went back to China.

I currently work as a daily labourer. I get paid, for example, 70 yuan (US\$9) to rip out an *ondol** floor in one day. I want to go to South Korea because I don't want to get caught again. I don't like it in China because I live in constant fear and insecurity.

* Korean under floor heating.

Case study 6

Gender: female

Age: 41

Hometown: Hoeryong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 3 (2005, 2004 and 2003)

Interviewed: 27 January 2007 in China

In North Korea, I worked in a factory that made confectionary and cigarettes. My husband was a maintenance worker at the railway station who died of kidney failure. We had two children - one son who is now 19 years old and one daughter who died of digestive problems. I was struggling to survive. I heard from other people about China and how you could earn money there.

First arrest:

On 14 November 2003, I went to China with two other North Koreans. I went to Sanhe village where my husband's relatives lived. They told me that North Korean women couldn't earn money alone. We had to get protection from a man. They said I wouldn't be able to survive and how I was better off getting married instead. So, they introduced me to a *Chosun Jok* relative who was a farmer from a rural village and we got married. There was no exchange of money. When we took a taxi to go to his village, we were stopped at a roadblock in Longjing by four Chinese policemen. I was arrested but my husband was released after his details were taken and he was fined 1,000 yuan (US\$130). The police took me to the Longjing police station. I was questioned on when I came to China and my activities here. After three days, I was transferred to the border detention centre in Sanhe.

After four days, they repatriated me to the *bowibu* in Hoeryong where I was held for 17 days. I had to take my clothes off so they could search for money. They checked my clothes and my entire body, including private areas. Money was confiscated from those who had it. The guards wrote down the amount and it was given back to you at the *anjonbu (boansung)*. I was called out for the preliminary examination twice. They asked me when I went to China and why. The agents pitied me because I was poor, older and only had one son alive. They didn't hit me but other prisoners were hit because they lied or worked in bad places like a karaoke bar. I could hear screams and yelling. When I wasn't being interrogated, I had to sit still without moving at all.

I was transferred to the Hoeryong *anjonbu (boansung)* for four days. I was interrogated again with the same questions. I was called out twice. Again, I had to sit still for the remaining time. When I was released, I stayed at a friend's house. I worked in the vegetable market and returned to China in 2004. I went to my husband's village.

Second arrest:

I was arrested again on 8 March 2004 while taking a bus to Longjing. The bus stopped at a roadblock and the Chinese police got on to check our documents. I was taken off the bus and sent to the Longjing police station. I was then transferred to the Sanhe border detention centre for three days before being deported back to North Korea. I was held and questioned at the Hoeryong *bowibu* for 22 days. Afterwards, they sent me to the Hoeryong *anjonbu (boansung)*. While I was there, I witnessed two pregnant women leave the facility to get an abortion at a nearby clinic. They were in the same room as me. After a week, the police decided to send me to a *kuhosuh* in Hoeryong. It's a welfare facility for North Korean prisoners with no family members. When I was released at the end of July 2004, I returned to China once again.

Third arrest:

On 28 May 2005, there was a crackdown on North Koreans by the Chinese military police in Hunchun. They came to our village and arrested me at home. After a brief stop at the Hunchun border detention centre, I was deported to the Saetbyul *bowibu*. There were about 120 prisoners. The *bowibu* agents asked me why I kept returning to China. I told them I had no one to support me in North Korea. I had to survive somehow. This time, they hit me and told me that I had broken the law. I was called out for

interrogation four times. I had no money but because I had on nice clothes, they thought I was hiding some so they kept questioning and hitting me.

After 17 days, I was meant to be transferred to the Saetbyul *anjunbu* (*boansung*) but because it was so overcrowded, I was sent to the Saetbyul *nodong danryundae* instead. I was there for 10 days with 60 other prisoners. The guards confiscated all our money, medicine and food, but not our clothes. I was hit most here. The *anjunbu* police thought I had money because they had received the information from the *bowibu* so they continued to beat me. I was punched in the eye and stomach. Because we were held at a *danryundae*, the police also made us work while we waited for transport to our next destination. From 6am to 6pm we worked in the corn and rice fields weeding with only 30-minute meal breaks. If you didn't do your work well, you were hit by the guards. I knew how to farm, so I wasn't hit. For food, we were given bean and corn rice and salty soup. All the prisoners had lice because we couldn't wash properly. We could only wash our face once a week. We slept at 10pm. In our room there were 40 female prisoners. There was no medical facility at the *danryundae*. If there was a very sick prisoner, a doctor would be called in and he would give the patient medicine.

I was transferred to the *anjunbu* (*boansung*) in Hoeryong, my hometown. There were five of us at the facility. I was at the *anjunbu* for two and a half months. I saw a document that said that I would be sentenced to six months at a *danryundae*, so when the guards sent me on an errand, I took this opportunity to escape. I arrived back in my village on 14 November 2005.

I would like for my son to come live with me in China. I have no one but him back in North Korea. Next time I get arrested, they will without a doubt kill me. I can't go back. My husband's sister lives in South Korea. Life in South Korea seems like a lot of hard work, but at least I would be safe and have peace of mind.

Case study 7

Gender: female

Age: 36

Hometown: Onsong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2005/2006)

Interviewed: 27 January 2007 in China

My father was a doctor and my mother was a housewife. I have an older brother and two younger sisters. I was married but my husband died of an illness. We had two children. My son is 16 years old and my daughter is 10 years old. I used to work at a museum. In 1996, I stopped getting paid and our government food rations from the Public Distribution System (PDS) also stopped. I was sent to work at a State-run farm, but they gave us so little food that I ran away. I had to eat alternative foods, which gave me digestive problems. I heard rumours about China and how you could earn lots of money. My cousin had been there before and said that he would accompany me. So we left in 2000. We crossed the Tumen River and went to the border town of Liang Shui where we knocked on all the doors but nobody would answer. Finally one did. My cousin asked the family to help me find a job and then left to go back to North Korea that evening. The family said that they knew a cousin who lived in Tumen, but when I went there, I found out that he was Han Chinese and no one in his family spoke Korean. So, I left and went back to Liang Shui. I couldn't find the same house but found another family who took me in. I asked them to find me a job but they said it was difficult. They told me that it was dangerous to work alone and that I couldn't survive on my own. They said that it was safer to get married to a Chinese man. That way I could earn some money and help out my family in North Korea. So, I married the *Chosun Jok* relative who came to visit the next day. He was a farmer. I helped him farm rice and corn. I gave birth to a daughter who is now six years old.

In May 2005, I was arrested in the village where I lived. The Chinese military police was waiting for me when I came home from work. They were not the local police but from Hunchun. I was taken to the

Hunchun border detention centre. They asked me questions like how I made a living, why I came to China and what I did in this country. They didn't hit me.

After two days, I was deported and sent to the *bowibu* in Saetbyul. I was there for 17 days. There were about 50 prisoners. I was strip searched for money. I didn't have any. If you have money and the guards find it, they take all of it. If you hand over the money to the guards, then they only take half of it. If they think you are hiding money, they will hit you until you give it up. During my preliminary examination, I was asked when I went to China, what I did there, how much money I made, if I had gone to church or met any South Koreans, Americans or CIA agents. I was even asked whether I had spoken about my experiences in prison with any reporters. I told them that that wasn't possible because I had not been arrested before. I told them that I had married a Chinese farmer but I didn't say anything about having a child. I wasn't hit, but you do get hit if they think you're lying. Male prisoners get hit more. I was called out for interrogation three times during my stay. They asked the same questions. I spent the rest of the time sitting still, which is very hard to do. It hurts to not move your body. The only break was 10 minutes of exercise each day and mealtimes. In one room, there were about 13 people. We had to ask permission to go to the toilet. The toilet had no doors so you could see the top of people's heads.

In mid-June 2005, I was sent to the Saetbyul *nodong danryundae*. There were about 60 prisoners. We woke up at 5am and ran while chanting re-education messages. Our work day began after breakfast. We were forced to weed in the rice paddies from 7am to 7pm with only a thirty minute lunch break. Men were hit more than women because women usually do what they're told. If you arrived late for work or didn't work hard, you'd get punished. The usual punishment was to squat and stand for 100 times. One 70-year-old woman couldn't keep up so she was punished. There is no respect for the elderly in prison. She couldn't do the punishment, so she yelled at the guards to just kill her instead. I was also punished once when my back was aching so much that I couldn't keep up. So I had to do the squat-and-stand punishment. The toughest part of prison life was the severity of the exercises. The guards constantly make you do things. You can never rest. There were two pregnant prisoners. They didn't have to work. They just had to sit quietly in the prison camp. Both were released early and sent home after signing a document stating that they would not return to China. The treatment of pregnant women has changed. Now they don't make the pregnant women abort their babies. For food, we were given corn rice and vegetable soup. I slept in a room with 20 other female prisoners. There was a toilet outside the building. In the morning we were given 10 minutes to wash. There were seven washbasins for 10 prisoners per session. We washed our face and brushed our teeth. Nobody could wash their body.

After two weeks, I was sent to the Onsong *boansung* with eight others. I was there for 33 days. I was called out for preliminary examination three times in total. I was asked the same questions to which I gave the same answers. They were trying to corroborate my answers with those I had given at the Saetbyul *bowibu*. They also did a check on what kind of help I had given to my family while I was in China. The rest of the time, I had to sit still. Food was brought from home, but for those without families, food was provided by the *boansung*.

I was then sent to a smaller *boansung* in a district of Onsong where I was held for two months. There were about 120 prisoners. We weren't questioned anymore. For food, they gave us cornhusk rice and vegetable soup. Towards the end of my incarceration, I was tried with one other woman and three men. Aside from the prisoners, there were six people present: two judges, defence lawyer, public prosecutor, *boansung* supervisor, and the *boansung* director. They asked me why I went to China. I told them it was because I had to earn money. They said my act of border crossing was a betrayal of my country. They accused me of being a sexual toy for my Chinese husband. I told them that I didn't do things like that. I defended myself by saying that I was just trying to survive. I had to find help in China. My husband helped me so that I could support my family in North Korea. The court members ruled that this was not a justifiable defence, as I had clearly broken the law. I received a sentence of one year and two months in a *kyohwaso*. After announcing the sentence to the five of us, one of the judges informed us that we could appeal the sentence within seven days, but we all declined. The whole procedure took about two hours.

I was sent to *kyohwaso* number 11 in Joongsan, South Pyongan Province. There were about 3,300 prisoners in total. There were 300 prisoners in one room and divided into squads of 30-40 prisoners. This facility was not only for border crossers but for normal criminals who were caught stealing, trafficking, prostituting, producing pornography videotapes and defrauding the State. Female prisoners had their hair cut short to 5cm in length and male prisoners had their head shaved. We wore a triangular headscarf and a uniform without a collar. Other prisoners had to wear normal clothes because they ran out of uniforms. We woke up at 6am and after washing up and eating breakfast, we walked for 30 minutes to the rice fields where we worked from 7am to 5:30pm with half an hour for lunch. Through hard labour, we were working off our crime. After dinner, we had to attend a two-hour re-education class. We were allowed to sleep at around 9 or 10pm. I was never hit but other female prisoners were. The guards or team leaders hit them using their hands or kicked them. Prisoners were sometimes hit very hard, but the guards and team leaders were careful not to do serious injury as they could get in trouble for it. There was a medical clinic at the *kyohwaso*, but there was no medicine, so all the doctor could do was diagnose your illness and if it was serious, he told you to lie down. He might give you some scorched rice to eat but other than that, nothing more could be done for you. During mealtimes, we ate tofu beans, cornhusk rice and rotten cabbage soup. That was never enough food for the amount of work we had to do. I had to supplement my meals with other things. In prison, nobody could be picky about hygiene or food. We ate everything - grass, frogs, etc. Our bodies were covered with lice. We were given some time to wash our clothes but that didn't help much. Because our bodies were so weak, most of us didn't get our menstruation. The few who still did had to use their underclothes as sanitary napkins.

On 10 July 2006, I was released and sent home. I saw my son but not my daughter. During my absence, my mother had to give my daughter away to another family because there was not enough food. I couldn't stay in North Korea because I couldn't find a job and the Onsong town officials kept telling me to leave, as I didn't have residency there. There was nothing to eat at home so I saw no point in staying. After one month, I crossed the Tumen River alone and walked to Hunchun where I called my husband to come get me. After I had left, the Onsong townspeople began to harass and humiliate my mother because I had gone back to China. My mother found it so difficult to stay that she moved out and now lives with my younger sister in Kangwon Province.

My six-year-old daughter does not have *hukou* (household registration). I heard that it costs 2,000 yuan (US\$260) to get one. I would like to stay in China but I am afraid of getting arrested again. I might be killed for my crime the next time I get caught. I can't stop thinking about it. I know if I get caught again, I will have to kill myself. Even if I wanted to, I don't have the money to go to South Korea. As it is, we live a day-to-day existence here in China.

Case study 8

Gender: female

Age: 35

Hometown: Orang, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 3 (2005, 2002 and 2000/2001)

Interviewed: 21 January 2007 in China

In North Korea, I was a soldier and later found work as a cook. My father was an office manager and party member. I was also a party member until I was arrested and repatriated from China. I decided to go to China because of the food situation. When I was living in the military base, life was bearable but when I returned home, it was completely different. We had nothing to eat. When my younger sister died of starvation in 1997, I decided to go to China so that I could help out my family. I met a woman in Chongjin who suggested we do business together in China. I followed her to Onsong, near the Chinese border. She then asked me if I wanted to get married to a Chinese man. She said that I would have a good life and in three years, I could get *hukou* (household registration) and freely travel to North Korea. After we crossed the border, she tried to sell me into marriage, but I ran away. I went into the mountains and met a *Chosun Jok* farmer who was kind to me. I married him and we had two sons. I have been

arrested and deported three times.

First arrest:

In November 2000, I was arrested in Longjing and was repatriated to Hoeryong *bowibu* where I was for two months. I was interrogated on why I went to China, with whom, where I lived, if I listened to South Korean radio or watched South Korean TV programmes. I said that I was married to a Chinese man and had a child with him. The agents did not hit me.

In January 2001, I was sent to the *nodong danryundae* in Hoeryong for one month. There were more than 100 prisoners there. We had to work in the corn and bean fields. I was hit once because I didn't properly address a guard by calling him 'teacher'. In the *danryundae*, there were prison guards as well as team leaders. For food, we were given corn rice and salty soup. There were 20 people to one room with bunk beds. Since we couldn't go out of our rooms at night, we were given a bucket to use as a toilet, which we had to empty and clean in the morning.

I was then sent to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* for four months. There were about 1,000 people - all border crossers - in that facility. We were sent to work in corn, bean and potato fields. If you didn't work, you'd get hit. I was a team leader and was responsible for making sure that nobody ran away. We ate better here. We were given more rice and side dishes, plus some meat or food from the farms where we worked. There was also a medical facility.

In May 2001, I went to the Orang *boansung*. I was there for one month. For punishment, they made us sit perfectly still all day minus mealtimes and toilet breaks. There were five people to a room with a toilet. We had to ask permission to use the toilet. We slept with one thin blanket. It was cold and there was no heating in the room. I was sentenced to serve six months at the *nodong danryundae* in Orang.

I was transferred to the Orang *nodong danryundae* in June 2001. I had been there two months when a cellmate was about to be released. I gave her a letter to give to my husband. In it I wrote my desire to return to China. This cellmate was checked before she left the *danryundae* and in her pocket the guards found my letter and read it. Because of that, I was given a double sentence. So instead of serving a six-month term at the *danryundae*, I was given a one-year sentence at a *kyowhaso*. I was transferred to the *kyowhaso* number 55 in Yongkwang, South Hamgyeong Province where I served out the remaining 10 months.

Life at the *kyowhaso* was much harder. During the day, we worked long hours in the fields. We had to farm and put fertiliser in the corn and bean fields. I wasn't hit - you were only hit when you didn't do your work. We ate corn rice and salty soup. It was impossible to survive on the food they gave us. Some people died of malnutrition. There was a medical clinic but they didn't dispense any medicine.

