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DPRK The darkness empire

If we had to redesign the geographic map of Asia following the shadow lines featuring its society, the Democratic Popular Republic of Korea (DPRK) would certainly be the darkest, the most secret and perhaps the most dangerous area of the whole continent. Kept alive, at an international relationship level, thanks to its strategic position and to the most profitable nuclear blackmail, the DPRK, is a nation that lives at the limit of survival. Its population, reduced to starvation before silence, has no opportunity to free itself from the iron grasp of a cruel dictatorship that controls any details of the Korean society and one of the largest armies in the world. The worship of the personality of the “Supreme Leader” Kim Jong-il, inherited by his father Kim Il-sung “The Eternal President” and now passed into the hand of the young Kim Jong-un, is the element around which develops the whole apparatus of power. Like a continental fault that separates the Chinese empire at north and the USA influence area at south (South Korea), the DPRK plays this role of buffer state, for the interests of the parties, like a political weapon for its own subsistence. However, the population seems to fight a different battle: along the semi desert avenues of Pyongyang, among the desolate streets of Kaesong as well as in the small countryside villages, in an unreal, deep silence, hidden behind the scared and lost glances, the daily struggle against hunger seems to be the only act and only answer that North Korean citizens are able to give. Squashed by the party propaganda and by the lack of any form of information coming from the exterior world, they move like robots in grey and impersonal towns where the only bright colours are reserved to the worship of the personality of the “Great Leaders”. Their whole life is managed by the government: control on the work and family, food rationing, prohibition to travel without authorization, prohibition to travel abroad, are just some of the restrictions imposed to the population. The black market is not sufficient to provide the quotas of food given by the government. Many try to escape from this tight country through the Northern border with China and through the Southern border with South Korea, by sea. Escaping is not easy, especially to China, where the refugees are not recognized as political refugees. With the recent death of Kim Jong-il, the reins of the country are held by the third son, Kim Jong-un, identified as the heir since a long time. The domestic situation of the DPRK remains tense like the international relationships with China, USA and South Korea. The nuclear nightmare hangs on the eastern Asia’s future and the stabilities between the nations are fragile and thin silk threads.



Like a divine, eternal, indispensable presence, to be respected and worshiped, the faces of Kim Il-sung and of his son Kim Jong-il are always present in the life of the North Koreans.



The large avenues of Pyongyang nearly empty of motor vehicles are a theatre of silence. People walks around in a surreal and dark atmosphere mirroring the stiffness and terror imposed by dictatorship.



Due to the monopoly of the government propaganda and the lack of a real free economy, Pyongyang is a city with no advertising posters or signboards.



People faces show their helplessness and resignation due to the power oppression and stiffness.
A tight future waits for them beyond the bus window.



In every square, in every avenue, in every public building appear the serene and reassuring images of the Great Leaders. Eternal fathers, eternal guides of a country that runs along the social and economic abyss. Only the Chinese and South Korean helps allow this country not to collapse.



The population can move from one city to another only with special authorizations of the local authorities. Out of the capital, the public transportations are inexistent and bicycle is often the only possible solution.



Even if poor, the production activities are controlled directly by the regime or by members of the military junta.
Private initiative does not exist in a country where everything belongs to the government.



The efficiency of traffic wardens, in a bright blue uniform, becomes a paradox in a city with rare circulating vehicles and where persons mainly move around by foot or by underground.



**North Korea changes its face as soon as entering the enclaves addressed to the foreigners or to the regime components.
Luxury restaurants and hotels are perhaps the aspect better showing the decay and ostentation.**



Luxury prisoners, the foreigners are forced to a rigid surveillance by the regime. Compelled to predefined itineraries, they cannot and must not see anything else than the positive, rich and prosperous side of this country. A tailored heaven offering rich self-service breakfasts surrounded by marvellous mountain scenarios.



In a country where everyday life assumes dull, dead, lifeless tones, the bright and brilliant colours are addressed only to regime rhetoric, bucolic scenes where the two Great Leaders are surrounded by marvellous and luxuriant landscapes are not rare.



The Korean people from countryside to the capital city are usually move by bicycle or by foot.



Normal situations in other countries as a group of people sitting talking on a street, are very rare in North Korea.



