

TRANSLATION AND DISCUSSION OF CHOI SUNG-GUK'S
LABOR INTERROGATION

by

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A THESIS

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North Korean defectors living in South Korea face a paradoxical situation: they hold rights as citizens of South Korea, but experience “social exclusion and identity problems as the Other” due to a mass media system that perpetuates biased depictions of North Korean defector stories and a largely ignorant and prejudiced society (Park, 2019:314). *Labor Interrogation*, a webtoon (Korean online graphic novel) written by North Korean defector and United Nations honoree Choi Sung-Guk, attempts to combat this by depicting everyday life for defectors living in South Korea and demonstrating how differences in language and culture, as well as literal and symbolic interrogation from South Koreans, can make assimilation an uphill battle. Choi based *Labor Interrogation* on his and other defectors’ real experiences, and through their stories demonstrates the stumbling blocks that exist for defectors who are trying to create new identities in the South.

For this thesis project I translated the first fourteen chapters of *Labor Interrogation*—of 46 chapters published online in Korean at Naver Webtoon from 2016-2017, and in paperback through publisher Koreaura in 2018—and explored this theme of identity-building. I met with Choi in Seoul periodically for interviews and

discussions to supplement the translation, and I include excerpts from one of these interviews in the preface of my thesis along with an introduction of Choi and his personal goals for his work. In my analysis of *Labor Interrogation*, I argue that language, cultural norms, and societal attitudes towards defectors are obstacles for defector identity-building in South Korea.

Choi's work has the power to give Americans and others around the world a much-needed new perspective on North Koreans—that of humanity. He achieved this in South Korea to some extent—his work educated readers about defector experiences and prompted a nationwide discussion of how South Korea treats its resident North Koreans, as well as South Korean policies towards North Korea. I hope that this work will prompt some of this same sort of discussion in the United States.

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to unlock what I feel will be a lifelong passion. Professor Lucien Brown inspired me to study linguistics and showed me that I could combine my love of Korean language with my newfound love of linguistics, and I thank him sincerely for his strong mentorship. I am deeply grateful to Professor David Frank for his enthusiastic support, great encouragement, and helpful suggestions in pursuing my thesis work. Thank you to Sophie and Angel for proofreading my translation and providing feedback and encouragement. I also could not have made it through to completion without the support of my parents, who helped me build up the courage to go forward with my thesis project, lent me their advice, patience, and love, and encouraged me to study abroad so I could meet Choi in person and make the most of my undergraduate education. Thank you to my sister, Kara, for keeping me humored and providing a shoulder to lean on. And last but certainly not least, thank you to Junhui for the tremendous help, translation advice, comfort, love, and support.

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Preface

We met at Sindorim Station in Western Seoul and talked while he drove. In the passenger seat of North Korean defector Choi Sung-Guk's SUV, I pulled out my notes so we could begin our check-in meeting about my translation. He was too busy to meet at the office, so we had to meet like this on the way to one of his lectures. His phone rang constantly, and while he ignored most calls there were some he had to take. After the fourth or fifth call, he told me, "When the caller is South Korean I tell them 'I have someone in the car with me.' When they're North Korean, I tell them 'I have an American in the car with me.'" He explained that since North Koreans are indoctrinated to hate Americans from a young age, having a born and bred American sitting amicably in your car is a hilarious irony. Definitely some food for thought on my end, too, I realized. Over the two years I've known Choi, he has imparted a lot of insights and quips similar to this one. His humanity and the humanity of other defectors is apparent to me through our interactions, but his primary goal is to spread that understanding to South Koreans and, in a broader sense, global society.

I never predicted that I would translate *anything* for a thesis assignment, let alone a cartoon drawn by someone who had fled North Korea. And yet here I am. But how did I get here? In fall 2017, I enrolled in a course entitled "Migration and World Literature" taught by Professor Susanna Lim. The course centered on themes of identity and how migration, diaspora, and displacement tie into how others see us and how we see ourselves. One day in class, Professor Lim presented a few strips from North

Korean defector¹ and United Nations honoree Choi Sung-Guk's webtoon *Labor Interrogation*. In so doing, she reframed defectors as migrants, displaced peoples, who must adapt and assimilate into unfamiliar societies. In the case of South Korea, while 70 years ago the Koreas were one, they are now awash in cultural, linguistic, and sociopolitical differences that make defector assimilation difficult. She told us of the incredible importance this webtoon holds in South Korea for educating a disinterested youth and promoting understanding. But with no translation, that is where its reach ended. I thought to myself, this work seems too important to leave untranslated—Americans have so many prejudices and misconceptions about North Korea and defectors, and I want to do my part to change that.

I first had the pleasure of meeting Choi in the summer of 2018 in Seoul, South Korea. He told me how shocked he was to receive a call from an American phone number, and now sitting across from each other how amazed he was to be greeted by a blonde, blue-eyed American college girl. He enthusiastically agreed to a translation, citing his intense desire to spread his work as far and wide as possible thereby stirring up worldwide awareness and empathy for his people.

Choi was born in Pyeongyang, North Korea in 1980 to a relatively affluent family. He attended the Pyeongyang University of Fine Arts then joined the North Korean animation studio SEK. There, he worked on several of North Korea's most

¹ There are a number of terms used to refer to those who defect from North Korea, the three most common terms used in South Korea being "North Korean refugee", "new resident", and "North Korean defector". When I asked Choi which term he prefers for my translation, he said to use "defector." He described how terms like "new resident" feel as though they take away his identity as a North Korean while still othering him, and that he would rather "say it like it is." For the translation specifically, he said that "defector" has the strongest impact and drives home the importance of his work. Therefore, I will be referring to him, and translating his work using, the term "defector."

well-known animation ventures, such as “Simba the King Lion” and “Squirrel and Hedgehog,” as well as outsourced foreign animation (surprisingly or perhaps unsurprisingly, North Korean animators have had a hand in many beloved American cartoons—Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, for example).

Choi told me (2020 August interview) that he was motivated to defect primarily because of three stints in jail. First, authorities jailed him for selling copies of South Korean films. Upon release, he was put under surveillance but managed to help his mother, sister, and nephew defect. “And for that crime—but they didn’t have any proof. They had a feeling...so even though they didn’t have any evidence they went with their gut and threw me in jail again.” Finally, he was caught red-handed receiving a phone call from his mother through a third party. “After the third time, I wanted to dig through the earth if that meant getting out of North Korea.” He said that aside from his time in jail there were a myriad of reasons for wanting to leave, including a breakup that left him heartbroken. He ultimately fled in 2010, arriving in South Korea after fifteen days traversing China, Laos, and Thailand.

After defecting to South Korea Choi, like all defectors who arrive in the south, spent three months at the National Intelligence Service building for defectors, Kukjeongwon (discussed at length in the webtoon and this translation) where, in addition to undergoing numerous interrogations by South Korean officials, they are also provided with lessons on how to survive in South Korea and adjust to a new life. He then attended graduate school for animation at Sejong University for a year but was unable to graduate because of tuition costs. He worked various jobs over the years after defecting—as a program developer, a radio host, a journalist and other related fields.

Through his work, he realized how different North and South Korean cultures, language, and attitudes had become. This realization inspired the creation of *Labor Interrogation*.

Labor Interrogation's 46 chapters were published online at Naver Webtoon from May 10, 2016 to March 15, 2017. Choi, with the small publisher Koreaura, published his work in three paperback volumes the following year. My translation contains the first 14 chapters of the webtoon, or the first paperback volume. To clarify, webtoons as they are known in South Korea are online serialized graphic novels. Webtoons originated in South Korea in the early 2000s and are now a multi-million dollar industry. In the past decade, some of the most popular domestic films and dramas have used webtoons as their source material. In the United States, webcomics and webtoons (the latter which entered the US via South Korea in 2014) are nowhere near the cultural impact of South Korean webtoons. One of their most striking characteristics, which sets them apart from other comic formats, is that a chapter is one long strip (as opposed to individual pages) read by scrolling down the page on your phone or computer. This makes them easily digestible, and readers typically catch newly uploaded chapters while riding the subway or bus to school, work, and home again.

This unique culture surrounding webtoons and their flexibility as a medium is important to consider when thinking about how stories are created and circulated in contemporary South Korea. The target audience typically ranges between middle schoolers to young adults but are also widely enjoyed by older demographics. The weekly uploading schedule also promotes interaction between the creator and readers.

The direct result of this interaction can be seen in *Labor Interrogation* in the form of a series of “North-South Comments Summits” wherein Choi answers questions about the North from South Korean readers in the *daetgul*, or comments section, of the webtoon. More indirectly, bite-sized “North Korea FYI” strips in-between chapters educate readers about North Korea from the perspective of a South Korean boy shipwrecked north of the thirty-eighth parallel. A story within a story, Choi uses this character to elaborate on aspects of everyday North Korean life that do not make it into the main narrative. *Labor Interrogation* was a fast hit among readers, gaining popularity for its new and intriguing subject matter and Choi’s deep involvement in interacting with his audience. It reached the coveted Best list on the Naver Webtoon homepage, where it was serialized, and received a fair amount of press and general buzz during and directly following its online release. This prompted Choi’s desire to publish the series in book format, in order to widen his readership and spread the story’s message.

August 3, 2020 Interview with Choi Sung Guk

What follows are excerpts from my 2020 August interview with Choi. I conducted the interview over two hours at Choi’s workshop in Oryudong, Seoul, with occasional breaks to give his three-month-old husky puppy some attention. I implement a mixed style of direct quotes, paraphrases, and added context in relaying his answers (and took out any additions from his husky). All my interactions and interviews with Choi are conducted in Korean, so I have translated the interview for use in my thesis.

❖ **What was your motivation for writing *Labor Interrogation*?**

“I did some work as a PD broadcasting propaganda to North Korea, and as a reporter. During that time I felt that we are one Peninsula, but even as we’re in the midst of a battle of ideologies South Korean people know very little about North Koreans, and North Koreans know nothing about South Koreans, so we misunderstand each other...So I felt that something was needed that could link North and South and help the two relate culturally.” Just as these thoughts were swirling in his head, someone suggested to him that he share the North Korean perspective, so he went ahead with the webtoon.

❖ **Why did you choose the webtoon format and not that of a book or film?**

Choi cited two main reasons for his decision to make a webtoon rather than some other form of media. The first was that in South Korea, webtoons are lucrative. The second, that “the power webtoons have for wide distribution is tremendous. Huge amounts of young people read webtoons. And there are so many young South Koreans who have no interest whatsoever in North Korea, so if the target audience is young people, the webtoon format is the obvious choice. Furthermore, when you approach the topic of North Korea from a political standpoint—when you look at it seriously—it’s scary, cruel. But through the webtoon format I can approach the topic in a lighthearted way, since it’s a comic.”

❖ **How did you decide on the title *Labor Interrogation*?**

So, why the title? *Labor Interrogation* (*Rodong Simmun*) is a play on the title of North Korea’s official Workers’ Party newspaper, the *Labor Newspaper* (*Rodong Sinmun*). The phonological difference is slight—a change from an “n” to an “m”—but it packs a punch. The title’s font also mimics the ever-present thick red lines of North

Korean propaganda. Choi told me his primary goal with the title was marketing. “North Korea is a very heavy topic. The *Labor Newspaper* represents North Korea. However, webtoons as a platform are very light. People read them for fun, and heavy issues don’t mesh well with the light-heartedness of the platform. And yet, there’s the bright red text [of the title] in the North Korean font. *Labor Interrogation*. I felt that would draw people in and more people would click and start reading out of curiosity.”

❖ **Why did the name change with the books published in 2018?**

The books, however, did not carry such an eye-grabbing title. When I asked why this came to be, Choi emphasized that he had no choice in the matter. As the South Korean governing administration changed with Park Geun-hye’s impeachment the publisher Koreaura, whose political position can be described as a form of far-right patriotism, declared the title “too North Korean.” According to Choi, the publisher worried about facing hate or a witch-hunt or the ire of North Korea due to Moon Jae-in’s more left-leaning administration. While Choi protested the change, his hands were tied. “When I signed the contract—the concept of a contract doesn’t even exist in North Korea—when we were going over the contract, I just signed without thinking. The copyright to my work should be mine, but it went to the publisher. So I couldn’t have a say in the title change.” When I asked what he preferred for the English title he, without hesitation, responded *Labor Interrogation*.

❖ **What did you want to accomplish with the original Korean version of “Labor Interrogation”?**

“I wanted to promote empathy and relatability regarding culture between North and South Koreans. I wanted to do so because I wished that people would have an

interest in North Korea, and through that interest save those who are suppressed and whose rights as human beings are constantly infringed. But these days, it's hard to make South Koreans really care about North Korea. So I hope that international society will take an interest. Also, isn't it shocking that someone would escape from North Korea then draw a *comic strip*? ... There isn't a single defector who has done that. In North Korea, the people that draw cartoons are a select few. The job is chosen for you. Becoming a cartoonist is nothing here in South Korea, but in North Korea it's a very difficult job to come by. So, I hoped that people would take interest in North Korea and work to save the people of North Korea."

❖ **What do you hope to accomplish with the English version?**

"Since South Koreans remain largely uninterested [in issues relating to North Korea], I hope that people abroad in places like America will take an interest. If I can sign with a publisher, I want to keep working for...North Korean peoples' rights."

❖ **Would you have written "Labor Interrogation" differently if you knew what you know now about South Korean people and culture?**

"I would have written it so that people who are used to capitalist society could have more fun reading it. I wrote it without knowing much about South Korean society—and while it is a fun read now, I would have tried to write it to be even more enjoyable. Back then, I lacked the sense to do so." I believe that Choi was being modest with his answer here. *Labor Interrogation* does in fact tell quite a bit about South Korean society, reflecting it back on itself. And his relative newness to capitalist society at the time of writing provides valuable insights into the defector experience and

the differences and similarities between people from such different political and economic systems.

❖ **If you continued this webtoon, what issues would you add?**

“I would have added even more slice of life elements, what life is like here for us. For instance, a North Korean man and a South Korean woman dating is funny. The South Korean woman says something off-handedly, and the North Korean responds with such extremes as ‘I’ll lay down my life for you.’ Ha ha ha. Little things that are really nothing—the North Korean person is really wacky, or something is hilarious to the North Korean guy but the South Korean girl has no clue what’s so funny; really, romance and dating in itself are really funny topics. ...I would show more of what life is like as a North Korean living in South Korea, and I would showcase more clearly the differences between people who have grown up within a socialist totalitarian state versus those who have grown up with capitalism.”

❖ **What would help South Koreans be more accepting and understanding of North Koreans?**

“There are thousands of North Korean defectors. I wish that the government would actively sponsor seminars, lectures, these kinds of things, throughout the country. Also, there are a lot of people in South Korea who insist that everything defectors say are lies. But how can thousands of peoples’ stories all match exactly? ...I would like it if TV programs and the like invited defectors as guests on their shows, too.”

❖ **Has life changed for North Koreans since you defected?**

“Life has become harder. The media will say some things have improved, but that’s not the case at all. I’ve been consistently helping people defect as a broker.

Talking on the phone with them, prices of goods are constantly going up, regulation/control of markets has gotten more severe, those kinds of things. Punishments for crimes are more severe. Life is difficult, more and more so.” Choi pulled out his phone and showed me a picture of handwritten letters. “The broker, the person helping someone who wants to defect, writes a letter like this. I help connect people based on letters coming from North Korea.” He then showed me photos of a young boy and girl in their home, portraits of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung hung on the wall behind them. He told me that these pictures are how he confirms that the people trying to defect are really in North Korea. The photos are also how he helps them connect with other family, etc. outside North Korea. “Because of this work, I am quite knowledgeable about the current state of North Korea. ‘The translator has verified with her own eyes.’ Ha ha ha. When I’ve gone to places like the UN to present my work, I’ve realized that ‘He said this’ and ‘I saw this’ are *very* different when conveying information. That’s why I am showing you these photos. Ha ha ha.”

❖ **The reason behind the shift in art style as the webtoon goes on?**

The first third of *Labor Interrogation* does not show this shift as much as the latter two thirds, but I think his answer is worth including here as it addresses the general style of the comic. “In North Korea, comics are drawn like American graphic novels. We look at and learn based on American materials. ... We are forced to do realistic(realism) art. There are no graphic novels like this, no satire in North Korea. ...In America, people probably don’t draw Trump realistically, but rather cartoonish, satirically. There is nothing like that in North Korea. You *can’t* because it’s a country made by an absolute authority, an authoritarian, a god. So artists are trained in realism.

But when I came to South Korea, I noticed that many artists draw in this comic style. So I decided to try it too. But later, I realized that I couldn't make myself keep drawing like that, since I'd never practiced. So after struggling to draw in the comic style I eventually returned to my original style. I thought it would be important to explain why the styles are different.”

Choi expresses to me each time we meet that it is not through high-handed politics that democracy in North Korea or unification of the Koreas will occur, but through grassroots channels. This is echoed by other defectors, such as Thae Yong-Ho, who spoke before the US Congress, stating “we can educate (the) North Korean population to stand up by disseminating outside information.”² Choi, Thae, and others believe that real forces for regime and humanitarian change must come from the inside, through demands for reform made by an educated and discontented North Korean population. Choi said that the single biggest factor in maintaining the status quo has been the real lack of factually accurate information about every aspect of life in the outside world. He hopes that, by publishing his webtoons in English, he can raise global awareness of his people's humanity and demonstrate the power that mass media has in educating people and effecting regime change. Choi believes that eventually his webtoons and other similar works will make their way into the North Korean black market, which he believes is the main conduit for educational reform.

² “North Korea Defector Urges US to Use Soft Power.” *BBC News*, BBC, 2 Nov. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41840866.

The primary method of information dispersion in North Korea is the marketplace, a site of increasing grassroots capitalism and private businesses. This “second economy” began its rise in the late 1980s and flourished as all-encompassing state economic and societal control collapsed.³ Individual private vendors began trading across the Chinese border, and other forms of enterprise soon followed. This link to China meant that merchants had close contact with the outside world, inevitably leading to the diffusion of information and goods into North Korea. According to interviews conducted by Lankov and Kim with North Korean defectors, vendors are “well aware of China’s prosperity” and “nearly all merchants know that South Korea is a rich country”.⁴ This shift to private vending in the marketplace is a crucial piece of the present situation in North Korea. Private vending is only possible because of the level of corruption among officials and border officers. As Lankov and Kim put it, “the world capitalist system moved to North Korea once the authorities lost their ability to keep the country’s borders under control.”⁵ Mainstream American media, however, often perpetuates the notion that North Korea is a modern-day “Hermit Kingdom.” Nobody and nothing goes in or out without a state sanction, and the few stories we do hear about those that defect are harrowing accounts of crossing borders that seem almost impossible to make past alive. Every once in a while we catch a glimpse of how powerful the grassroots commercial industry is in North Korea—articles about pop music and South Korean TV dramas making their rounds on the black market and the

³ Andrei Lankov and Seok-hyang Kim, “North Korean Market Vendors: The Rise of Grassroots Capitalists in a Post-Stalinist Society,” *Pacific Affairs* 81, no. 1 (2008): 53–72
<https://dspace.ewha.ac.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/216247/1/north%20korean.pdf>.

