

Cultural Identity Changes in *The Girl with Seven Names*: A Critical Analysis of An Immigrant's Experiences

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Abstract

This study focuses on cultural identity and cultural changes that are experienced by the main character in the memoir *The Girl with Seven Names* written by Hyeonseo Lee. This study follows Hall's (1996) theory about cultural identity in the process of becoming rather than being. There are three scopes of study in analyzing cultural identity, including: how is the process of cultural identity constructed; the cultural disparities in achieving social status between South Korea and North Korea; and the criticism toward North Korea. Using a textual approach, the data were analyzed after the researchers did a series of close reading. The results reveal the struggle of the main character's process of identity becoming as an immigrant in surviving the host culture to form a new identity as a North Korean defector. The findings also showed that this memoir was used as a form of criticism toward the North Korean government whose politics and class system restrict its people's freedom.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Changes, Immigrant, North Korea

INTRODUCTION

Analysing human society requires us to observe the culture that contributes to form people's identity. The first point of culture can be seen from the shared practices and beliefs within a particular group. Human and literature can make a strong boundary in defining their life. The unique ability to shape and define one's life through the creation of literature serves as both a reflection of their experiences and a medium for expressing their ideas. One of the forms of literature is memoir, a writing based on real-life experiences. In this context, memoirs can be used as a medium of critical writing that is more complex and perhaps could show the other country's political

condition called critical memoir (Mack, 2014).

Since the 1990s memoirs have been a popular literary term as non-fiction stories and forms of autofiction and semi-autobiographical novels (Gíslason, 2021). A memoir, based on the author's real-life experiences, can be used as an influential tool to gain support from the audience. Similar to *The Girl with Seven Names*, a memoir tells the story of a North Korean defector's challenging journey to find identity and assimilate into South Korean society. By providing a critical examination of the North Korean regime and the quest for freedom, these memoirs not only highlight the personal struggle for independence but also invite readers to engage in a broader

discussion on political oppression and the process of seeking identity. The focus of the study above was highlighting the complexity of becoming an immigrant to survive in the host country.

This study explores the understanding of how cultural identity and cultural changes shape the main character and author, a North Korean defector, in the memoir *The Girl with Seven Names*. From the researcher's perspective, the analysis seeks to uncover the evolving identity of the main character. Therefore, the research offers knowledge and information gathered from relevant websites, recent research and other related sources related to the topics which can be valuable for all readers. In practical terms, this study is expected to offer valuable contributions and solutions for writers and readers alike. Regarding social relevance, the research indicates that individuals from culturally different backgrounds experience both positive and negative impacts on their learning processes during cultural identity formation (Altugan, 2015). This phenomenon is closely related to the cultural identity held by the society itself.

In examining the cultural identity of the main character in *The Girl with Seven Names*, the research involves three key approaches to understanding the process of cultural identity. Firstly, it investigates how cultural identity is depicted and developed within the memoir. Secondly, the research analyzes the cultural disparities in achieving social status between South Korea and North Korea. Lastly, the study explores the author's critique of North Korean politics. The study draws on Hall's (1996) theory to explore cultural identity.

Based on a review of several previous studies, this research examines how cultural identity is managed by immigrants as they adapt and endure in their host countries. Additional research, such as the cultural identity crisis in "White Teeth" by Indasya

(2017), the representation of the changes in cultural identity in "Rich People Problems" by Prastika (2022), and the exploration of cultural identity and dislocation in "Girl in Translation" by Muliawati (2015), illustrates that the process of cultural identity is a complex issue. These studies highlight the difficulties characters inside a novel is the encounter in their search for identity. In this research, the study examines the challenges faced by the author of *The Girl with Seven Names* by Hyeonseo Lee with David John, focusing on her struggle to navigate and define her cultural identity. The author of this memoir is Hyeonseo Lee. David John is the editor who helps Hyeonseo Lee in editing the text for coherence in her writings. Through this analysis, the research aims to reveal the complexities of her journey and how cultural identity evolves alongside cultural changes.

