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978-0-521-89778-5 - North Korea: Markets and Military Rule

Hazel Smith

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North Korea

In this historically grounded, richly empirical study of social and economic transformation in North Korea, Hazel Smith evaluates the 'marketisation from below' that followed the devastating famine of the early 1990s, estimated to be the cause of nearly one million fatalities. Smith questions preconceptions about North Korea; charting the development of a distinct northern identity prior to the creation of the Democratic People's Republic in 1948 before analysing the politics, economics and society of the Kim II Sung period. Smith shows how the end of the Cold War in Europe and the famine ushered in a process of marketisation that brought radical social change to all of North Korean society. This major new study analyses how different social groups in North Korea fared as a result of marketisation, transforming interests, expectations and values of the entire society, including Party members, the military, women and men, the young and the elderly. Smith shows how the daily life of North Koreans has become alienated from the daily pronouncements of the North Korean government. Challenging stereotypes of twenty-five million North Koreans as mere bystanders in history, Smith argues that North Koreans are 'neither victims nor villains' but active agents of their own destiny.

HAZEL SMITH is Professor of International Relations and Korean Studies and Director of the International Institute of Korean Studies at the University of Central Lancashire.

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To Mihail – from Mount Myohyang to God’s
own county . . .

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Acknowledgements

The subject of North Korea generates a lot of heat, but not a lot of light. To the extent that this book illuminates anything about North Korea it is because I have been lucky enough to have worked, over the years, with a number of people who have been generous with their time and expertise. Colleagues, some of whom I am twice lucky to count as friends, have shared information and ideas and many times organised fora, especially in Washington, DC and Seoul, that allowed for critical but constructive exchange and dialogue that helped me enormously in the rethinking, refinement and sometimes rejection of ideas that is utterly necessary in any process of research and writing.

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Contrary to outside caricatures about the US government (which is far from monolithic) there are a ton of people in State, Defense and other agencies who can see a way in which serious policy development vis à vis North Korea, in the United States national interest, could evolve, but these folk rarely talk the loudest, and are often drowned out by those who know nothing about North Korea but everything about how to get their

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name out there on the internet and in the press. I would like then to record my experience of the highly professional and genuinely reflective analysis that takes place in DC; in the Congressional Research Service, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) and the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilisation and in Defense. The pity is that this knowledge and expertise does not seem to permeate top-level decision-making.

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