⁴ Lankov and Kim, “North Korean Market Vendors,” 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

subsequent arrests of people who dare to access it. However, is not as iron-clad as it is presented, both in terms of the number and ease of defections out of and the transfer of media and culture into North Korea. The inception and flourishing of markets in North Korea all came from bottom-up methods. Choi staunchly believes that change in North Korea will only be successful working from the bottom up. And in turn, this can only be achieved when the outside world has a better understanding of North Korea.

One could say that *Labor Interrogation* succeeded in Choi's goal of helping South Koreans understand North Koreans, and through that helping North Koreans, even if for some all it did was start a conversation. Every step forward, no matter how small, is important. Many of the prejudices towards defectors in South Korean society are evident throughout the webtoon. South Koreans are not quite ready to accept North Koreans. By addressing South Koreans and appealing to shared humanity while educating audiences about the lived experiences of North Koreans and what makes them different culturally, Choi takes that first step in his longer term project of helping liberate North Korea. Choi, like the main character of *Labor Interrogation*, arrived in South Korea as a young man, come to settle in a new life and pave a new way forward. His identity, and the identities of all those who have defected and migrated to new lands, shine through.

It is clearly evident that Choi is passionate about liberating his homeland. He is determined to bridge the gap between disinterested South Korean youths and North Koreans on both sides of the border. He is committed to creating a world in which that gap has closed and his work will be a thing of the past, no longer relevant or needed. And in his mind, the way to do that is through cultural empathy. In a 2018 interview

with *The Korea Economic Daily*, Choi stated that “I will bury my bones in the cultural industry. I have seen how there is nothing more powerful than culture and media for changing North Korea. There may even be a day that even North Koreans read my webtoon.”⁶ (my translation). In a preface to the paperback version of *Labor Interrogation*, he writes, “I hope that someday soon the world will have no need for or interest in this graphic novel.” In translating *Labor Interrogation*, my goal is to help make his dream a reality.

A note on translation: I tried to follow a few principles in my translation of *Labor Interrogation*. First, I used the Revised Romanization of Korean (RR) when translating *hangeul* (Korean orthography) into Roman letters. This is the “popular” romanization system promoted by the South Korean government and easiest to read both for Koreans and non-Koreans. The other two most popular systems are mainly used in linguistics and other academic fields; as my thesis is aimed at producing a translation for a target demographic of teens and young adults, I felt that RR is most appropriate. Following from this, I also used creative liberty by adding more American-sounding casual speech rather than abiding by purely technical one-to-one definitions. I tried to be as accurate in my translation as possible and do as much justice to Choi’s original work as I could, but I had to let go of some things—namely, while I set out with the goal of clearly demonstrating the difference between North Korean and South Korean dialects, it was nearly impossible to do so without taking away from the

⁶ 홍윤정, “탈북민 웹툰 작가 최성국 “北체제 바꾸는 데 문화만큼 강력한 것 없어””, *The Korea Economic Daily*, 22 June 2018, www.hankyung.com/society/article/2018062114121.

readability of the translation. I have, however, added a number of “Translator’s Notes” in which I add clarifying details for an English readership so as not to detract from the translation itself. These are in contrast to “Author’s Notes” that Choi himself added intended as clarification on North Korean concepts for his South Korean readership.

A discussion of one of the main themes of *Labor Interrogation*—defector identity-building and the defector experience in South Korea—is provided after the translation.

Self-Reflection on Summer 2020 Developments: 2020.09.02

In Summer 2020, my thesis hit a rough spot. Choi had told me in previous discussions that there should be little trouble in terms of translating and using his work for my thesis. He was enthusiastic and amazed that an American college student had even heard of “Labor Interrogation.” Any talk of future publication took a backseat to the current task of translating and interpreting his webtoon for my undergraduate thesis.

A large motivation for my desire to translate this particular work was its format as a webtoon. Most defector stories are told through traditional media and are rather dark in tone, as befits the subject matter. Defector accounts presented in English, in particular, are often biographies or books written by non-Korean journalists or writers. Yet here was a story direct from the source, shared online in a format specifically chosen to reach the largest audience perceived by Choi - disinterested young South Koreans. I was aware of a paperback version published by a South Korean publishing firm, but it seemed to be of little relevance to my project when I first embarked on my translation work. The paperback edition suddenly became essential in late 2019 when “Labor Interrogation” disappeared from its host site, Naver Webtoon (for reasons still unbeknownst to me). Its virtual disappearance left me with few options for accessing the webtoon, so I bought all three paperback volumes in order to continue my translation work.

From the start, transferring my translated English script onto the webtoon strips posed an editing challenge. I originally planned to take screenshots of the online webtoon and then photoshop my translations into each character’s speech bubbles. When I first met Choi in 2018, he emphasized that he wanted the finished product to

look professional, and that he could provide me with the original artwork containing blank speech bubbles for easy, seamless insertion of the translated text. I asked Choi about these original storyboards again in early July 2020, as I began to finalize translations of the first 16 chapters (i.e., volume one of three) for my thesis. He told me that he had to check with his publisher, Koreaura, before he could answer me.

I interviewed Choi for my thesis discussion sections on August 3, 2020. He was very enthusiastic about my translation progress and excited that it seemed like his dream of having “Labor Interrogation” translated into English would finally come to fruition. The publisher of the paperback books came up in our conversation when I asked why the names of the webtoon and print version differed. Choi responded, “I didn’t want to change the title, but when I signed the contract—the concept of a contract doesn’t even exist in North Korea—when we were going over the contract, I just signed without thinking. The copyright to my work should be mine, but it went to the publisher. So I couldn’t have a say in the title change.” Then he revealed that the copyright claims for “Labor Interrogation” and his other works lay with the publisher, Koreaura. Choi analogized his contract later by comparing himself to a contract worker at Samsung—he makes the product, but ultimately it is not his.

The following week, Choi informed me that the CEO of the publishing company, Mr. Park, wanted to meet me. Choi told me that Mr. Park was a distrustful man who just wanted to confirm that I was a real college student working on a real thesis, not some spy from a foreign publishing company there to steal “his” work. When the three of us met on August 12, it became clear to me that Park was thinking far less about my thesis and much more in terms of immediate publication by, and profit for,

Koreaura. The general theme of the conversation centered on publishing the English translation in book form. Park supposedly had told Choi before our meeting that my thesis translation work qualified as fair use and would not violate copyright terms. He was prepared at that point to approve my use of Choi's original storyboards. My goals for the meeting were to assure the publisher of my intent to use the webtoon content solely for my thesis, and to confirm that I wanted to focus on my thesis and finish this project before any discussion of future publishing. I tried to make this clear, but for the duration of our meeting Park pressured me to give him my unfinished work. He was hyper-focused on Otto Warmbier, the young American man who allegedly died as a result of prolonged imprisonment in North Korea. Park told me that he wanted to take my partially proofed work, finish the edits himself, and make one copy of a "sample book" that I would then take to Warmbier's parents as a means for obtaining funding. Park believed that the Warmbier family had set up a charitable organization with their substantial settlement from the North Korean government for the wrongful death of their son, and that they would fund translation work on the two remaining webtoon volumes after I graduated from the University of Oregon. (A quick online check of the Warmbier settlement revealed that they had set up an organization to solicit charitable donations, not dole them out.) Park then emphasized that things needed to happen *quickly*, that I needed to send him my translation before I left Korea in early September, and that I needed to finish all translations as fast as possible after graduation. This high-pressured maneuvering raised many questions and red flags in my mind. I felt like Park just wanted to take advantage of me and use my work, without any remuneration or credit, for his own political and monetary gain. It also seemed as though the webtoon

and the books had become so conflated, because of the copyright issue, that Park felt like he could expect the author and me to accede to his demands. I left the meeting confused and wary, feeling like things were suddenly slipping out of control. The meeting taxed my command of the Korean language and I could barely keep up with what Park was saying directly or indirectly. It also became very difficult to think critically about the evolving situation in the moment.

After returning home, I called Choi, expressed my concern about the meeting direction, and asked him to slow down the publisher's plan to exchange my translation work for a "sample book". In stark contrast to our conversations of the previous week, he too was now hurried and impatient, focusing on publication rather than our agreed-upon first step of me completing my thesis. I managed to convince Choi that I could not just hand over my translation without insurance that it would not be used in bad faith (e.g., without proper credit), and that I needed to focus on my thesis in the near-term.

Choi met the publisher and explained my point of view. He then told me that Park had doubled down on his stance that the storyboards would not be shared unless I gave him my translation work; he and Park had argued about the issue. I was confused by some of their statements, such as Park's questionable claim that he already had a translator for "Labor Interrogation" before I ever showed up. Other statements made it seem increasingly clear that Park either did not understand the concepts of translation and copyright or was not observing the copyright laws in an ethical manner. While it seemed ludicrous that I had to ask him for permission to use the storyboards when he was not the webtoon creator in the first place, ultimately I had to reach out to Park directly over email one last time to try to obtain the storyboards. I told him repeatedly

throughout our exchange that I had no desire to break copyright laws and profit from my translations, that the storyboards were only going to be used for my thesis, and that using the blank storyboards for my educational purposes is permitted under fair use clauses in Korea. However, he persistently replied that he “hopes the work will not be used in a way that goes against copyright”. He told me in the end that if I wanted to use the storyboards, I needed to sign a contract and compensate him either in cash (amount unspecified) or with my translation. He also stipulated that he could do whatever he wanted with my translation. I told him, in turn, that I could not just hand over my work without a fairly arbitrated contract that guaranteed some safeguards for the originality of my work. And there ended our interaction.

I am still very confused about this whole situation. I have many unanswered questions regarding Choi’s contract with Koreaura, whether he fully understands the nature and limitations of his contract, what Park’s (real) role is as Choi’s publisher and whether he is operating legally and ethically in that capacity, what words were exchanged between the two men, what Choi and Park understand (or don’t understand) about the thesis process and what I wanted to accomplish with my project, and what Mr. Park had intended by trying so desperately to wrestle my translation from me. From what Choi told me, it seems Park turned away other potential translators in the past and was fixated on doing everything in-house, at the expense of helping Choi further his creative talents and worldwide exposure as a noteworthy author. It is clear, however, that the plans Choi and I had for a joint publication in English to worldwide audiences is unlikely, at least for now.

This experience, while frustrating and demoralizing, ultimately was a valuable one. I learned a lot firsthand about South Korea, publishing, translation, and just some of the nuances and stumbling blocks in the life of a North Korean defector. The situation in addition sheds some light on Mr. Choi's place as a defector—and as an artist—in South Korea. As my thesis advisor Dr. Susanna Lim put it, “It is sad to know he risked so much to come to the South in search of freedom...only to have his creative freedom so ironically restricted.”

P.S. I am getting my thesis copyrighted.

Translation

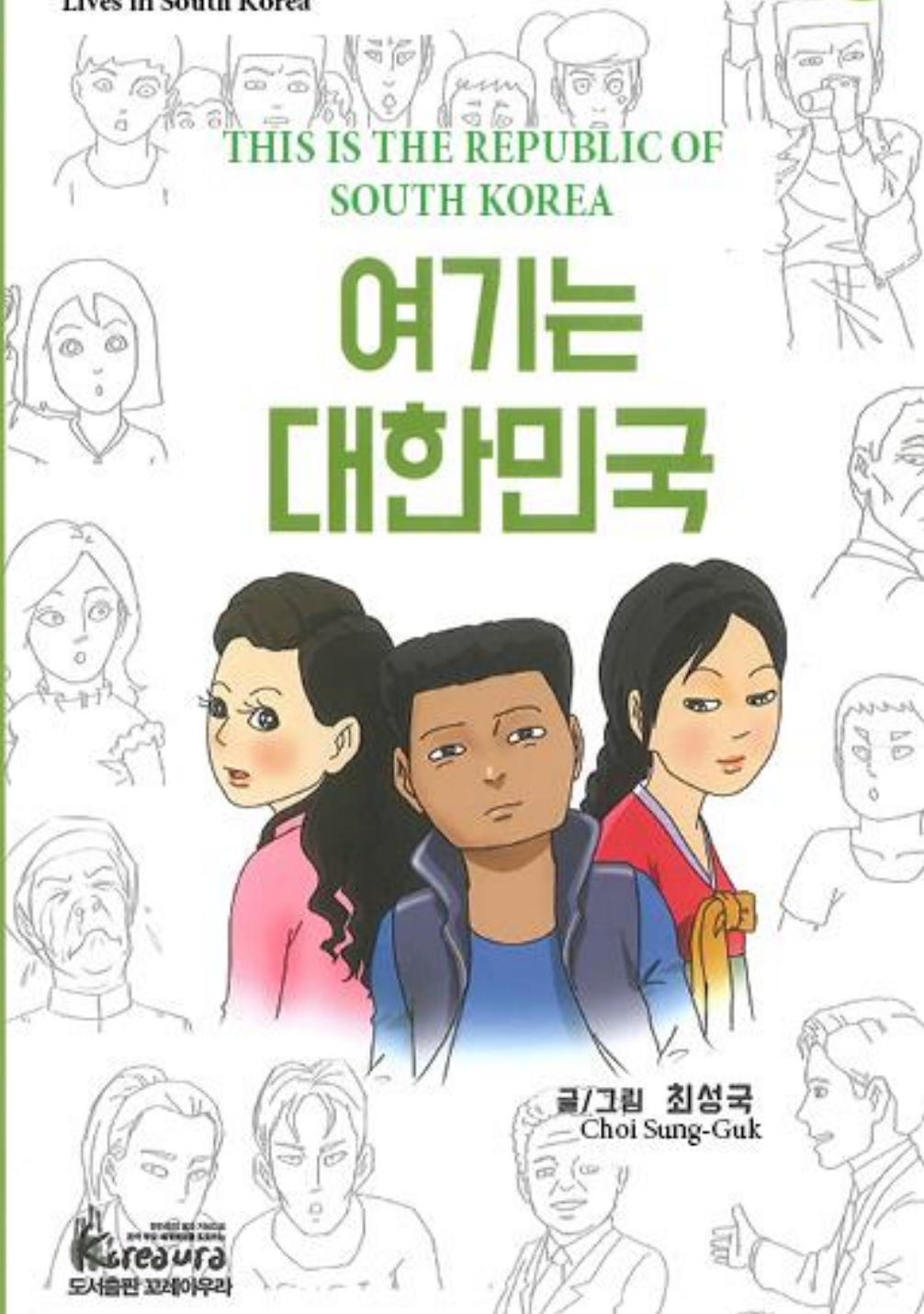
We who escaped North Korea:
Our Stumbling Adventures and
Mishaps while Building New
Lives in South Korea

Finding Freedom Series,
Book 1

제 1 권

THIS IS THE REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH KOREA

여기는
대한민국



글/그림 최성국
Choi Sung-Guk

이탈한 북조선
남한에서 어떻게 살아야 할까?
Koreaura
도서출판 포레아우라

탈북인이 그린 남한 정착기 & 탈북 심화

자유를 찾아서 시리즈 ①

여기는 대한민국

The original book “Labor Interrogation” is copyrighted by the publishing company Koreaura. I was given written and verbal permission by both the publisher and the author of “Labor Interrogation” to translate and use this work in my thesis.

달북만이 그린 남한 정척기 & 달북 실화
자유를 찾아서 시리즈 ①
여기는 대한민국

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추천의 글

남과 북이 갈라진지 70년이란 세월이 흘렀습니다. 강산이 변해도 벌써 7번이 변했을 세월이 흘렀으니, 이념으로 갈라져 맞서고 있는 남과 북은 그 얼마나 변하였을까요?

자유 민주주의를 선택한 대한민국은 6.25 전쟁의 폐허속에 세계 10위권의 경제대국으로 성장한데 비하여, 공산주의를 선택한 북한은 경제후퇴, 식량부족과 아시^{橫死}, 1인 독재 공포정치에 신음하고 있습니다.

목숨을 걸고 자유 대만을 찾은 한 탈북자가 그린 이 만화는 남과 북이 서로의 현실을 잘 이해할 수 있도록 그림으로 표현하였습니다. 재미에 빠져 읽어가는데 “아, 남과 북이 이렇게 다르구나!” 하는 것을 저절로 느낄 수 있습니다.

본 만화는 그러한 남과 북이 사회적, 문화적 차이를 극복하고 서로 이해, 포용, 협력하여 다 함께 잘 사는 날을 위해 기획, 제작되었습니다.

아무쪼록 이 만화가 출판사 기획 의도와 같이 먼 훗날 대한민국이 통일일이 되는 그 때, 남과 북이 서로 이해하고 협력하여 세계 속의 부강한 대한민국을 세우는데 일조하기를 바라마지 않습니다.

2018. 1

전 체육청소년부장관, 육군참모총장 이 진 삼

추천의 글

만화『자유를 찾아서』시리즈는, 북한에서 태어나 30여 년간을 북한에서 살다가 자유를 찾아 대한민국의 품에 안긴 한 탈북 작가가 자신의 경험을 바탕으로 남과 북의 차이를 그린 실화입니다.

이 만화는 작가가 자유 대한민국에 도착하여 문화적 차이로 겪는 에피소드, 미지의 땅 자유 대한민국에서 살아남기, 탈북민이 살아온 오늘의 북한과 탈북 과정 등을 생생하게 보여줍니다.

식량이 부족하여 아파트에서 물레 닦을 기르고, 어쩌다 생긴 쌀로 쌀밥을 해 먹는 것을 들킬까봐 다른 솥에 강냉이밥을 하며, 원수님(김정은)이 온다고 온 주민이 도로 청소애 나서 물걸레로 도로를 닦는 어처구니없는 북한의 현실을 보여주고 있습니다.

또한 탈북민들의 대한민국 정착생활을 사실적으로 묘사하여, 만화를 보는 많은 북한 동포들이 대한민국의 발전상과 사회, 문화에 대하여 자연스럽게 이해하는 계기도 되리라고 생각합니다.

부디 이 만화가 남과 북이 서로의 다른 환경을 잘 이해할 수 있게 하여 진정한 남북 화합을 이루게 하는 교육 도서가 되기를 기대합니다.

2018. 1

전 국사편찬위원회 위원장 유 영 렬

책을 내며

환단고기 이래 9000년, 단군왕검 이래 5000년을 함께 살아온 우리 민족이 남과 북으로 분단되어 헤어진 세월이 70년을 넘어섰습니다. 이념의 차이가 아니더라도 10년이면 강산도 변한다 하였는데, 강산이 변하여도 7번을 변했을 세월이 흘렀으니 그동안 얼마나 많은 분야, 분야에 크나 큰 차이가 벌어져 있을까요?

