

STATE OF THE MARKET IN THE DPRK

North Korean authorities are increasing market regulation. Beginning December 1st, women under the age of 49 were prohibited from running businesses in Pyongyang. Age restrictions were placed on female merchants since the inter-Korean summit meeting in October, at first prohibiting those 39 years and under, but now includes anyone under the age of 49.

In North Korea, because males are officially required to be at their assigned workplace, women generally run the businesses. However, market regulations started being enforced in order to eradicate South Korean dramas, movies, and other so-called non-socialist elements from the marketplace.

According to the results from a Daily NK survey on the present state of the North Korean marketplace, although market activity has slowed, these new regulations are not being enforced aggressively outside of the cities, and businesses still continue to operate because the regulation officers are receptive to bribes.

Also, because of the direct link between business regulations and the issue of making a living, citizens' voices of opposition are getting louder than ever. Let us explore the present state of the North Korean marketplace.

Although not an exact statistic, it seems that there are roughly two to four marketplaces within a city. In the case of the most-populated city, Pyongyang (19 districts), there is a marketplace in

every district. Tongil-geori has two because of its large population. In Sinuiju, the bridgehead of trade between North Korea and China, there is one in South Sinuiju, and three in Sinuiju itself (Chaeha, Namjung, and Dongseo [The Peace Market]). In North Korea's second largest city after Pyongyang, Chungjin, there are two marketplaces in the larger districts. In the case of counties, there is a town marketplace, and one to two smaller farmers' markets.

The marketplace is generally active, except during the rice-planting and harvest period. However, it has become very stagnant recently due to the enforcement of restrictive measures like price regulations and age restrictions on merchants. For instance, in Pyongyang, there used to be around 50-60 merchants in one area, but now there are only 7 or 8. Now, it is that much more difficult to find good products at the market.

Stallholders' daily earnings differ depending on their products. In the case of agricultural goods, merchants earn an average of 3,000 won per day, and around 5,000-6,000 won per day for marine products. Merchants who sell manufactured goods could make around 10,000 won.

In addition to the age restrictions, there are increasing measures regulating products sold at the marketplace. There are officers who patrol the marketplace enforcing regulations. Outside the marketplace, safety officers regulate the businesses. The level of control depends on the person, but if bribes are given, they tend to slack off.

With exception of large cities in North Hamkyong Province such as Hoeryeong, Musan, and Chungjin, market activity remains 'business as usual' in smaller cities and counties, despite the

regulations.

Because everyone knows each other in small cities and counties, it is not possible for the regulations to be strictly enforced. Moreover, even in main cities, there are many merchants under the age of 40 who carry out their business, and if they are not able to in the marketplace, they are still able to sell products in alleys and other locations.