Cultural identity theory is discussed in this research to provide a framework for analysis. According to Hall (1996), identity is the use of resources of history, language, and culture with the process of becoming rather than being, regarding what a person might become. Meanwhile, Fiske (2010), stated culture is in various aspects of society that participate in some community or individual society and is expressed in the form of media, arts, language, rituals and symbols. In conclusion, cultural identity is shaped by the interplay of history, language, and culture (including media, arts, rituals, and symbols) as part of an ongoing process of becoming and positioning.

To understand an individual's identity within society, cultural identity plays a crucial role in helping people find and define who they are. Confusion surrounding self-identity often triggers a sense of identity loss. Within the context of cultural identity, educational systems and practices significantly influence how cultural norms, values, and beliefs shape individuals within their environment. Navigating a new identity

involves finding a "space" to understand oneself truly (Amiot, 2018). This suggests that during the process of cultural identity change, it is important for individuals to identify their "space" within their new identity to gain a clear understanding of who they truly are.

A discussion about cultural identity theory and its forms would be incomplete without addressing the main trigger of cultural changes within individuals. As an immigrant in the adopted country, a person may experience a sense of belonging to their country of origin and face trauma and discrimination related to their identity (Tummala, 2014). Negativity towards the country of origin often emerges when an individual becomes an immigrant, especially as they gain awareness of the actual conditions in their homeland, including its political situation, educational system, and social structure. This issue profoundly impacts an individual's cultural identity, potentially leading to changes in personal identity and a significant loss of cultural identity.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses descriptive data with a qualitative method that is conducted in this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 2), qualitative research uses a real background, and the purpose is to understand contextual meaning. Qualitative research incorporates non-numerical data taken from analyzing the narration inside a memoir or other literature. The purpose of this study is to analyze the connection between the main character in the memoir and the author of the memoir, as it happens in real-life situations, within the context of the changes in cultural identity in *The Girl with Seven Names* memoir.

As stated by Blaxter (2006), there are four steps in data collection: interviews, observations, document analysis, and

questionnaires. In this study, the documentary method is employed, using written materials as the primary source of data. Data collection is divided into two categories: primary and secondary data. The narrative in *The Girl with Seven Names* memoir serves as the primary data, while materials related to cultural identity are utilized as secondary data in this research. Primary data refers to the information collected directly from the main research source. Secondary data is used to support the primary data already gathered. In this study, the primary data comes from *The Girl with Seven Names* memoir, which is analyzed to understand the process of cultural identity formation as depicted in the text. For secondary data, the researcher used journal articles, books, web-based articles, and previous research related to cultural identity, as well as the historical context of North Korea, China, and South Korea before the Cold War, to support this research. To collect the data, the researcher categorizes and classifies the relevant information. In this step, the data connected to this research is analyzed, particularly focusing on the cultural identity of the main character, including their perspective, thoughts, behaviour, and surroundings. The data is classified into three main points. First, to understand how the memoir constructs the process of identification in cultural identity. Second, to examine the cultural disparities in achieving social status between South Korea and North Korea. Lastly, to identify the critics toward the politics in North Korea. To apply the theory, a critical analysis is conducted following Hall's (1996) cultural identity theory, which examines the process of identification in cultural identity, particularly in the context of immigrants. This research focuses on the main character undergoing the process of cultural identity formation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Process Identification of Cultural Identity in *The Girl with Seven Names* Memoir

The purpose of cultural identity is to provide individuals with a sense of belonging and continuity through ongoing cultural and societal changes. It helps people navigate the transformation process within their cultural and historical contexts, allowing them to find freedom and meaning in their evolving identities based on personal experiences. As based on Hall (1996) identity is a question about the process of becoming rather than being. The clarity of identity in this context was not a fixed process but always continued. Hall (1996) also claims that identity is the resource of history, language and culture that is an ongoing process. This statement meant that identity in its process connected with the history, language and culture in constructing the identity. By employing this analysis, individuals who struggle with finding their identity can gain a sense of belonging by integrating aspects of their culture into their new identity as an immigrant.