언젠가는 반드시 한 민족으로 함께 살아가야 할 우리 민족, 통일 후 겪게 될 남북간의 혼란 상황을 대비하여 미리 준비하였습니다. 남북간의 이질감과 차이점을 극복하고, 동질성 회복을 위해 특별 기획한 연재 웹툰 만화 『로동심문』 초등학생으로부터 어르신에 이르기까지 남녀노소 누구나 즐겁고 재미있게 읽으면서 함께 공감할 수 있도록 책으로 만들었습니다.

국력이 부강한 나라, 정신세계가 바르고 아름다운 통일 대한민국이 세계 중심에 우뚝 서서 전 세계를 평화의 등불로 밝게 비추는 희망의 나라가 되는 날을 그려 봅니다.

도서출판 꼬레아우라 대표
발행인 박 창 재 올림

작가의 말

세상에 제가 책까지 낼 줄은 몰랐습니다. 책이란 것은 공부도 많이 하고 아주 성공한 사람들이 펴내는 것으로 알았습니다. 갑자기 이 사실을 빨리 북한에 알리고 싶어집니다. 그곳에서는 일반인이 책은 고사하고 글자 하나라도 인쇄한다면 불법으로 엄중히 다루어지기 때문입니다. 정말 똑같으면서도 완전히 다른 남과 북입니다.

바로 이런 차이를 줄이고 싶어 그런 그림입니다. 기쁨과 동시에 슬프기도 합니다. 하루 빨리, 언제인가는 이 만화가 필요 없고 관심 없는 만화가 되기를 바랍니다. 아마도 그때에는 우리나라가 통일된 부강한 나라일 것이며, 핵 위협이 없는 평화로운 세상이 될 것입니다.

최성국



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LABOR INTERROGATION

로동신문



Translator's Note: Rodong Shimmun is a play on Rodong Sinmun "Labor Newspaper", the official organ of the Worker's Party of North Korea.

My name is Kim Yong-Cheol!

Just like any other day, I go to work to keep my hunger at bay.



Work doesn't really require using your head.



You just do as you're told.

"If the Worker's Party commands it, I'll risk my life for it!"



On the contrary, autonomy is forbidden. You must only do as ordered.

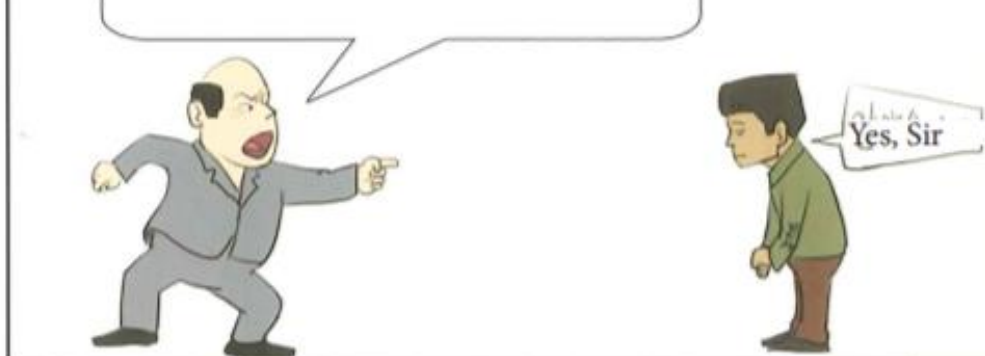
Why did you put a window in the door of the neighborhood guard post? Why did you do things your own way?!



The room was too dark, sir.



If the security office is bright, enemies can look right in! Just do as the Party says, you @\$%!

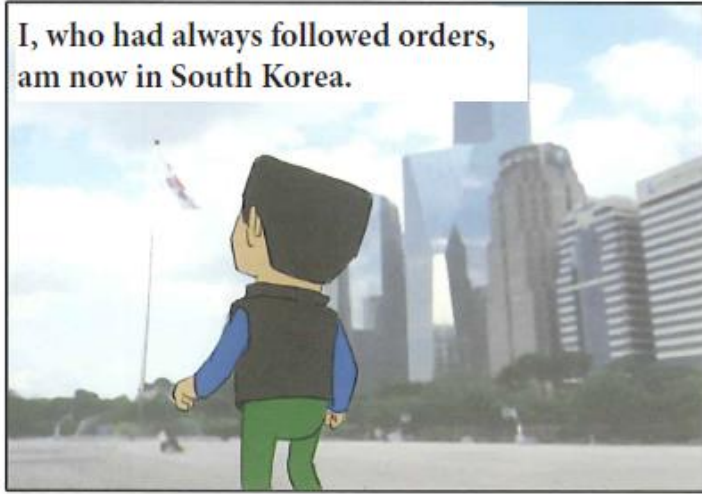


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I, who lived like that all my life,



I, who had always followed orders, am now in South Korea.



But South Korea is a truly strange place.



Nobody says anything even if you stand around and do nothing all day.



I had no idea how uncomfortable this freedom and indifference would be.

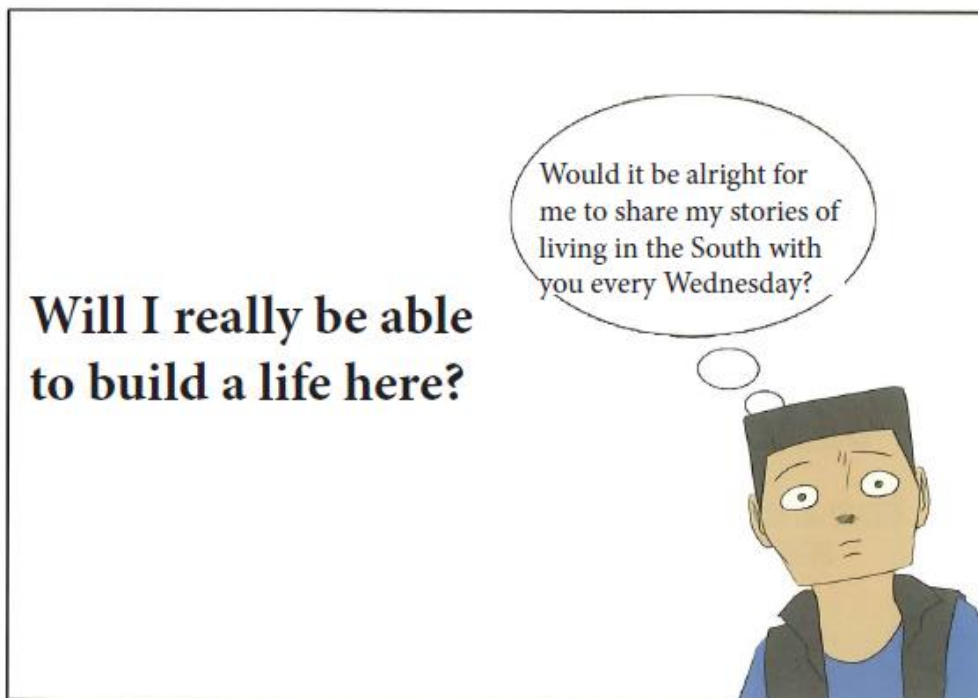
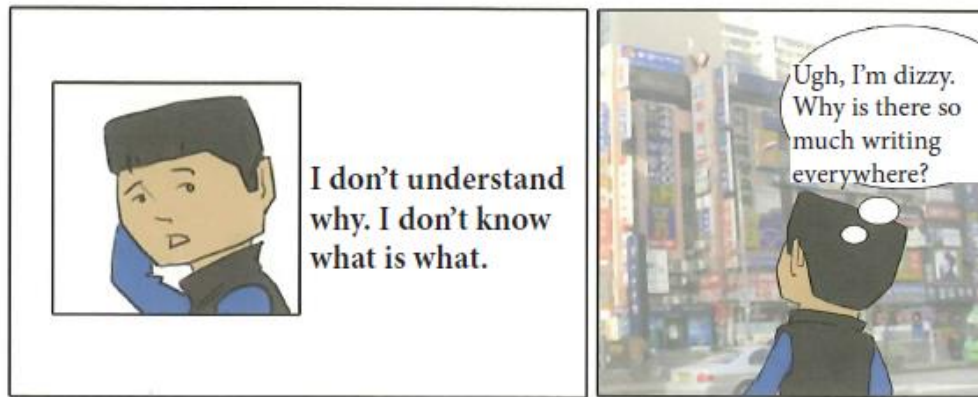
Do you do this like this?



Asking again? You have to figure things out yourself. Ask Google.



Even when I approach people they put up a wall and don't get involved.



MY FIRST JOB



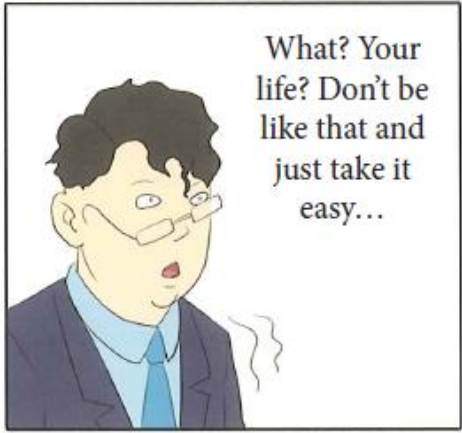
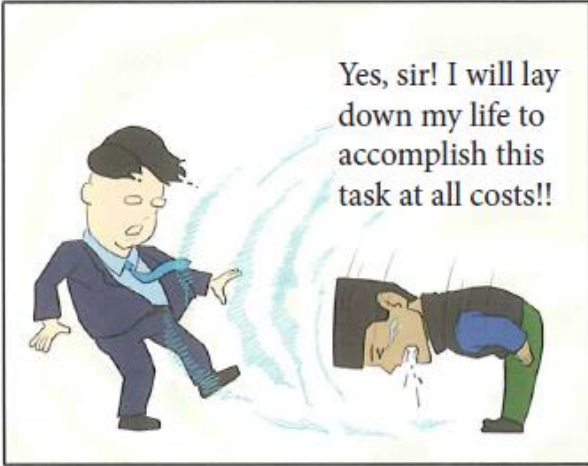
The first company I worked at after escaping North Korea



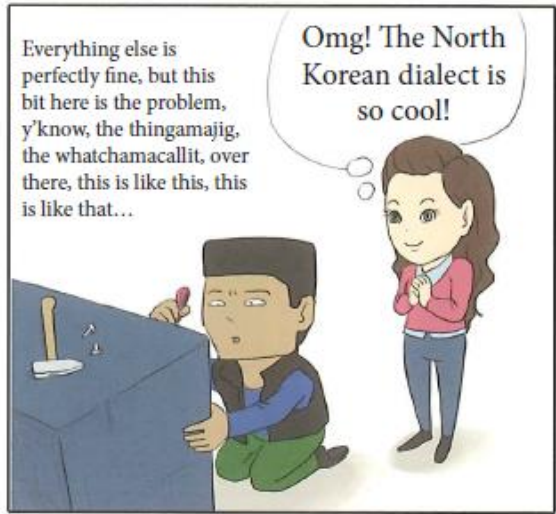
My 10th day of work! No one is giving me anything to do since I am still adjusting to company culture. I never realized how hard it would be to do nothing.

Please...give me a little work to do...





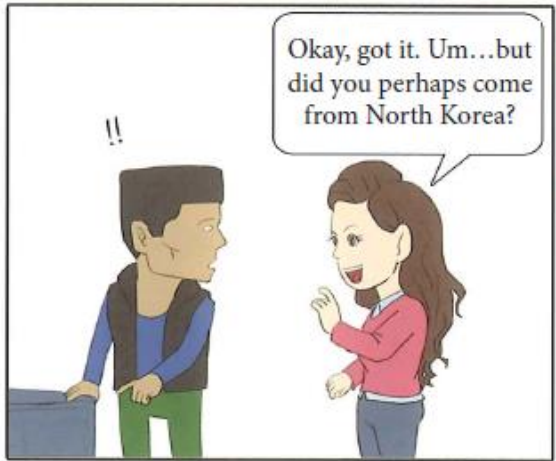
Yong-Cheol eagerly charges ahead at the opportunity to prove himself, but...



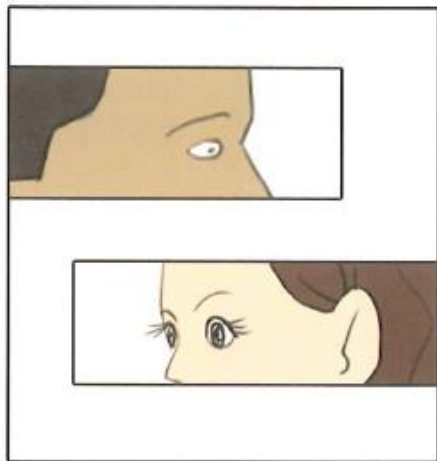
Everything else is perfectly fine, but this bit here is the problem, y'know, the thingamajig, the whatchamacallit, over there, this is like this, this is like that...

Omg! The North Korean dialect is so cool!

I've gotta get his number and brag to my friends~



Okay, got it. Um...but did you perhaps come from North Korea?



Actually, I wanted to hide the fact that I was North Korean. I hated the prejudices when people found out. It was embarrassing. It was hard on my self-esteem.

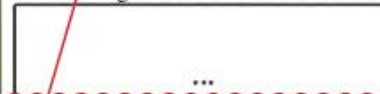
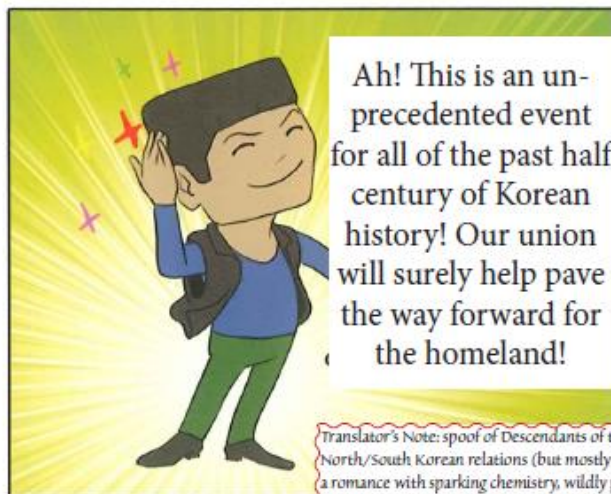


Ugh, so embarrassing to be found out... and by a nice woman at that...



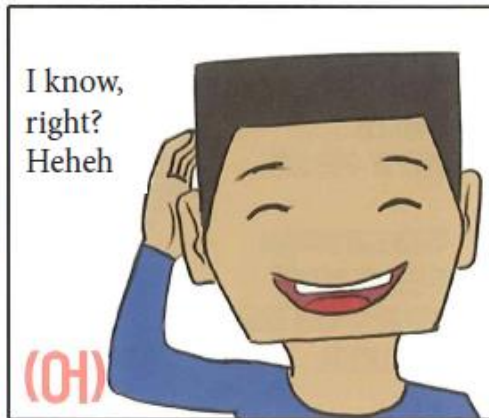
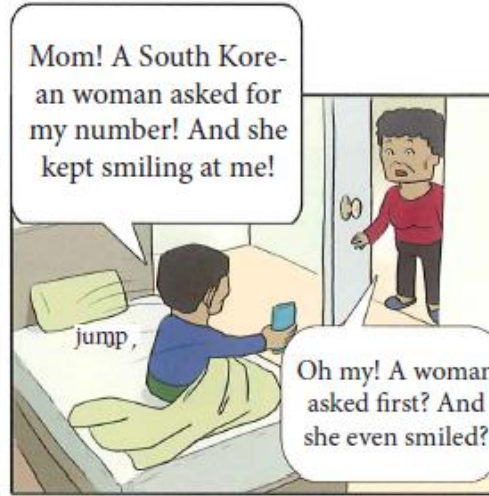
Chapter 2
Let's Get Married 2

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER



Translator's Note: spoof of Descendants of the Sun, a 2016 South Korean drama that touches on North/South Korean relations (but mostly takes place in a fictional war-torn country) and features a romance with sparking chemistry, wildly popular on both sides of the border. It starred mega-popular actors Song Joong-ki and Song Hye-kyo as leader of a South Korean special Forces unit and a surgeon, respectively. It was one of the most popular dramas at the time Labor Interrogation was written, so it is no coincidence that Choi chose it to spoof on.

Translator's Note: fun fact: limited mobile phone service has been available in North Korea since 2002 (not taking off until 2008), and North Koreans have had smartphones since 2013. Currently, roughly 20% of North Korea's population has a mobile phone. These phones cannot access the global internet but rather operate on the country's intranet.



I'd never been this happy since leaving North Korea.

The fact that Mother was happy made me even happier.

But...



no text.



But I can't text her first. According to the Juche Diplomatic Strategy, in order to gain the upper hand, you need to surprise the enemy with a provocation or...

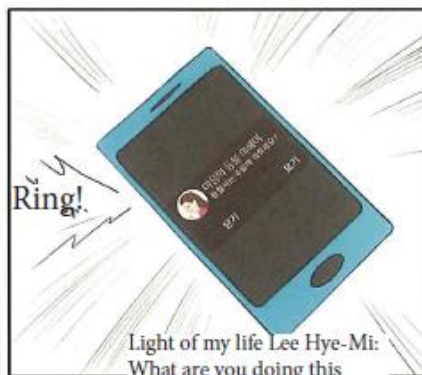


Or... rather than get dragged into your adversary's tactics, you must sweep them up in yours!

Translator's Note: Juche, developed by Kim Il-Sung is the official state ideology of North Korea. In English, it is often translated as "self-reliance" and its principles encompass every aspect of North Korean politics, culture, and daily life.



As the Juche strategy of endurance says, "If I become weary, so does my enemy" ...ah!



Light of my life Lee Hye-Mi: What are you doing this weekend, Yong-Cheol?