On 25 June 2002, I was released after one year. They asked me if I would return to China. I told them I would not. I returned home by train and then in the same month made my way back to China with two of my siblings. We went to Onsong and then crossed the border by bribing a North Korean soldier by paying him 300 yuan (US\$40).

Second arrest:

In September 2002, I was living in Yanji. The police came to my house and arrested me. A neighbour had reported me to the police. I spent one week at the Tumen border detention centre before being deported to Onsong *bowibu* where I was for one month. I was then sent to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* for one month, followed by 10 days at the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso*. I spent a further two months at the Orang *boansung* where I was given a one-year sentence for re-crossing the border into China. I was to serve out my sentence again at the *kyowhaso* number 55. In October 2003, I was released. I stopped in Hoeryong before returning to China.

In 2004, my Chinese husband died of liver cancer. I had to send my sons, who were four and six years

old at the time, to an orphanage.

Third arrest:

In May 2005, I decided to go to South Korea. I went with some other North Koreans but were caught in Tianjin and arrested. After a month at the police station in Tianjin, I was sent to the Tumen border detention centre for another two months. I was then repatriated to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was incarcerated for one month. They asked me the same questions - whether I saw any South Korean TV programmes, went to church, with whom I went to China, etc. I said that I lived in the rural area and was caught there. I said nothing about Tianjin. Fortunately, the Chinese officials had not sent the arrest documents to North Korea - they just sent administrative details like my name and date of birth. The *bowibu* agents didn't hit but swore at me because I was nervous and sick so I wasn't able to speak clearly. They became suspicious and told me to stop lying.

At the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso*, the prisoners were taken to a water plant to work. We woke up at 5am and after washing our face, we had breakfast at 6am. Work began at 7am and didn't stop until 12pm when we ate lunch. We returned to the water plant at 1pm and didn't come back to the prison until 5 or 6pm. We ate dinner at 7pm and from 8-10pm we had to attend a re-education class. Food was relatively better because we were working hard. At the *jipkyulso*, we were given corn rice and salty soup but at the plant, we were given snacks such as biscuits, rice cake and bread in between work. There was no medical facility. If you were very sick, you just had to lie down in your room. There was no medicine available. At the *jipkyulso*, there were five pregnant women who had to work, but they weren't treated worse than us. I heard that before 2000 the guards used to kill the babies and were very harsh to the mothers but not now. They are sometimes even sent home.

After a month at the *jipkyulso*, the police came to pick me up to take me to the *boansung* in Orang. While they were drinking, I ran away because I knew that this time I could get the death penalty.

In December 2005, I left North Korea with an acquaintance and went to Yanji. I worked as a masseuse for one year. I was earning a lot, but had to quit because I had contracted laryngitis and was too weak to continue working.

I wouldn't mind living in China but because of the fear and insecurity, I would prefer to go to South Korea. To get to South Korea, you have to pay about 5,000 yuan (US\$650). I want to go there, earn money and come back to China. I never want to go back to North Korea. For the past three years, I've been living with my new husband and his mother. My husband does piecemeal work at an embroidery factory, but there is little work in the winter months. He earns about 200 yuan (US\$26) per set amount. I visit my sons twice a year at the orphanage. You're not allowed to visit them more than that. In 2003, my first husband and I paid 500 yuan (US\$65) for each child's *hukou* (household registration). When they grow up, I don't want them to marry a North Korean because they would suffer every time their wife gets arrested and sent back.

Case study 9

Gender: female

Age: 43

Hometown: Hoeryong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2005)

Interviewed: 25 January 2007 in China

I was in the Korean People's Army in Pyongyang for one year. Then I worked in a shoe factory in Hoeryong. I married and moved to Rajin Sonbong where I worked on a farm. At work, I lost my right arm when I fell off a truck. My husband and I returned to Hoeryong to live with my parents. I have a daughter who is now 20 years old.

On New Year's Day 2000, I went to China leaving behind my daughter. My husband had previously asked for a divorce so by then we were already separated. I went with a man and a woman. The man had been to China before so he knew the way. Once we got to China, I went to stay with my mother's relatives. I didn't work because it was too dangerous. In February 2001, I was introduced to a *Chosun Jok* man who ran a local store. I decided to marry him. I gave birth to a son in August 2002. In January 2007, my son finally got *hukou* (household registration). My husband and I paid 500 yuan (US\$65) to get it.

On 29 April 2005, I took a taxi to go to the market in Yanji. There I met a female acquaintance. While we were together, the Chinese police approached us and arrested both of us. I found out later that the police had been running surveillance on her because of her activities. She apparently was known to the police for helping North Koreans escape to South Korea. They wanted her, not me, but I was unfortunately with her at the time. I was taken to the Yanji police station and then transferred after two days to the Tumen border detention centre. The police asked me how I knew the woman and I told them that I didn't know about her activities. I was there for one month because there weren't enough North Koreans to send back so I had to wait until more arrived.

With 30 other prisoners, I was repatriated to Namyang and then sent on to the Onsong *bowibu*. The agents asked me where I lived, where other North Koreans in China lived, if I went to church or knew any South Koreans. I told them that I was married and had one son in China. They didn't hit or punish me for that. I told them I didn't do anything wrong.

After a week, I was sent to the Onsong *nodong danryundae*. There were about 100 prisoners at this facility - all border crossers. I was there for only two weeks. I was asked the same questions as the ones at the *bowibu*. I was exempt from work because I had a missing arm. The other prisoners, both men and women, were forced to work loading fertiliser, which they collected from the outhouses of schools, public offices and private homes. We were fed on corn rice - about three spoonfuls - and watery cabbage soup. There was a container of water that all the prisoners had to share to clean in the morning. We had to queue and get a bucketful between many people. We dipped our towels in it to wash our face. There wasn't enough water to wash our body. The water became dirty very quickly. The quantity of water was often not enough so those not fast enough didn't get any. Female prisoners used strips taken from their underclothes to use as sanitary napkins during their menstrual cycle. They sometimes had to use the strips again without washing them. There were toilets outside the building but you couldn't go whenever you wanted. There were set times - once in the morning and once in the afternoon. You had to queue but because there was only one toilet for men and one for women, many prisoners didn't bother and just went outside, anywhere. During the night, there was one urine bowl, which would overflow because it wasn't big enough. If prisoners were really sick, a doctor was called in from the outside and they were given some basic medicine. At the *danryundae*, the prisoners did everything together. Our collective behaviour included work, eating, washing, going to the toilet, sleeping, etc.

In June 2005, I was transferred to the Hoeryong *bowibu* where I stayed for only two days. I was asked the same questions and I answered them in the same way as I had done previously. I was never hit. The agents only hit you when they think you are lying. In the room where I slept, there were about 15 women. I don't know how many there were in total.

I was then transferred to the Hoeryong *anjunbu (boansung)*. It's the responsibility of the *anjunbu* to sift through the prisoners and decide who needs to get punished further and who gets released. They didn't hit us. I was released after one week because I had told them the truth from the very beginning. They wouldn't have believed me anyway if I had said that I didn't marry a Chinese man. I told them I married in order to survive. That was the truth.

When I was released in July 2005, I went to my brother's house in Hoeryong. I saw my daughter who was living in Chongjin. I had to leave her behind to return to China on 20 August 2005. I send her money whenever I can. I have to stay in China because I have a new husband and a child here. I can't abandon

my young son.

I registered with the local police in 2000 because they said that they would protect North Korean women. It also helps when you are trying to get a *hukou* for your child. If there is a police raid from the bigger cities to arrest North Koreans, our local police warn us with a telephone call. They give us enough time to escape.

My husband and I farm corn, beans and rice. I am happy with him so I will try to continue living in China. Sometimes because of the fear, I think it would be nice to go to South Korea where I would be entitled to citizenship.

Case study 10

Gender: female

Age: 38

Hometown: Orang, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2005)

Interviewed: 22 January 2007 in China

In North Korea, I was a farmer and so were my parents. We grew rice and corn. I was married but I divorced my husband after one year because he didn't want to work. I have no children. I left North Korea because life was too difficult. I heard that you could eat better so I left for China alone without anyone's help. I crossed the Tumen River and took a ride on a truck to Kaishantun in February 2004. I met a North Korean man who told me not to stay in the border area, but instead to go inland where it was safer. I met an elderly *Chosun Jok* woman in a village called Chaoyang, near Kaishantun, who gave me some food. At first she didn't want me to stay with her because it was dangerous harbouring a North Korean, but I begged her until she changed her mind. After three months with her, I left for Yanji in May 2004. I met a *Chosun Jok* man in Kong Shin and lived with him for three months. He made a living by catching dogs and selling them at the local market. I left him because we lived in abject poverty and there was no possibility of bettering our lives. In Yanji, a relative found me an apartment. I did seasonal agricultural work (corn, bean and rice) in the spring and autumn where I was able to earn 500-600 yuan (US\$65-80) per month - sometimes even 800 yuan (US\$104).

In March 2005, I was arrested on the streets of Longjing while I was trying to take a taxi. Three policemen approached me because they noticed that I didn't speak Chinese and was looking lost and confused. They took me to the Longjing border detention centre where I was for two days. They asked for my personal details and what I did in China. I was then repatriated to the Hoeryong *bowibu* where I was imprisoned for one month. They asked me why I had left North Korea, how I got to China, what I did there, etc. I had to go through this interrogation process for 10 days. I told them everything but they didn't believe me. So the agents kicked and hit me. When my interrogation was over, I had to still stay there until the police from Chongjin came to pick me up. During the day, we exercised a little but for the majority of the time we had to sit totally still with our heads bowed. In one room, there were about 30 women. We slept on the floor. The toilet was outside.

I was at the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* for one month. They didn't interrogate me but I had to wait there until the *anjunbu (boansung)* from Orang came. I didn't work, only exercised a little and then sat again very still with my head bowed. We had 10-minute rest breaks to stretch and move around a bit. There were about 20 women to a room - I'm not sure how many there were in total.

I spent three days at the Orang *anjunbu (boansung)* where I was interrogated again on my activities in China. I was told that I would spend six months at the Orang *nodong danryundae* for illegal border crossing into China.

At the Orang *nodong danryundae*, prisoners were sent to State-run farms where we had to dig, sow seeds, weed and harvest rice and corn in the autumn. In one room, there were about 20 women. At

meals, we were given cornhusk porridge. If we didn't work hard or listen to the team leader, we got hit by the guards. Once I was not feeling well and didn't work fast enough. A guard kicked me and although he hurt my back, I still had to continue working. He yelled at me saying how I had to work off my crime for going to China and to stop pretending to be sick or tired. The team leaders supervised our work, but they never hit us. If you were really sick, you could go to the hospital outside the *danryundae*. I was released in November 2005. I first returned home and then in January 2006 I returned to China.

It's hard to live in China because of the constant fear of being arrested and deported. I want to earn money and return to North Korea but there is still a severe shortage of food so there's no point in returning now. Once I tried to contact my younger sister and went to the border area but I was unsuccessful. I'm sad that I cannot help her out. I don't contact other North Koreans living in Yanji because it's not safe. I don't like to go outside my apartment. I stay mostly indoors. Despite all this, life is still better in China than in North Korea. I would like to go to South Korea but it's completely out of my financial means - it costs about 5,000 yuan (US\$650). Plus, the journey is very dangerous and difficult.

Case study 11

Gender: female

Age: 30

Hometown: Kyongsong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2004)

Interviewed: 29 January 2007 in China

I worked at a ceramics factory in North Korea. So did both my parents. My father died of a blood clot in the brain in 1994. I have three older brothers who all live in North Korea. The two eldest are bus drivers. The youngest of the three contracted tuberculosis and might be dead now.

We were having economic difficulties at home and had very little food to eat. I met a man in Hoeryong who told me that I could earn lots of money in China. I had a cousin who had gone to Yanji so I thought maybe she could also help me find a job. In June 1998, I decided to go with the man to China. We crossed the Tumen River - the water was waist high - and walked to a nearby village. The man told me that he'd help me find a job and also my cousin but I found out that he just wanted to sell me. He took me to Wangqing and introduced me to a Han Chinese farmer. The farmer paid the man 6-7,000 yuan (US\$780-910) for me. I didn't get any money. At first I didn't want to marry the farmer but the broker told me that it was better to marry and that I needed protection from a Chinese family. So, I changed my mind and married the farmer. We gave birth to a son who is 9 years old. I can't leave now since I have to raise a family.

On 29 September 2004, I was attending a Bible studies class at a friend's house when the police came and arrested me. I was taken to the police station in Wangqing. The next day, I was sent to the Tumen border detention centre. They fed us well, but I was so upset that I lost my appetite and hardly ate anything. I regretted it when I was in North Korea.

After five days, I was repatriated to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was held for one and a half months. There were 100 prisoners. I was stripped searched. I told the guards that I didn't have any money but they didn't believe me. They made me squat and stand many times to see if any money would come out. I was called out for interrogation twice. The *bowibu* agents asked me what I did in China, when I went there, who brought me over, and whether I watched South Korean TV programmes, met any South Koreans or attended church. I didn't tell them I attended church, but I said that I was married to a Han Chinese farmer and had a son with him. They didn't have a problem with the marriage or the birth of a son, but they wanted to know why I had married a Han Chinese. There were two pregnant prisoners at the *bowibu*. The guards didn't treat the pregnant women any worse than they treated us. We all had to sit still when we weren't being questioned. If we moved, talked or stole food, we were hit. I saw some of

the prisoners get hit.

I spent the next 20 days at the Onsong *nodong danryundae* where there were about 50 border crossers and almost as many common criminals. We had to wake up at 5am to wash. A male prisoner drew water and poured it into a container. From that container, prisoners in pairs drew a pail of water and washed. At 6am, we ate breakfast, which consisted of corn rice and salty soup. We then went out to our work assignments. Everyone had to work - even the elderly but they worked less than we did. It was mid-November so there was no farming work. Instead, we worked in road construction and also made ropes from rice stalks. I wasn't hit but I've seen prisoners get hit by the team leaders. Both men and women were hit. We ate lunch at 1pm and came home at 5:30pm. When we came back to the prison, we were checked for any food or other items we might have stolen from outside the prison camp. After dinner, we had re-education class at 7pm where we learned how to be good citizens and obey society's rules and regulations. We were allowed to sleep at 10pm. Our room was so small that we had to sleep on top of one another. There were no medical facilities at the *danryundae*. Prisoners suffering from diarrhoea were given some medicine once in a while.

In December 2004, I was sent to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso*. There were about 200 prisoners. We worked at a site where they were building a water plant. The prisoners had to pick out small stones from a pile, which were then used to construct the plant walls. We were also sent to the mountains to log. We carried the logs down the mountain working in pairs - one in front and the other in the back. We used wires to secure and carry the logs. It was very hard work. For food, we were given corn rice and salty soup. We were allowed to wash every two weeks. We washed collectively sharing a small bar of soap among 10 prisoners. During my incarceration, two female prisoners tried to escape. When they were eventually caught, the team leaders gathered all the prisoners and in front of us, the team leaders pulled the women's hair and kicked their bodies. I saw them the next day and they both had bruises and swollen faces. They were forced to work that day without shoes. There was one doctor at the *jipkyulso* but not a lot of medicine available. If prisoners got sick, the best they could hope for is a couple of days off from work.

In January 2005, I was picked up by the police from my hometown and taken to the Kyongsong *boansung*. There were four other border crossers with me. I was there for a couple of days. I was asked the same questions as in the *bowibu*. You had to answer them exactly the same way or they interrogated you further. I was put on trial with another prisoner, which lasted 40 minutes. There were about five or six officials present, including a judge but no defence lawyer. I had to read out loud my confession. Then they asked me if it was true. I said yes. The officials sentenced me to six months in a *kyohwaso*, but I was released because of time served. They multiplied by two the four months it had taken for me to get from the Onsong *bowibu* to the *anjunbu* so according to this calculation, I had spent the equivalent of eight months in prison. I would have been sent to the *kyohwaso* in Pyongsung. Before being released, I had to sign a declaration never to return to China.