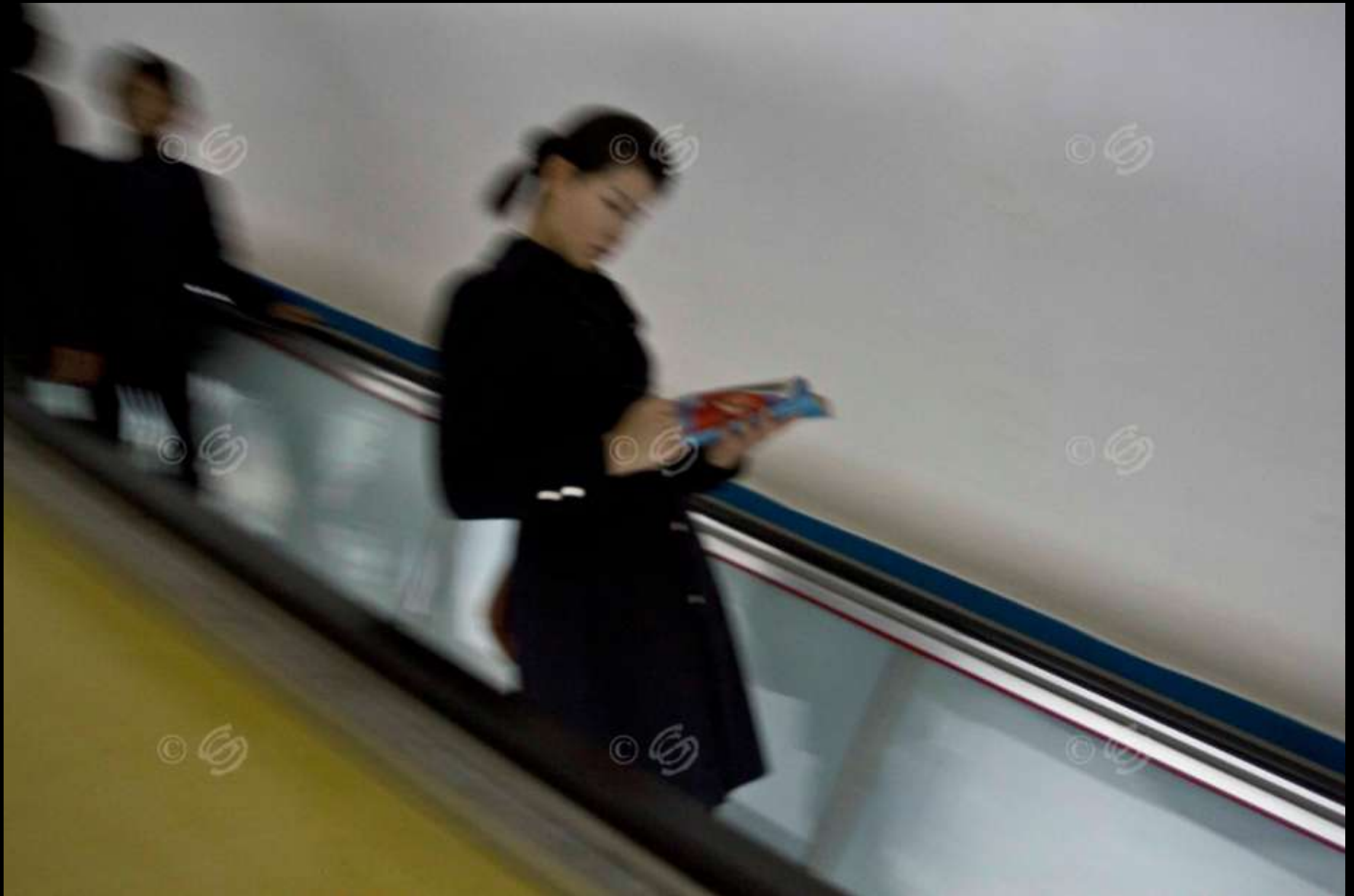
A woman pushes her cart along a main road leading to Pyongyang.



The marvellous stations of the Pyongyang underground contrast with the cold and austere architecture of the town.



Since when, in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, the Korean peninsula was separated along the 38th parallel and later, in 1953, the division was confirmed, following the Korean war, many families were separated with no contact opportunity. Only in rare occasions, thanks to bilateral meetings, groups of South Koreans have been able to meet members of their family residing in DPRK.



Culture has always been an important element of propaganda. Every cultural, communication and education aspect is strictly controlled and piloted by the regime. A young woman on the escalator in the metropolis of Pyongyang.



The pictures of Kim Il-sung
and Kim Jong-il
in the Pyongyang underground.



**The regime austerity is reflected in people behaviour.
An unreal silence flutters on the underground trains of the North Korean capital.**



Pyongyang metro. A woman walks to the exit in the silence of the underground station.



