

★ **Accidental Tyrant: The Life of Kim Il-sung****Fyodor Tertitskiy**

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A forensic reconstruction of the life of North Korea's founding dictator, Kim Il-sung, Fyodor Tertitskiy's *Accidental Tyrant* covers the regime that has dominated North Korea for seventy-nine years.

A man of many names, the grandfather of North Korea's current dictator was born Kim Song-ju before changing his name to Kim Il-sung, or "becoming the sun." *Accidental Tyrant* follows his path from a peripatetic youth—he left Korea at the age of seven and, with brief exceptions, did not return until he was twenty-eight—to becoming a World War II Soviet operative. By his death in 1994, he had ruled for almost fifty years.

Acknowledging the profound censorship and lack of reliable historical sources about a regime that never connected to the internet and considers viewing foreign media a criminal offense, the book relies on international records. Many questions, as about Kim's original birthplace, are left to conjecture. Details regarding the 1967 implementation of the "Singular Thought System" and other central elements of his totalitarian regime are treated with dense, academic precision. The minutiae of government meetings and decision-making processes are detailed, as are the ways in which North Korean culture was reconstructed in Kim Il-sung's image.

The narrative of Kim's life and actions is enriched by a scholar's grasp of the historical and geopolitical events that played out around him. Reverberations of Chinese and Soviet policies are tracked within his Democratic People's Republic of Korea—a name that emerged as an ideological middle ground between the two dominant communist powers. Further information is provided in the articulate footnotes that account for almost a third of the book.

A biography with grand political and historical dimensions, *Accidental Tyrant* tells the story of the man who shaped modern North Korea.

WILLEM MARX (March / April 2025)

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