I was sent home and stayed there for four months. A probation officer from the *boansung* came by to check on me everyday. I waited for a holiday, May Day on the first of May, to escape. I knew the probation officer would not work on that day. I crossed into China with the help of a guide. When my husband came to pick me up at a designated place, he paid the guide 1,000 yuan (US\$130) for his help.

When I was in prison, I felt shame that so many North Koreans had to suffer because our country was so poor. I also thought about my son. I missed him a lot. He currently doesn't have *hukou* (household registration) but we can get him one at the local district police if we pay 500 yuan (US\$65). I would like to go to South Korea. I have even met with a broker but I need to save a lot of money first in order to pay for the journey. Life is not bad in China, but the problem is the lack of freedom and not having legal status. I don't want to get arrested again. But life in China is still better than living in North Korea. At least, I can eat well here.

Case study 12

Gender: female

Age: 41

Hometown: Chongjin, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2004)

Interviewed: 29 January 2007 in China

I worked in railway construction for three years and then I fished for a living. Both my parents were manual labourers. My father died in 1994 of an alcohol-related illness. My mother died in 2006 of starvation. I have one brother and two sisters who all live in North Korea. In December 1998, I went to Namyong to collect some money that I had lent to a man. But when I got there, he wasn't there. I waited for him for a month, but he never showed up. I was getting very desperate because I needed the money and the thought of returning home empty-handed made me upset. I met a man who suggested that I work in China. I felt that had no choice but to go with him. So in January 1999, I crossed the Tumen River and stayed at his relatives' house in Tumen for two days. During that time, he suggested that I marry. He said that living in China was much better than returning to North Korea. I agreed and through him, I met my *Chosun Jok* husband. There was no exchange of money for this introduction. My husband is a daily labourer who suffers from slight brain damage due to a car accident.

In 2004, I got in contact with relatives living in South Korea. My cousin gave me money to come to South Korea so I arranged the trip with a broker. I paid him 130,000 yuan (US\$16,900) including 20,000 yuan (US\$2,600) for a false *hukou* (household registration), ID card and passport. I bought a flight ticket to Seoul through a travel agency and pretended to go on holiday. In June 2004, I checked in at Yanji Airport and went through immigration. I was about to board the plane when an immigration officer approached me and asked to see my documents again. I was taken to a room where I was questioned for two hours. When they found out that I was North Korean, they confiscated my bags, jewellery and 1,000 yuan (US\$130) in cash. They then sent me to the Tumen border detention centre. I was there for over two months because I had to wait for the broker to be tried and convicted. During that time, I contacted my husband's family to ask them to bring me some warm clothes. All I was wearing at that time was a thin summer skirt and top.

In September 2004, I was repatriated and sent to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was held for one month. There were about a hundred prisoners. I was stripped searched but I had no money on me. During my interrogation, I denied trying to go to South Korea. I said that I was at the airport because I was saying goodbye to a relative who was going to study in Japan. I denied it to the very end. When I wasn't being interrogated, I had to sit still with the others. I prayed and even sang church songs for comfort. One of the female prisoners saw me praying and recognised the church songs so she told on me. During my next interrogation session, the agents asked if I attended church in China. When I said no, they slapped and kicked me on my back. When I confessed, they didn't hit me any more, but just asked details about it. I said that there was nothing wrong with going to church - it wasn't an act against the North Korean State. It was a good place where good things were done. I also told them that I had married a Chinese man because otherwise I couldn't have survived. They didn't hit me, just taunted me about it. I told them I didn't have a child with him, which was true, because he already had one.

At the *bowibu*, there were three rooms - each had about 30 prisoners. There was a toilet with no door. You could see people's heads. There was no privacy but everybody was suffering so much in this facility that nobody cared about modesty. We were given a small bucket of water to wash. I saw other prisoners get hit. Sometimes guards hit so hard that the prisoners bled.

In October 2004, I was then sent to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* for another month. There were about 60 prisoners. I didn't work because I wasn't a resident of Onsong so the guards were afraid that we would run away. Only Onsong residents were sent out on work assignments. The prison officials asked us questions only on arrival. For the rest of the time I had to sit still doing nothing. We could go to the toilet in the outhouse twice a day - once in the morning and once in the evening. When the others

were working, we were locked inside where we had to use a urine bowl. For food, we ate barley rice and salty soup. I got sick because I kept thinking of all the money I had lost. I began getting nosebleeds. A kind guard gave me three cucumbers to eat, which gave me the moral strength to carry on. I thought if a guard could be kind to a prisoner when even prisoners were unkind to each other, then I could find the strength to live.

In November 2004, I was transferred to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso*. There were about a hundred prisoners and we were all worked to death there. We were sent to building construction sites where we carried, in pairs, stones and cement. I was hit a lot - all over my body - because I was not walking fast enough. My legs hurt a lot so I couldn't keep up with the others. Only the prison guards hit us, not the team leaders. I also weeded in the cabbage patch. I was hit for various reasons - because I didn't work hard enough, I was too slow or I had missed a weed. I couldn't bear it anymore so I wrote a note to my sister asking her to give some money to the *jipkyulso* guards. I asked one of the farmers to deliver the note to my sister. Thanks to her help, I was transferred out after one month - otherwise I could have been there for much longer. Prisoners who live far from Chongjin have to wait at the *jipkyulso* until the *boansung* from their hometown comes to pick them up. This usually takes a long time, so the prisoners' family sometimes give food and money to *boansung* officers in their hometown so that their loved ones could come out of the *jipkyulso* faster.

In December 2004, I was taken to the Chongjin district *boansung*. I was the only prisoner and I was held for 40 days. This was where I was supposed to receive a sentence to either serve time at a *danryundae* or a *kyohwaso*. But because my sister bribed the *boansung* officer, I was released.

I stayed at home for 20 days. Everyday, a probation officer from the *boansung* came to check up on me. He told me not to go back to China, but I couldn't remain in North Korea. My mother was sick and there wasn't any food. I had to go back. So on 6 February 2005, I returned to China without telling anyone. I first went to Musan and from there I had a guide take me to Helong. I called my husband's family from there and they came to pick me up. They paid the guide 1,000 yuan (US\$130).

I would really like to go to South Korea but when I think of the punishment I would receive in North Korea if I got caught again, I lose my nerve. I can't go back and get punished. If China didn't repatriate North Koreans, I could live well and happily in this country.

Case study 13

Gender: female

Age: 68

Hometown: Suhsangdo, South Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 2 (2004/2005 and 2003)

Interviewed: 28 January 2007 in China

I left North Korea in 1997 because of the food shortages. We no longer received food rations from the PDS (cuts began in 1994). There was no work because all the factories shut down. Many people died. You saw corpses on the streets. I used to work at a medicine factory and my husband worked at a factory that produced car parts. He died in 1978. We had a son and a daughter, but both died of starvation in the mid-1990s. I came to China with a friend who knew the route. From Musan, we crossed the Tumen River and went to Helong and then to Yanji. In Yanji, I met a very nice *Chosun Jok* woman who took me to her home and helped me.

First arrest:

I was first arrested in December 2003. I let a North Korean man stay with me for a couple of days, but I guess we caught the eye of a neighbour because the police came to my house and arrested us. After one week at the Wangqing police station, I was taken to the Tumen border detention centre where I was incarcerated for five days.

I was repatriated and sent via Namyang to the Onsong *bowibu*. I was there for two weeks. There were about 150 prisoners. I had to take my clothes off, put my hands behind my head and squat and stand repeatedly. They wanted to see if I was hiding any money. I was called in once for the preliminary examination. I gave them my details about where I lived in North Korea, my parents and what I did in China. I wasn't hit. I was told that Kim Jong Il had issued a decree stating that those who left North Korea during the famine period shouldn't be punished severely. The State forgave us for going to China.

All prisoners who lived south of North Hamgyeong Province were first sent to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso*. It was like a holding cell for those who were waiting to be transferred. The prison officials checked that the personal details you gave them were correct and consistent. If they weren't - for example if your registration hadn't been updated - then you were there longer until everything was sorted out. There were about 200 prisoners. I didn't work because I was over 60 years old. Under Kim Il Sung, elderly people received a lot of benefits. There were two pregnant prisoners who were also exempt from work. They stayed in the camp with the elderly and sick. The younger prisoners worked in the State-run farms, which provided food for the *jipkyulso* staff. I was never hit - prisoners only got hit if they didn't follow the rules. During mealtimes, we were given corn powder rice and salty cabbage soup.

After one month, the *anjunbu* (*boansung*) picked me up and took me to the local police station in my hometown of Suhsangdo. There were three prisoners. I was only there for three days. The police asked me the same questions as the *bowibu*. After verifying the answers with the previous ones, they let me go. I was not tried or sentenced. I did nothing wrong. It was the North Korean State that failed to feed us. I don't think the police saved me from the *nodong danryundae* or *kyohwaso* because I was elderly. It was because of my good character.

I spent three days at my sister's home before going back to my *Chosun Jok* friend in China. I didn't have any choice. There was nothing to eat and nobody in North Korea to help me.

Second arrest:

I decided to go to South Korea with seven other North Koreans. Two *Chosun Jok* brokers arranged the trip and told us all to meet in Yanji on 2 May 2004. From there we took a train to Dalian, Liaoning Province and then a boat to Weihai, Shandong Province. In two taxis, we went towards our destination, but the broker in our taxi noticed that we were being followed by the police so we went off route and stayed overnight at his relative's house. We went to the designated meeting place the next day but because we had arrived a day later, nobody was there. We had to wait until another date could be arranged. The broker got in touch with the others and set a new meeting day and time. But the evening before at 8pm, the police came to our hiding place and arrested us. The police had apparently been given a tip from the Yanji police. We were taken to the police station in Weihai and interrogated one by one. One of the North Koreans was released after three days. We found out then that he was the spy who told on us. We then had to wait three months at the Tumen border detention centre until the two brokers were prosecuted.

In September 2004, we were deported and sent to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was held for two months. This time I was hiding money in my anus, which I successfully managed to hide from them. There were 150 prisoners - several of them also had been caught trying to go to South Korea. The agents interrogated me on why I went back to China and why I wanted to go to South Korea. The crime that I had committed was severe but I told the agents that the Chinese authorities were bad because they didn't just repatriate us but tricked us with a sting operation. They also lied about not sending the arrest documents (with information on trying to escape to South Korea) to the North Korean authorities. I told them that I wanted to go to South Korea not because I liked the country or hated North Korea, but because of the desperate food situation. They didn't hit or ask me any further questions. During my incarceration, I witnessed two women and six men die. Some were beaten to death while the others died of an intestinal disorder.

In November 2004, I was transferred to the *bowibu* in Hamhung where they ran a background check on

me and asked me the same questions as the agents in Onsong did. I was questioned for three days. Each day I had a different interrogator. They all asked me if I listened to South Korean radio, watched their programmes or read their newspapers. They also asked me whether I attended church in China. I said no to all of the questions and responded in the same way as I had previously done at the Onsong *bowibu*. My last day of questioning was conducted by a very imposing agent, but he didn't hit me. The rest of the time I had to sit perfectly still and not say a word. One time the guard caught me dozing off while seated. He made me hang on to the cell bars for 10 minutes using my arms and thighs. For food, we were given corn rice and seaweed soup. I pretended to be sick so they released me after one month. I returned to my sister's house in December 2004 and stayed with her for four months. There was a probation officer who kept an eye on me, to make sure that I didn't escape to China again. I gave him some money so that he would stop following my movements. Then in May 2005, I went with another elderly woman to China.

I am currently living with an elderly *Chosun Jok* vegetable farmer. I help him with his work. Life in China is better than in North Korea, but you never feel fully safe or comfortable. I am afraid of being arrested again. I need money and would like to go to South Korea, but the broker must be trustworthy.

Case study 14

Gender: female

Age: 47

Hometown: Hoeryong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 4 (2004, 2003, 2001 and 1998)

Interviewed: 11 February 2006 in South Korea

I lived in Hoeryong with my husband, two daughters and a son. I was a housewife and my husband was an electrician. I went to China in 1997 because it was hard to live in North Korea. My family couldn't eat. We went many days without eating anything. I went with a woman who knew a safe route because she had been to China before. I had aunts in China, so I went to stay with them. I wanted to do business. I had some family antiques but I found out that they weren't worth anything. My aunts didn't have any money, so I went to work in restaurants. I also worked as a domestic worker.

First arrest:

I was arrested and repatriated to North Korea four times. The first time was in 1998. The Chinese police caught me in Dasu, a town near Yanji. I was taken to Yanji police station and then transferred to the Tumen border detention centre. I was then deported to the Hoeryong *bowibu* where I spent one month. I was searched and interrogated on my activities in China. In the room where I slept, there were 25 female prisoners. There were two rooms for women and two for men.

When the *bowibu* agents were convinced that I was telling the truth, I was transferred to the *nodong danryundae* in Hoeryong where I was incarcerated for another month. There were about 100 prisoners. We had to get up every morning at 5am to get firewood from the mountains. At 7am we had breakfast, which consisted of 30-40 corn kernels. Then we worked at a fish farm. When a bulldozer dug up sand, our job was to transport the sand into a cart and deposit it at a designated place. You always had to run. If you didn't, the team leaders hit you with a stick. We even had to run with the empty cart on the return journey. If we didn't fill the cart high enough with sand, we were also hit. At the end of the day, all of us could be hit as a collective punishment for not having worked hard enough.

One time a young man stole some food and got caught. That night he ran away but was caught by the prison guards. The next day, all the prisoners were gathered. The man was in a sitting position with his hands tied. The team leader forced two of the prisoners to take two thick sticks and hit the man. At first the two refused, so the team leader hit them. The two prisoners, having no choice, began to take turns hitting the man's knees. The message was that by hitting his knees, the man would not be able to run

away again. They broke his right knee, it was bleeding very badly. Afterwards, he walked by dragging his broken knee. He later died because the knee didn't heal properly.

My birthday was in August. It was very hot and sweaty. It was 12 noon and I was looking forward to the meeting time when I would get to see my daughters. But the prison guards gathered us together and told us to find a big rock and stand in line. Then they made us run three laps around a field the size of a football stadium with the rock on our back. We were hungry, tired and sweaty. The rock was rubbing the skin off my back. Many collapsed. The guards hit those who didn't run fast enough. Then we were told to squat and stand with our arms outstretched 1000 times. I did it 150 times and because I was doing it in earnest, I was allowed to stop. The guards sent us to wash up at a murky pond. We were all so thirsty that all of us charged towards the pond. The strongest got there first, the weaker had to wait and be satisfied with what was left. The water was not clean or fit for drinking but none of us cared. I was finally able to see my daughters who were waiting for me with food that they had prepared.

When I was released, I returned home for a while. I eventually went back to China in 1999 with a woman I knew.

Second arrest:

In China, I found work in restaurants and as a nanny in people's homes. I was caught by the Chinese police in 2000 or 2001 - I can't remember exactly - on the streets outside my house. I think a Chinese neighbour had reported me.

I spent only two or three days at the Hoeryong *bowibu*. Then I was sent to the Hoeryong *nodong danryundae*. I was there for a month. There were about 90 prisoners. The daily routine was pretty much the same as before. For food, we were given corn gruel made from corn powder - the kind that Chinese farmers feed to their animals. I got up at sunrise, around 5am to do chores before our farming work. We had to get logs from the mountains. First I sawed the wood, cut off the branches and then dragged it down the mountain. Women had to carry logs that were 20-30cm in diameter and about 8 metres long. We carried them alone without any help. It was easier in the winter because the logs slid on the snow, but not in the spring when it was muddy so they would get stuck. The guards hit you if you didn't hurry. When we were finished at 7am, we ate breakfast.

When I was released, I went home. I tried to live in North Korea, but it was too difficult to get by with a criminal record. We had no home because we had sold it before. My husband was living at a friend's house. So, I decided to return to China in 2001. This time I went alone.