Light of my life Lee Hye-Mi
 What are you doing this weekend, Yong-Cheol? 오후 10:34

마음의 등불 이해미
 Do you want to get lunch? 오후 10:41

Yes, of course! My heart swells with gratitude for you texting me first like this! 오후 10:49

마음의 등불 이해미
 Woah lol you sound so fancy haha. Does everyone in North Korea talk like that? 오후 10:50

마음의 등불 이해미
 It's no big deal. I just want to thank you for your hard work. It'll be my treat. 오후 10:50

Oh! If the heart is burning passionately, such words just come naturally! 오후 10:51

+ Let us risk our lives for lo 전송

그리고 | 사랑 | 아 >

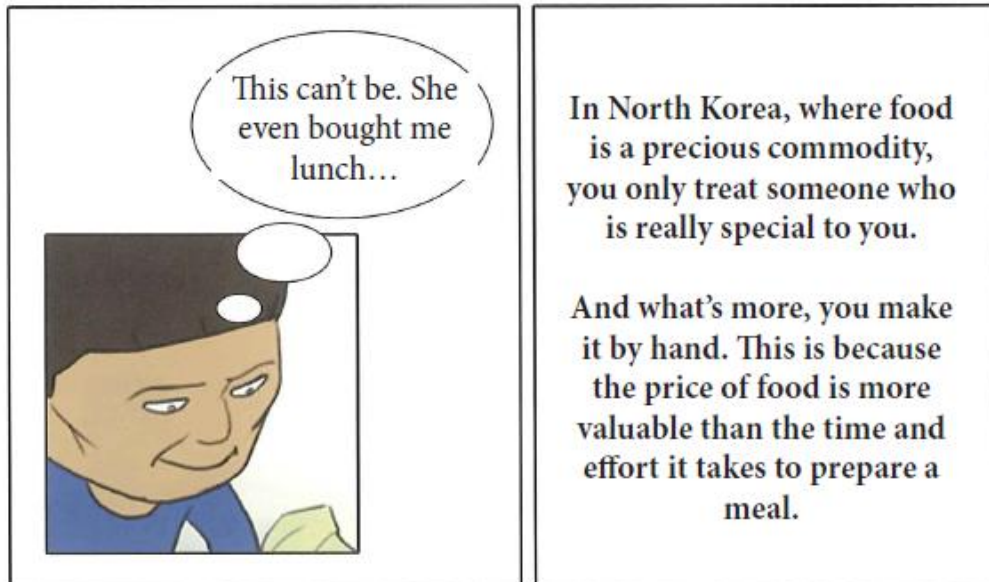
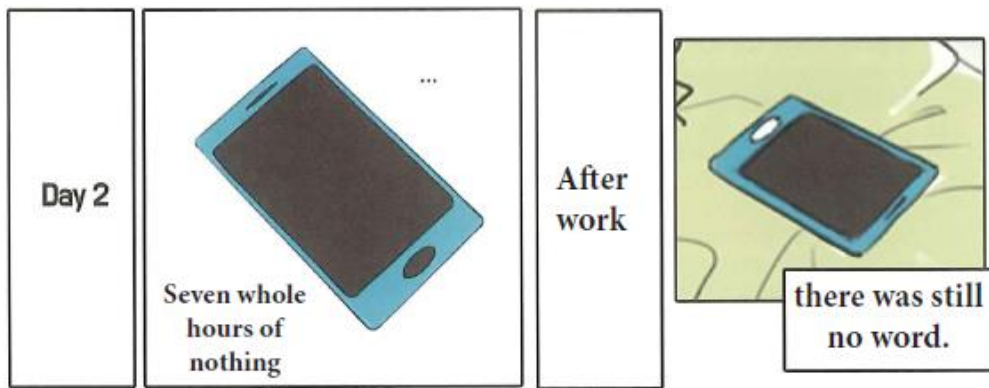
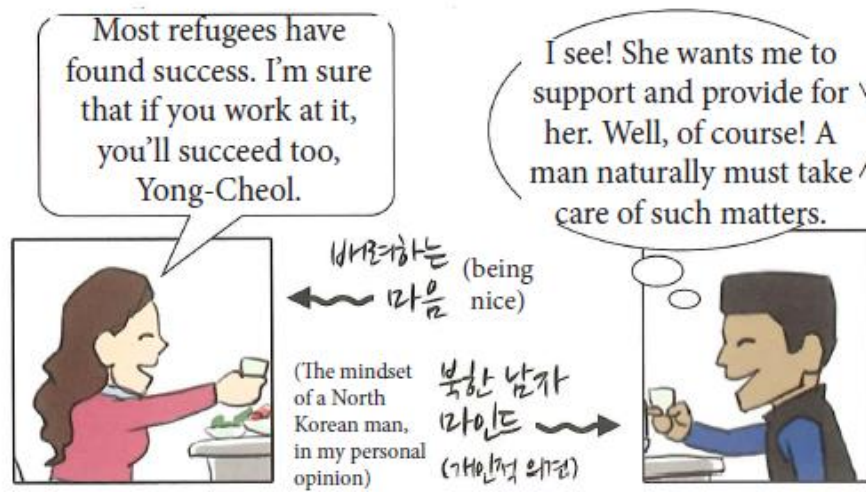
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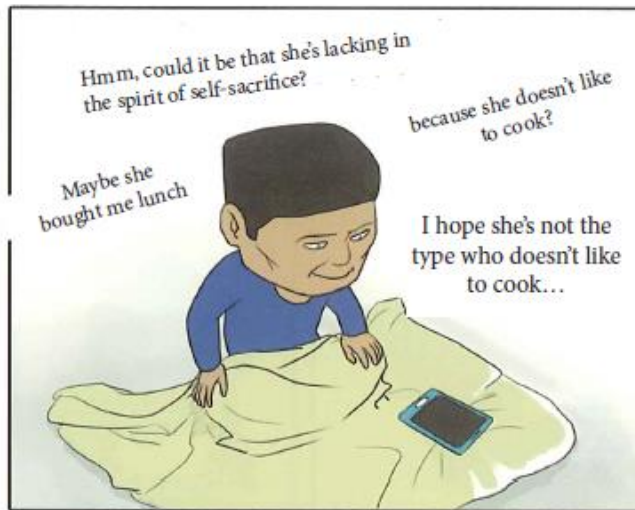
That's how we started meeting, and...

Day 1

Here's to your great new life in South Korea, Yong-Cheol!

Whooh! My defection was clearly worth it if there are days as great as today!





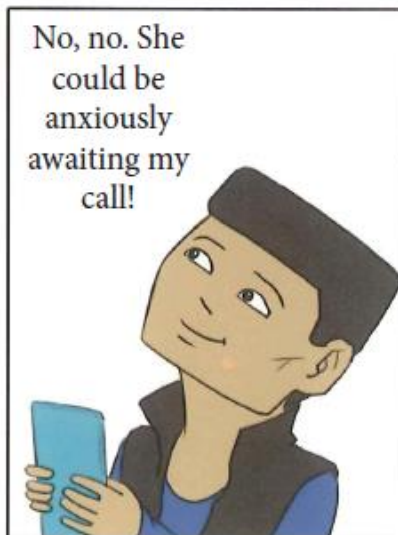
Anyway, the act of buying someone a meal. That is the highest form of hospitality.

***North Korean Language Dictionary:**

Spirit of Self-Sacrifice:
 This means, of course, the willingness to sacrifice oneself, but in North Korea it generally means the diligence and sincerity to not take the easy way out or spare oneself any pains or physical exertion



Hey, it's midnight already! Maybe something's wrong?? Should I call her? Not call her? Is it rude to call this late at night?



This is so upsetting--! I waited all day but he hasn't texted me! I love him so much... oh whatever should I do?? Wah, wah...



Uwah~~
Yong-Cheol!
No, Yong-Cheol
oppa~! If a woman
reveals her heart first,
shouldn't the man
reciprocate??
Uwahh~!

Translator's Note: oppa: a female term
of endearment towards an older male

Okay, okay. We've
come this far, so I
should at least give
her a call.

Anyway, if she picks
up at this hour she
definitely likes me!

~ 지이잉
Bzz~

Don't they say that life is
full of twists? Well, those
twists and turns are what
make living so exciting!

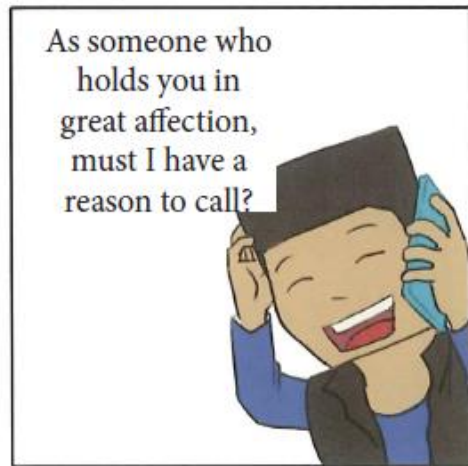
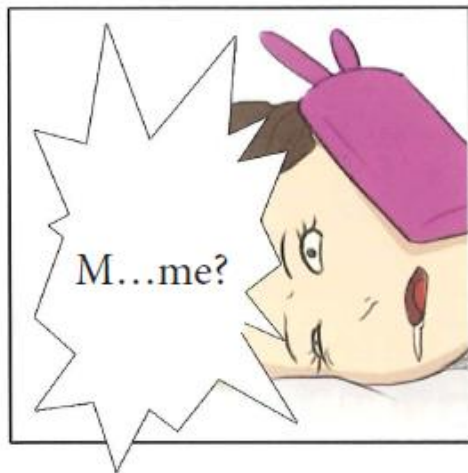
Good luck, Yong-Cheol!

Bzz~ 징~ Bzz~ 징~

김용철씨(탈북)
Kim Yong-Cheol
(Defector)

MY FIRST CONFESSION





Since ancient times, if a man becomes head of a family he must know how to lay down his life and take responsibility, you know. So! Starting now I will endeavor such that my *blood burns*... yadda yadda



***North Korean Culture Dictionary:**
such that my blood burns—I will work so hard that my blood will literally boil with passion



Actually, in this kind of situation, North Korean women...

Are you *insane*?? Not after 10pm!

are quite standoffish.
But Hye-Mi...

Translator's Note: fun fact: "fighting" is a widely used Korean Konglish (originally English but used in Korea with a different meaning) term that can be generally translated to "you can do it" or "good luck."

I see you're very...diligent, and I'm sure you'll succeed in whatever you put your mind to. Fight...ing...

Even at this hour she listens so well and even compliments me?! She must really be into me!

Day 3

Light of my Life Lee Hye-Mi

What are you doing now?

Hello?



10:00am Are you busy?

마음의 등불 이혜미
Oh sorry! I'm a little busy.

11:03am

11:04am Unread Oh! What are you doing? I'm good at working! I can help!

I bet you're pretty tired.
Good n...

The third day after we met she only texted me once. She must be very busy. I want to be of some help.


Day 4 The fourth day after we met...I really missed her.

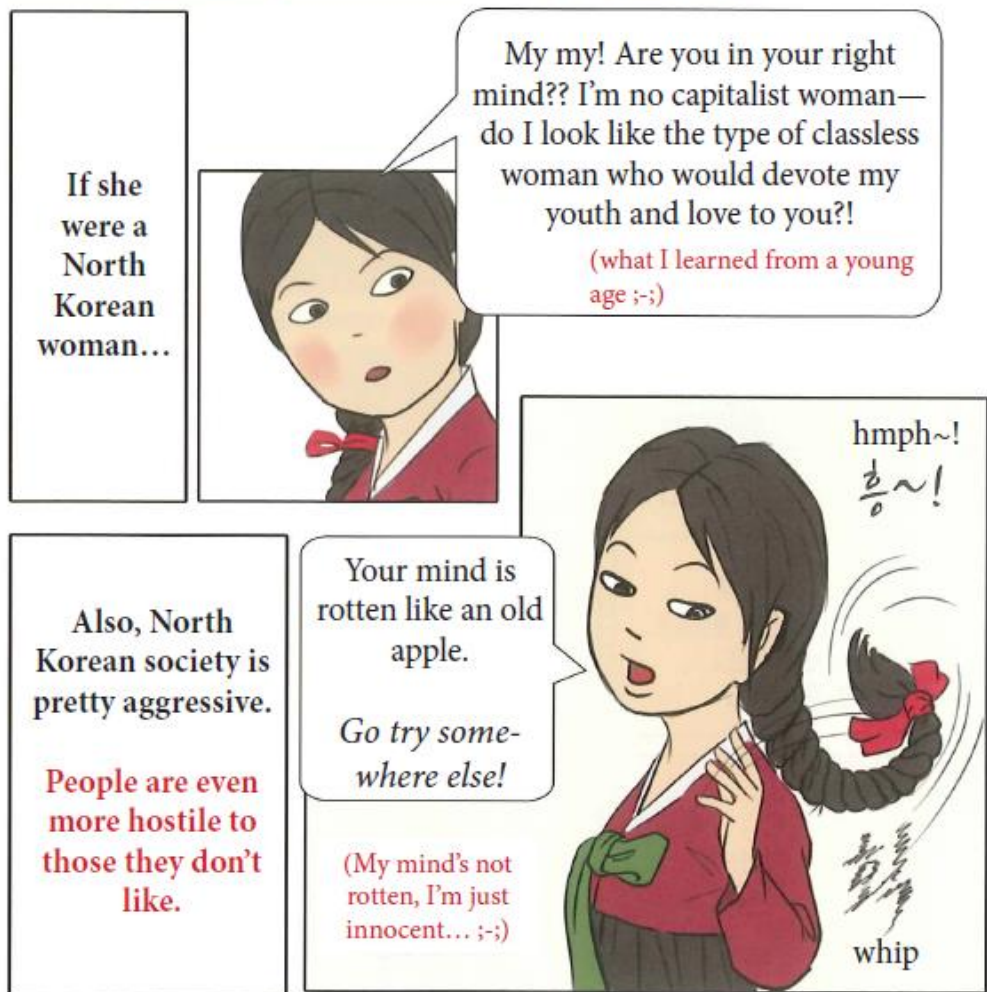
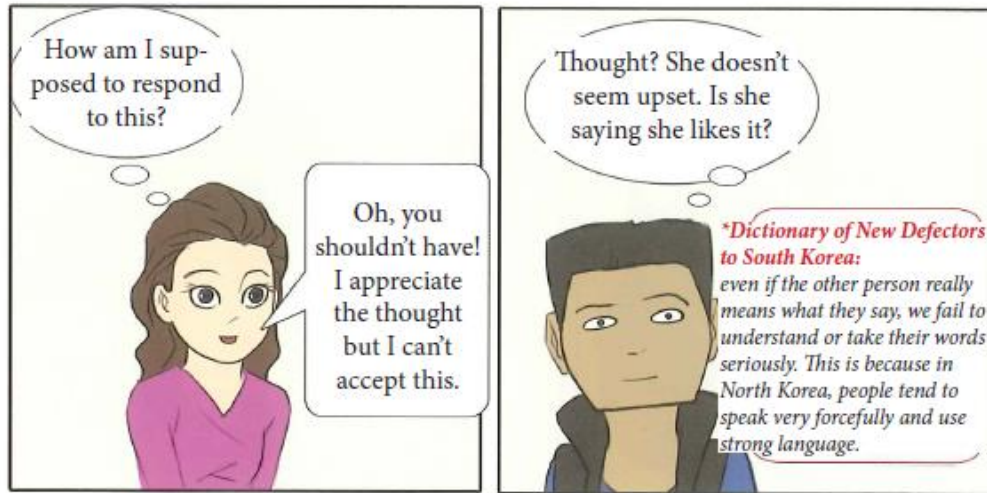
Oh my...you didn't call to let me know you were coming! And right as I get off work...

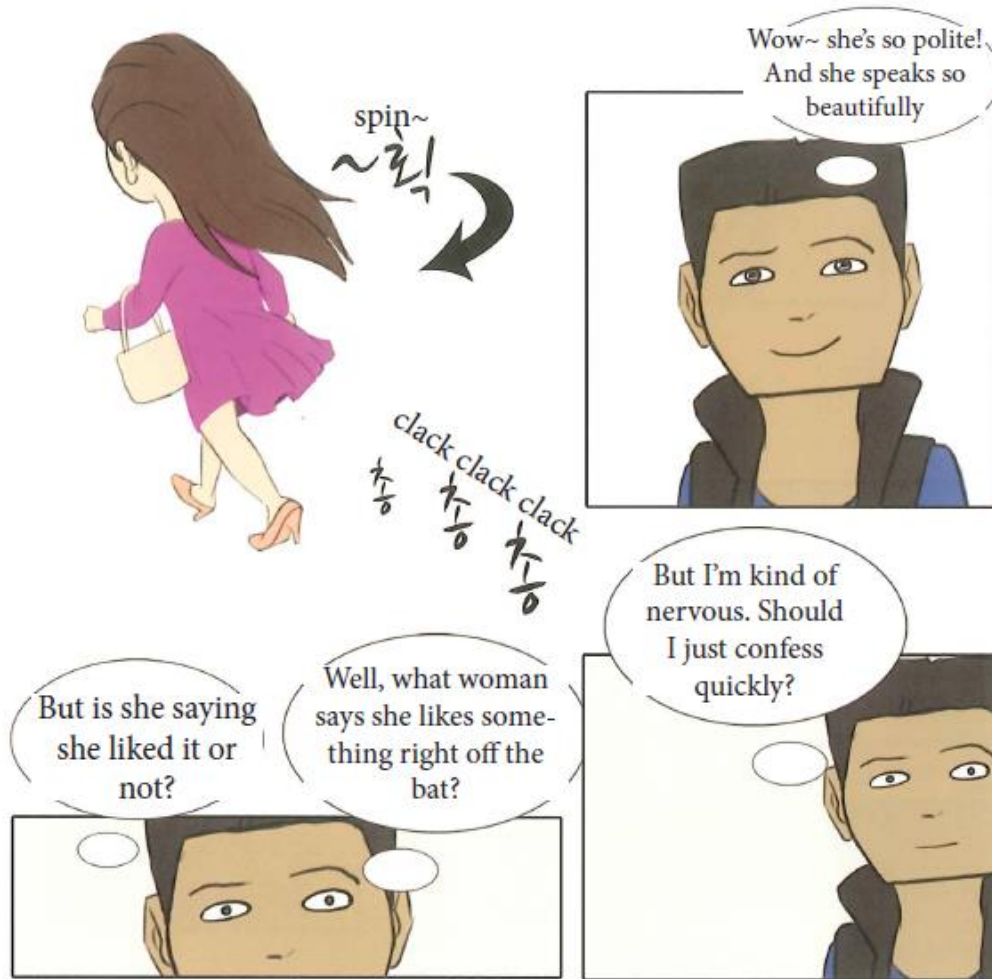
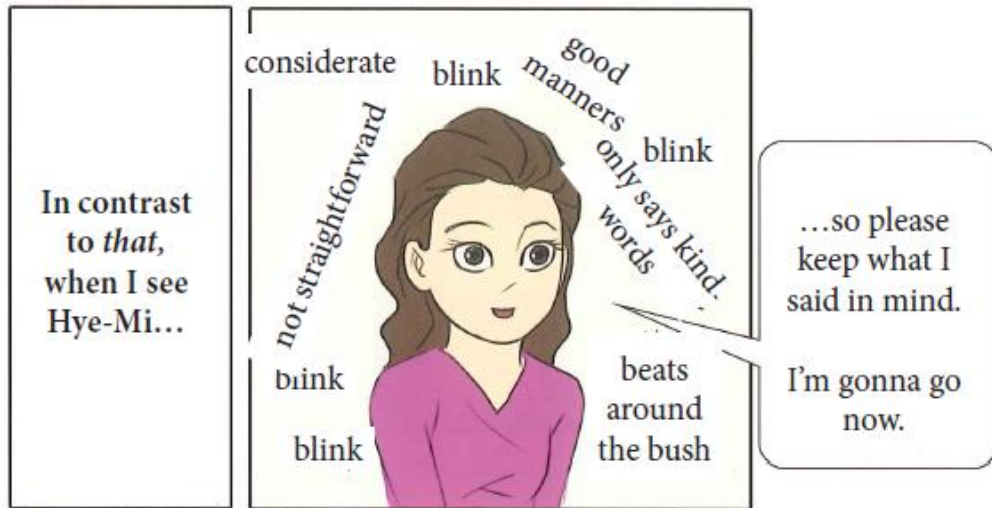
Oh! I was just passing by so I stopped in! It's a bit embarrassing for a man to carry this sort of thing around so would you take it?