Images of a developed and prosperous Korea decorate the walls of subway stations.



Propaganda poster in a Korean school.



Each form of art is at the service of the regime. In a school of Pyongyang, a folklore dance performed by the students praises the splendour and the value of the Korean tradition.



In the DPRK, no form of imported music exists. Triumphant patriotic songs praising the heroic and fighting Korean spirit are the only ones allowed.



Pyongyang. Students in the school courtyard during the lesson breaks.



**As a wrong metaphor of the Korea situation, the "South" is far from being a reflection of the "North".
The two societies are separated by an abyss of individual rights and development.**



Transfigured faces look at the city through a public bus window. Perhaps these eyes show the essence of this country.



The night in Pyongyang is dark and without shadows. The lights of the public transportations are the only luminous source except for the reflectors aiming at the government palaces and the monuments, unquestioned symbols of the regime power.



Pyongyang railway station. The passengers of the train to the Sinuiju border city prepare to leave.



Martial severity in the row of persons preparing to exit the railway station of the Korean capital.



At the end of the Korean war in 1953, supported by the Mao Chinese regime, the DPRK transformed in a Confucian rather than communist country. The worship of the Great Leaders personality is the base element from which stems the power subjugating the whole population. The picture of Kim Jong-il overlooks the entrance of the Pyongyang railway station.



The Juche tower erected on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Kim Il-sungn along the Taedong river.



In 2002, George W. Bush inserted the DPRK in the evil axis. The proliferation of the nuclear threats used by Kim Jong-il as an element of force and blackmail in the international relationships, thrusts a shadow or terror not only on the Korean citizens but on the whole humanity.



The whole economy of North Korea is based on foreign help programs. The Chinese geopolitical interests, the only considerate ally of Pyongyang and the support of Seoul in view of a possible re-unification, are the motives pushing these two nations to support the economy of the DPRK.

Panoramic view of the city of Pyongyang.



Monument praising the reunification of the DPRK and South Korea along a street at the entrance of the capital.



A suspended and unreal atmosphere accompanies the everyday life of the North Korean citizens.



**Border area (DMZ) between DPRK (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea).
This land strip, four kilometre large, dividing the Korean peninsula in two areas, is the most mined and militarized border in the world.
On the background, the flag of the Republic of Korea flutters on top of the hill.**



Panmunjom. In this room in the core of DMZ, the meetings between the representatives of the UN and the North Korean Army top managers take place. The agreements led to the signature of the armistice on 27th July, 1953.



Picture of Kim Il-sung with the army top managers. The armistice in 1953 brought the borders back to their status before the war. Officially, the conflict is not yet finished. During the following years, many episodes of strong tension took place between the two countries.



The Korean residential architecture mirrors the regime stiffness.



The North Korean population is approx. 24 million persons with an army of approx. 9,500,000 units, even if it is difficult to have access to certain and updated data. Currently, it is the most militarized country in the world.



Population is starving, especially in at the countryside. The quotas of food distributed by the government are not sufficient.

The black market contributes in a minimum part to satisfy the daily needs. In the city of Kaesong, near the DMZ, the life conditions to which these persons are forced are evident.



Like in the capital, even in the city of Kaesong , the motorized vehicles are rare. Along the streets, the propaganda posters are a constant warning to the population.



A man in the city of Kaesong. Here, a special economic area has been created where some South Korean industries have built their plants in agreement with the regime with the purpose to exploit the very low cost of local manpower.



The city of Sinuiju on the Chinese border. From this city, like from the Southern islands near Incheon, clandestine escape ways to China and South Korea have developed. Beyond the river Yalu, the developed city of Dandong is the destination of many North Korean refugees.



Capital of the kingdom during the Koryo dynasty, the city of Kaesong, besides the special economic area, has a very small local economy based on the plantation of one of the best qualities of gingseng.



A man riding a bicycle at the outskirts of Pyongyang.



Kaesong. Even here like in most of the country, the most striking element is the silence on the streets.



Pyongyang railway station.



Waiting room at the station of Pyongyang. This man seems to wait for a train of hope for himself and the whole North Korean population. A train currently much delayed.



As two ghosts in the dark these men are seeing the semi desert street of North Korean capital.



The DPRK bases its international policy on the nuclear threat and blackmail and, at the same time, it proposes as a “buffer nation” to separate the Chinese neo communism from Western capitalism. A situation profitable for everybody. Will the DPRK be able to exit from this dark tunnel?