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*North Korea's Hidden Revolution: How the Information  
Underground is Transforming a Closed Society* by Jieun Baek  
(review)

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*North Korea's Hidden Revolution: How the Information Underground is Transforming a Closed Society*, by Jieun Baek. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016. 282 pages. \$30.00 hardcover.

Jieun Baek's *North Korea's Hidden Revolution* examines how media flows secretly into and out of North Korea, as well as how this information affects North Korean society. Baek illuminates how networks of citizens take enormous risks as they disseminate and consume illegal content including foreign films, TV shows, books, and news. The author discusses the ways in which forbidden information is spread through gossip, freedom balloons, radio, and USBs. Baek utilizes in-depth interviews with ten North Korean defectors, and cites a variety of academic sources, news websites, governmental documents, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The author argues that foreign media "may be instrumental in someday bringing down one of the most brutal and repressive regimes in modern history" (p. x).

Baek explains the interlinked networks of actors who push illegal media into North Korea, including *compassion-driven networks* (e.g., good-will driven organizations who raise funds to create content and fill USBs), *profit-driven networks* (e.g., smugglers who work for profit to move USBs), and *demand-driven networks* (e.g., those who consume the content). The author makes a causal argument that "This active flow of goods and information now plays a central role in the social consciousness of North Korean individuals, and has sparked irreversible changes inside North Korea" (p. xviii).

This text offers a coherent picture of the inflow of illicit media. Baek illustrates how the Great Famine drove people away from their work assignments and toward illegal markets and trade. CDs and VHS cassettes with Korean, Chinese, and American films became available on the black market. To counter such cracks in the system, police began to conduct home inspections looking for illegal media, and there ensued bribery or punishment. The author pieces together her interviewees' stories intelligibly, illustrating that citizens are "more curious than afraid" (p. 55).

Regarding "old school" media, Baek argues "word of mouth was and still is the most trusted and widely used source of information for North Koreans" (p. 89). The author provides examples, such as citizens receiving information about currency exchange rates and commodity prices from Chinese traders across the border. Baek also addresses the use of "freedom balloons" to deliver pro-democracy literature, radios, and USBs loaded with foreign media. However, balloon launches have the potential to cause threats to national security. Baek does not mention the use of *GPS-guided*

balloons or other modern vehicular technologies to deliver information, such as drones. NGOs such as the North Korean Strategy Center utilize more covert delivery of information on USBs via the Chinese-North Korean border.

Baek provides a thorough discussion of the usage and importance of radio. The author lays out interviewees' testimony about their previous use of radio when living in North Korea, as well as defectors' production of programs aimed at North Korean consumption. The content of these radio programs include news, music, South Korean dramas, descriptions of South Korean society, North Korean defector memoirs, biographies of the Kim family, and content pertaining to history, human rights, and democracy. The Unification Media Group has "a joint goal of reaching one million North Korean adults within the next five years in order to spark organic changes from within the country" (p. 134).

In her discussion of the digital underground, Baek more fully explores the dissemination of information via cellular networks and content-filled USB drives. Up to 2000 calls using cell phones are made between South Korea and North Korea each day; many of which allow family members to remain in touch and coordinate the transfer of money and goods to North Korean relatives via brokers in China and North Korea. Despite tracking, surveillance, and the risk of punishment, illegal cell usage continues to grow. Although Baek's primary argument is that the information underground is transforming North Korea, the author acknowledges that "information campaigns into North Korea are not linear experiments with the human mind, whereby a piece of outside information instantly and magically liberates a person," (p. 158) and includes the opinion that "foreign information is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of creating positive changes inside the country" (p. 197).

In her discussion of a new generation rising, Baek describes the *Jangmadang* generation—those who grew up during the Great Famine who never received state rations, and utilized street markets to survive. Baek labels this new generation as capitalistic, individualistic, more apt to take risks, non-reliant on the government, likely to have watched foreign media, and less loyal to the state. The author contends, "more information will drive more social and cultural changes" (p. 196).

In her conclusion, Baek argues, "Civil society organizations and possibly government-agency-powered efforts to increase the flow of information into North Korea may well be the most reasonable, sustainable, cost-effective, and peaceful way of creating positive change inside North Korea" (p. 216). The availability of more information, Baek

argues, gives the North Korean people “the agency, self-determination, and knowledge to write their own future and destiny as a nation” (p. 217). Baek informs readers that they too can become involved with organizations that send information into North Korea, which may include “researching best practices from comparative situations, finding and/or creating technologies for dissemination purposes, creating and editing original digital content, fundraising, and more” (p. 225).

Readers may ponder whether foreign media has actually created a “hidden revolution” in North Korea, as Baek’s title states. Baek could have unpacked the notion of a *revolution* more explicitly. Indeed, illegal, hidden, and outside information may very well be *sowing the seeds* for a revolution. These are issues that Baek and her readers should continue to explore, both intellectually and pragmatically.

Baek’s *North Korea’s Hidden Revolution* is a valuable examination of the transformative power of media and information. The text makes a vital contribution to our understanding of North and South Korea, and is a must read for those invested in Korean studies and human rights. The timing of Baek’s work is opportune as “now, more than ever, North Korean people are taking extraordinary risks to learn more about the world that exists outside of their universe” (p. 256).

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*Igniting the Internet: Youth and Activism in Postauthoritarian South Korea*, by Jiyeon Kang. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016. 248 pages. \$68.00 hardcover.

In early December 2016, Gwanghwamun Square, the center of Seoul, drew more than a million people. Outraged and stunned by President Park Geun Hye’s corruption scandal, ordinary citizens held candles and demanded her immediate resignation. The candlelight protests had been held every Saturday evening for months, and eventually succeeded in helping to oust President Park. These protests were extraordinary in many ways: Not only were they peaceful, festive, and family-friendly, but these protests also became a site of diverse cultural activities that expressed their anger against Park with innovative and creative signs and slogans, political parodies, and music performances. This historic