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## BOOK REVIEW

**Lee Ahlam. North Korean Defectors in a New and Competitive Society, London: Rowman&Littlefield, 2016, 159 pages. ISBN: 978-0739192665**

The number of defectors from North Korea has increased significantly in the past decade. In South Korea as of 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. The book is only dedicated to a minor extent to the stories of these defectors. The publication is much more focused on what is happening when defectors settle in South Korea or other countries. The author is Lee Ahlam, an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Resource Development at Xavier University Cincinnati, Ohio.

The book *North Korean Defectors in a New and Competitive Society*, written by Lee Ahlam was published by Rowman&Littlefield in 2016. Excluding the preface, the conclusion and additional elements, the book consists of six chapters. Some 70% of the book is related to the situation of North Korean defectors in South Korea.

Chapter one is related to the policy of foreign states toward the situation of North Korean defectors. The author underlines that China is not only repatriating North Korean citizens to their country but also allows the defection of 2,000 North Korean people. Chapter two describes the journeys of North Korean to other countries where the reader will note that the average journey took 4 years. Chapter three discusses the problems North Korean defectors face in a “New Society”, providing only

those elements related to the South Korean case. The support of the South Korean government to defectors is mentioned in chapter four. The fifth chapter discusses the fate of North Korean defectors who are not living in South Korea. Chapter six proposes some policy implications related to the issue of North Korean defectors.

Still, for such a short book -- little less than two hundred pages --, this book provides a good deal of ground related to the adaptation of North Korean defectors to Western societies and demonstrates that many issues may be improved in spite of the willingness of the South Korean government in the case of that country. As a kind of precursor (the book was published in 2014), its content provides some unknown facts related to the situation of North Korean defectors based out of South Korea. In spite of the clarity of the book and its valuable knowledge, I do have some minor remarks that I want to point out below.

Firstly, the book provides an amazing number of data related to North Korean defectors in South Korea, but didn't deeply analyse interrelations between South Korean citizens and North Korean defectors in selected areas such as New Malden, a suburb in south-west London. Secondly, I would recommend to the author a discussion of whether issues faced by defectors are different for female and male defectors. Thirdly, the information provided by the authors is clear and verifiable thanks to the important bibliography mainly based on South Korean documents, nevertheless I would like to point out some issues. On page 51 the author underlines that investigations are done by the NIS. In some cases, US inspectors are also involved. Fourthly, I would like to underline that the author provides three successful histories of North Korean defectors: Jung Sung-san, Lee Soon-shil and Joseph Kim. On this case, the author didn't clearly define what is meant by successful. Secondly, each of them has a different profile, but I think it would be more valuable to provide a story of a self-made North Korean man in South Korea such as Choe Sae-ung, the owner of a financial company (SN뱅크). Unsuccessful stories may be also provided such as that of Lee Young-kuk, the bodyguard of Kim Jong-il, who couldn't fit in to the life in South Korea. He finally emigrated to Canada in 2015. Fifthly, I also suggest that the author focus also on testimonies provided by not fully trustable people such as Park, Yeon-mi (page 44, footnote 31) who was criticised to a certain extent by other defectors. Here I suggest that the author might refer to such information. Furthermore, on page 62, a paragraph is related to self-employed North Korean defectors, where the author mentions traditional North Korean

restaurants in South Korea, he indicated the “start of big business” but that point is not further developed, which I deeply regret. Regarding this matter, the author relays us in footnotes to a report entitled 탈북자가 말하는 남한 사회 prepared by Lee Joo-chul (p. 88).

In spite of the previously mentioned remarks, I definitely consider that this book is a wonderful addition to the growing field of North Korean studies, I would suggest the author make a second edition by updating data and discussing more about the situation of North Korean defectors not only in Great Britain, but also in Canada and the United States. I also suggest the author discuss interactions between North Korean defectors in the United States and Soy. I would also suggest to the researcher to incorporate a chapter related to the notion of North Korean defectors in the North Korean media, and to see how the approach toward these defections changed over the last years.

I also think that Lee Ahlam has prepared a brilliant book, and I would like to highly recommend this book as one of the best ways to understand the situation of North Korean defectors. In order to supplement their information on that issue, I would like to invite interested people to read North Korea's Hidden Revolution: How the Information Underground Is Transforming a Closed Society, a constructive book about the escape and the life of a North Korean defectors in South Korea and the United States written by Jieun Baek, a young but already distinguished American scholar with Korean roots. Her book gives more additional names and inside stories than the Ahlam's one, but Lee Ahlam's book is definitely a more scholarly book. Jieun's one is more similar to a kind of novel. Interestingly both books were written with a humanitarian purpose, as each of the authors underlines that proceeds from books sales go to organisations that send information into North Korea. It's a real example of humanitarianism that should not only be underlined, but also firmly spread.

Dr Nicolas Levi