Third arrest:

In 2002, I was working at a restaurant in Yanji when the Chinese police came and arrested me and took me to the local police station. From the Tumen border detention centre, I was repatriated to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was held for one month. There were about 160 prisoners at this facility. Afterwards, I was transferred to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* where I spent another month. There were more than 200 prisoners. Since it was autumn, we had to harvest cabbages and rice. For food, we had very small portions of corn rice - about five spoonfuls in soup. The living conditions were terrible at the *danryundae*. 20-25 women slept in a small, crowded room. Our bodies were full of lice. Because I wasn't eating properly, my hair fell out in lumps - I still have bald patches today. Due to malnutrition, my nails were so weak that they would turn over.

Fourth arrest:

I went back to China in early 2004. The police crackdowns were getting more severe so in March 2004, my two daughters and I decided to go with eight other North Koreans to South Korea via Mongolia. We travelled from Dandong towards the Chinese-Mongolian border. Nine of us were caught in Inner Mongolia by the Chinese border guards while trying to cross into Mongolia. I was afraid to return to North Korea, so I tried to kill myself by taking a large dose of sleeping pills. I woke up in a hospital two days later. I stayed in the hospital for another two days and then was transferred to a border detention centre

near the Mongolian border, where I remained for 20 days. Then my daughters and I were transferred to the Dandong border detention centre briefly before we were deported.

We were sent to the *bowibu* across the border in Sinuiju. The first thing they did was check our bodies for money. A female guard searched all the female prisoners. She wore rubber gloves and checked our vagina for any hidden money. After each prisoner, she put her gloved hand in a bucket of disinfectant and searched the next prisoner.

Before we had been deported, my daughters and I had agreed not to say anything about trying to get to South Korea. We decided to lie and say that we went to China because my eldest daughter was going to marry a Chinese man. But because we were caught along the Chinese-Mongolian border, the *bowibu* agents didn't believe us so they beat us with their hands, shoes, broom - whatever they could find. They broke my ribs. I was interrogated for hours. One security agent would start, then he would take a break and another would continue in his place. They were always men. It was like that for two weeks. My face and body was full of bruises. Part of my face still aches today. When I finally confessed, the beatings stopped. My daughters were sent home for a month's rest (before being sent to the Hoeryong *nodong danryundae* - but the eldest escaped to China so she didn't go) because I had convinced the agents that my daughters were just blindly following me.

I was then transferred to the *bowibu* in Hoeryong. I was in a small room with a tiny window with 25 other women. I had to sit down completely still, without moving at all, from 5am to 10pm. If you moved, the officers would hit you. Sitting still is more difficult than doing hard labour. The North Korean authorities consider one day of sitting still equal to two days of hard labour. The room smelled so badly. The stench was very strong because there was a toilet in the corner. There were designated times to go to the toilet, for example, after meals, but if you couldn't wait, you had to ask permission. If the guards let you, then you had to go to the toilet in front of everyone. The toilet was only partially blocked by a low barrier.

A *bowibu* officer pulled a prisoner out of the room for interrogation. They hit the others but not me because I had already confessed. I just had to verify the information that I had given in Sinuiju. They wanted to know who my friends were, what friends I had and what they did, the names of North Koreans who were still in China, as well as the names of Chinese and South Korean people, including Christian missionaries.

We had three meals per day that lasted 10 minutes each. The meals consisted of corn gruel, that is, corn powder mixed with water and a bit of salt. We sometimes had *kimchi*.^{*} I was always so hungry. I felt so envious of those with family members who brought them food.

The worst thing about the *bowibu* was that there was no running water. The prison guards gave us one bucket of water a day to share amongst 25 women. There was a hierarchy in place where people who had been there longer had access to the water first. Only after they washed were we then able to wash. The dirt just fell off our bodies. We had to rinse our towels in the same bucket after wiping our bodies with it. You can imagine how dirty it was. Some of the women were going through their menstrual cycle. After we cleaned our bodies, then we had to use the same water to clean the floor of the room. Then finally the water was used to flush the toilet.

After a month, I was sent to the Hoeryong *nodong danryundae* where I was incarcerated for four months. I was forced to do construction work. Labour at the prison camp was seen as re-education punishment not as a means to kill you. My job was to transport stones and cement in a cart. Of course everyone had to work - even if you were sick. Nobody would dare to refuse. If you didn't work hard enough, the guards would hit you. Those who the guards thought were pretending to be sick were hit. You weren't treated like humans. Prisoners who were genuinely ill were sent to the clinic and if their illness was verified then they were given some days off.

^{*} *Kimchi* is a spicy Korean vegetable (usually cabbage or turnip) side dish seasoned with red chilli pepper and garlic.

Food was worse than at the other detention facilities. Prisoners were so hungry that they ate anything - bark, leaves, grass, etc. We worked hard without caring about our bodies. I had so little nourishment that my head would spin and I would easily get dizzy. I couldn't work like I used to before. My ribs broke again because of a fight I had with a guard. Because the work was too heavy for me, I asked the guard if I could change it. He hit me because I had been disrespectful. I didn't use the honorific form when addressing him. He was so young that I felt he was like my son, so I used the familiar form. When he hit me, I was so upset that I threw down my cart. The stones in the cart then fell in front of him. They didn't hit him but they landed close enough to enrage him. He kicked me in the chest. I fell down and the other female prisoners gathered around and hugged me. After that, I couldn't work anymore and spent the rest of my incarceration in the clinic. Due to my injury, I was released early from prison. I had spent only four months out of a six-month sentence at the *danryundae*. It took me two months to fully recover from my injury and be able to walk again.

In December 2004, I took my son and crossed into China. On the way to Yanji, we got lost in the mountains. We hadn't eaten for four days. Finally I knocked on a door and begged for food. A man lived there by himself and he was at first reluctant to help us. I asked him to just give us the corn powder (that is used as animal feed). He felt so sorry for us that he invited us in and fed us. I couldn't keep the food down because I hadn't eaten for so long. We spent two days there. Then we went to stay with an elderly *Chosun Jok* woman whom I knew from my previous stays. We stayed with her for a month. I left my son with her and went to Yanji where I found work as a domestic worker. I cooked, cleaned and took care of an elderly woman. I was there for a month and was paid 500 yuan (US\$65). I then worked for another Chinese family for a month before finally deciding to go to South Korea with my son.

We went with a 33-year-old North Korean woman and her son. We travelled by bus for three days through China to the Lao border. Then we crossed into Laos on foot. We took a van from the Lao border into a city - I don't remember the name. We took a boat and travelled down the Mekong River into Thailand. From there we took a bus to Bangkok. We arrived in Bangkok in March 2005 where we remained for three and a half months under the care and protection of a Korean church. We were interviewed three times by the South Korean Embassy officials and finally given permission to go to South Korea in July 2005.

I now live in Seoul with my husband, son and two daughters. I am interested in training as a masseuse so I can work in a sauna. I heard that you could make a lot of money doing that. My husband does not have a job. My youngest daughter and son go to school. My eldest daughter just arrived in South Korea so she still is unsure of what she wants to do. *(In February 2007, she travelled to Laos to free her mother from a Lao jail. After some negotiations with the South Korean authorities, her mother was released and resumed her journey to South Korea.)*

Case study 15

Gender: male

Age: 27

Hometown: Pyongyang

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2003)

Interviewed: 12 February 2007 in South Korea

I lived in Pyongyang where I was a university student. My father was a high ranking Party member, but he got into trouble. He was taken away and sent to a *kwanliso* (political prison). My whole family was exiled to a town in North Hamgyeong Province. We were spared from following my father to the *kwanliso* because of the special commendations my father and grandfather both received for fighting against the Americans during the Korean War. I found out later that my father had died in the *kwanliso*.

I went to China alone in 1999 because of my family situation. I survived by working on farms and in restaurants. I even worked for a South Korean NGO. In May 2003 through a tip from one of my neighbours, the police came to my house and arrested me. I was living in Yanji at the time. I was taken

to the Yanji police station and kept there for two weeks. I was then transferred to the Tumen border detention centre where I remained for one and a half months before being deported to North Korea.

In July 2003, I was sent to the Onsong *bowibu*. There were about 100 prisoners - about 17 prisoners per room. The agents asked me why I went to China, who I met there, what I did, whether I went to church or thought about going to South Korea. I wasn't hit. The agents don't hit you without a reason. If they think you're lying, then they'll hit you. I was interrogated twice.

After about one month, I was transferred to the Chongjin provincial *bowibu* where I was incarcerated for one year. There were about 100 prisoners also at this facility. I was interrogated many times because they thought I had gone to China not for economic reasons, but to defect to South Korea. They questioned me on the type of people I knew in China, whether I watched South Korean TV programmes, sought help from a church, etc. They then asked me if my father had told me to go to China, who had sent me there and what I had taken to China. They thought I had taken sensitive documents to China. I denied everything. I wasn't hit during my first interrogation but during the subsequent ones, I was. The agents suspected I was hiding something so they were trying to get me to confess. One time I was hit so hard that I lost consciousness. When I wasn't being interrogated, I had to sit still during my first month. After that, I was given odd jobs to do around the *bowibu* like fixing things or cleaning. I still had some relatives with influence so through them I was able to avoid going to trial. When I was released in August 2004, I had to sign a confidentiality statement as well as a declaration not return to China.

I stayed at home in Hoeryong for a month before returning to China in September 2004. When I first went to China, I went because of survival purposes, but the second time, I went because I disliked the Kim Jong Il Government. I hated life so much in North Korea that I would have preferred to have died in the *bowibu* than continue living in my country.

Things have changed a lot from the first and second time I went to China. Back in 1999, it was easy to bribe the North Korean soldiers. This time there was tighter border control and the soldiers were not so willing to take your money. In the end, I had to cross at night at a spot where there weren't any border guards.

Since 1999, I think the North Korean Government relaxed its policy on border crossing. They downgraded the punishment for going to church or meeting South Koreans, but because the number of border crossers kept rising, they had to reverse their policy and try to control the numbers. I think from 2003, there was tighter border control. These days, you are sent to a *kyohwaso* or a *kwanliso* if you were caught escaping to South Korea, evangelising in North Korea or trying to contact South Korean relatives from North Korea.

In November 2004, I made plans - with the help of a South Korean NGO - to enter the South Korean Embassy in Beijing. We had to be extra careful because security around foreign embassies was extremely tight due to the Vietnam incident.* The NGO helped me get a false South Korean passport and with that, I walked into the South Korean Embassy and sought asylum. I arrived in South Korea in January 2005.

When I lived in China, I always felt unsafe, so life in South Korea is much better in that respect, but it's still not easy living here. Seoul is such a big city. I feel alone and miss the love of my parents and brother. In order to survive in South Korean society, North Koreans have to change their way of life and thinking, but that's difficult to do. So many North Koreans live with past pains. I've tried to contact my parents but nobody is willing to help me. They are all too afraid because of the grave consequences if caught. I have even offered to pay three times the normal rate.

I am currently enrolled at a university in Seoul where I will be studying political science. I'm a bit intimidated at the thought of studying with South Korean students, but I'll try my best.

* In late July 2004, for example, 468 North Korean refugees were airlifted from Vietnam to South Korea. In protest, the North Korean Government broke off diplomatic relations with the South. The Chinese Government also reacted with more frequent police crackdowns on undocumented North Koreans and greater tightening of security around border areas and foreign compounds in China.

Case study 16

Gender: female

Age: 42

Hometown: Hoeryong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2003)

Interviewed: 27 January 2007 in China

I first came to China on 6 April 2002. I left North Korea because life was very difficult and there was a rumour that you could earn 300 yuan (US\$40) per month in China. In North Korea, I was married and had two children - my son is now 19 years old and my daughter is 16. I graduated from teachers college and taught at a middle school. I went to China with two others. They had been to this village before and told me that I could find work at a kindergarten. After one month, I left for Yanji and found work as a domestic worker for a *Chosun Jok* family. I returned to the village and stayed with a friend. I asked her to introduce me to a *Chosun Jok* man. I needed a safe place to stay so that I could earn money and help out my family in North Korea. Through her, I met my husband who is a *Chosun Jok* farmer.

I had been living with my new husband for almost a year when I got arrested on 24 April 2003. The Chinese police came from Daechung and arrested me at home. I was taken to the police station and then transferred to the station in Wangqing. The next day I was sent on to the Tumen border detention centre where I was held for five days. We had to strip down to our underclothes, as the police checked us for money. They confiscated any money that was found. There were over 100 North Koreans captured when we were deported back to North Korea.

We were held in quarantine at a facility in Namyang for 10 days because of the SARS epidemic in China. Then we were transferred to the *bowibu* in Onsong. I was there for 10 days and there were about 150 prisoners. The first thing they made us do is take all our clothes off so that they could check our clothes and body for money. If the guards found any, they would confiscate it and give some back in the end. I was called for the preliminary examination once. They asked me how I entered China and what I did there. The interrogation wasn't too difficult because I had nothing to hide. I left North Korea because I needed food. I told them that I had married a Chinese farmer. They asked me if he was *Chosun Jok* or Han Chinese. I said he was the former. I wasn't hit. The *bowibu* agents only hit if you lied or talked back. I spent the rest of the time sitting still.

I was then sent to the Onsong *boansung*, which was in the same compound as the *nodong danryundae*. There were 120 prisoners. I spent one month and 20 days there. We woke up at 5am to do some weeding in the fields before breakfast. We ate both breakfast and lunch in the fields because the prison was too far away - almost an hour on foot. After breakfast we sowed seeds and weeded. We worked until lunchtime at 12pm and continued afterwards until sunset, which was between 5pm and 6pm. The guards delegated the supervision of the work to a few male prisoners. These team leaders became responsible for the work we did. They hit, using their hands or kicking, if the prisoners didn't work or arrived late to work. I was never hit because I kept quiet and did my work well. Men were usually hit more and harder. We ate dinner at 8pm and then from 8:30pm we had to attend re-education and self-criticism classes. We studied prison rules, about North Korean society and why we shouldn't return to China. We sang songs and were forced to criticise our own behaviour. We didn't sleep a lot because the prison officials kept us awake with things to do. We were only allowed to sleep at midnight. About 80 women slept in one room. There was no floor covering so we slept on the stone floor, which was not smooth and quite often broken in places.

There were two pregnant women whom I met at the Wangqing police station. They made the same trip as me. They weren't hit by the *bowibu* agents in Onsong and they didn't have to work at the *danryundae*. The women were allowed to stay inside along with the sick and elderly prisoners. I heard that before pregnant women were beaten and forced to abort their babies.

We also worked on other labour projects. We were sent to the mountains to carry stones on our backs or

heads. Because of the friction, the skin on my back peeled and bled. We had to load the stones onto a truck, which was then taken to a building site. It was such hard work that people fainted. Guards were always yelling and hitting the prisoners. When we worked on this project, we didn't come home until 11pm. It took us over an hour to walk back to the prison camp.

We never washed at the prison camp. Occasionally we were allowed to wash in the stream after working in the fields. The most difficult time for me was when I had menstruation. I had to use my underclothes. I bled a lot because two months prior to my arrest, I had a miscarriage at the end of my first trimester. I suffered from anaemia so I was very light-headed and dizzy. I was allowed to rest one day during this period.

One time five prisoners - two women and three men - escaped from the prison camp. One of the women was caught and brought back to the camp. She was beaten by the team leaders. They kicked her in the stomach, her back and head. They did this in front of all the prisoners to deter us from attempting to run away. We then had to criticise her until 2am.

When I left the prison camp, I was transferred to the *boansung* in Hoeryong. I spent only two days there because a neighbour bribed one of the *boansung* officials and had me released. If I had not been released, I would have been tried and sentenced to serve time either at a *danryundae* or a *kyohwaso*. I hid at my neighbour's house for a week. I became ill with a high fever and diarrhoea because I wasn't used to eating normal food. When I got better, I called my husband and returned to China on 25 June 2003.

