

North Korea's Hidden Revolution

Jieun Baek

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Listening to Caroline McLaughlin's engrossing audio recording of Jieun Baek's book *North Korea's Hidden Revolution* feels a little like being told a scary bedtime story of a horrific land ruled by a despot, whose people could benefit from the arrival of a benevolent prince or some other fairy-tale staple.

Chapter after chapter details an impossibly harsh regime that promotes its leader as a god, complete with legends of his incredible deeds, and even an ideology-supporting version of the ten commandments. Though many details of living under the totalitarian Kim regime seem fantastic, they're all first-hand accounts by defectors Baek has interviewed, discussing the near-crippling government oversight of entertainment, social gatherings, and food distribution, along with the falsehoods of government propaganda. The Kim regime claims, for example, that the United States invaded North Korea to start the Korean conflict.

The defectors' incredible stories of daily tyranny and harrowing escapes are related by McLaughlin with only subtle, yet effective, distinctions in her tone, allowing the impact of the defectors' own words to deliver their messages without undue embellishment. The recording becomes a bit dry in its concluding summary section, losing some of its sense of immediacy as personal narratives give way to a textbook-style tone, but even here the topic carries McLaughlin through, with fascinating glimpses as to what a reunification between North Korea and South Korea might look like.

North Korea's Hidden Revolution soars highest with simple stories of smuggled USB drives, pirated DVDs, and the role of foreign media in opening the perceptions of North Koreans to the truth about their country's status in the world. There don't appear to be any easy solutions for those inside North Korea—no prince or savior is on the horizon—but during this enjoyable and educational recording, it becomes clear that the people of North Korea are slowly becoming their own saviors.

PETER DABBENE (Audio 2017)

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