Hall's (1996) statement about cultural identity aims to address the specific challenges of identity faced by diaspora subjects, including immigrants. In the context of this study *The Girl with Seven Names* memoir uses Hyeonseo Lee as the main focus. Hyeonseo Lee has a different vision of the world that she lives in now. The conflict happened when she managed to escape from North Korea and realized she got confused with her identity which caused her to experience a certain kind of identity loss. The loss of identity leads some individuals or someone to cultural changes that bring new identity. Hyeonseo Lee is a unique case because she is both a diaspora subject and an immigrant. She is considered a diaspora subject due to her dispersion from her homeland as a result of political persecution.

On the other hand, she is also classified as an immigrant since she became a North Korean defector seeking freedom and a new life, first in China and then in South Korea. Because of this case, according to Hall (1996), cultural identity involves several aspects related to the process of becoming rather than being. First, it includes the process of identifying cultural identity through history, language, and culture. Second, it addresses cultural disparities, such as those in achieving social status between South Korea and North Korea. Lastly, it involves criticizing political issues, in this case in North Korea, to understand the main character's identity as both an immigrant and a diaspora subject.

Identifying Cultural Identity: History, Language and Culture

One of the crucial aspects of understanding cultural identity is analyzing cultural differences based on history, language, and culture. The meaning of cultural differences is all people become more global in their outlook and behaviour, and when it is utilized as a resource then it is beneficial but if it is not, they make a huge impact on society (Moran et al., 2011). This statement means that cultural differences influence people's behaviour when they arrive in a host country. If these cultural differences are embraced and used as a resource by society, they can have positive effects. However, if they are not accepted, they may lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and harm.

In *The Girl with Seven Names* memoir, as a woman who escaped from North Korea, Hyeonseo starts to realize that her identity between China and North Korea is very related, yet she feels that there is a big difference of gap between North Korea and China, especially in historical context on the economic condition between North Korea and China. The situation occurred during the great famine in North Korea in the 1990s,

known as the 'Arduous March,' which led to widespread starvation. In this state, Hyeonseo starts to doubt her feelings that her country is the best one in the world. This statement will show the distinctive conditions in North Korea. *Why hadn't they eaten for weeks? This was one of the most prosperous countries in the world* (Lee, 2015, p. 78). This brings Hyeonseo Lee to the idea that she wants to cross the China border and see what is on the outside. Hyeonseo believed that North Korea was a dictatorial regime that kept its citizens unaware of the realities beyond its borders. The regime enforced political self-reliance, leading the people to reject all external help. During this time, the North Korean government prioritized military expenditures, resulting in severe food shortages. The only means of survival for many was through illegal trade. Due to the closed nature of both North Korea and China, people living near the border engaged in illegal transactions, referred to as 'trading,' to exchange goods for food. When North Korea was suffering from famine, Hyeonseo noticed that a child from China appeared healthy and well-nourished, highlighting the stark cultural differences between the two countries and illustrating that others did not endure the same hardships. This event reflects how China's economic rise, connected with the global commodity price surge, significantly expanded the role of the Sino-North Korean border economy in North Korea's external economic relations (Lee and Gray, 2017). It was clear that the historical economic relationship between North Korea and China was deeply connected.

In terms of language, North Korean writing is derived from Chinese characters, specifically from Mandarin. However, as an illegal immigrant who escaped to China, Hyeonseo faced differences in tone, accent, and meaning. This distinction required her to adapt to the new environment in language. The differences between Korean and Chinese

also made it challenging for Hyeonseo to understand the language.

My first day as a waitress in the Gyeong-hwoi-ru Korean Restaurant nearly ended in catastrophe...

'I didn't ask for this.'

'I'm sorry, sir. You asked for gum?'

'I said cigarette, not gum.'...

