

How information is smuggled into North Korea

HRWF (27.03.2017) - One of the least understood countries in the world, North Korea, has long been known for its repressive regime. Yet it is far from being an impenetrable black box. Media flow covertly into the country, and fault lines are appearing in the government's sealed informational borders. In September 2015, the Seoul-based NGO North Korea Strategy Centre published an article about one of the techniques that they use to introduce information in the country:

Smoke signals

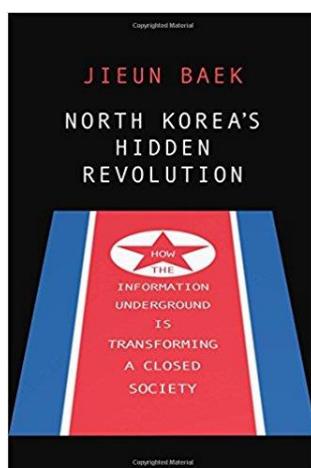
On the border between North Korea and China, along the Tumen and Yalu rivers, thousands of North Korean soldiers keep watch. In one of the most isolated and repressive countries in the world, the military's job is two-fold: stop people getting out; stop information getting in. When you look from the Chinese side, it is difficult to see the guards, but they are there, hiding in strategic holes dug in the ground, sitting quietly and observing.

Every so often the soldiers spot something suspicious floating in the river. One of the ways people smuggle foreign content into North Korea is to put it on a flash drive and hide it in cigarette boxes. You carefully wrap the boxes with plastic bags and tie them to a spare tyre. Parts of the river are only a few metres wide and there you can throw the tyre into the water. The soldiers will see you; later, when nobody is looking at them, they will pick up the tyre, take the cigarettes and find the flash drive inside.

These soldiers are typically young and curious. Being on watch can become lonely and solitary. They are tempted by this China contraband, including flash drives and DVDs with South Korean programmes and foreign movies, all of which are strictly forbidden. The flash drives carry content that is fresh and different from everything that North Koreans know.

The soldiers might watch the content on their computers or portable DVD players, or sell it on the black market. Perhaps they will report it, but then their supervisors will end up watching the content anyway. It will be quickly passed on among family and close friends, and it is through this curiosity that North Koreans are slowly beginning to understand the outside world, personal freedoms and opportunities for choice. This is why the national leader, Kim Jong-un, has recently tried to cut down on banned music through house-to-house searches.

What threatens this authoritarian regime most is external information getting into the ears, minds, and eventually, mouths of its controlled citizens.



The book can be purchase on Amazon here:

<https://www.amazon.com/North-Koreas-Hidden-Revolution-Transforming/dp/0300217811>