Dictionary of New Defectors to South Korea:
Tuna gift set= meant for show; the canned tuna gift sets we had always seen on South Korean TV shows! For those of us newly defected, this is food of the finest quality. (In South Korea, expensive sets of tuna, spam, and other commodities are common gifts given on national holidays and other special occasions. But among young South Koreans, the practice is considered slightly tacky—certainly not romantic.)

tuna gift set







Day 5

Omg omg! This isn't how this should be going! It seems like he's getting more serious but if I don't respond will it get worse...?



You always listen so well, you smile at me, and you even like me! A fire is truly alight in my heart!

오후 12:41



마음의 등불 이해미

a...fire in your heart?

12:43

I feel like his feelings will get hurt because of our cultural differences...I've gotta phrase it in a way he'll understand...



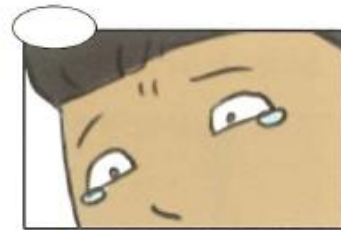
마음의 등불 이해미

I just thought we could be friends...

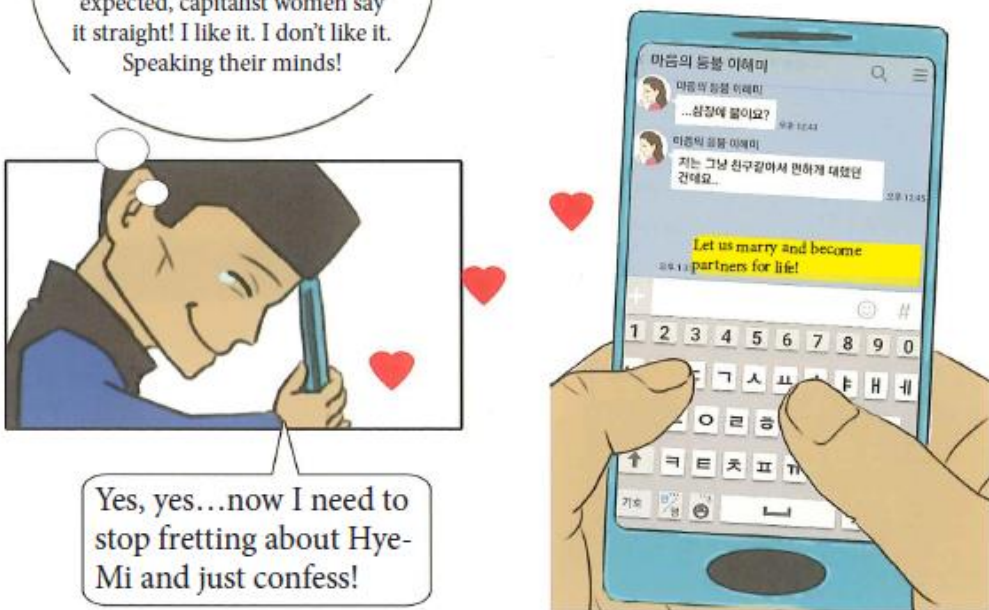
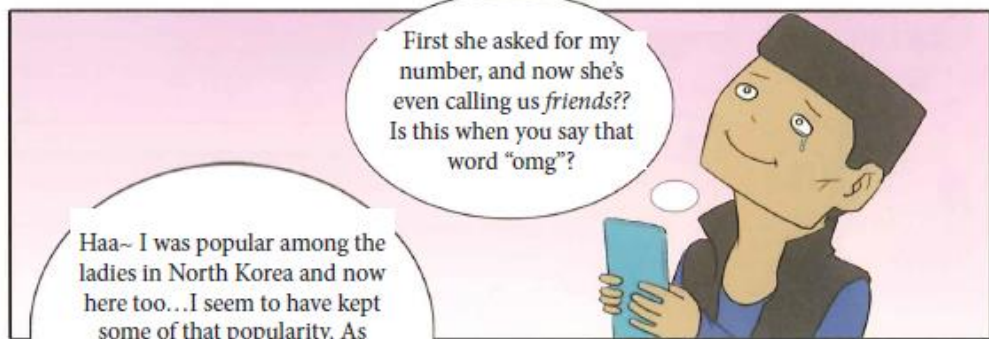
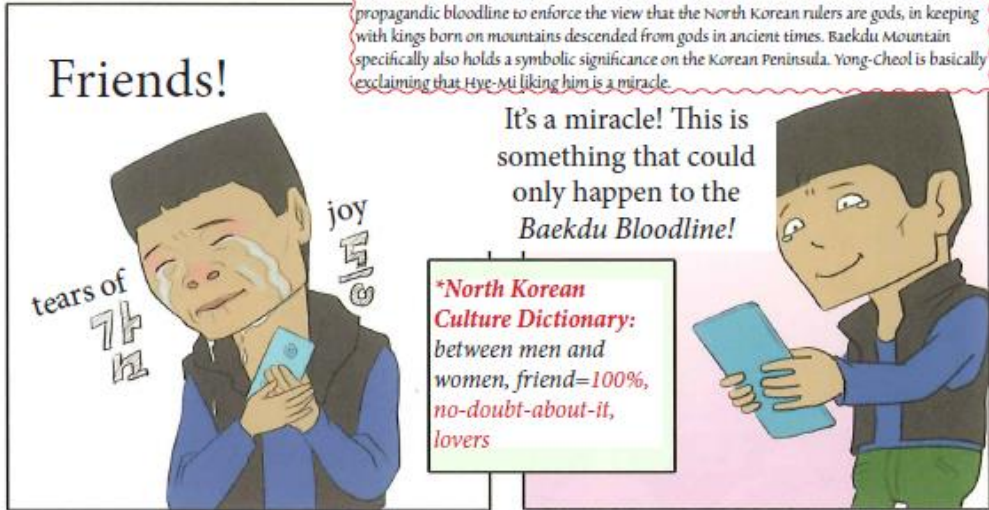
오후 12:45

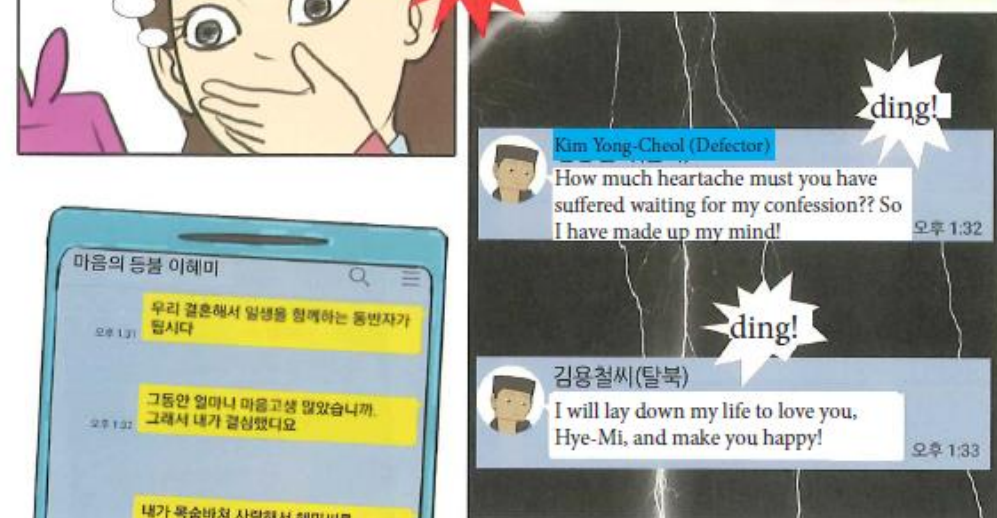


FRIENDS?!



Translator's Note: The Baekdu Bloodline refers to the Kim dynasty: Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-Eun. Kim Jong-il was born near Khabarovsk, Russia, but his official biography states he was born on Baekdu Mountain on the border of North Korea and China. This is a propagandic bloodline to enforce the view that the North Korean rulers are gods, in keeping with kings born on mountains descended from gods in ancient times. Baekdu Mountain specifically also holds a symbolic significance on the Korean Peninsula. Yong-Cheol is basically exclaiming that Hye-Mi liking him is a miracle.







Chapter 4
Let's Get Married 4

‘UNKNOWN’





Ugh, really! Let me sleep! Dumped? Who's dumped?!



Mother! I am *Yong-Cheol*! You know what kind of person I am!

splutter
기어리



기어리
splutter

I am the very *Yong-Cheol* who, despite all the hardship, was the first to recite the Juche Ideology and who everyone said had a good head on my shoulders! I was always *first place* in Party quiz competitions, so even the *top officers*...yadda yadda

splutter
기어리



tearful
눈물



눈물
tearful



눈물
tearful



Hoo~! I can't believe I acted like that in front of her... Juche Ideology, Party quiz competition...what kind of nonsense am I saying??

My body left North Korea but my head is still stuck there...ridiculous, bringing up that @\$% Juche.



But now everything is just so embarrassing...

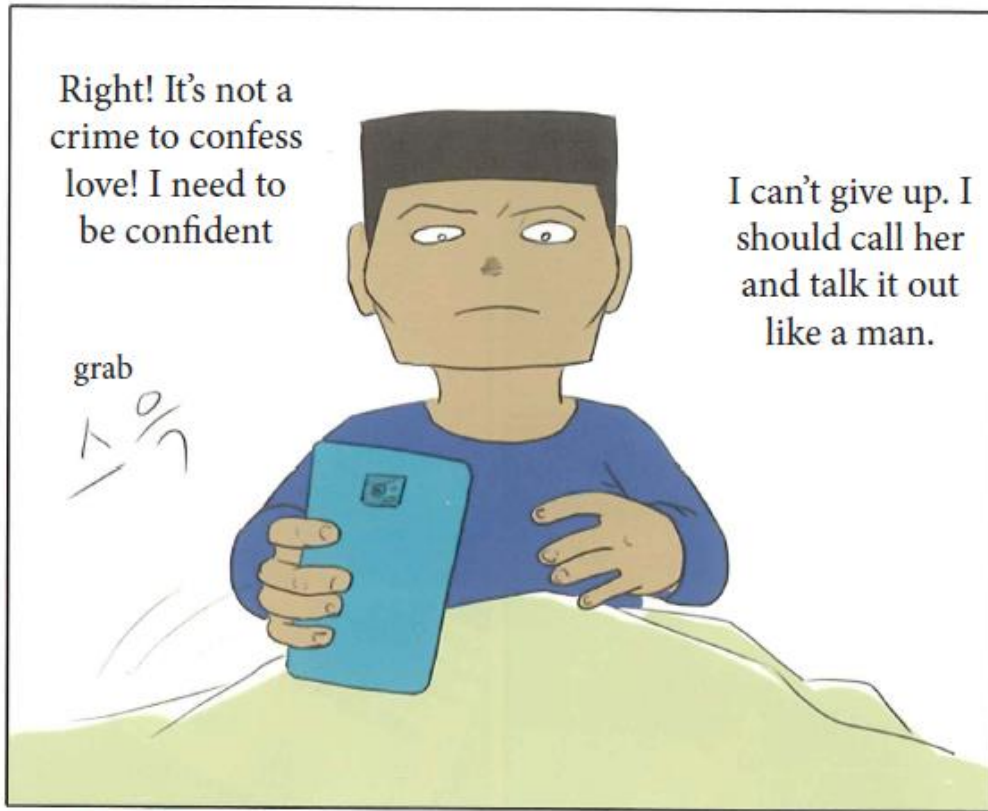
No, no. I did the right thing.

Right! It's not a
crime to confess
love! I need to
be confident

I can't give up. I
should call her
and talk it out
like a man.

grab

스윙



hesitate
주춤

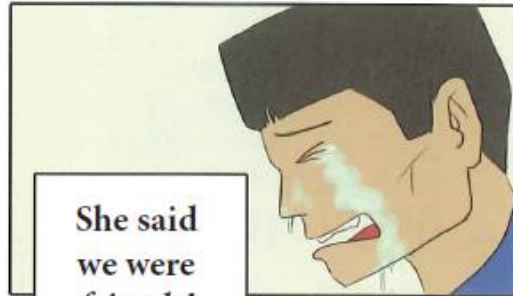




She asked me
for my *number!*



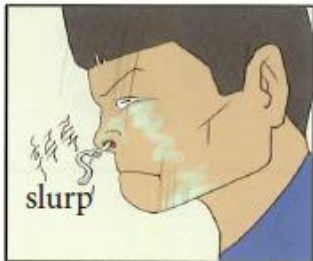
She said
we were
friends!



There are so
many strange
things about
this place...



슬러프
slurp



Even to someone they're
seeing for the first time...

Let me help
you with that!

ramen
라면



Translator's Note: English loan words in Korean in red. North Korean dialect does not contain many English loanwords; this is one of the main contributing factors in difficulty in communication and settlement in South Korea for defectors. (fun fact: loan words in South Korea take on native Korean pronunciations, while in North Korea loan words are spoken as closely as possible to their original pronunciations; this is in order to highlight their foreignness to the Korean language.)

*officetel=office + hotel. It is a type of studio apartment and includes residential and commercial units.

Our **LH** construction is leasing **new officetels** etc...if you look at the next **page** of the **manual**, you can reference the **list**.
It's your last chance!

They follow you all friendly, giving you candy and saying foreign words and that it's your "last chance"



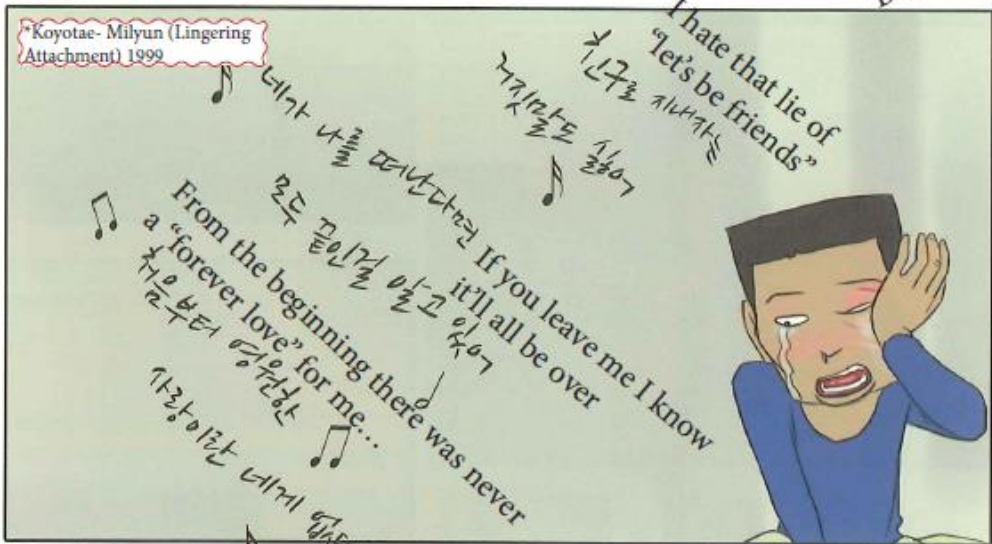
I don't know what's what here...

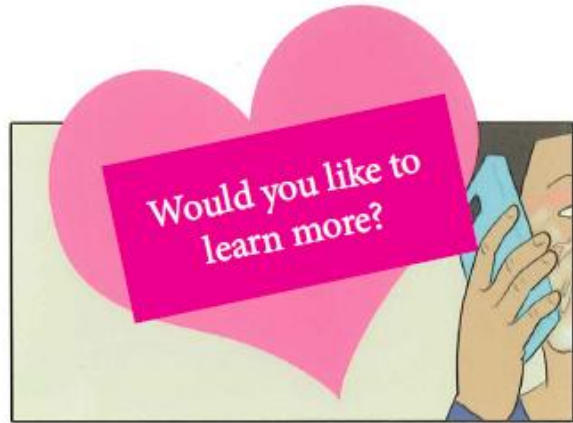


It feels like I've become a fool.



don't say we'll meet again
 ... 만나자는 약속따윈 말아
 이제는 친구로 지나가는 I hate...





Building a new life!

It's not an easy affair. Whether it's South Korea that's changed...

Translator's Note: In Korean, taking responsibility also means a man marrying a woman.

Do you *really* love me?
If you take responsibility
for me, *so what?*



Or it's North Korea
that *hasn't* changed...

in any case, there is a
little problem starting
with *communication*.

In the next chapter, we will
begin with the story of our
group of defectors' first step
into the Republic of Korea, the
National Intelligence Service!
Things that seemed so valuable
to North Koreans turn out to
be such commonalities in the
South! And so many new sights
and concepts!

How will they adjust and start
their lives in South Korea?

See you again in the
next chapter!



I guess they just throw
around the word love
in South Korea...

Let's Get Married, fin.

결혼합니다



Hallyu "Korean Wave" in North Korea



I was out fishing and got swept away by the waves... Now I'm washed up on some beach

My phone doesn't even have a signal. Where am I?

Oh my! Comrade, are you alright? This is a minefield so you must be careful!

Long Live Our Great Leader

Comrade? Mines? Could this...possibly be...

*일 없다 : 괜찮다

Ack! I must have floated all the way to North Korea! What do I do??

Yes! Long live the Great Leader (Kim Jong-un), the light of the people! Long may he live!

What's with him? He seems suspicious.

*North Korea's leader is referred to by his people simply as 'Marshal' or 'Comrade', and exalting titles and slogans such as Great Leader are only called out at events.

His skin is fair and he has a large build so he seems like a rich or important official's son...

으아아아아

Pleasure to meet you! Pleasure to meet you!

but he doesn't seem like someone from here...he's moving around in such an undignified, unmanly way.

*태집 : 체격
*갑작갑작 : 가볍고 출렁거림

Yes, yes, he looks and acts like a South Korean! So trendy!

Of course, who doesn't watch South Korean movies these days, even officials' kids?

Comrade, what is your name (up tone)? Where are you from (up tone)?