He must have said the Mandarin word xiang yan (cigarette) but I'd heard kou xiang tang (gum)...the manager told me that some customers behaved like pigs in order to get something for free. (Lee, 2015, p. 125)

The data above portray that a person who is not fluent in their language could easily be taken advantage of by people in the host country. In this context, Hyeonseo, as a North Korean woman who escaped to China, is considered an illegal immigrant and hides her identity among Chinese people to avoid deportation. The reason she cannot return to her country of origin is that North Korea is a dictatorship that punishes those who are not loyal to the leader. By escaping from North Korea, Hyeonseo has already demonstrated disloyalty, as North Korea prohibits people from making connections with the outside world. This is related to the top ruling elites in North Korea knowing who they eliminate which means the one who rules North Korea is the one who can form and make the destiny (Jung and Joo, 2021).

Hyeonseo Lee an illegal immigrant that not 100% good at Chinese, realised that looking for a job was quite a challenge since she realised that the most important thing was people skills and how they use their language. This is related to the cultural differences that can impact society by preventing individuals from becoming part of it in terms of language. The style also has an

impact on cultural differences in the context of culture.

...warm winter half-boots and a lightgreen Chinese-style padded winter coat. These would make me look more Chinese. I had already cut my hair in the style that was fashionable then for girls in China – like men's, long at the front and short at the back. (Lee, 2015, p. 99)

In this case, because she became an illegal immigrant in China, Hyeonseo decided to become more like a Chinese to avoid being noticed by Chinese society as North Korean. This shows that cultural differences based on style can impact how society accepts people who follow their culture, in this case, through style. As a North Korean, Hyeonseo was very cautious about her appearance and tried her best to follow the environment. Even though she lived as a Chinese, she was considered illegal, which made staying a not available option for Hyeonseo. For this reason, Hyeonseo decided to move to South Korea and overlap with another cultural difference in the host country. The overlap between her own culture of origin and China happened when Hyeonseo tried to give her identity to the South Korean embassy to become a South Korean legal citizen.

*'Are you really North Korean?' ...
'Your passport and visa are genuine ...
'North Koreans don't come here with real passports. They have fake' ...
'It is a real passport, but that is not my real identity. I'm from North Korea' ...
The irony. In Shenyang, I'd had to convince suspicious police that I was Chinese, not North Korean. Here, I was trying to do the opposite. (Lee, 2015, p. 192-194)*

Not only did Hyeonseo experience cultural differences in China, but she also experienced cultural differences in South Korea in the context of history. South Korea was also cautious with North Korea, as one of the North Korean defectors attempted to spy on the North Korean defectors who had refuge at the South Korean embassy. The reason for the spying was that North Korea and South Korea were historical enemies before they separated into two Koreas. The statement above brings out the overlap between cultural differences and loss of identity that initiated cultural changes within cultural identity. As stated by Papa (2016), identity attributes/self-construals can help individuals maintain their sense of self and prevent losing their identity. In the statement above, Hyeonseo was losing her sense of self-construal, which led to experiencing a loss of identity. Loss of identity can cause confusion and insecurity inside a person. This problem emerges as a part of cultural identity because the process of identity is not a fixed as process as stated by Hall (1996). Not only that, the South Koreans also believe in education as a part of their culture in deciding their social status.

In South Korea, too, social status matters a lot, but here it is not hereditary. It is determined through education. And although education is a great leveller in South Korea – even the children of the wealthy get nowhere if they do poorly at school – it brings with it oppressions of its own. It is partly the reason why South Koreans are, according to surveys, the unhappiest people in the developed world. Everyone I seemed to meet was desperate for a good education in order to avoid sinking to the bottom of the pile. (Lee, 2015, p. 207-208)

In this statement, Hyeonseo portrays culture in the aspect of education in South Korea as a critical case of how cultural differences in education impact society. Education also plays a significant role in language within South Korean society. This represents the third cultural difference in South Korea in the aspect of language. South Korean language in recent times was similar to foreign languages such as *co-la* and *pop-corn*. This happened because South Korea was a partner of the political and military alliance of the United States when the Cold War between South and North Korea happened in choosing parties. It is also claimed that in the 1950s, South Korea received a lot of American aid, mostly for supplies, rather than industrial projects that would develop the economy (Agov, 2013).