I now have a son with my Chinese husband. He is three years old. He does not have *hukou* (household registration). It costs 5,000 yuan (US\$650) to get one. We already had to pay a 2,000 yuan (US\$260) fine at the district office for the illegal birth. I have worked hard and helped my husband get out of debt. We recently bought a new house. It has a modern roof and not a thatched one. We have also bought a cow for ploughing. I am able to send some money to my son in North Korea. He is also a farmer.

I would like to go to South Korea, but I have already left one son in North Korea. The journey to get to South Korea is dangerous so I would have to leave another son behind. If I get caught, my son in China would also be motherless. It's probably better that I stay in China. I just would like to be safe and not have to constantly worry about getting arrested and being sent back. I get scared when I hear car noises outside.

Case study 17

Gender: female

Age: 47

Hometown: Musan, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2003)

Interviewed: 10 February 2007 in South Korea

My husband was a driver at a construction company in Musan. I was a housewife. It was hard to survive in the mid-1990s because there was no work and the food rations had stopped. In 2000, a friend introduced me to some Chinese merchants and suggested I do business with them. So I began to travel to border towns in China and sold whatever items I could - dogs, ginseng, porcelain bowls, etc. I would either get paid in Chinese currency or with another item like an old black-and-white TV, which I would then sell in North Korea for a profit. Since starting this business, our family began to eat well.

I wanted to sell dogs to a Chinese merchant who lived in Helong. To negotiate the deal, I went to his house in March 2003. While I was there, the police raided the house. The merchant ran away but I was caught. Apparently, a North Korean woman who was arrested in connection with this merchant told the police where he lived. He was also involved in transporting North Koreans for a fee to more inland places

like Yanji. The police sent me to the Tumen border detention centre where I remained for 50 days. I had to wait until the merchant was found and prosecuted. I was so worried that I suffered from digestive problems. I saw a doctor but he didn't give me any medicine.

In mid-May 2003, I was repatriated and sent with a hundred other North Koreans to the border town of Namyang. Because of the SARS epidemic, we were held in quarantine for 10 days. After the quarantine, we went to the Onsong *bowibu*. There were about 300-400 prisoners. During my 10-day incarceration, I was interrogated twice. The agents asked me how I went to China, why I went there, what I did and at whose house I stayed. They also wanted to know whether I went to church or knew any South Koreans. I told them I was there just for business so I didn't have any time for church or meeting South Koreans. The *bowibu* was so crowded that you couldn't sleep properly. We had to lean on one another. For food, we ate corn noodle gruel. It was only two spoonfuls, so we just drank it.

I was incarcerated for over two months at the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso*. We had to wake up at 5am and work from 6am to 7 or 8pm with a 30-minute break for breakfast and lunch. It was planting season, so we were sent out to the State farms to sow and weed. There were so many weeds to pull out - it was back-breaking work. The guards would check your work and if you missed some, they would make you do that row again. There were about five pregnant women at the *jipkyulso*. Women in their first trimester had to work in the fields, but those in the second or third trimester were given light work cleaning or taking care of pigs at the prison camp. But money solved most problems. For example, you could bribe guards to change your work assignment to an easier one.

Only the guards hit the prisoners, never the team leaders. The guards hit prisoners who didn't work hard, talked back or stole food. One time a prisoner escaped so as a collective punishment, we were forced to squat and stand one hundred times.

There were specific times we could go to the toilet - even when we were out in the fields. I was hit by a guard once because I had asked him if I could go to the toilet outside the prescribed time. He kicked me and cursed at me.

A very difficult time for female prisoners was during their menstrual cycle. They had to improvise by using strips taken from their underclothes. They had to use them again but it wasn't easy to get water to wash the strips.

While I was working in the fields, I asked the supervising farmer to go to a friend's house in Chongjin and inform her of my incarceration. My friend came with my daughter and gave 800 yuan (US\$104) to the supervisor. They also paid US\$200 to a prison official to allow me to be transferred early.

In July 2003, I was picked up by the police and taken to the *anjunbu (boansung)* in Musan. There were seven other prisoners. They asked me the same questions as the *bowibu*. They then made me write and sign a statement promising to never return to China. On 20 July 2003, I was temporarily released and sent home.

On 27 December 2003, the officials from the Musan *nodong danryundae* came to my house to take me to the prison camp. I was there for 10 days. There were about 300 prisoners. We worked for eight hours a day logging in the mountains. If we didn't have transport, we had to walk for over two hours. We cut logs that were then used for cooking and heating in the homes of Musan officials. When we weren't working, we had to study. After breakfast, we read out loud the newspaper and studied North Korean political ideology. In the evenings, we had to attend re-education classes. For food, they gave us corn rice and cabbage soup. The quality of the food was better than at the *jipkyulso*. Other prisoners were hit, but because I knew the guards, I was treated better and not hit at all. I was allowed to go home during the day. I brought back food, cigarettes and alcohol for the guards. On 10 January 2004, I was released and allowed to return home.

I continued to do business in China. I travelled back and forth several times, often staying overnight in China. To get across and safely back, I had to pay 100 yuan (US\$13) to the North Korean border guard on duty.

In February 2005, I paid a broker 10,000,000 South Korean won (US\$10,500) to go to South Korea. I took a plane from Dalian to Seoul. That's how four of my family members - two daughters (2003 and 2004), husband (2005) and mother (2006) - reached South Korea. Each journey cost about the same as mine. My husband is currently employed as a driver at an electronics company warehouse. I stay at home and look after my granddaughter.

Case study 18

Gender: female

Age: 36

Hometown: Yoosun, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 time (2003)

Interviewed: 26 January 2007 in China

In North Korea, I was married and had two daughters. My husband was a miner and my father worked in a factory where they produced building materials for houses. My mother was a housewife. Life was very hard then in North Korea. It was impossible to survive. I wanted to earn money by doing some business in China so I left in March 1999 with friends who had Chinese relatives. We crossed the Tumen River. The water was icy - I had to change into dry clothes once we reached the other side. I stayed with my friends' relatives in Longjing. I didn't work. They said that it wasn't safe to be alone in China and that it would be better for to marry. That way I would have someone to protect me. When I agreed, they introduced me to my current husband. No money was involved. My husband is a *Chosun Jok* farmer. We have a six-year-old son.

In February 2003, the Chinese military police came from Longjing to arrest North Koreans in our village. They captured a North Korean man and his daughter. The police told them that they would be released if they gave information where other North Koreans were hiding. My house was the closest one so the police came to mine first. I was able to run away but they came back a month later and arrested me. I was taken to the Longjing border detention centre where I had to wait for one week until more North Koreans were captured. We were then deported together.

In mid-March 2003, I was sent to the Hoeryong *bowibu* where I spent 10 days. I first had to take my clothes off and have them search my body for money. I was then taken to a room where the agents asked me questions about China. They wanted to know why I went to China, when I went, how I got there and what I did there. I told them that I married a Chinese farmer, but I didn't mention my son. They didn't get angry about the marriage. I wasn't hit because I answered their questions properly. If you don't obey, then you get hit. I was called out only once for preliminary examination. For the rest of the time from 5am to 10pm - minus mealtimes - I had to sit still with my hands on my lap. We couldn't talk. Anyone caught talking or moving would get hit by the guards. We couldn't go to the toilet whenever we wanted. We had a set time once a day for only five minutes. In the room where I slept, there were about 20 women - I'm not sure about the total number of prisoners. For food, we were given corn gruel with some salt in a bowl. I lost quite a bit of weight while I was there.

At the end of March 2003, I was picked up with two others and taken to the *anjunbu (boansung)* in Yoosun, my hometown. I was there for only a day. They asked me the same questions the *bowibu* asked. I answered them in the same way. I didn't receive any sentence and once I signed a statement promising not to return to China, I was released. The local police knew me so they let me go because they knew how poor my family was. Besides, first-time border crossers are given a break. Punishment would be more severe the next time I get caught.

After my release, I stayed at home for one month. I was able to see my daughters who were married and lived with their husbands. Since I had no money, I had to borrow from my sister so that I could buy some food for my daughters. In May 2003, I returned to my family in China.

My husband and I struggle to get by. We are always in debt. Since we have nothing, we have to borrow money from the Government to farm and after the harvest season, we have to pay back the loan. Although we are very poor, we can still eat reasonably well. I would like to support my daughters in North Korea, but we have no money. To send money to North Korea through a courier, you have to pay 30 per cent of the amount you're sending. I also think about going to South Korea, but then I would be so far away from my daughters. It would be better to get legal status in China so that I wouldn't get arrested again and can live with a peace of mind. My son now has legal status. In January 2007, we were able to get him *hukou* (household registration). We paid 500 yuan (US\$65). Even before, he has attended school, but now he can receive official grades.

Case study 19

Gender: female

Age: 48

Hometown: Musan, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2002)

Interviewed: 28 January 2007 in China

I farmed corn and beans in North Korea. In the 1990s, I lost several members of my family. Because of these personal tragedies, I suffered a trauma from which I never fully recovered. I went to China in October 1998 with my two sons because we didn't have any food or money. We moved around at first living in Longjing, then Antu and finally Wangqing. In October 2002, the Chinese police came to our house and arrested my sons and me. I spent a short time at the Wangqing police station before being sent to the Tumen border detention centre. I don't know how long I was there.

I was deported and sent to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was held for two weeks. There were about 150 prisoners. I was stripped and checked for money. I didn't have any. I told the agents that I was sick and suffered from a weak heart. I had pain in my left leg and my face was visibly swollen. They didn't question me and I wasn't hit either. I just had to sit still the whole time.

Afterwards I was transferred to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* where I spent one week. There were about 250 prisoners. I didn't have to do any hard labour, just clean the *jipkyulso* grounds. That didn't take long so I spent the rest of the time sitting still. I couldn't talk. For food, we ate corn rice and pickled radish.

I then went to the Musan *anjunbu* (*boansung*) with 50 other prisoners. Again I wasn't questioned by the police because I was sick and besides, my sons would have already answered for me. I had to sit still. After three days, I was released along with my younger son. Since deportation, I had not seen either of my sons. We were released because I was too sick and my son was a minor - he was 15 years old at the time. My older son was sent to a *nodong danryundae*.

When we were released, we went to stay at my uncle's house for a month. I then found a place of our own to rent for three months. We decided to return to China. My older son was still imprisoned so he couldn't join us.

My youngest son was arrested in Yanji and deported in January 2007. I worry about him. I went to the hospital in December 2006 and was diagnosed with having a brain clot and internal haemorrhaging. I'm taking medicine for it. The left side of my body is partly paralysed. I'm currently living with a 54-year-old *Chosun Jok* man who makes cow shoes. I'm too sick to work, so I just help around the house. I would like to continue living in China but I worry about my safety.

Case study 20

Gender: female

Age: 57

Hometown: Chongjin, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 2 (2002 and 2001)

Interviewed: 25 January 2007 in China

I am an orphan and lived in an orphanage in Chongjin until 1965. I then went to work in a coal mine in Aoji. My first husband died of an illness and I re-married. My new husband and I had a son and two daughters. We were struggling to survive in the mid-1990s so my husband went to China to look for work. When he returned, our situation deteriorated even further. We were so desperate that in February 1999, we took our children and left for China. We travelled first to Onsong and then, with the help of a guide, crossed the Tumen River into the Chinese town of Tumen. My husband and I got separated from our children in Yanji. My eldest daughter got married to a *Chosun Jok*. She and my other two children were arrested and repatriated in November 1999. My husband and I lived in Yanji where I worked at a restaurant. My children returned to China in the spring of 2000 and went to the town where my eldest daughter's husband lived. My son-in-law didn't want to work so my daughter married another *Chosun Jok*. In October 2000, I had to quit my job at the restaurant because it became known that I was North Korean. My husband and I went to live close to our children.

First arrest:

In October 2001, we were arrested by the Chinese police. A North Korean woman who was arrested informed on us. We spent one week at the Wangqing police station before being sent to the Tumen border detention centre. We spent two weeks there awaiting deportation.

We were transported in a van across the Tumen Bridge into Namyang where the *bowibu* took down our details. We were then sent to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was held for two weeks. After they strip searched me for money, the agents began asking me questions about my activities in China - where I lived, where I worked, what I ate, etc. I wasn't hit, but my husband was. When I wasn't being interrogated, I had to sit still and if we were caught talking, we had to squat and stand continuously as a punishment. There were so many people in our room that we sat with our backs in between the legs of the person directly behind us. We were given corn noodle soup and not much water. There was a toilet in the room but no door. You could see everything.

I was then transferred to the Onsong *nodong danryundae*. I spent three weeks there but I wasn't told the length of my incarceration beforehand. There were about 60 prisoners. We had to wake up everyday at 5am. I wasn't forced to work because of my age (I was 51 then). We sat quietly in the prison camp. The other prisoners worked in the corn fields. There was one pregnant woman amongst us who also didn't have to work. When it was time, a doctor from outside came to our camp and helped with her delivery. The guards didn't hit us unless we stole food. We ate small potatoes, about five to 10, which was in salted water or steamed corn. Apart from meals, I spent all my time in re-education class, which was basically created to change our way of thinking and discourage us from going back to China. At the end of December 2001, I was released with my husband. We both had to sign a statement promising never to return to China. Neither of us received any judicial sentencing.

On 13 August 2002, I came back to China - this time with a female acquaintance. My husband decided to remain in North Korea because he had suffered too much from the beatings he had received while incarcerated. I returned to China where my daughter lived. She married a farmer so I helped with farming.

Second arrest:

In September 2002, I was caught by the police because the same North Korean woman told on me again. After a brief stay at Wangqing police station and the Tumen border detention centre, I was sent back to

the *bowibu* in Onsong. This time I went through a more intense interrogation process. I was questioned for a month. The agents asked if I knew any South Koreans or watched any South Korean TV programmes and were particularly interested in whether I went to church. I found out later that the woman who had me arrested in Junping also told the agents that I had attended church services. When I finally confessed, the agents threatened me with life imprisonment. I was able to save myself by convincing them that the woman had coerced me into attending church with her. I also think the agents let me off because I was an orphan and they felt sorry for me.

I was then sent to the same *nodong danryundae* in Onsong on 9 October 2002 where I was once again exempt from work. Because 10 October was a national holiday - the founding of the Korean Workers Party - I was given an amnesty and released after only two days of incarceration. I returned to China the very same month.

My eldest daughter is in South Korea now. She arrived in November 2006. I want to remain in China. Even though I don't feel safe, at least my stomach is full. I don't want to go to South Korea because it's too far to travel. Besides, I get terribly car sick and wouldn't be able to survive the journey. I don't know where my younger daughter is. When she was repatriated and imprisoned in 1999, she was beaten so badly that I married her to a Han Chinese in Jilin Province because I felt that she would be safer. I have not heard any news from her in five years. My son was repatriated a second time and now lives in North Korea. I think my husband and my son may be dead.

Case study 21

Gender: female

Age: 28

Hometown: Onsong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 3 (2002, 2000 and 1999)

Interviewed: 29 January 2007 in China

My father was a welder and my mother was a housewife. I have one brother and four sisters. It was hard to live in North Korea in the mid-1990s. We had no job and no food. My father died of starvation in 1997. In August 1997, I went to China with four other North Koreans from Onsong. One woman knew the route so she took us to Yanji where I stayed with a *Chosun Jok* family. The family told me that it was unsafe to be alone in China and persuaded me to marry. They introduced me to a *Chosun Jok* farmer whom I later married. We have one 10-year-old son who has *hukou* (household registration). We had to pay 2,000 yuan (US\$260) in 1999 to get it.

First arrest:

I was caught and arrested by the police from the nearest city in May 1999. All the villagers knew I was North Korean so when there was a crackdown, the police knew where to go. When I was deported to North Korea, I was sent to the *bowibu* in my hometown, Onsong then to the Onsong *nodong danryundae*, where I spent one month. While we were working in the corn fields, I ran away and returned to China in August 1999.