I'm Yu...Ryu Si-Jin from Seoul...no, Pyongyang!

Yeah, I can talk like a South Korean too!

That should be a good cover for now. But why did her intonation change?

*South Koreans have certain stereotypes about what North Korean language sounds like (it doesn't come through in translation but he uses an accent that is popularly assumed in South Korea to be the North Korean accent). On the other hand, North Korean people hear a rising intonation at the end of sentences in South Korean speakers, and she is trying to mimic that to seem hip.

Young South Korean Ryu Si-Jin's North Korea Travelogue

Translator's Note: Yu Si-jin is the main character in 2016 K-drama *Descendants of the Sun*. It was wildly popular on both sides of the border and aired slightly before "Labor Interrogation" began. The character in North Korea FYI is also named YU Si-jin, not RYU Si-jin. He tells the North Korean woman Myeong-Suk that his name is RYU Si-jin in order to "sound" North Korean--South Korean Language, but not North Korean language, follows a "beginning sound rule" (duembeobchik) where words cannot begin with some consonants. This is one of the most noticeable linguistic differences between the two Koreas.

Ryu Si-Jin!

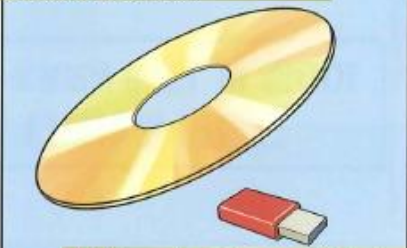
Descendants of the Sun



People are crazy over South Korean culture these days, but he even changed his name to the lead character's name?! That tops all!

*Changing one's legal name is allowed in North Korea and, since the early 2000s, the number of young people changing their names to South Korean-style names has increased (rising with the popularity of South Korean dramas). Some people even name their children after South Korean celebrities.

*What does she mean by "eggs"? In North Korea, people call CDs "CD-al"-s, or "al"-s for short. Illegally downloaded files of South Korean movies and dramas are distributed via the black market on CDs.



CD-Rs have almost disappeared in North Korea, just like much else of the world. This is because of the introduction of USBs, which are much more easily hidden during inspections.

Right! I have to get close to this kind of guy so his sophistication and trendiness will rub off on me!

Comrade, just between you and me, what kind of "eggs" do you have?

"Egg"? What do you mean by "Egg"?

Does she mean... that "egg"?



Translator's Note: The "R" in CD-R is pronounced "al" by Koreans, which also sounds like the Korean word for "egg".

So what device do North Koreans use to watch dramas? The video playback device Enhanced Versatile Disc (EVD), developed in China, is sold in large quantities by the name "Note-tel"



The Note-tel is small in size and easy to hide in case of random inspections. It also has a rechargeable battery that comes in handy during blackouts. It is especially useful when inspectors cut the power to raid homes.

I am also thinking of changing my name to Eun-seo or Mo-yeon (up tone).

Who is Song Hye-Gyo?

Oh, are you talking about the names of Song Hye-Gyo's characters?



Translator's Note: Song Hye-Gyo is the actress who plays the female lead role in *Descendants of the Sun*. Mo-yeon is the name of her character there, and Eun-seo is the name of her character in another popular drama.

In North Korea, watching South Korean dramas is a serious criminal offense, so people cover themselves and the screen with a blanket to prevent light or sound from escaping and to keep from getting caught. The names of characters are more well-known than the names of their actors.

Hallyu, the "Korean Wave," in North Korea! Despite attempts at suppression from North Korean authorities, South Korean movies and dramas have already spread throughout North Korea and are leading pop culture. For North Korean citizens, *Hallyu* is not just a window to indirectly experience South Korean society but also a way to feel pride and self-esteem as one and the same People.

Who knew I could communicate with people in North Korea about TV dramas! Awesome!!

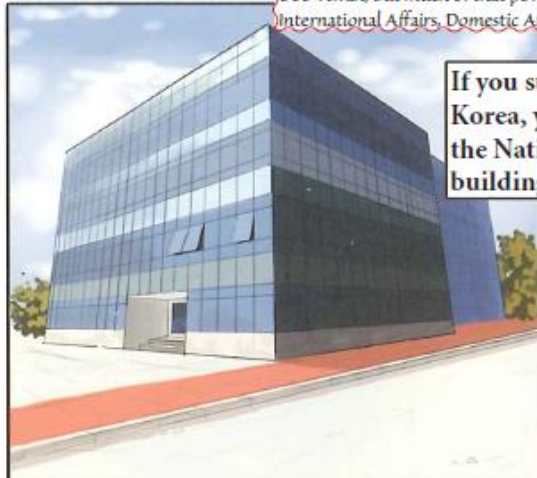


Chapter 5
 Stories of the National Intelligence Service 1

Kukjeongwon?



Translator's Note: The National Intelligence Service (NIS) originated from the Korean CIA (KCIA), which grew out of the Korean War. It was officially founded in 1961 and renamed to Agency for National Security Planning (NSP) in 1981, then to NIS in 1999. It held vast privileges and powers during the military dictatorships of Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan, but much of that power has been curtailed post-1999. It has three departments: International Affairs, Domestic Affairs, and North Korean Affairs.



If you succeed in defecting from North Korea, your first stop in South Korea is the National Intelligence Service (NIS) building, called Kukjeongwon.

Against the odds, we each made it to Kukjeongwon.



However, emotions vary.



Some of us knew a little of what was to come, others knew nothing, but all of us were tense and anxious.





Stop right there!

A little about North Korea's "won"-s.

("won" means "building" or "facility". In South Korea, it is typically assigned to relatively serious "complexes.")

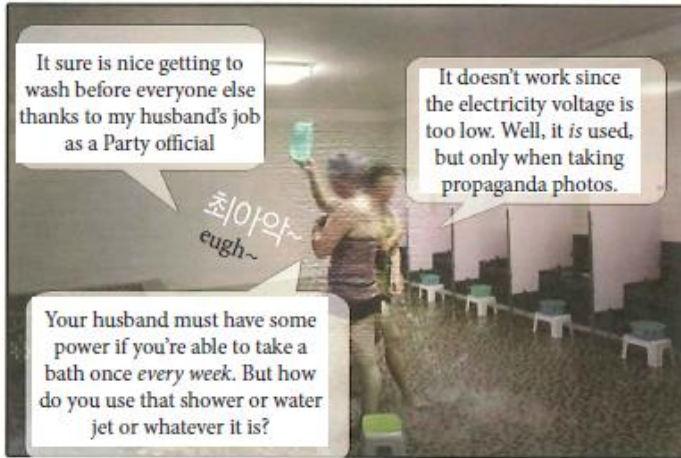
Every region in North Korea has a building whose name ends in "won". What are they, you ask?



Eundeokwon



Bupyeongwon



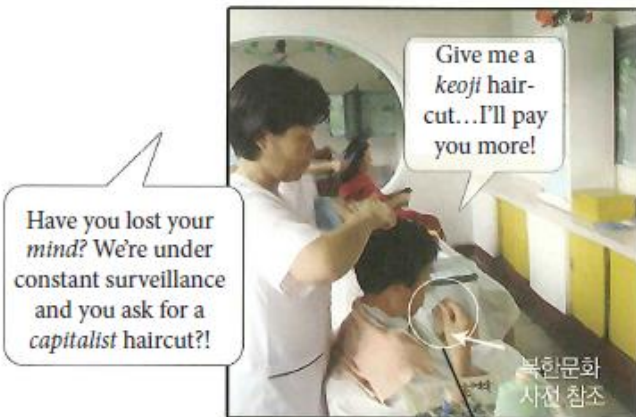
It sure is nice getting to wash before everyone else thanks to my husband's job as a Party official

It doesn't work since the electricity voltage is too low. Well, it *is* used, but only when taking propaganda photos.

최악~ eugh~

Your husband must have some power if you're able to take a bath once *every week*. But how do you use that shower or water jet or whatever it is?

for taking baths...
and getting haircuts...



Give me a *keoji* haircut...I'll pay you more!

Have you lost your *mind*? We're under constant surveillance and you ask for a *capitalist* haircut?!

**North Korean Culture Dictionary: keoji haircut="beggar's hairstyle," a layered cut; a popular hairstyle in South Korea*

-As seen in the picture, when getting a perm, the customer acts as assistant to the hairdresser and helps her

see North Korean Culture Dictionary

As for general facilities in North Korea...

Translator's Note:
"satellite-won", named in honor of North Korea's satellite program started in the mid-1980s—of five launches, two have been successful.



Each building received a name according to the current situation at the time of construction. All end in "won."

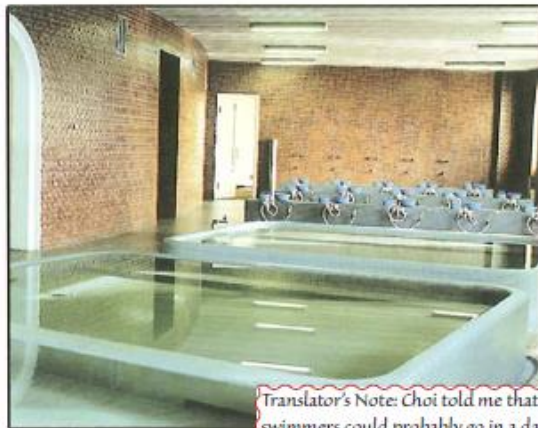
But when all is said and done, North Korea's best "won" is Changkwangwon.

literally, "light seeping through", or "brightly lit facility".





The proud face of North Korea, Changkwangwon Health Complex opened in 1980.



The gross floor area is 30,000m² (3 hectares/322,917.31ft²) and can hold 10,000 swimmers a day. It also contains baths divided into public baths, couples' baths, family baths, and individual-use baths,

Translator's Note: Choi told me that while 10,000 swimmers could probably go in a day, there would never be a time when that number would ever actually swim there since 90% of people can't even go look at it from the outside.

the *highest* (comparatively, of course) quality hair salon...



Didn't Japan give us these facilities?

Are you mad? They weren't given to us! They must have been presented with *great reverence*...

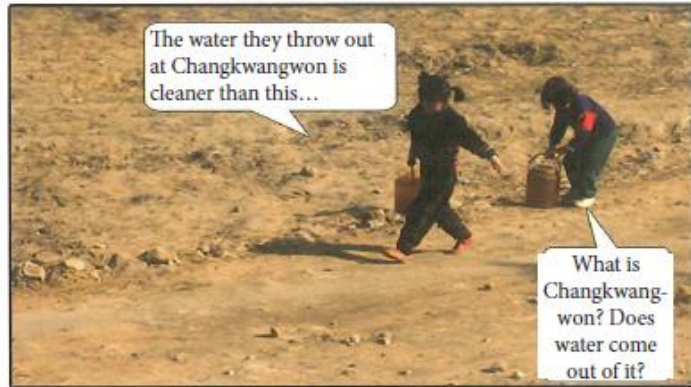


a restaurant, a pool, indoor and outdoor water parks, and more!

However, these public facilities are only accessible to the Pyongyang upper class.

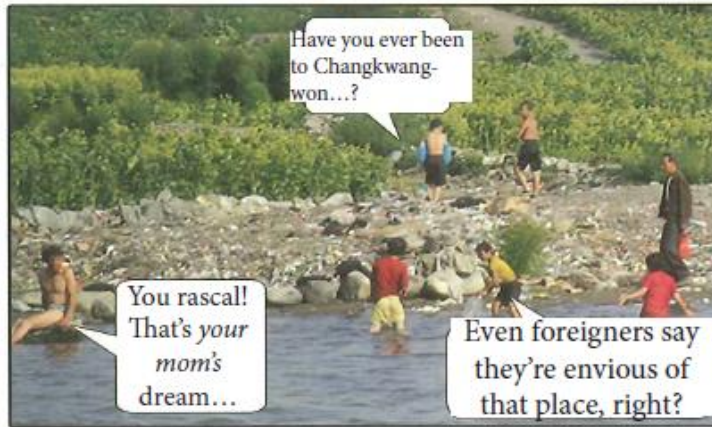


For the remaining 90% of North Korean citizens that live outside of Pyongyang...



The water they throw out at Changkwangwon is cleaner than this...

What is Changkwangwon? Does water come out of it?



Have you ever been to Changkwangwon...?

You rascal! That's your mom's dream...

Even foreigners say they're envious of that place, right?

It is only an unreachable dream.

And that is exactly the **Changkwangwon** she's talking about...

Going to Changkwangwon was my *lifelong dream*,

and I've come to the *even better* Kukjeongwon!! I'll have to learn how to swim!

How is her provincial accent so *strong*? I don't understand anything she's saying! Does she even watch CD-als? She is still so *North Korean*!

**North Korean Culture Dictionary:*
CD-al = South Korean or foreign film

Translator's Note: She thinks that because "won" is at the end of Kukjeongwon, it will be a place like Changkwangwon. But Kukjeongwon is decidedly **not** a spa.



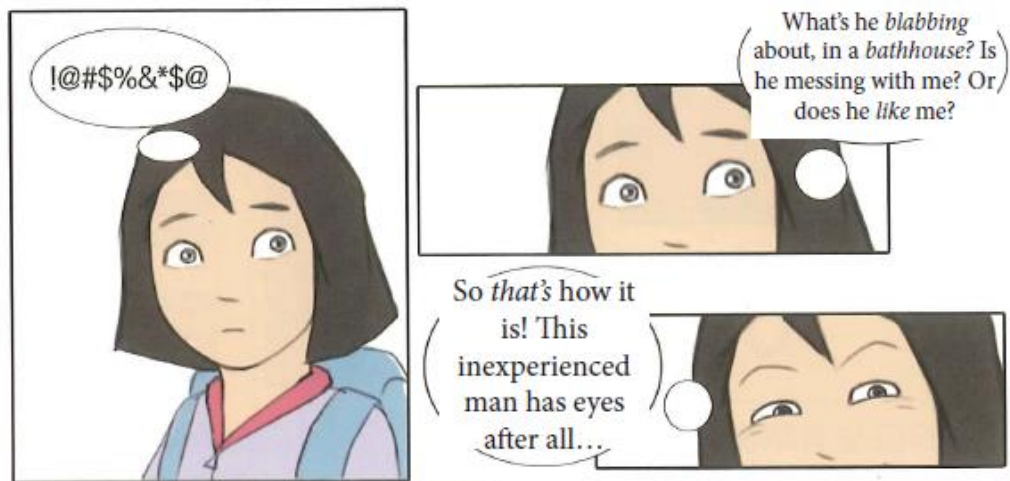
Shhhh~!

And I'm telling you this for your own sake, but when they're interrogating you, tell them you blew up the **Mansegyo Bridge** before you defected

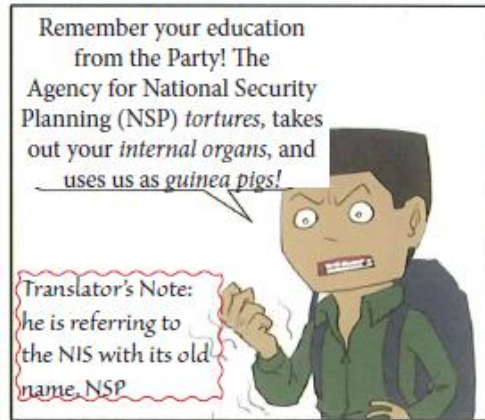
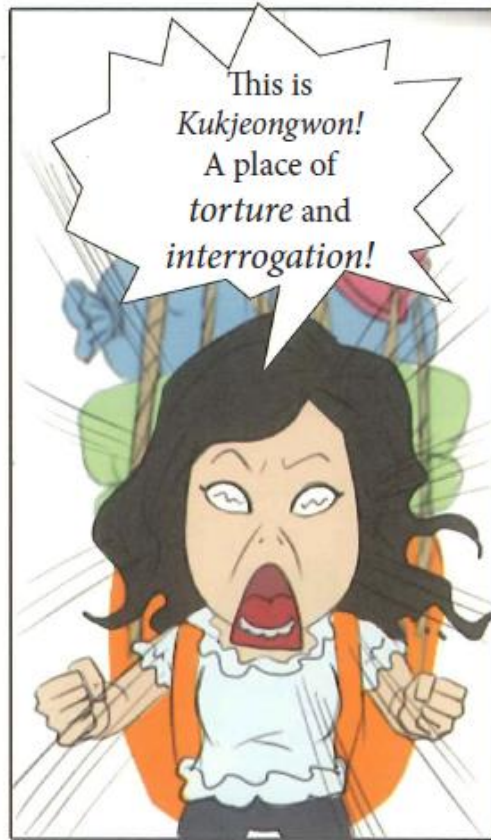


***North Korean Culture Dictionary:**
Hallakggungi—someone who uses the North Korean Hamgyeong Province dialect (and therefore is seen as something of a country bumpkin)
 -The North Korean State Security Department is on par with the South Korean National Intelligence Service. However, you cannot throw around the name of the State Security Department with impunity

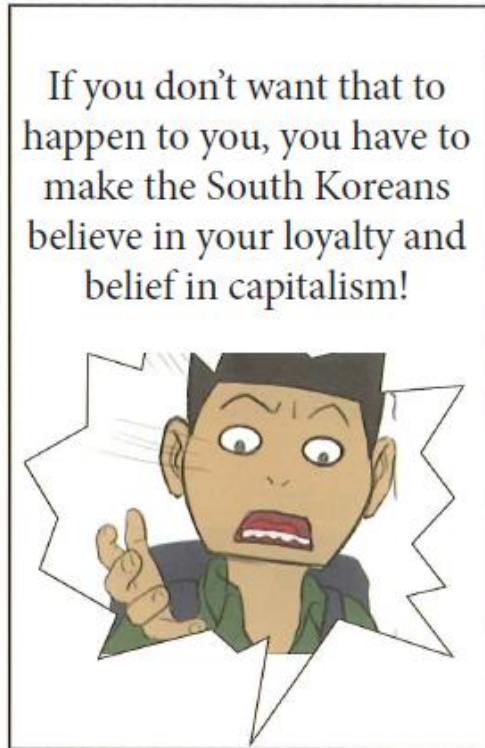
***North Korean Culture Dictionary:**
Mansegyo Bridge—A bridge in Hamheung (a city in Hamgyeong Province) that military trains use
 -It is seen as useful to be injured by the enemy in order to receive recognition for your loyalty







Translator's Note:
he is referring to
the NIS with its old
name, NSP

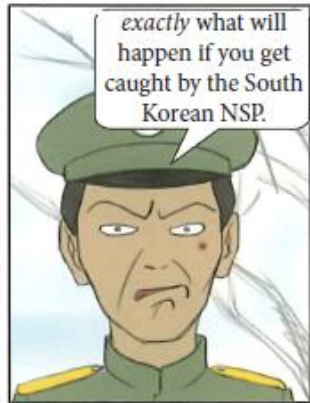




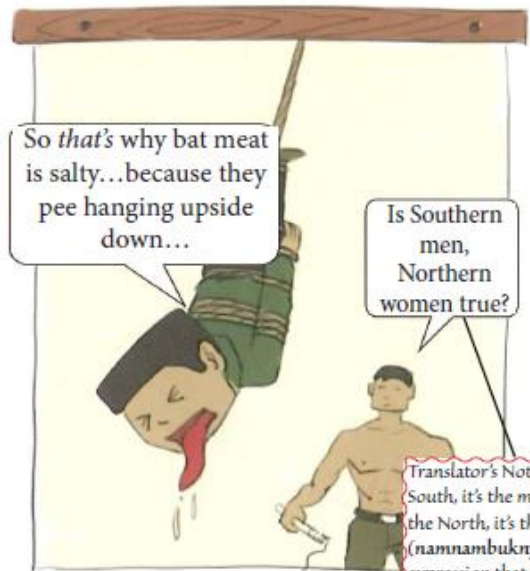
Now that I think of it, as we all stood in front of Kukjeongwon—the National Intelligence Service building—we were all quite nervous...



