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BOOK REVIEW

Kim Yong, With Kim Suk-Young. Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor, New York City: Columbia University Press, 2009, 168 pages. ISBN: 978-0-231-147447

Kim Yong. With Kim Suk-Young. Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor, New York City: Columbia University Press, 2009, 168 pages. ISBN: 978-0-231-147447

The number of defectors from North Korea increased significantly in the past decade. In South Korea in 2017 about 29,000 North Korean refugees are said to have settled, and many more are thought to be hiding in the border region between China and North Korea. Their stories are most valuable for understanding the totalitarian regime in the North and publicising unthinkable human rights abuses in the infamous gulags in which about 200,000-300,000 prisoners are believed to be forced to work under inhumane conditions. This book tells us the story of Kim Yong, a former military official who escaped abroad.

The book Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor, co-prepared by Kim Yong and Kim Suk-young was published by Columbia University Press in 2009. Kim's disastrous story of his six-year detainment and outrageous escape from North Korea was interpreted by Kim Suk-young, a professor of Theatre and Dance studies from the University of California. Both prepared the book using a writing style balancing between poetry and journalism. The book comprises many interviews Kim Suk-Young held with Kim Yong after they met a couple of years ago. The novel is not only including the story of the North Korean military officer, but also some pictures related to Labour Camps established in North Korea.

Born in 1950, Kim Yong was sent to an orphanage in Pyongyang (p. 23) and was in the end received, at the age of nine, by a couple. Later he

received a military education. Kim Yong was made a lieutenant colonel in the North Korean National Security Agency and a career military officer earning foreign currency. Meanwhile, as an officer and a businessman of the North Korean Army, he was able to travel freely within the country and experienced a high level of corruption among party authorities.

His life changed in 1993 (p. 60), when North Korean authorities discovered that the young Kim had a father who collaborated with the Americans during the Korean War. Then the narrator was removed to labour camps (nos. 14 and 18) where he spent six years before he escaped. Kim Yong is the first person known to have escaped from Pyongnam Kaechun, the No. 14 detention centre, which is accurately described on page 80. Later he fled to South Korea through Mongolia and China. Later he moved to the United States, but finally he now resides in Seoul.

In the period 2012-2016, there is literally an flow of books prepared by North Korean defectors. *Long Road Home...* is a kind of precursor as it was published in 2009, and exposes the reality of Kwanlisos, North Korean labour camps, to the outside world. Until this period, although it is known that gulags exist in North Korea, little had been written on this topic.

Still, for such a short novel -- little over a hundred pages -- this compelling, but also terrifying provides a good deal of ground related to North Korean internal affairs and demonstrates that nobody can secure there. This volume is certainly not the last word on North Korea and its defectors. The book definitely has to be recommended, in particular for those who already possess a basic knowledge of North Korean affairs, as it provide some unknown facts related to the militarisation of the North Korean economy especially concerning the implication of military companies in the trade of seafood (p. 43). Furthermore, the novel gives a unique peek into the life of Pyongyang's high ranking officials of the Korean Worker's Party (Kim Yong met Ko Yeong-Hee, Kim Jong-Il's third-wife-to-be).

Therefore, I would like to recommend this book as one of the best ways to understand the institutional system of North Korea, which too often under-estimates the role of the North Korean Army in the economy of this country. In order to supplement their information, readers should also have a global view of North Korean society, and so I would like to invite them to read *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot: The True Story of the Tyrant Who Created North Korea* and *The Young Lieutenant Who*

Stole His Way to Freedom, a constructive book about the escape and the life of a North Korean defector in the western society prepared by No Kum-sok and Blaine Harden, which depicts the defection and the life of No Kum-sok, a former pilot of the North Korean Army. Concerning the life of high ranking officials of the Korean Worker's Party, I suggest reading the book Exit Emperor Kim Jong-II: Notes from His Former Mentor, depicting not only the daily life of North Korean elites, but also the cruelty of the policy of the leader Kim Jong-il.

Dr Nicolas Levi