Second arrest:

The city police came to my house and arrested me again in March 2000. I was held overnight at the local police station before being transferred to the Tumen border detention centre where I was held for one month. Upon deportation, I was sent to the Onsong *bowibu* for two weeks and then to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* via the *anjonbu (boansung)*. I thought that this time they would punish me severely for having run away the last time, but they didn't. Instead after a week, I was given an amnesty because I had a widowed mother to support. I was released and in July 2000 I returned to China.

Third arrest:

In August 2002, the city police came to my house and arrested me for the third time. I was held at the

station for one month because I had to wait for the police to capture other North Koreans. I was then transferred to the Tumen border detention centre.

After three days, I was deported and sent to the Onsong *bowibu*. Due to the police crackdowns in China, the *bowibu* was full of prisoners, about 200. It was so crowded that prisoners were overflowing out into the aisles. I spent two weeks at this facility. After they checked my body for money, I was interrogated by the *bowibu* agents. They asked me where in China I lived and how I made a living. They also wanted to know whether I watched South Korean TV programmes, knew any South Koreans or religious people, or went to church. I denied everything, but I told them that I married a Chinese man. They understand that North Korean women have to marry when they are in China. I didn't mention my son because I didn't want to give them any reason to think that I would return to China. In total, I was called out for interrogation three times. I was never hit but others were hit when they didn't answer questions. The rest of the time was spent sitting perfectly still, not moving or talking. There were five pregnant women with us. They weren't treated any differently. There was some verbal abuse, but no hitting.

In October 2002, I was transferred to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* where I was incarcerated for three months. The 300 prisoners at this prison camp were all border crossers. Our long day began at 6am when we had to quickly wash our face and attend re-education class. Breakfast was at 7:30am. All the meals were identical: cornhusk/powder rice and salty soup. Work commenced at 8am. Female prisoners were forced to dig holes and carry stones. We also had to carry coal that male prisoners dug out. Everyone had to work - nobody was exempt, not even pregnant women. When the pregnant women could not keep up with the work, the guards verbally abused them, saying things about getting pregnant by Chinese men. We ate lunch at 1pm and then continued working until 5 or 6pm. We had re-education class when we returned and then dinner at 8pm. Afterwards, there was roll call - to ensure that all prisoners were accounted for - followed by re-education class and self-criticism where prisoners who didn't work hard had to criticise themselves and were then punished. We were finally allowed to sleep at midnight.

There was one doctor at the prison camp but he didn't treat us, just diagnosed our illness. He wasn't very understanding either. Prisoners had to be really sick before the doctor released them from work.

Prison officials wanted my family to make regular contributions to the food supply at the camp, but because they didn't have enough food for themselves, they said no. This meant that my family was forbidden from bringing any food just for me. So when they tried to sneak some in and were caught, the guards punished me for their action by beating me on my legs and back.

Towards the end of my three months, the prison officials took my finger prints and prepared a document to send me to a *kyohwaso* for one year, but my sister managed to bribe the official who would have provided the final signature on the document. So instead of going to a *kyohwaso*, I was released and sent home at the end of January 2003. I spent one week at my sister's house and then returned to China in February 2003.

My Chinese husband and I finally decided to move out of the rural village because it was too dangerous to remain there. If we had stayed, it would have been only a matter of time before the city police returned and arrested me for the fourth time. My husband is currently unemployed. He can't find a job where we are now because he has a weak body. I want to continue living in China, but I would like to live in our own place instead of moving from one rental property to another. But we have to keep changing house because of the police crackdowns - rental properties are frequently checked. I would like to go to South Korea but it's so dangerous and I'm too afraid of getting caught again.

Case study 22

Gender: female

Age: 32

Hometown: Onsong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 2 (2002 and 2001)

Interviewed: 29 January 2007 in China

I used to work at a coal mine in North Korea transporting coal onto trains. My husband was a farmer. In February 1999, we decided to go to China because of the difficult economic and food situation at home. I was pregnant at the time. We crossed the Tumen River into China and lived in Yong Sung, a village near the border. My husband found work as a day labourer.

First arrest

In February 2001, the Chinese police got a tip off from a neighbour and came to my house to arrest me. My husband had already been deported six months before. The police took my baby girl and me to the Tumen border detention centre where we remained for two weeks before being repatriated to North Korea.

We were sent to the Onsong *bowibu* via Namyang. I wasn't hit or severely questioned by the agents. They knew that I had a baby with me so they released me after one week.

When I returned home, I found out that my husband had died in prison from the beatings he had received from the guards. They punished him severely because he was responsible for bringing his entire family to China. Without my husband, surviving in North Korea became even more difficult so I left my baby with my family and returned to China in July 2001.

Second arrest

I wanted someone's support while in China, so I asked my sister who was also living in China to introduce me to a Chinese man. Through her, I met a *Chosun Jok* pedicab driver whom I married. In May 2002, the Antu police came to our house at 10pm and arrested me. I was held at the Tumen border detention centre for 10 days and then sent back to North Korea.

I was sent to the Onsong *bowibu* where I was incarcerated for 10 days. The agents asked me why I went back to China. I told them that my husband had died and that I needed to earn money. They then asked me about my activities in China - whether I watched South Korean TV programmes or went to church. I wasn't hit.

Towards the end of May 2002, I was transferred to the Onsong *nodong danryundae*. There were over 300 prisoners. The number was so high due to the police crackdowns in China. All prisoners woke up at 4am and after feeding the animals and eating breakfast, we had to go outside the camp for work. We had to work. If you didn't work, you were hit. Work assignments included cleaning up areas clogged with sewer water, planting seeds, weeding and road works. When we worked in the fields, we were allowed to wash our body in the stream every two weeks. During mealtimes, we were given steamed cornhusk and salty soup. There were two pregnant women with us. Because they were only in their first trimester, they both had to work but less than us. We didn't return to the camp until 6pm. After dinner, we had re-education class until 10pm. If we were lucky, we slept at 10pm, otherwise the guards kept us busy until midnight. There was a doctor at the *danryundae*, but he didn't care about our welfare. He felt that we needed to work off our crime so unless prisoners were really sick, they weren't relieved of their duties. If prisoners needed medicine, they had to buy it.

After one month at the *danryundae*, the prison officials informed me that I would be spending three months in total at the facility. Six months is apparently the maximum. So at the end of August 2002, I was released. The prison officials told me not to return to China and sent me home. I couldn't stay at home. There was no job and no food. So after only a week, I went back to China. Through a second

introduction, I married another *Chosun Jok*. He works for the local authorities and earns 300 yuan (US\$40) per month. We have a four-year-old son who has *hukou* (household registration). We paid some money for it - I'm not sure how much. I go to church and do some paid embroidery work for them.

I would like to stay in China, but feel insecure without any legal status. We have to constantly change house because it's too dangerous to stay in one place. I would like to go to South Korea but I'm afraid of getting caught. I have one sister in China who was repatriated several times. My other sister was also repatriated with her husband. They are in North Korea because they are too scared to return to China. My daughter in North Korea is now eight years old and lives with a family in Onsong. I would like to bring her to China one day.

Case study 23

Gender: female

Age: 35

Hometown: Soongam, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 2 (2002 and 2001)

Interviewed: 26 January 2007 in China

My father was a soldier and my mother worked as a tailor. I have two older brothers and two older sisters. I worked at the zoo in Chongjin and then in the market selling food. A woman approached me one day and asked if I wanted to go to China. I thought it was a good opportunity since life was so difficult in North Korea. We weren't getting any food from the Government since 1995. Even in 1994, the food distribution through the PDS was not very regular. I had heard from others how you could earn 700-1,000 yuan (US\$90-130) per month in China. So on 16 October 1998, I followed the woman to China. We stopped in Helong before going to Yanji where I stayed with a Han Chinese family. They sold me to a Han Chinese farmer in Luozigou for 5,000 yuan (US\$650). I lived with him for three years and we had one daughter. She is now seven years old. I had a lot of problems with my mother-in-law. Every time I argued with her, my father-in-law would hit me. I finally couldn't take it anymore and left at the end of May 2001. My daughter is still with them. She doesn't have *hukou* and we can't get it because she has a North Korean mother.

First arrest:

I wanted to return to North Korea but I didn't know how to get back so in June 2001, I turned myself in to the police in Luozigou. I stayed there overnight and was transferred the next morning to the Wangqing police station for two days before they sent me to the Tumen border detention centre. I was held for another two days.

I was repatriated and incarcerated at the Onsong *bowibu* for one week. As soon as I arrived, I was stripped and checked by two female guards for money. I had to do 100-200 squats with my legs spread wide. They asked me if I had any money. I said no, but they didn't believe me so they hit me. Guards hit you with a stick if they are not satisfied with your answers. If prisoners have money, half of it goes to the State and the rest the prisoners get to keep. During my preliminary examination, the agents interrogated me on why I went to China, when I went, if I did anything wrong there. I said I went because I was starving. I told them that I married a Chinese man and had a daughter. I thought that I could earn money but when I arrived in China, I wasn't able to. I had to get married. Having a Chinese husband and children is alright but meeting South Koreans or attending church is not. I wasn't asked about South Korea or the church. There were about 170 prisoners. There were five rooms - three for women and two for men. In each room, there were about 30 people sitting in a row. It was hot in the building and people were sweating. For meals, we were given corn noodle gruel. It was difficult to get drinking water.

I was transferred to the Onsong *nodong danryundae* where I spent eight days. There were about 150 prisoners. We were forced to work on State farms and construction sites digging holes. Sick people

didn't have to work. Work supervision was delegated to the team leaders who hit the male prisoners a lot but not the women. The prison guards had little contact with us when we were working. During mealtimes, they fed us corn rice and watery vegetable soup. There was a doctor at the *danryundae* but he didn't tend to cases like diarrhoea. Really sick prisoners were taken to the hospital because there was no medicine available. You had to buy medicine from other prisoners or arrange for someone to buy it for you outside. Once I had very high fever and diarrhoea. A male prisoner was kind enough to trade his cigarettes for some medicine from another prisoner, which he then gave to me.

In mid-June 2001, I was transferred to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* where I spent eight days. There were 80 prisoners. Our daily routine began at 4:30am. Without even washing our faces, the female prisoners had to walk to the corn fields to weed. The work was very hard. Because we were weeding, we had to constantly bend over. Our backs ached a lot. At 7am, we ate breakfast, which usually consisted of steamed wheat and cabbage soup. Then we continued working in the fields until lunchtime. We were only given 15 minutes to eat before returning to work. If we didn't work hard, we were hit. At this facility, it was the guards - not the team leaders - who hit us. Because the guards were afraid that the male prisoners would run away, only female prisoners were sent out to the fields. Once I was hit by a guard because I cleared my throat and spat on the ground near to where he was standing. I didn't see him but that didn't matter. He was incensed and slapped me very hard. It hurt so much that I had tears in my eyes. My face was red and swollen afterwards. We returned to the prison camp at 6pm. After dinner, we attended a daily self-criticism session where we had to tell everyone what we did wrong - even if we didn't do anything wrong. If we didn't criticise ourselves, we would get hit. The team leader decided which prisoners would speak. Then from 8:30-10:00pm the prison officials would make us sing patriotic songs and dance. If we didn't know the words to the song or the movements of the dance, we were hit. We were finally allowed to sleep at 10pm.

The hygiene conditions were really bad at the *jipkyulso*. We couldn't wash and during our menstruation, women weren't given any sanitary napkins, so we had to use our underclothes. Some prisoners would throw away the cloth after one use and then tear another piece of their underclothes the next month, but longer staying prisoners would have to use it again. There was no doctor in prison. When prisoners were sick, they had to buy medicine from the staff members and pay them commission as well. We were given so little food that sometimes prisoners were desperate to supplement their diet with other things. Once a female prisoner caught a rat and asked one of the guards if she could roast it. The guard verbally abused her and as punishment, told her to draw water from a nearby stream ten times. The poor woman fainted from exhaustion.

At the end of June 2001, I was picked up by the police and taken to the *anjunbu (boansung)* in Chungam. The police hit me because I had gone to China illegally. I wasn't given any food. My mother visited me and gave me some food. Because they knew my mother, I was allowed to go home after two days. I was sentenced to serve at the *nodong danryundae* in my hometown.

On 10 July 2001, after 10 days of home rest, I was recalled and sent to the *nodong danryundae* in my hometown of Soongam. I was there for 24 days with 60 other prisoners. During our incarceration, we were given smaller tasks to do like digging holes, collecting rubbish and cleaning toilets. Each prisoner was also assigned to one of three types of work: State farming, construction work or building a goat pen. I was assigned to farming, which was the easiest of the three. Team leaders at construction sites, for example, made prisoners run all the time. If you didn't work hard or caused trouble, your stay at the *danryundae* could be extended. Because the work was harder here, prisoners were normally not hit by the guards. Male prisoners woke up at 3:30am to go logging in the mountains while female prisoners woke up at 4:30am to tend to the weeding in the corn fields. After breakfast, 20 of the female prisoners, including me, were taken to a poppy field where we had to make an incision on the poppy bulbs and collect sap from them. The prison guards explained to us that we were helping to produce opium, which would be sold abroad. The foreign currency that we would get would help support our country and our people. We worked in the poppy fields until dinnertime. For food, we ate corn rice, seaweed soup and pickled radish.

On 11 August 2001, I was released a bit early because I had worked hard. I went back home and tried to look for work, but couldn't find any. So, I went back to my old job selling food at the market but nobody would buy from me because I was an illegal border crosser. There was a soldier in my village who wanted to marry me. I said no but he kept coming to my house and bothering me. He was always drunk. I decided that I couldn't stay in North Korea anymore.

Second arrest:

In March 2002, I got on a train from Chongjin but because I didn't have a ticket or travel papers, I got off before the train arrived in Musan. I was caught at 10pm at the Musan rail station. Two policemen saw my pierced ears and coloured hair and thought I looked suspicious. So, they apprehended and questioned me. The officers verified the information I gave them with the police from my hometown. That's when they found out that I had previously been caught in China. I told them that I just wanted to go there to get some money from my Chinese husband.

I was held at the Musan *anjunbu* (*boansung*) where I remained for eight days. I didn't eat badly - corn gruel and soybean soup - but we had to sit still all day. Before interrogation, we had to sit on our lower legs and after we had been interrogated, we had to sit with our legs crossed. If prisoners moved, they were punished by having to raise their arms for an extended period.

In mid-March 2002, I was sent to the Chongjin provincial *jipkyulso* once again. This time I spent two and a half months inside. There were about 200 prisoners. We did brick work because it was winter so there was no farming. We had to make bricks and run while carrying 50 kg of bricks to a designated deposit area. If you didn't run, you were hit. The living conditions were terrible. We all had lice and people were starving. When people died, their bodies were disposed of in the mountains without a proper burial. The work was much harder than before. After making bricks, the prisoners were sent to work on construction sites. During my incarceration, I contracted tuberculosis (TB) so I was given light work in the cafeteria. Once I became ill because a guard kicked me. My face swelled and there was puss in my throat. I was given medicine for it and spent several days in the clinic. Out of 20-30 prisoners who slept in the same room as me, seven died. I saw a very ill woman being taken to the hospital. She died there. My TB started acting up and I also became very ill. This time, I was released and sent home. I stayed at home for six months recovering. I was never sentenced for border crossing.

In November 2004, I returned to China via Musan through the help of a broker. He took me to Shenyang where I was sold to a Han Chinese farmer for 7,000 yuan (US\$900). I stayed with him for only one week. He didn't want me because I had TB so the broker took me to Helong where he dropped me off at my friend's house. My friend gave me 50 yuan (US\$6.50) so that I could take a bus to Luozigou. I made a last attempt to live with my husband and his family.

The arguments continued and so did the beating from my father-in-law. I was treated so badly that I left in November 2006. I live by myself and currently don't have a job. I'm still ill and take medicine for my recurring TB. I want to live in China because I have nowhere else to go. I never want to go back to North Korea. Prisoners in North Korea are treated worse than animals. I want to bring my daughter here so that we could live together but I don't have any money. I can't support her - I can't even support myself.

