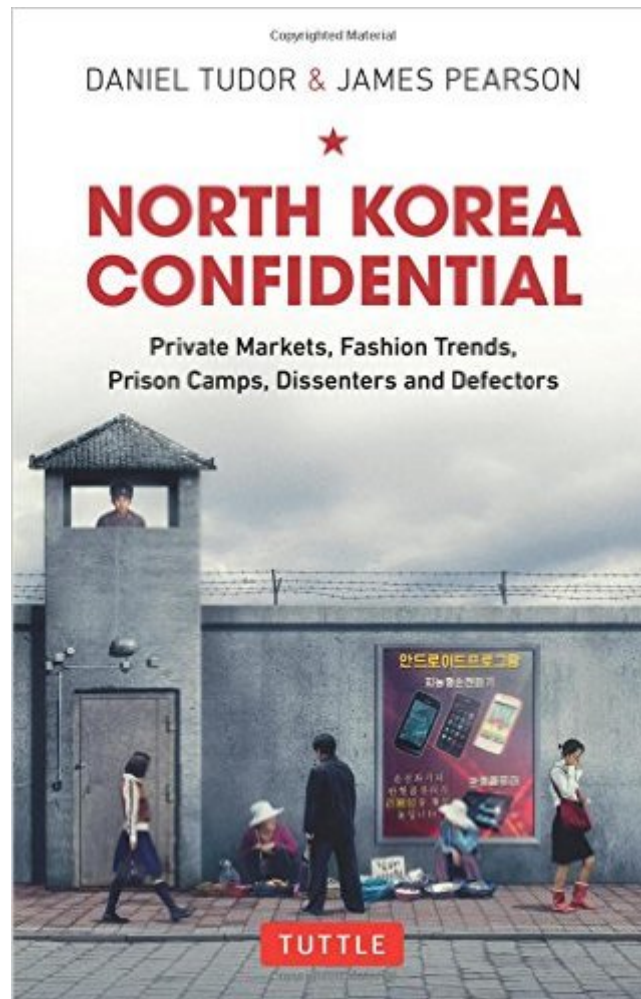


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# North Korea Confidential: Private Markets, Fashion Trends, Prison Camps, Dissenters And Defectors



## Synopsis

**\*\*Named one of the best books of 2015 by The Economist\*\*** Private Markets, Fashion Trends, Prison Camps, Dissenters and Defectors. North Korea is one of the most troubled societies on earth. The country's 24 million people live under a violent dictatorship led by a single family, which relentlessly pursues the development of nuclear arms, which periodically incites risky military clashes with the larger, richer, liberal South, and which forces each and every person to play a role in the "theater state" even as it pays little more than lip service to the wellbeing of the overwhelming majority. With this deeply anachronistic system eventually failed in the 1990s, it triggered a famine that decimated the countryside and obliterated the lives of many hundreds of thousands of people. However, it also changed life forever for those who survived. A lawless form of marketization came to replace the iron rice bowl of work in state companies, and the Orwellian mind control of the Korean Workers' Party was replaced for many by dreams of trade and profit. A new North Korea Society was born from the horrors of the era "one that is more susceptible to outside information than ever before with the advent of k-pop and video-carrying USB sticks. This is the North Korean society that is described in this book. In seven fascinating chapters the authors explore what life is actually like in modern North Korea today for the ordinary "man and woman on the street." They interview experts and tap a broad variety of sources to bring a startling new insider's view of North Korean society "from members of Pyongyang's ruling families to defectors from different periods and regions, to diplomats and NGOs with years of experience in the country, to cross-border traders from neighboring China, and textual accounts appearing in English, Korean and Chinese sources. The resulting stories reveal the horror as well as the innovation and humor which abound in this fascinating country.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For those who believe North Korea is all about nuclear missiles, zoot-suited dictators and labour camps - think again. While these deeply unpleasant realities form the dominant global media images of the Hermit Kimdom, they are far from the full story. In fact, since the late 1990s, a market economy has - almost unnoticed by the outside world - sprung into being inside North Korea. With the state distribution system having virtually imploded amid the murderous famines of the 1990s, desperate North Koreans turned to the market mechanism to survive. The astonishing result: While the nation's polity remains frozen in its Cold War deep freeze, the country's economy is now - de facto if not de jure - capitalist. In what may be the world's most top-down state, this transformation marks the biggest bottom-up change in the country's short history. So what are the components of this new "grey" economy; how does it work; and how do its players interact with the still-powerful state? These are the questions this important book tackles. A plethora of tomes focus on North Korean dictators and human rights abuses. This work portrays a different North Korea - and one that is, for the average Kim, Park and Lee, far more representative of their daily reality. The bigger question is why Western policymakers are sticking to their Cold War guns and not recognizing the fact of North Korea's marketization. Why is the wider world not working to support and strengthen this highly positive and promising development - a development that is being driven by ordinary North Koreans themselves, rather than by the monarch and his odious cohorts in Pyongyang - instead focusing policy almost entirely on sanctions aimed at externally denuclearizing the country?

Daniel Tudor and James Pearson's new book, *North Korea Confidential: Private Markets, Fashion Trends, Prison Camps, Dissenters and Defectors*, seeks to investigate many of the popular misconceptions and myths that have sprung up around North Korea - still one of the most reclusive countries on the planet. One of their central goals is to cut through the usual hyperbole and rhetoric one often encounters when reading about North Korea to present more of a rounded picture of the actual day-to-day life of ordinary citizens there. In asking what life is generally like for regular North Korean citizens, they come to several surprising and illuminating conclusions. Their core argument is that the devastating famines experienced by the country during the 1990s, coupled with the North Korean government's "Arduous March" policy and a significant

decrease in aid from long-term benefactor Russia, led to a series of highly significant social and economic changes. They reason that subsequent to the calamities of the 1990s, during which time the North Korean government essentially relinquished responsibility for feeding its people, private informal markets began to emerge – markets which now play an increasingly important role in the country's social life. They memorably liken this new style of private trade to Victorian Britain's attitude towards sex: "While everybody does it, few publicly admit to its existence." The book comprises seven fascinating chapters, each of which explore a specific aspect of contemporary Korean life. Each chapter is packed full of insightful analysis and compelling nuggets of information, from the popularity of South Korean-style eyelid surgery (often performed by privately trained citizens!

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