In North Korea, education was accessible to all citizens, but higher education was reserved for privileged individuals in North Korea who achieved a high songbun. The songbun system is similar to a class system in North Korea, where people with low songbun have fewer privileges. Having a surname like 'Kim' affects the North Korean songbun, as it is considered a name associated with a high-ranking class that holds power and high social status in ruling the country. It was stated that the percentage of individuals that have the surname Kim was considered the same as having a high socio-economic association (Kim et al, 2014).

I was conceived during the honeymoon, and born in Hyesan in January 1980. My birth name was Kim Ji-hae.

It would seem that my mother's future, and mine, was sealed...

My mother could not live with the official, my biological father, and left him just after I was born.

In the Korean way of measuring age, a child is one year old at the

beginning of its first year and not, as in most countries, at the end of the first year.

I was age one. (Lee, 2015, p. 7)

Hyeonseo Lee is a lucky woman because her name started with the name "Kim" that obtained from her mother who married a Kim family. This statement was not a fixed process since in the process of her cultural identity, Hyeonseo experienced the changing of name many times due to the safety of her escape journey. For this reason, Hyeonseo a woman who escaped from North Korea experienced a loss of identity because of the changing of identity that happened repeatedly 7 times until her name that she is now as "Hyeonseo Lee". This experience could bring self-construals towards people because they experience the changing of thoughts and feelings of their identity, in this context towards their changing of name. In the end, the feeling of loss in their name, origin and culture can bring someone into the loss of identity. Loss of identity is the spark of cultural changes that happen inside a person and emerge a new identity. The spark of changes in cultural identity is started in the sense of confusion and emotional disconnection, also the feeling of lost touch with the mother's cultural heritage and traditions is the spark of cultural changes. The feeling of loss of identity can spark the feeling of belonging to their own culture of origin and it is considered as becoming in Hall (1996) since cultural identity is not a fixed process. This is becoming a major concern for the immigrant who is trying to adapt to the host country and feel the complicated process of cultural identity, because of this case identity is not a fixed process there is a process called "positioning" in cultural identity.

In the process of positioning in cultural identity, Hyeonseo Lee experienced a new identity in the host country based on

the process of becoming. When the new identity is created a person does not lose her cultural identity origin. Instead of losing their mother culture, a person gives a space of room for the mother and the host culture.

When the South Korean athletes were winning, they cheered tumultuously...I couldn't shout uri nara...My heart was rooting for North Korea. I was proud to see my country winning gold medals. But I couldn't cheer. North Korea was the enemy... The Olympics sparked a full-blown identity crisis in me... Am I North Korean? That's where I was born and raised. Or am I Chinese? I became an adult there, didn't I? Or am I South Korean? I have the same blood as people here, the same ethnicity. But how does my South Korean ID make me South Korean? People here treat North Koreans as servants, as inferiors. I wanted to belong, like everyone else around me did, but there was no country I could say was mine (Lee, 2015, p. 210-211)

The statement above clearly describes the process of belonging to the mother culture while not wanting to leave the host culture. The hesitation to become a part of the host country due to negative stereotypes was not easy for Hyeonseo. Although she had already become a part of the host country, as a North Korean, Hyeonseo was treated as part of an inferior group with a negative history. As her new identity emerged, Hyeonseo adapted to the host culture in terms of ethnicity and language. She tried to learn the South Korean accent and words derived from English, like *pop-corn* and decided to pursue further education in South Korea. Obtaining a degree in South Korea was a new identity adopted by Hyeonseo Lee as a North Korean. The

confusion in the process of belonging and forming a new identity as an immigrant initiated her identity as a North Korean defector as a part of both the host culture and the mother culture.

