

BRIDGING POLICY AND COMMUNITY: HOW GOVERNMENT AND LOCALS SHAPED REFUGEE EXPERIENCES IN 1990S KOREA AND 1960S HONG KONG

INTRODUCTION

In one episode of Squid Game, Player 101 taunts Player 067, a defector from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), to "wave the North Korean flag" (Figure 1). While seemingly casual, this remark reflects a deeper reality: DPRK refugees in the Republic of Korea (ROK) are often perceived as fundamentally different, highlighting the broader challenge refugees face worldwide in gaining acceptance. Today, **1 in 67 people globally is a refugee**, yet many face resistance: nearly half of global respondents in an Ipsos survey support closing borders entirely to refugees.



Figure 1: Player 101 told Player 067 to "wave the North Korean flag." Taken from netlix.com. Accessed on August 26, 2025.



Figure 2: A propaganda poster from ROK written 조국의번영을 원하는 반공애국자 북한해방을 위하여 싸우는 그들을 지지하라! [Anti-communist patriots who want the prosperity of our homeland, support those who fight for the liberation of North Korea!] Taken from https://www.fmkorea.com/index.php?document_url=4242013128&cpage=2. Accessed on August 26, 2025.

OBJECTIVE

- **Examine** how public attitudes shaped refugee experiences
- **Investigate** how community opinion and government policy interacted
- **Show** that integration was negotiated both from above and within communities

METHODOLOGY

Case Studies

- DPRK refugees in the ROK (1990s)
- People's Republic of China (PRC) refugees in Hong Kong (1960s)

Sources

- **Primary sources** like posters (Figure 2), newspapers (Figure 3) and polls (Figure 4)

Approach

- Uses a **case study** approach, analyzing primary sources to examine how local attitudes shaped refugee integration and how the interplay between local attitudes and government policies affected refugee experiences



Figure 3: Kung Sheung Daily News (May 20, 1962) with headline 夜冷雨凄風 今晨邊境山頭發現不少病倒難胞 [After a night of cold rain and piercing wind, many sick and weakened refugees were found this morning on the border hills]. Taken from <https://www.hkpl.gov.hk/en>. Accessed on August 26, 2025.

RESULTS

DPRK Refugees in the 1990s

- Surveys (1989–1995) show many ROK citizens saw the DPRK as **hostile** or a **competitor**
- This negative view extended to DPRK defectors through anti-communist propaganda
 - Defectors were seen as **"inferior," "lazy,"** or **politically suspicious**
- Language, cultural, and technological barriers hindered integration → social and economic isolation

→ Defectors were recognized legally, but **socially excluded**

PRC Refugees in the 1960s

Aligning with the government's neutral stance, Hong Kong residents generally viewed PRC refugees **positively**, seeing them as **"long-lost brothers"** due to shared cultural and familial ties and a sense of moral duty:

- Residents actively **provided** food, shelter, and support
- Newspapers like Sing Tao Daily and Ming Pao highlighted refugee needs, likely reflecting **public sympathy** due to their commercial nature

→ This combination of public support and government accommodation **helped refugees adapt successfully**

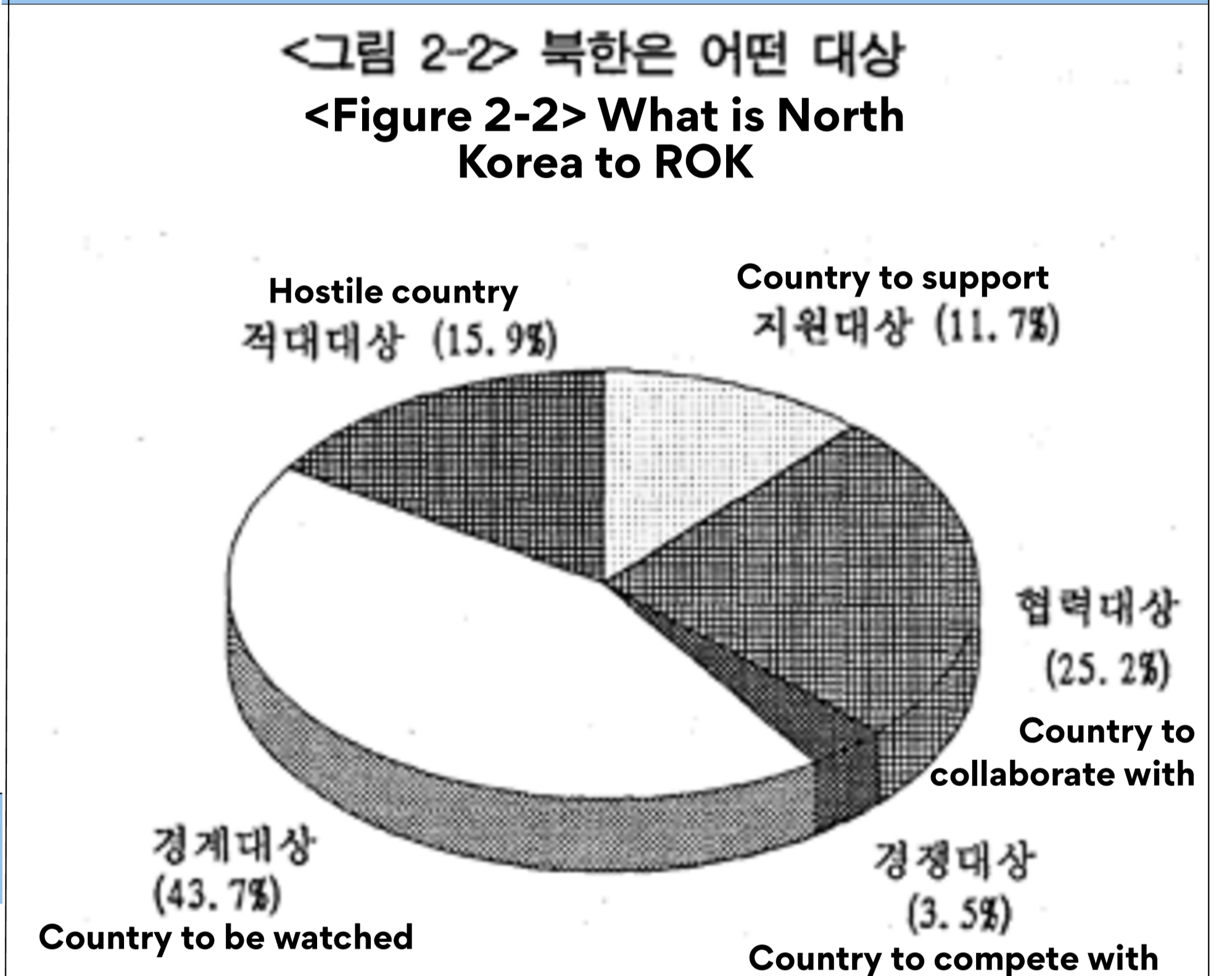


Figure 4: Taken from 1995年度 統一問題 國民輿論調查結果 [Results of the 1995 National Public Opinion Survey on Unification Issues]. Accessed on August 26, 2025.

CONCLUSION

- **Residents' attitudes** are often more crucial than policies—local acceptance is key; policies alone are insufficient
- Especially in today's era of **social media**, where opinions spread rapidly, **public opinion** should be taken into account in humanitarian efforts

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