

Review: Soon Ok Lee, *Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman*, Living Sacrifice Book Company, Bartlesville, OK, 1996

Pages: 157

Hell in the DPRK

A terrifying account of what North Korea is really like for those who are marked and targeted. Faithful Communist Soon Ok found out the true morality of the Party when asked to take the fall for a senior.

She endured beatings, freezings, and severe torture both before and after her 'confession'. There was no due process or right to appeal as promised in prison.

Christians were treated the worst, given jobs of toilet cleaning and clearing out excrement.

The reader will continually ask himself; "could I have endured this?", and the answer will most likely be, "no!".

Foreword (pp. 5-6)

I) Out of the Den of Death (pp. 7-10)

Prisoners who could not work 18 hours' hard labour were sent to solitary confinement.

Soon was released from Khechen prison in December, 1992.

II) The Den of Devils (pp. 11-23)

Interrogations began 0500 and lasted till 0000 [!].

"After a while, I found ways to survive the torture."

She endured one hour's "frozen fish" torture each night.

Cells were too cold for sleep, and prisoners were denied water for 3 or 4 days.

III) Days of Torture and Betrayal (pp. 24-34)

Soon began to develop an almost supernatural ability to survive torture.

"In reality, the Party and the security bureau officials all work to satisfy their own greed and to fill their own fat stomachs." [p29]

A procurement manager was arrested and tortured for not giving TVs to police officers.

IV) For My Husband and Son (pp. 35-47)

Soon was expelled from the Party and had her citizenship revoked.

"We have to freeze her to make her feel miserable so that she cannot tolerate any more, and then she will confess her crimes." [p36]

Males succumbed to torture quicker than females.

In October 1987, Soon signed a confession statement; the judge sentenced her to 13 years.

Prisoners could be killed without trial. There was a 2ft by 60cm torture room with an adjustable ceiling.

Whoever insults Kim Il Sung (KIS) is killed immediately in the DPRK.

In iron closet torture the victim is put in a closet and struck with a nail-filled club.

V) To the Den of the Tailless Animals (pp. 48-52)

A 10m barb-wire electrified concrete fence surrounded the prison.

“If you want to survive here, you’d better give up the idea that you are human.”

VI) Hard Labor, Cold, and Starvation (pp. 53-58)

Prisoners’ Commandments:

1. Adore the authorities of KIS and Kim Jong Il with all your heart.

Prisoners awoke at 0500 and slept at 0030; there were only three set toilet breaks during the day.

A woman who stole 1kg of sugar appealed her sentence and it was increased from 3 to 20 years.

Prisoners were only given 300g of food p.d., and if they failed to meet production quotas it was cut.

VII) Although They Worked Their Hardest... (pp. 59-67)

Toilets are much larger in the DPRK so people can share.

Dead prisoners were simply thrown into the mountain to be eaten by wild animals.

90 prisoners were housed in 6m x 5m cells.

The prison’s annual production quota was 10,000 coats.

Officers communicated by whipping, kicking and cursing.

Those consigned to solitary confinement in winter came out with paralysed legs.

VIII) Export Factories – The World’s Worst Slavery (pp. 68-80)

In May 1988, the DPRK arranged to export 900K brassieres to Russia:

“I began to get upset with the North Korean government. I thought. Russia’s government is making such soft, comfortable brassieres for women, but North Korea’s government is arresting innocent housewives

and treating them worse than animals. This was about the time I began to wake up from my brainwashed Communist ideas.” [p70]

Almost everyone experienced solitary confinement.

IX) Dying Was Easier Than Living (pp. 81-87)

X) Twisting the Necks of Babies (pp. 88-95)

KIS ordered all anti-Communists eliminated within 3 generations; pregnant women were forced to abort.

XI) Clay Was Tastier Than Rice (pp. 96-100)

Prisoners who over-ate clay rolled on the floor and died in agony.

XII) The Discipline Department (pp. 101-104)

Christians were given the worst tasks such toilet cleaning and removing excrement. This is so poisonous concentrated exposure can kill in a short time.

XIII) All for Kim Il Sung (pp. 105-111)

Prisoners who missed quota were not allowed to sleep.

XIV) The People Who Believed in God (pp. 112-119)

XV) The Son Who Lived in America (pp. 120-125)

My father is Kim Il Sung. My mother us the government.” [p123]

XVI) Shadow of the Communist Paradise (pp. 126-131)

XVII) The Real Robbers in Prison (pp. 132-135)

“Knowing too many secrets brings an early death.”

XVIII) The Traitor Who Walked Out of Prison (pp. 136-142)

KIS ordered Christian in prison could never lift their heads and look up to the sky.

Prisoners: “If I divulge secrets about the prison, I will return to prison.”

When wives are imprisoned, husbands are sent to rural areas unless they got a divorce (90% do).

XIX) Crossing the Tumen River (pp. 143-152)

In December 1995, after nearly 2 years, Soon arrived in South Korea.

XX) I Will Never Forget (pp. 153-157)