Achieving Social Status Between South Korea and North Korea

Social status is a part of crucial things in culture that are shaped by the individual or group that exists. There are three main things that become the focus of achieving social status including education, social hierarchy and politics. In *The Girl with Seven Names* case, social status called as "Songbun system" in North Korea was classified into three classes; core, wavering and hostile classes. According to the latest data around 25% of the population belongs to the "core" class, 55% to the "wavering" class, and 20% to the "hostile" class (Lipes, 2012).

It was from the woman's sister who lived in North Hamgyong Province, a neighbouring province to the east of ours. My mother wanted to show it to us. 'I need you and Min-ho to know something. People are having a hard time. You ask me for this and complain we don't have that. Not everyone has what we have.' (Lee, 2015, p. 81)

Based on the statement above, Hyeonseo Lee is not from the hostile class and is considered part of the upper class in the system. The major concern of this statement is about the hostile class of North Korea, because, at that time, North Koreans who experienced famine died from hunger, and most of them were from the hostile class. Unlike them, Hyeonseo Lee did not suffer the same experience. The hostile class usually lived in labour camps or sub-standard housing because they did not have access to high-rise apartments or level-five housing (Patterson,

2017). The class system in North Korea is based on family generation, determined by their name, their contribution to the country, and their level of loyalty to the leader. The concern about North Korea's social class is that it becomes very difficult for citizens to obtain a higher class in the system, as people do not get good living conditions, jobs, or education because of their class.

The difference of the South Korean class system was South Korea is positioning education as the number one importance of achieving social class. The education was for everyone and it was ensured to all students with every socio-economic background.

He was highly educated and his parents were also graduates of prestigious universities. As crucial as education is in South Korea, it is not an end in itself. It is the means toward status, and social status is the insurance against the fear that everything may one day turn upside down. (Lee, 2015, p. 209)

The statement above portrays the condition of people in South Korea, who prioritize education as a means of achieving social status. People who graduate from university can apply for better jobs depending on their skills and the class of education they come from. It is very possible for low-class people in South Korea to achieve high social status through scholarships. This is different from North Korea, where education is based on people's songbun and loyalty to their leader. This is because North Korea's songbun system is related to the political system in North Korea, which uses songbun to ensure people become loyal citizens to their leader. The political system in South Korea is more flexible and does not depend fully on education; instead, education is considered a prestigious thing in South Korean society. The change in cultural identity based on the

problems experienced by the hostile class became the answer to the changes in identity inside Hyeonseo Lee. As a South Korean citizen, Hyeonseo faced discrimination due to her origin, which became a trigger for criticism of North Korean politics and the desire for freedom in the host society by becoming a North Korean defector.

The Criticism of Political Issues Towards North Korea

Hyeonseo Lee is a South Korean author that born in 1980 in Hyesan, North Korea. Recently, Hyeonseo Lee lived in South Korea became a North Korean defector to speak out about North Korean human rights to find freedom in North Korea. She also graduated from the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and works as a student journalist at the South Korean Ministry of Unification. Throughout her studies and career, Hyeonseo Lee authored one of her famous memoirs called *The Girl with Seven Names* in 2015. The North Korean regime is considered a closed country with the Juche system that prohibits people from having contact outside their country.

They know North Korea is bad in some vague way, not clearly. But when we explain it, they then wonder how can a whole country be modern-day slaves? In North Koreans, the moment we are born we don't know there's another life existing outside of our country. The regime always told us all the bad things about the outside world, describing America as full of thieves, all human scum, beggars, everyday people dying on the streets and hospitals. When I heard the propaganda, I thought living in North Korea is paradise. At the same time, how the propaganda works --besides telling us all the horrible things about a capitalist country like America--you

witness public executions frequently.
(Donnelly in Oslo Freedom Forum,
2016)