Why?



First! They force you to hold a press conference denouncing socialism and praising capitalism



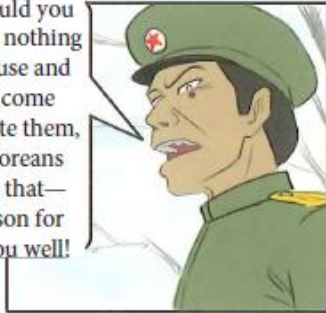
Second! If you disobey them, they either kill you or hang you upside down

Third! The women's special forces will use you for their experiments

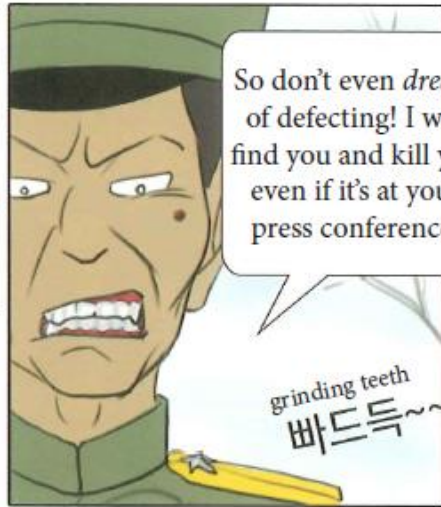
Translator's Note: "In the South, it's the men and in the North, it's the women" (*namnambuknyeo*) is an expression that refers to a strongly held assumption and stereotype held by both North and South Koreans that men are more handsome in South Korea and women are more beautiful in North Korea.



Think! How would you feel when there's nothing to eat in the house and your relatives come begging? You hate them, right? South Koreans think of us like that—there is no reason for them to treat you well!



So don't even *dream* of defecting! I will find you and kill you even if it's at your press conference!



**North Korean Culture Dictionary:*
There is a saying that came about in the mid 90's (during a period of famine) that goes, "a guest's backside is beautiful". It means, "it makes one happy to see guests leaving," or "I have nothing to treat you with, so don't come."

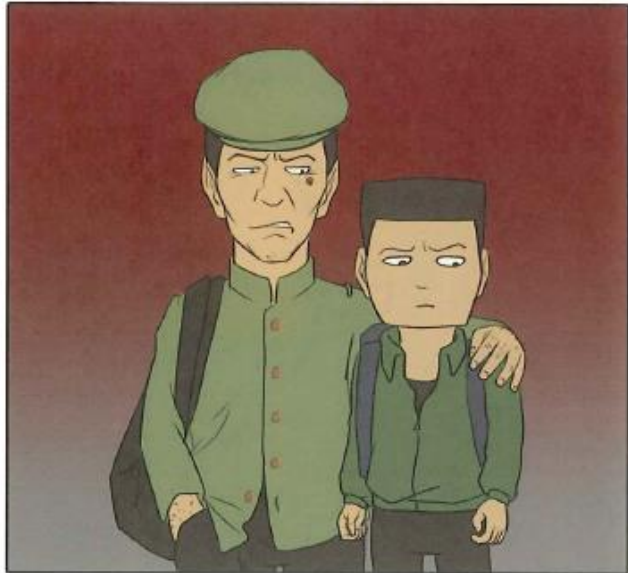
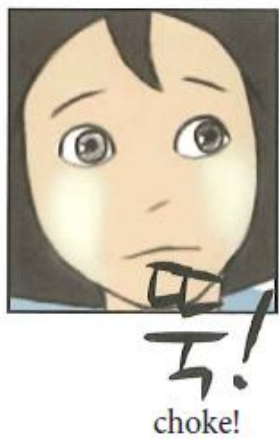


...gulp!



Hey, what if they really make us do a press conference?

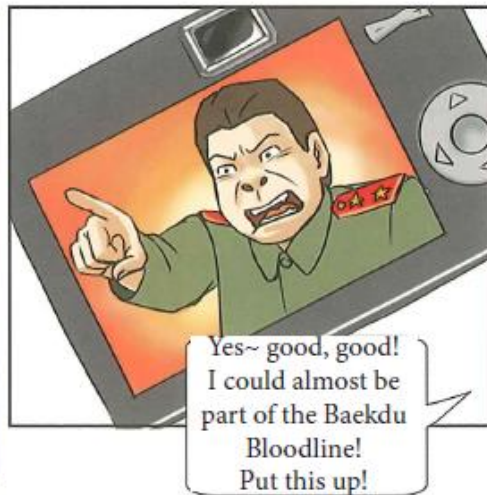
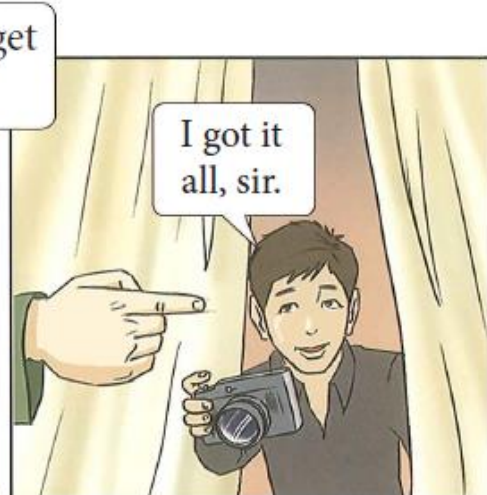
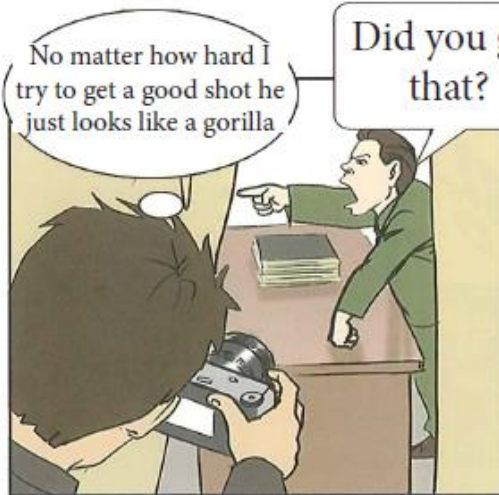
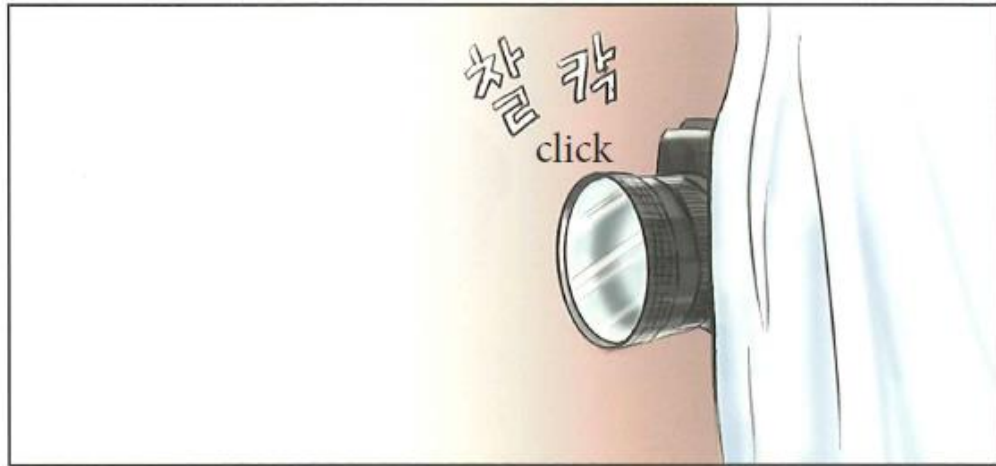




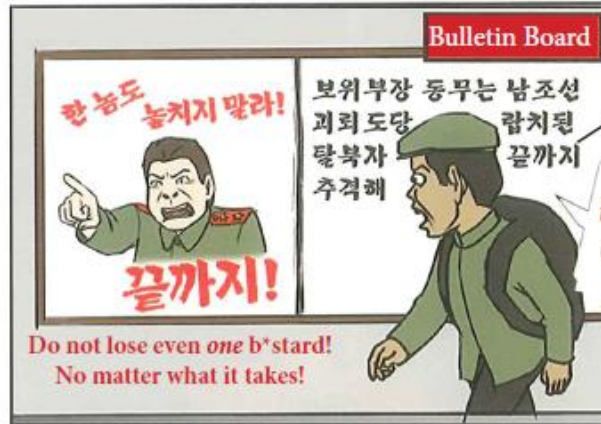
Chapter 6
Stories of the National Intelligence Service 2

What's so special about rations?





displayed...



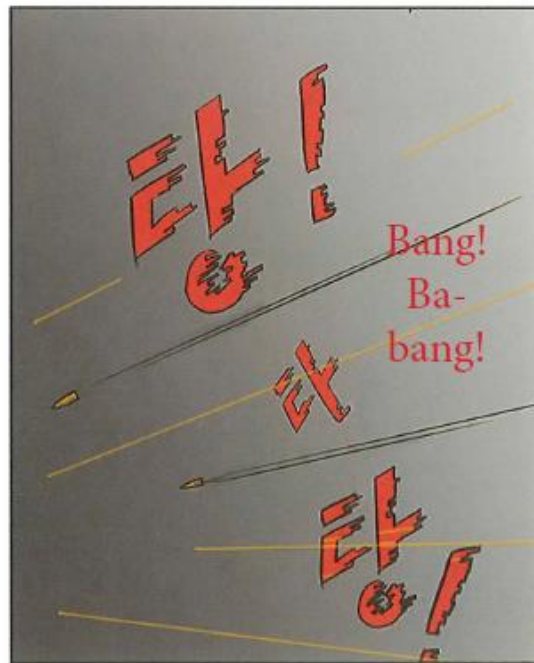
Comrade State Security Department Head will pursue defectors kidnapped by the South Korean puppet party at any cost!

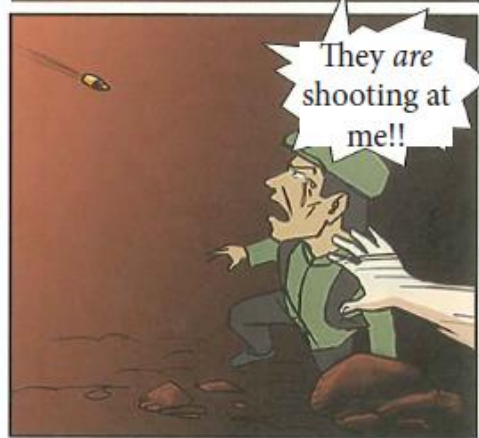
He's catching them?! I'm the one doing all the work!

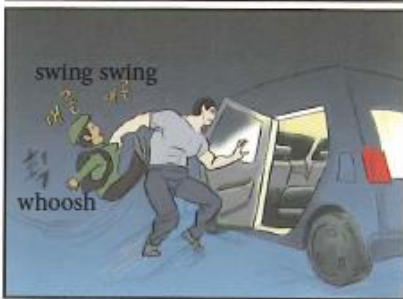
He just takes all the credit...



That's how the undercover defection operation in pursuit of defector Yong-Cheol began... and shortly after...







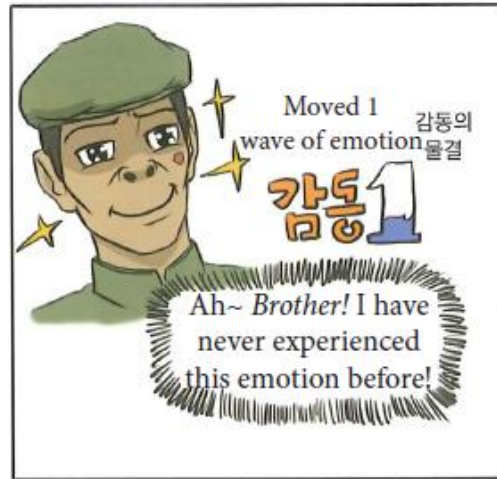
So that's why they say Northern men, Southern women! The men really are more handsome!

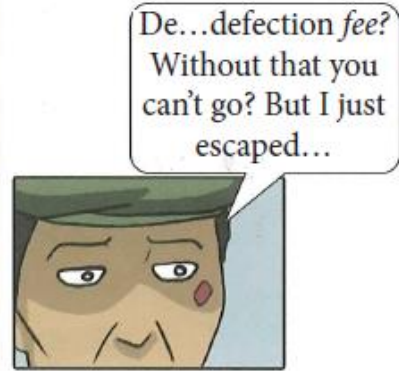


What say you? Publicly announce you have a child here then die!

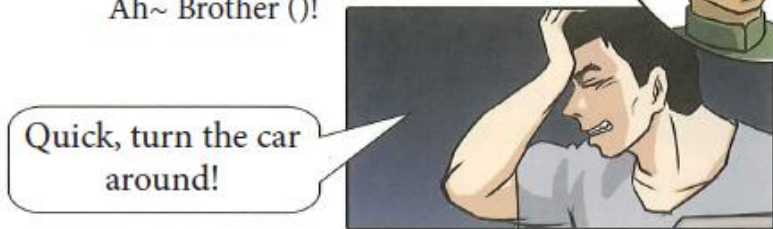


"I am being kidnapped! But is that a man or a bear? If I try to run he'll most likely catch me...he's so strong...in any case, I should be getting to South Korea fairly easily...but what do I do if they torture me?!"



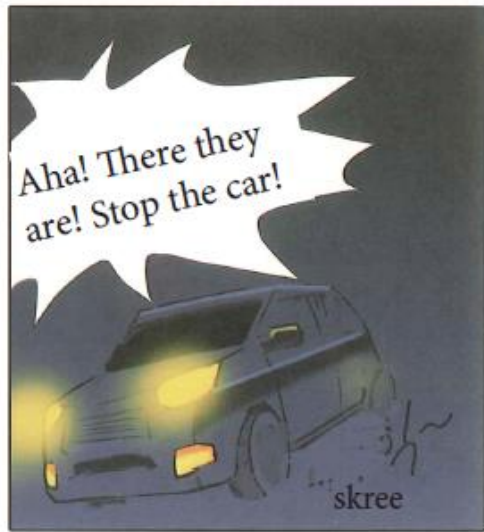


Ah~ Brother ()!

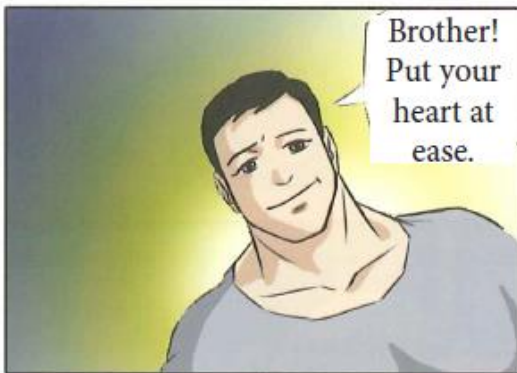




But why do I feel so disappointed...? It's not like I really wanted to defect... I've never felt this kind of emotion...



I will be right back.

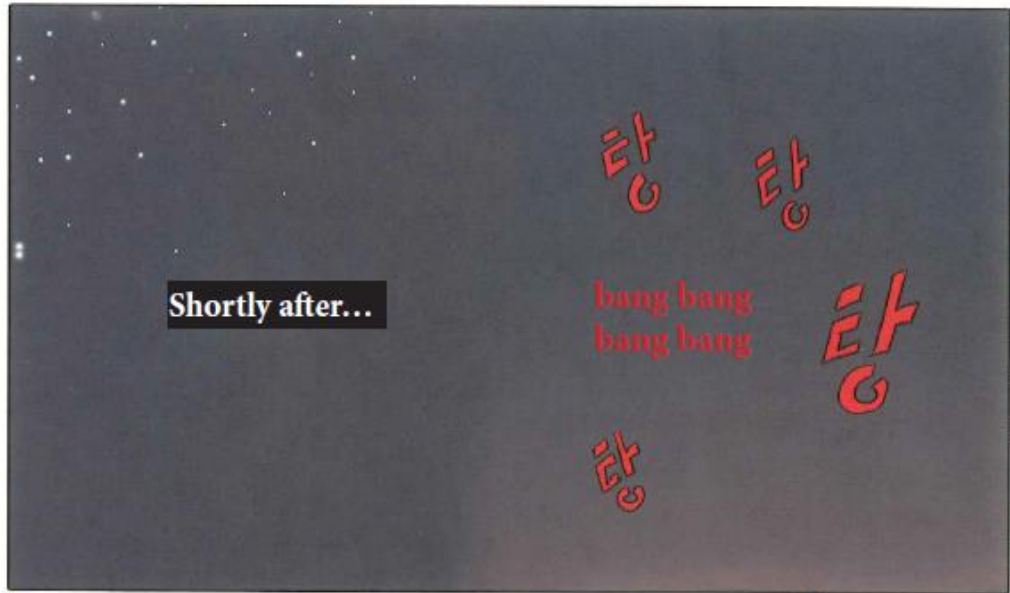


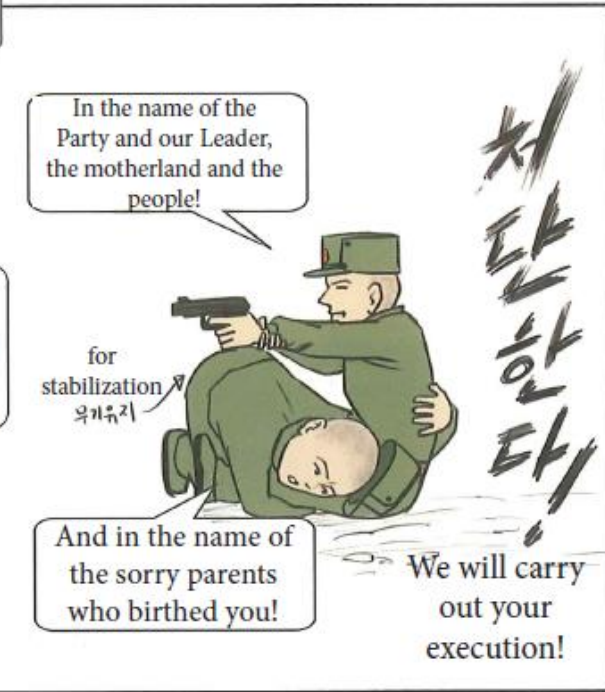
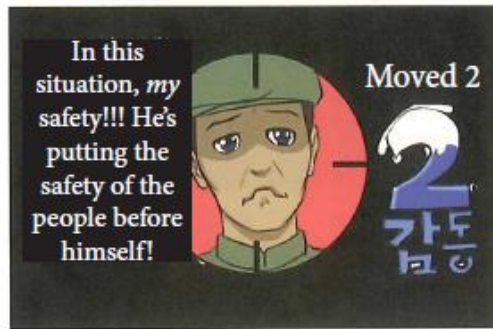
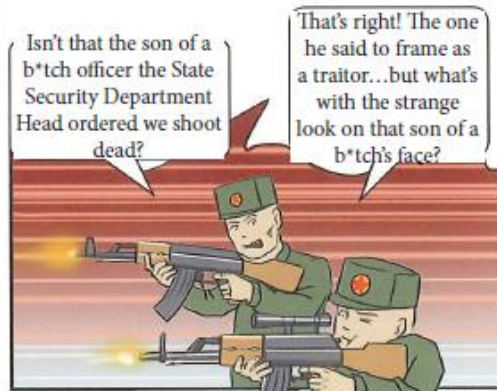
Brother! Put your heart at ease.