Case study 24

Gender: female

Age: 58

Hometown: Mayang, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2001)

Interviewed: 23 January 2007 in China

My husband was a soldier and party member. My son was in the army. I have two daughters. My eldest at that time was called to work on a construction project in Pyongyang and my youngest was a student. I worked for three years at a collective fruit farm in North Korea. We grew apple and pear trees. We were doing very badly economically - we didn't have our own house - so I tried to make some money on the side by purchasing some bean seeds on loan and planting them. But things didn't go very well. I couldn't pay off the loan for the seeds, and I needed money to marry off my children. So in desperation, I left for China in August 1998.

I came to China with the help of my younger brother who had been there before so he knew the route. Men can't work in China - it's too dangerous - but women can. We went through the mountains to a village called Baijin. An elderly lady whom my brother knew lived there. She fed and clothed us. At her suggestion, I did some logging work. I felt safe there as it was in a very isolated place. I was paid 400 yuan (US\$50) per month. After one month, my brother went back to North Korea. I gave him all the money I had plus food and clothes because my youngest daughter was still a student. When my brother left, my employer stopped paying me. One day, the employer called me over and said the police had come to arrest me. I found out later that they were not real. They took me and another North Korean woman to a house in Yanji. We were going to be sold to Chinese men. When I refused, they kicked and hit me. I fell to the ground. When the traffickers left me overnight at a storage facility, I managed to escape. I didn't know anyone else so I went back to the trafficker's house. Only the grandmother was there. When I explained my situation to her, she helped me. She sent me to a place where I was able to work for a while. I left because I started to feel unsafe.

I decided to go to Yanji because I had been there once to visit a relative. I found work at a laundry where I was paid 400 yuan (US\$50) per month. In October 2001 when there was a police crackdown and houses were individually checked, I was arrested. After one day at the Yanji police station, I was sent to the Xing'an police station for 10 days. Many North Korean women and men, both young and old, arrived everyday. We were given corn bread and water. The guards allowed us to make phone calls for a fee. I called the laundry owner who came and gave me 300 yuan (US\$40). I carefully folded the money into a plastic wrapping before putting it in my mouth. In November 2001, I was sent to the Tumen border detention centre for 10 days where they searched me for money and took photos of me. They then asked me simple questions like when I came to China and where I lived. The facility was new and well-heated. We were given white rice and vegetable soup.

The Chinese police handcuffed and repatriated fifty of us to Namyang *bowibu* where we briefly stopped. We had to give our name, place of birth and other personal details. We were then sent to the Onsong *bowibu*. We went in two transport vans. On the way, the van in front of us crashed and one female prisoner died. I was at the Onsong *bowibu* for 10 days. There were about 500 people. In one row, there were about 50-60 people. There was a team leader per row. We were given corn noodle porridge and a little water. It was very crowded and the smell was unbearable. The toilet only had a low door so you could see almost everything. I saw a pregnant woman who gave birth in the *bowibu* because it was too late for her to go to the hospital. The guards helped in the delivery. I was told that because there were so many people, I would be interrogated in Hoeryong.

I was taken in a van to the Hoeryong *bowibu*. When we stopped for petrol, my brother was there waiting for me. He paid for the petrol and sneaked me away. I knew that I would get into trouble if I didn't report to the police so I went to the *bowibu* in Mayang, my hometown, and explained my situation. I told them

that I went to China to earn money so that my children could marry. They were understanding and told me to write out a confession. I gave them some money and they released me.

I returned to China in August 2005. I now work as a domestic worker and carer for a *Chosun Jok* family where the couple have gone to South Korea to work leaving behind their son and father. I have been with the family for the past two years and earn 400 (US\$50) per month.

My children get harassed in North Korea because I am in China. When they wear nice clothes, the neighbours taunt them because the clothes are from China. I don't want to go back to North Korea but would like my youngest daughter to come live with me in China. She is currently having marital problems with her husband. She once came to visit me in China for three days and liked it. None of my children can leave because if one leaves, then the others will get into trouble because I am registered as an illegal border crosser. I have to be careful not to get arrested again.

Case study 25

Gender: female

Age: 35

Hometown: Eundok, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2001/2002)

Interviewed: 25 January 2007 in China

I lived with my sister and her family. After finishing school, I worked as a farmer growing rice and corn. When I was 27 years old, I got married and moved to Eundok. My husband was a miner. We had no children. I divorced my husband and decided to come to China in March 1998 because I was hungry. I knew the route to China because I sold fruits to Chinese merchants. I crossed the Tumen River by myself and went to an acquaintance's house in Kaishantun where I stayed for two days. Then I went to a rural village called Sambong where I stayed with an elderly woman who suggested that I marry a Chinese man. I was introduced to a man from Yanji. I went with him to his apartment in Yanji and stayed for a week. I thought I was marrying him but later realised that he wanted to sell me. I escaped and met a woman on the street. She took me back to Kaishantun and through the woman's daughter, I met my *Chosun Jok* husband. There was no exchange of money - I was just given one bag of rice. I have been living with my husband since April 1998. I gave birth to our son in 1999.

In August 2001, there was a severe crackdown on undocumented North Koreans in China. Three policemen came in the middle of the night while I was sleeping and arrested me. They took me to the police station in Wangqing where I was held for 10 days. The Chinese police never hit and prisoners eat far better in Chinese prisons than in North Korean ones. I was briefly at the Tumen border detention centre before being repatriated to North Korea.

I spent three weeks at the Onsong *bowibu*. The agents asked me when I went to China, what I did, where I lived and whether I had a child with a Chinese man. I lied and said that I wasn't married and didn't have any children in China because I had just recently crossed the border. I was asked the same questions almost everyday. The agents didn't believe me so they slapped me, pulled my hair and kicked me. When I wasn't being questioned, I had to sit still with about 17 other women in one room.

In September 2001, I was transferred to the *bowibu* in Eundok where I was incarcerated for two weeks. There were about 20 people but not all of them were border crossers. There were also common criminals. The agents there asked me the same questions, always trying to catch me out on a lie. After several sessions, I finally confessed that I had married a Chinese man because I had no other way to survive in China. They didn't hit me after that. My sister also helped the situation by giving them some money. During the days when I wasn't interrogated, I was told to help with farming.

I spent the next three months at the Eundok *nodong danryundae*. There were about 30 people at this

facility. We were forced to work in the corn fields. We had to walk for 40 minutes to get to the fields. We had to work but the guards didn't hit us. For food, we ate salted steamed corn kernels. We were given water. There were about 15-20 women in one room and we had to sleep sitting up because there wasn't enough space. Everyone had lice because there was no washing facility at the prison camp. We could only clean our faces in the stream near the corn fields. The camp had a clinic and a doctor but there was no medicine and no possibility of buying some from outside. My health deteriorated, as my leg joints began to hurt because I was constantly sitting on a cold, unheated surface. I also suffered from stomach problems and had trouble digesting corn. I saw one young woman die in the camp. She had arrived before me. One day, she didn't wake up. The others tried to wake her up but she was already dead.

When I was released in January 2002, I returned to my family in China. My son is now 9 years old. In January 2007, we paid 500 yuan (US\$65) to the local authorities for his *hukou* (household registration). There were very few Chinese-North Korean children attending school, but the local authorities seem to have now allowed parents to register their Chinese-North Korean children. My son had always gone to school - the difference now is that he is properly registered so his grades are kept on the official school registrar. I don't worry about his safety. The Chinese police repatriate us but never our children who are half Chinese.

In China, we farm corn, rice and beans, and work from 6am until 5pm. My husband is a bit sick so he can't overdo it. We are poor and have financial worries. We earn about 2,000 yuan (US\$260) net per year.

If I had the money, I would like to go to South Korea because it's a rich country and I can earn money. I wouldn't have to worry about the police either. In North Korea, they tell you that South Korea is poor but that's not true. I also want to go there because we speak the same language.

Case study 26

Gender: female

Age: 63

Hometown: Kyongsong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2001)

Interviewed: 29 January 2007 in China

My husband and I used to work in a ceramics factory in North Korea. We had three sons. They are now 42, 39 and 34 years old. My husband died in 1994 of a blood clot in the brain. Our family had difficulty surviving - we had no food and it was bitter cold in the winters because our house didn't have any heating. I went to China in April 1997 because I didn't want to be a burden on my children. I went with another woman. We walked from Hoeryong and crossed the Tumen River into China. We didn't know the way so we just kept walking through the mountain roads until we came upon a village called Sanhe. We then knocked on doors, but nobody answered at first. Then finally, one person did. Although it was April, it was still very cold so my cloth shoes were completely frozen and my feet were frostbitten. The family gave me dry clothes and shoes and helped me recover. When I felt better, I went to a rural village near Yanji and did some farming for a family. I was there for two months. A distant relative introduced me to a *Chosun Jok* farmer whom I married. We farm beans and corn.

On 7 April 2001, I was caught by the Chinese police on the streets. I was on my way back home from church. I spent one week at the Antu police station. Then I was deported with seven other North Koreans to the *bowibu* in Hoeryong. I had to take my clothes off and have the guards check me for money. Then I was interrogated by the agents. I was called out four times. They asked about my hometown, my family, work, why I went to China, whether I married a Chinese man, watched any South Korean programmes, met any South Koreans, wanted to go to South Korea or attended church. The agents checked my hands to see if I had been living in comfort - meaning I worked at a place like a karaoke bar. They clearly saw that my hands were rough and knew that I worked on the land and didn't have an easy life. When I told

them I was married, they asked me very personal questions about my married life. Because I felt uncomfortable, I didn't answer them right away. That's when they slapped me for refusing to answer. I told them defiantly that I went there because I was hungry, that I didn't have any food, place to live or job. The agents kicked me on my back and I fainted. When I gained consciousness, I was lying in the common room where all the prisoners were kept. I felt so angry and frustrated at my treatment that I cried. When we weren't interrogated, we had to sit completely still. The guards hit anyone who moved. Prisoners had to ask permission to go to the toilet. For food, we were given corn with a bit of white rice and cabbage soup.

After three days, I was transferred to the Hoeryong *nodong danryundae*. There were about 40 prisoners - mostly women. I spent 40 days at this facility. Everyone had to work here. We woke up at 4am to do some running exercises. Then at 5am we read the newspaper and studied North Korean political ideology. We ate breakfast at 6am and then went to work. In May, we were sent to a State-run farm to plant seeds and spread fertiliser on the corn and bean fields. It took an hour to walk to the farm so we ate lunch there. We worked until it got dark. Then we walked back to the prison and ate dinner at 6:30pm. At 7pm we had re-education class, which went on until 10pm when we were finally allowed to sleep.

Working on the farm was very difficult because I was old and hungry. The guards had no respect for the elderly. One time while I was sowing, I was so tired that I stopped for a rest. A young guard caught me and grabbed me by my neck. I pleaded with the guard and begged for his forgiveness, but he just cursed at me and kicked me on my back and head. He said how I could dare to be tired when I had been eating so well in China. Because of that beating, I suffer from chronic back pains and headaches still today. At the *danryundae*, both prison guards and team leaders hit the prisoners. The team leaders hit the prisoners because they were responsible for the work so if we didn't work hard then they would get in trouble with the prison guards.

In one room 25 women slept. We were given thin blankets, which didn't protect us from the cold. The room was very smelly because there was a toilet in the room, which was used by so many people. We all had lice in our hair, body and clothes. During menstruation, women were given some paper but that was never enough so they had to use their underclothes. I saw three female prisoners die during my incarceration. One collapsed at work in the fields, another died in her sleep and the last woman died of intestinal problems. We ate very little in prison - just a bit of steamed corn kernels and cabbage soup. Many prisoners suffered from diarrhoea. There was no medical facility, so when prisoners were sick, they were given some rudimentary remedy that had no effect. The problem wasn't any particular sickness, but the hard labour itself combined with terrible living conditions, inadequate food and dirty water. For example, prisoners were so thirsty that they would drink water they knew was dirty just to quench their thirst. When prisoners were really sick, the guards called the *anjunbu* police to come pick them up and send them home.

In June 2001, I was picked up by the police and accompanied to the *boansung* in Kyongsong. I was the only person and I stayed there for three days. I was sent to the ceramics factory where I used to work. The factory had closed down years ago but they wanted me to clean it anyway. I also had to collect human fertiliser from the outhouses of schools and other public offices. I had to take the fertiliser and unload it onto a grass/hay heap, which would be used during the following sowing season. After two weeks, I escaped and crossed the border. I returned to the Chinese family in Sanhe who helped me. From there I called my husband and he came to pick me up.

North Koreans living in China need Chinese citizenship. If we had it then we'd have the freedom to do what we want. We wouldn't live in fear. I pray to God for citizenship. It's so unfair how we are treated in this country. It makes me feel so frustrated. North Korean women only marry Chinese men who have some kind of defect such as old age, disability, poverty, etc. My husband cares a lot for me but his children treat me badly. They look down on me because I'm North Korean. When I eat, I feel guilty

because I think of my sons in North Korea who may not have anything to eat. I was only able to send money to my sons once and that was three years ago. I even had to borrow 1,000 yuan (US\$130) from a neighbour. I have since paid off that loan. I live better in China than I did in North Korea, but sometimes I think going to South Korea would be better because I would then have South Korean citizenship. In South Korea, I would be able to speak my mind freely without watching what I say all the time. I would like to see my sons again before I die.

Case study 27

Gender: female

Age: 34

Hometown: Onsong, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (2001)

Interviewed: 25 January 2007 in China

I worked at a coal mine in Onsong where I drove the train that transported the coal to a designated site. I decided to go to China because I had no family left in North Korea and I needed to survive. My mother died of a heart attack. My father, who also worked at the coal mine, died in a work-related accident. My younger brother, who had gone to China before me, was repatriated and sent to the *danryundae* in Onsong where he later died from liver problems. My eldest brother is missing, but I think he's dead too.

On 8 October 2000, I crossed the Tumen River with a man. I fell in the water and almost drowned. The man saved me. Once I reached the other side of the river, I went to a random house in Tumen. They helped me by giving me dry clothes, food and a place to sleep for the night. The next morning, they gave me money to go to a village by taxi. Through their connections, I was introduced to a *Chosun Jok* farmer whom I married.

In a crackdown in February 2001, the Chinese military police from the Tumen border detention centre came to our village and arrested a North Korean woman who was one of our neighbours. They made her tell where other North Korean women were living. That's how I got captured. I spent one week at the Tumen border detention centre. When it was full, they deported us to North Korea.

I was incarcerated at the Onsong *bowibu* for about a month. There were so many prisoners - about 100. The *bowibu* agents interrogated me on my activities in China - what I did there, if I knew any South Koreans, went to church, or married a Chinese. I lied and said that I wasn't married. I was not hit. Usually they don't hit women, only male prisoners. When I wasn't being questioned, I had to sit still with my hands behind me. At other times, they made us exercise, squat and stand repeatedly. I couldn't sleep at night because the guards would always check on us.

In March 2001, I was sent to the Onsong *nodong danryundae*. There were about 100 prisoners at this facility as well. There weren't any children. I spent about two months there but of course I didn't know how long it would be until I was released. Our daily routine began at 4am when we woke up and had to run one lap around Onsong singing a patriotic song. We were given different chores to do everyday. The prisoners then washed together. Three prisoners shared one bucket of water. We weren't given a towel and the slow ones sometimes didn't get any water. There was only enough water to wash our face and hands. We ate breakfast at 6am. All meals consisted of cornhusk rice and cabbage soup. After breakfast, we were forced to work in various projects - any project that the city of Onsong needed help with. For example, we worked on a housing construction site where we had to transport sand and cement, and draw water. We also had to work in the fields farming. We went from one work project to another. Each project lasted several days. One supervising guard and two team leaders oversaw our work. Unless you collapsed from exhaustion, you had to work. I've never seen female prisoners get hit, only men. The guards would kick them. We had thirty minutes for lunch and then we returned to work until 7pm. After dinner we had to attend long meetings where we had to criticise each other. At 10pm, we attended re-

education class where we learned patriotic songs, studied about North Korean politics and basically were told never to go to China again. We were allowed to go to bed after midnight. There was one doctor at the *danryundae*, but no medicine was dispensed. He only checked to see how sick a prisoner was. In extreme cases, a very ill prisoner was sent to a hospital outside. If you worked hard and had a good relationship with the guards, you could get some benefits. At the end of April 2001, I was released a bit early in honour of Kim Il Sung's birthday, which is on the 15th of April. I was sent home and on 18 October 2001, I returned to China.