In North Korea, people are focused on propaganda and following the leader's orders. The people in North Korea need to respect the leader like a god, for example, through the Kim Il-sung portrait. North Koreans believe that the leader is sacred and that the portrait is more important than their lives. This phenomenon raises concerns in other countries because the people are becoming slaves rather than citizens. This is not a natural condition of people becoming loyal citizens to follow the leader's orders; it is the impact of the regime in North Korea, particularly the 'Kim' family, trying to control the people and make them loyal citizens. Based on Choi (2013), the distribution of social resources in North Korea is monopolized by the state and its bureaucrats. During the famine in North Korea, people were required to contribute their food resources for military expenditures, while they suffered from hunger and died of starvation. The leader in North Korea prohibits citizens from having contact with the outside world, causing people to be indoctrinated with false information about other countries, which are considered to be in poor conditions. From Hyeonseo Lee's perspective, she is willing to help the North Korean people achieve their freedom by uncovering the truth about the regime from their cultural background, political conditions, and the indoctrination of false information taught by North Korea. In the end, Hyeonseo's criticism of North Korea was delivered through her memoir, *The Girl with Seven Names*, which she wrote to ask for support from the host country and audience to seek freedom for her country by becoming a North Korean defector. Hyeonseo is a unique subject of the diaspora, as she is dispersed from her country due to

political conditions. On the other hand, as an immigrant, Hyeonseo wanted to experience life outside of her country to seek freedom by becoming a North Korean defector in South Korea.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of cultural identity is to find the identity inside the individual in order to achieve the thinking that identity is not a fixed process but it is an evolving process of the person's experience towards new culture and identity. As stated by Hall (1996) cultural identity becomes the resource of history, language and culture that is an ongoing process. For this reason, based on Hall (1996) about cultural identity that was very wide scope of study, in the analysis of *The Girl with Seven Names* memoir by Hyeonseo Lee, the cultural identity is divided into three scopes of focus including the process of identifying cultural identity through history, language, and culture; the cultural disparities in achieving social status between South Korea and North Korea; the critics toward the politics in North Korea. In focus on finding the cultural identity, Hyeonseo Lee went through many challenging situations in search of a new identity. The differences in history, language, and culture between North Korea, China, and South Korea created a complex process of cultural identity, as described by Hall (1996), which is not a static process. Hyeonseo experienced that North Korea and China were connected through their economic conditions based on history. This experience made Hyeonseo curious about the outside of North Korea's borders, which marked the beginning of the process of change in her cultural identity. After this change, Hyeonseo Lee experienced an overlap in the loss of identity. The overlap occurred because Hyeonseo refuge in the South Korean embassy and experienced confusion and stress between the mother and host cultures

that she was trying to adopt. The loss of identity eventually led to the creation of a new identity for Hyeonseo Lee, allowing her to position herself to give space between the overlap of her identities in the mother and host cultures. As a result, Hyeonseo adopted a new identity as a South Korean citizen and adopted a new education in South Korea. However, Hyeonseo does not define her identity as only South Korean, Chinese, or North Korean; instead, she considers herself a North Korean defector, reflecting her sense of belonging to her mother's culture. The second focus is on the social status between South Korea and North Korea in cultural disparities. As a North Korean, Hyeonseo Lee's social status is based on people's songbun. The songbun system in North Korea is a class system that consists of a core class, wavering class and hostile class. The major concern of hostile class triggers the cultural disparities/cultural changes inside Hyeonseo. Knowing the real situation Hyeonseo began to realize that North Korean politics, education and social class were considered tools of the political regime to use the citizen in obeying their leader. Education in South Korea was used as a way of achieving social status in gaining a better life. These differences make Hyeonseo realize her desire for freedom for North Koreans and her intention to pursue a university degree in South Korea to expose the false information taught by North Korea about other countries' conditions. The last focus is on the criticism of Hyeonseo Lee as an immigrant living in South Korea, aiming to achieve freedom for North Korean people from political oppression, particularly those from the low class of Songbun in North Korea. The "Kim" family tries to control the citizens by obtaining loyalty, thereby taking advantage of monopolizing the distribution of social resources. This control led to the famine during the Arduous March in the 1990s, resulting in deaths from starvation and

hunger. Through her memoir, *The Girl with Seven Names*, Hyeonseo Lee seeks support from other countries and the host country to achieve freedom in North Korea and become a North Korean defector.

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