My husband and I have one son who is now six years old. I help my husband with farming from spring to autumn. We try to get seasonal work during the remainder of the year. We earn about 2,000 yuan (US\$260) per year, which is enough to live on but not enough to put some money aside. We have to pay 150 yuan (US\$20) per month for our son's school fees. In January 2007, we had to also pay 500 yuan (US\$65) to get his *hukou* (household registration).

Since returning to China, I have never stepped outside this village because I'm too scared - even though we get help from the local police. I always keep our doors locked. When I hear a noise especially at night, I get scared. It really affects my nerves. If it weren't for the insecurity, I'd gladly remain in China, but in South Korea you are safer and can live in peace. Plus, my child would be able to have a better life.

Case study 28

Gender: female

Age: 52

Hometown: Pyongyang

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 2 (2000 and 1999)

Interviewed: 12 February 2005 in South Korea

In Pyongyang, I was the citizen leader of my neighbourhood and my husband was in the military. We had two daughters and a son. Life in Pyongyang was good before 1995, although there were some PDS cuts even from 1985-89. On Kim Il Sung day, everyone received bananas and tangerines. After his death in 1994, there were drastic cuts in food rations - people in Pyongyang received food only five days per month. Our family received 10g of wheat, beans, corn, and rice. From 1996 the PDS completely stopped. Only the military and security people received any food.

From 1996, families began selling houses and animals to get money for food. We ate alternative food like grass, which you cook like spinach. I soaked it overnight and we ate it the next day. When my son ate it, his body swelled up. Only after 10 days did the swelling die down. You can still see marks on my son's body.

On 10 October 1997, I went to China with my 15-year-old daughter in search of my eldest daughter who had gone missing at a border town market in China. She was 17 years old at the time. But once in China, my younger daughter also went missing. She was abducted from the house in Helong where I worked as a nanny. She was sold for 4,000 yuan (US\$510) and forced to marry a farmer in a remote rural village in Heilongjiang Province. To get her back, I sought the help of a Han Chinese man whom I married. He paid the farmer 4,000 yuan and brought her home.

First arrest:

In July 1999, four men came to our house at night and kidnapped us. They were planning to sell us as 'brides' to men in a mining town for 10,000 yuan (\$1,200) each. My daughter was so scared that she couldn't eat anything. The neighbours, suspecting foul play, called the police. My daughter and I spent forty days at the Helong border detention centre before being deported to North Korea.

In August 1999, we were sent to the Musan *bowibu*. I was told to undress and they checked everywhere

for money. They made me squat and stand 60 times to force out any money we may be hiding in our vagina or anus. I was then sent to a room where I was interrogated on what I did in China. The agents asked me whether I had spoken to any South Koreans or missionaries. I denied doing any of that.

That evening, the prisoners were moved to the Musan *nodong danryundae*. In the mornings, the guards made us run about eight kilometres. It was harvest season so we worked in the cabbage patches. We also had to carry heavy logs from the mountains. The guards threw stones at us if we didn't run fast enough. I had swollen joints so I always had problems keeping up. All we had for food was porridge made from black, rotten flour and watery soup. Three days later, a prison guard sent me on an errand. I went to my sister's house by bicycle to ask for some money - so that I could buy the things that the guard wanted. When I got there, my sister told me to escape to China. She said that the authorities in Pyongyang had notified the Musan *bowibu* that I had gone missing so there was a warrant from Pyongyang for my arrest. So, I escaped to China again.

Because of my swollen legs, I had trouble walking. When crossing the Tumen River, I was almost carried away by the current because I was so weak. I lost consciousness and was saved by an elderly woman who happened to see me. She took me to her house and helped me recover. I called my husband and he came to pick me up. I found out later that the prison guards had beaten my daughter because I had escaped. After two and a half months, she was released in November 1999.

Second arrest:

I was eventually reunited with my younger daughter. We got arrested again in July 2000 and sent to the Musan *bowibu* again. This time before we were deported my daughter and I swallowed money, which was tightly wrapped in plastic. Someone told on us so our money was confiscated. The guards beat me for hiding the money. The *bowibu* agents asked me more specific questions about any connections I may have had with South Koreans or missionaries. I denied having any relationship with either.

After three days, we were transferred to the Musan *nodong danryundae* where we were held for one week. Then we were sent to the Chongjin provincial *jiplyulso* for 40 days. Our confiscated money was returned to us minus the money for the food my daughter ate during her two-and-a-half-month incarceration at the *danryundae* in 1999. During the day we were sent out to the State farms to work in the vegetable fields. We worked until 5pm. At night, we clung to the window sill like bats to avoid the swarm of blood-sucking bedbugs that would get into our navels, fingers, toes, ears - just everywhere. I couldn't take it anymore so when the police came to pick up prisoners from Songchun, South Pyongan Province, I begged him to take us. The prison officials felt sorry for me and changed the place of origin of my daughter and me to Songchun instead of Pyongyang. On the way to Songchun, my daughter and I managed to escape while the policeman was asleep. He had been drinking heavily so he was in a deep sleep. We went back to Musan and then onto China.

My younger daughter came to South Korea in January 2003. In the same year, other good things happened to me. I finally found my eldest daughter after placing an ad in a Chinese newspaper. She had been sold to a farmer in Ning'an, Heilongjiang Province and they had one son. In March 2003, my son came to China to join us. My husband had recently passed away.

I was not happy in China because I couldn't live peacefully - I was always living in fear. And going back to North Korea was not an option. When I watched South Korean dramas and met South Koreans, I liked what I saw. I was also afraid that my family would get separated again so I decided that we should join my younger daughter who was already in South Korea. My eldest daughter had to leave her 5-year old son behind. He would have been a security risk because young children cry and make noise. We travelled from China to Vietnam where we got help from a church and an NGO. We then travelled to Cambodia where we sought the help of the South Korean Embassy in Phnom Penh. From there, we were flown to South Korea and arrived in June 2003.

I live in Seoul with my three children. I work in sales and head an organisation that raises public awareness about North Korea. When I first arrived in South Korea, I called my Chinese husband a few times but then stopped. There was no point since he could not come here. My children are all working or studying. My eldest daughter sends money regularly to her son in China.

Case study 29

Gender: male

Age: 25

Hometown: Chongjin, North Hamgyeong Province

Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (1998)

Interviewed: 17 February 2006 in South Korea

When I was four, my mother passed away due to a heart attack and my father died of starvation when I was 12 years old. He died in front of the Chongjin train station. When I was 11 years old, I was caught wandering the streets and sent to a 9.27 camp* in Chongjin where I was incarcerated for two weeks. All the children were forced to do farming work from 9am to 5 or 6pm. We ate corn rice three times a day. We were so hungry that sometimes we ate the cabbages in the field. We were kicked by the guards when they caught us. When I was released, I was sent to an orphanage in North Hamgyeong Province for three years, from November 1994 to April 1997.

I went to China in April 1997 because there was nothing to eat in North Korea. I looked for farming jobs where I worked for a family and in return they gave me rice, used clothing, etc. Once I was given a bicycle, which I was able to sell in North Korea. I made a living by bringing small goods that I got from China and selling them in North Korea. I crossed the border into China many times, but I stayed for only short periods of time - overnight or a couple of days, maximum a fortnight. I always travelled alone.

In October 1998 when I was 16 years old, I got caught crossing the border. Somebody must have told on me. I was taken to the *bowibu* in Onsong where I was imprisoned for three months. Even though I was a minor, they treated me as an adult because I had graduated from high school at the orphanage. I was handcuffed to a wall and the guards hit me with a steel poker on all parts of my body except for my head. If they didn't have a poker, they used whatever they had in their hands. My body hurt so much that I couldn't sit or lie down. I had problems sleeping because of the pain. For meals, I was given corn noodles once a day.

At the end of December 1998, I was sent to the Onsong *anjonbu* for three months. The prisoners there were all border crossers. We had to sit still from 6am until the guards wanted to go to bed. We were given bread once every three days.

In March 1999, I was sent to smaller *anjonbu* in a district of Onsong where I was incarcerated for another 11 months. The *anjonbu* in Onsong made sure that I was 18 (in Korean age**) when I was transferred over, so that they could try me as an adult. We ate rice that was made of cornhusks and beans. I was interrogated again on the reasons why I went to China. I had to sit completely still from 6:30am to 9pm. The guards hit us if we moved at all. They hit us with things like a wooden stick, the wire used to clean guns, etc. During my trial, I was charged with three crimes: contraband smuggling, illegal exchange of foreign currency and border crossing. I was given a lawyer who worked for the State. I could defend myself but there was no point because it was a closed trial. It was not open to the public so I knew that I would be found guilty. I was given a three-year sentence - one year for each crime. The sentence included time already served.

In November 1999, I was sent to the *kyohwaso* no. 12 in Junger-ri, near Hoeryong. There were about 1500 prisoners. We had to wake up at 6:30am and after eating breakfast, all the prisoners gathered for work at 8am. We worked in a stone quarry where we had to load stones onto carts and transport them to the train depot. We then unloaded the stones onto the trains. We had to finish our work in the quarry

and return to the labour camp by 7pm.

I had no choice but to work. Even if I was sick or near death, I would still have to work. There wouldn't be any help for sick people anyway because the clinic at the labour camp didn't have any medicine. We were hit frequently by the guards. We were hit even for smoking. My body became numb to pain. I had no skin, just bones so when I was hit, I stopped feeling pain.

For food, we were given rice made of grass, corn and beans. It was only two mouthfuls. The guards didn't care if we died of starvation.

Every evening from 8-9:30pm we learned prison rules and regulation. We had to memorise them and if one of us couldn't, the whole group was punished collectively. We wouldn't be allowed to sleep until all of us had memorised the rules and regulation correctly.

I was forced to work in a cucumber patch. We needed wood to grow cucumbers so we went to the mountains to get it. I had to get 50 sticks (1-2 kg) and carry them down to the patch. I was sick and suffering from three different illnesses: high fever, stomach ache and typhoid. Because I was so sick and malnourished, I couldn't follow the others. When the guards noticed I wasn't with the group, they stopped all the prisoners and went looking for me. When they found me, they beat me with sticks. They thought I was trying to escape. Then they dragged me by my feet back to the camp. Blood was streaming down my head and back. My body hurt so much. I couldn't sleep. A teacher at the *kyohwaso* who liked me convinced the guards to release me early because I was so sick.

Many people died in the prison. Some of my fellow prisoners just died in their sleep and didn't wake up in the morning. I went into the *kyohwaso* with 23 people and I was the only one to leave the place alive. 21 others died while in custody and one was serving a 7-year sentence. I, on the other hand, had my sentence commuted and was released 14 months earlier on 6 July 2000 in commemoration of the death of Kim Il Sung (8 July).

About a month later on 12 August 2000, I returned to China. I stayed at a friend's house. When I first arrived, I was so hungry that I ate everything in sight. I couldn't control myself. Because I was so malnourished, my body couldn't handle all the food. My face swelled up and I was sick for several days.

I didn't work in China. I found shelter in a church and studied the Bible. The church had to shut down so they were busy trying to send us to different places. The pastor suggested that I go to Mongolia. He said that once I get to Mongolia - even if I'm arrested by the police - I wouldn't be deported to North Korea and that my case would eventually be heard by the South Korean Embassy in Ulan Bator. So in July 2001 I left for Mongolia with four other North Koreans. We took a train from China to the border of Mongolia. Then we had to travel by foot across the border to Ulan Bator. We were told the route, but it was complicated so we got lost. It was terrible. A baby died during the trip. When we finally made it to Ulan Bator, we went to the South Korean Embassy. We left for South Korea on 14 September 2001.

I am studying Korean literature at a university in Bucheon City, Kyunggi Province. To earn money, I deliver food at a Korean restaurant. Before that I used to work as a mechanic. I want to write my own biography one day.

* 9.27 camps (named after the month and day they were established) were set up by the North Korean Government in 1997 to protect the children living on the streets. But in reality, these facilities merely rounded up street children (occasionally even adults) caught searching for food and incarcerated them one month at a time. These camps eventually closed down due to poor hygiene and lack of food.

** In Korean age, a person is one year old at birth and the person's age increases by one year at the beginning of the calendar year (e.g. a person born in December 2006 would be two years old in January 2007).

Case study 30**Gender: female****Age: 49****Hometown: Hoeryong, North Hamgyeong Province****Number of times repatriated/imprisoned: 1 (1997)****Interviewed: 23 January 2007 in China**

In 1997, I went to China to buy clothes to sell. I was caught with a friend who was involved in the clothing business with me. She bribed the police to release her. I was taken to the Hoeryong *anjonbu* where I was incarcerated for one year. In those days, you were sent to an *anjonbu* (Social Safety Agency) and not the *bowibu* (National Security Agency) because there weren't many border crossers at that time. During the interrogation process, the *anjonbu* asked me where I lived in China, who gave me the clothes I was wearing, if I met any South Koreans and whether I had any intention of going to South Korea. I was hit with a shoe, kicked and beaten all over my body until I confessed. After three months of interrogation, I suffered from a nervous breakdown so I was sent home for 20 days. Afterwards, I returned and spent the remaining nine months at the *anjonbu*. During this time, I wasn't interrogated anymore, but I had to sit still all day. I saw a pregnant woman who was taken to a clinic to have an abortion before being transferred to a prison camp. I was sentenced to four years in a *kyohwaso* for crossing the border attending church. The sentence for border crossing could be anywhere from 1-15 years.

I was sent to the Hamhung *kyohwaso* in 1998. There were about 400 women and 1500 men. They were not only border crossers but also common criminals. I was forced to work in the fields farming corn, cabbage and radish. The prison guards hit you if you didn't listen, weren't able to meet the daily quota or went somewhere you weren't supposed to. Only prison guards hit you, not the team leaders. Sick people didn't work because there was no medicine to treat them. There were doctors but the medical facilities were poor. For food, we were given a small quantity of steamed corn rice in a cup and some watery cabbage soup. They didn't give us any water. We were always hungry. To supplement our diet, we ate grass, pine tree leaves and tree bark. I was released in 2000 during an amnesty for prisoners. I had served two of my four-year sentence.

In the winter of 2000, I came with my four sons because we needed to find food and work. My husband had died of malnutrition in 1997. We stayed at a church. The church was hiding about 100 North Koreans. We then returned to North Korea after four months. The church people helped almost all the other North Koreans get to South Korea but they didn't help us. I felt used and ignored by them. I felt that they didn't fully understand the dangers North Koreans faced crossing the border into China.

On 30 September 2006, I returned with my four sons to China. We walked for eight days from Hoeryong to Sanhe (in China). We then made our way to Yanji where we live with a relative. My sons are 30, 28, 22 and 17 years old. My 30-year-old son recently fell ill and had to be hospitalised. He had kidney problems and suffered from high blood pressure. We were late in paying the bills - I had to borrow 3,000 yuan (US\$390) from a relative - but because there was still an outstanding balance of 600 yuan (US\$80), they wouldn't release him. Now the Chinese authorities have taken over the case because they suspect him to be North Korean. I can't even visit my own son because if I do, the police will arrest me. I don't know if he's dead or alive. In China, the hospitals cannot provide a proper burial for undocumented people. It breaks my heart to think that he's lying in a hospital morgue. I would rather risk a prison term and take my dead son back to North Korea but my other sons won't let me.

The problem with living in China is we have no proper documents. My sons and I need to go to South Korea because there we can at least live and work without the fear of being arrested and deported.

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