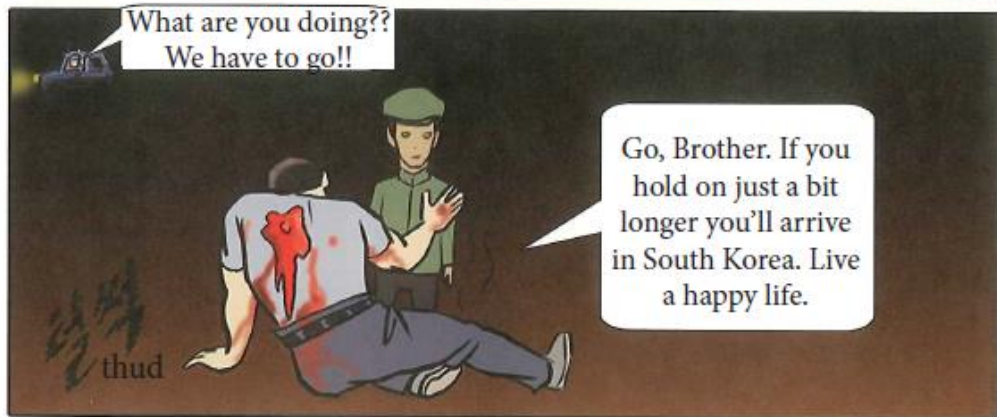
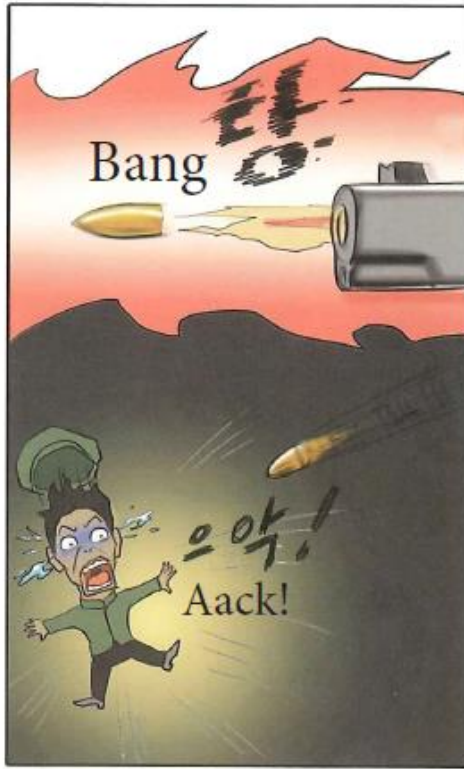


Oh~ He is like the Great Leader! I've never felt this way before!









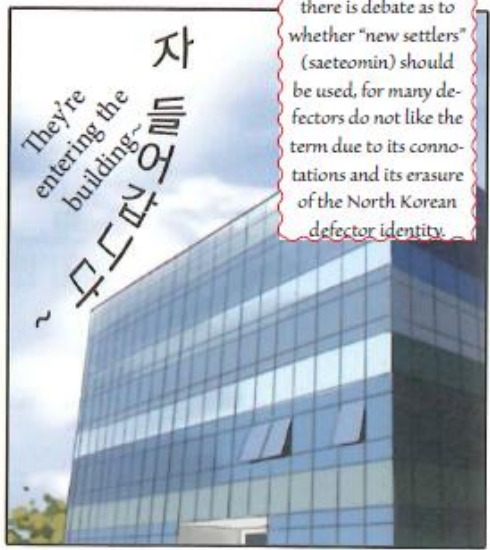


Why did you do it?! Are you mad?
Why would you save me when I don't
even have the money to pay the fee??



Brother! Life is
precious...





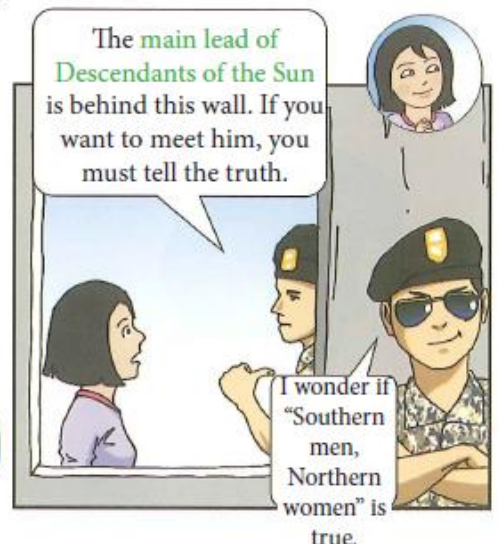
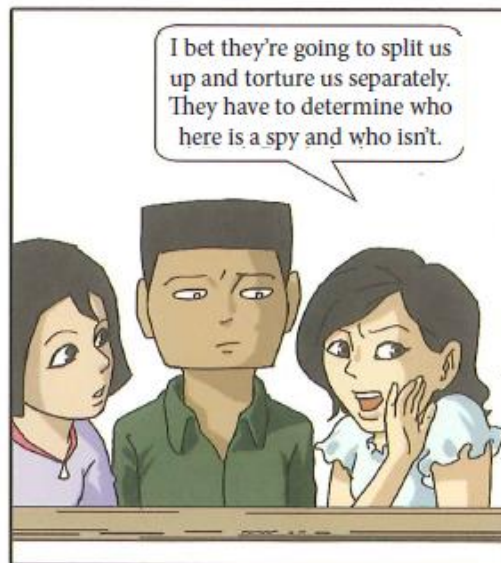
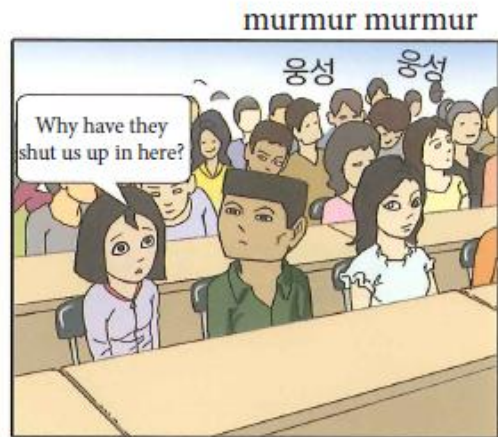
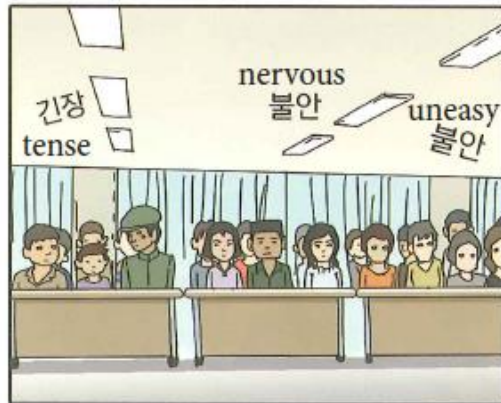


**We will never forget all those people,
known and unknown, who put aside
ideology and religious beliefs to give
their lives for complete strangers.
Your memory will live on.**

**The real National Intelligence Service
stories begin in the next chapter.
To be continued...**

Freedom of Expression







Translator's Note: eonni: a term used by younger women towards close older women



Has she gone nuts?! She was crying just a minute ago!



It looks like she likes the idea of getting interrogated?!



Eonni! They won't hit us as long as we do what they say, right?

I can't believe you! Are you really North Korean??



I've already written this 99 times...

They make you write what you have already written over and over again! Even if you're right they say you're wrong and hit, hit, hit you again!



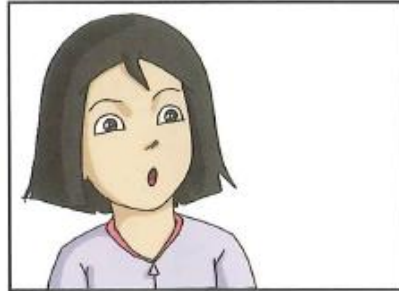
Hoo~ if this keeps up I'll die... I should just confess to things I didn't do...



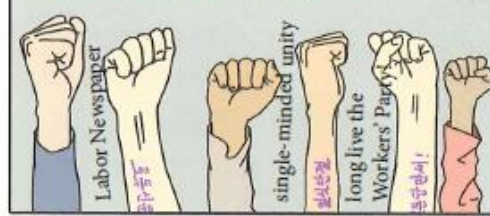
That is interrogation!



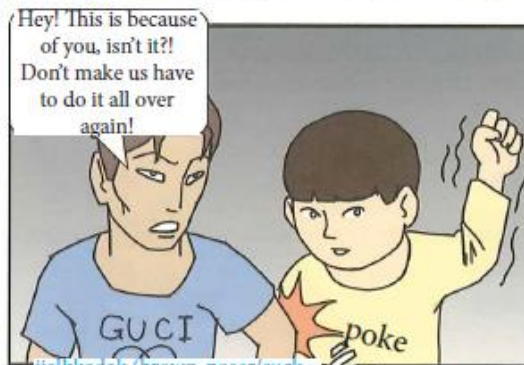
떨떨
떨
떨
tremble



Translator's Note: In South Korea, this means "attention", with jumeok meaning "fist". North Korean does not distinguish eo and o, so they think he is telling them to raise their fists.



Put...put your hands down!



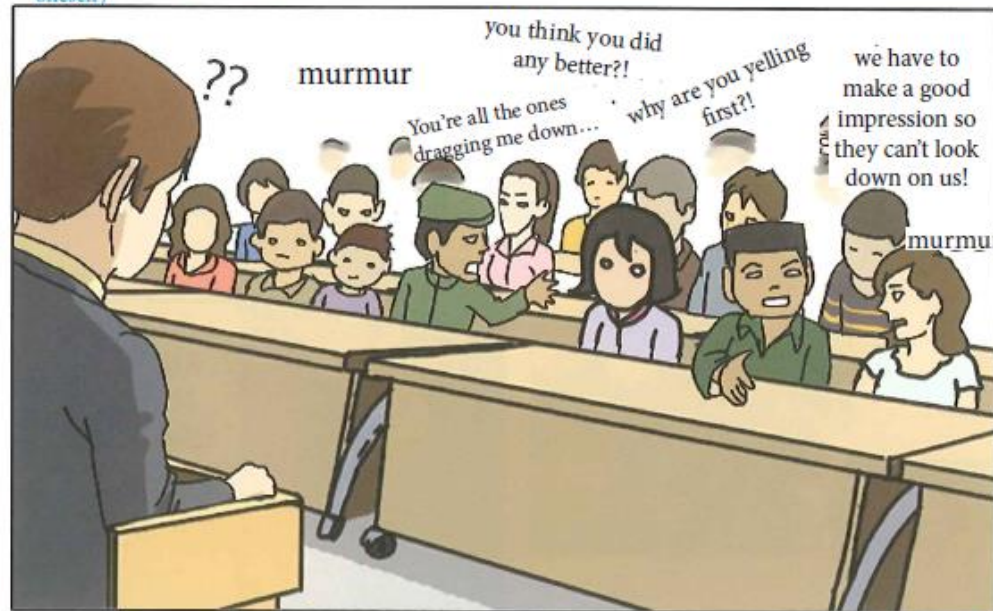
Hey! This is because of you, isn't it?! Don't make us have to do it all over again!

poke

↑ jjalkkadak (brown-noser/suck-up) (the first to make noise and appeal to authority or justify oneself)



We come all this way and you're playing around and embarrassing us~? We've got to start strong, huh?!



??

murmur

you think you did any better?!

You're all the ones dragging me down...

why are you yelling first?!

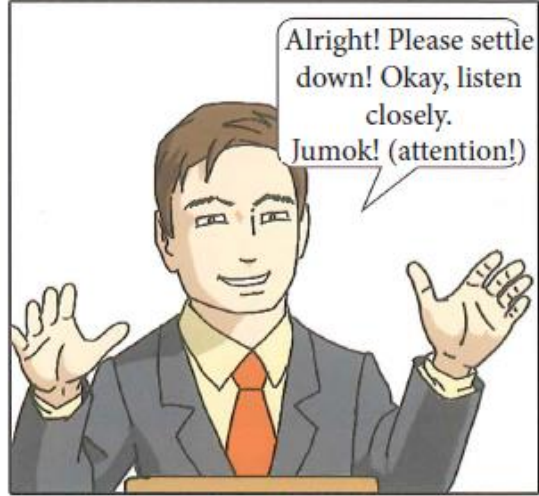
we have to make a good impression so they can't look down on us!

murmur

Did I...do some-
thing wrong?
Why are they all
bickering?



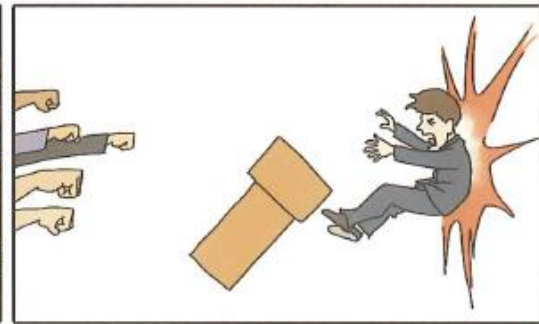
Something about this makes
me nervous...if this keeps
up...will they attack me?
Ah, no way! Okay, let's at
least try to make them relax
as much as possible.



Alright! Please settle
down! Okay, listen
closely.
Jumok! (attention!)

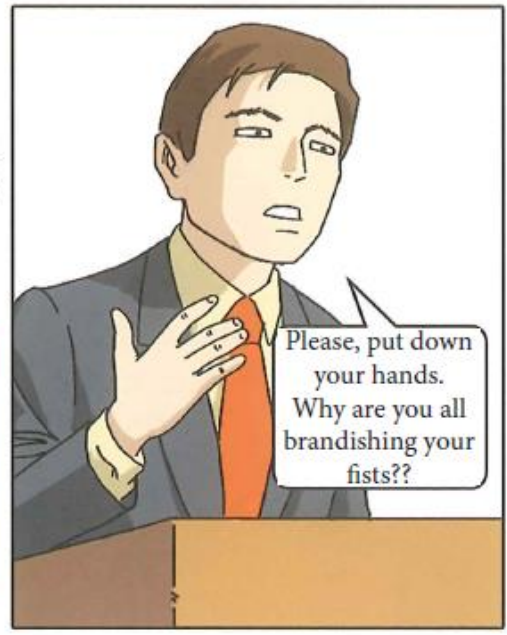


fists raised!

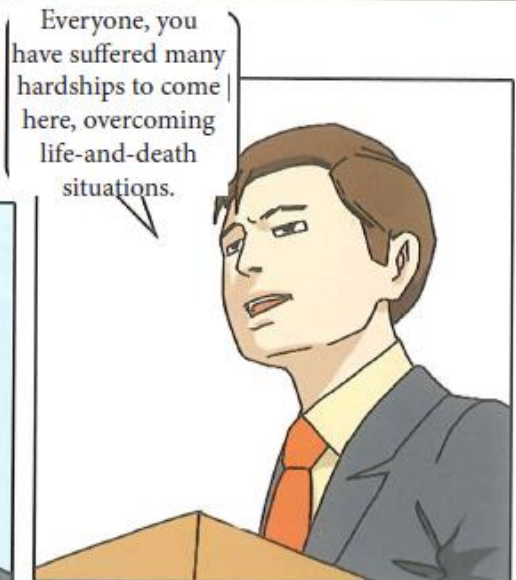
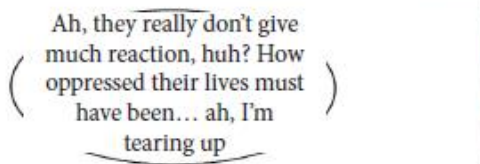
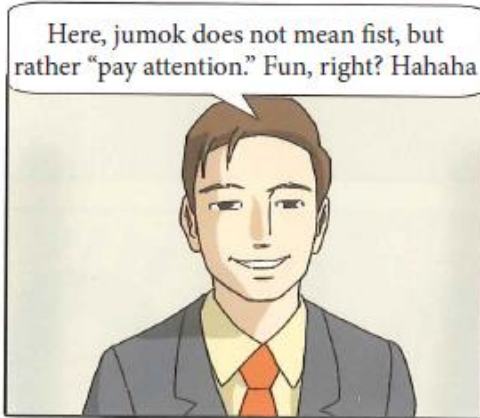
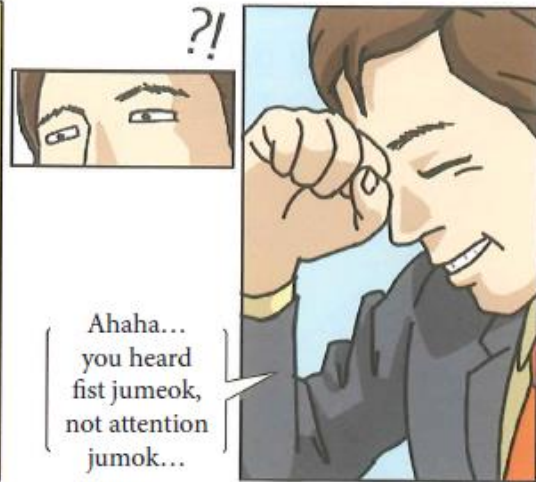


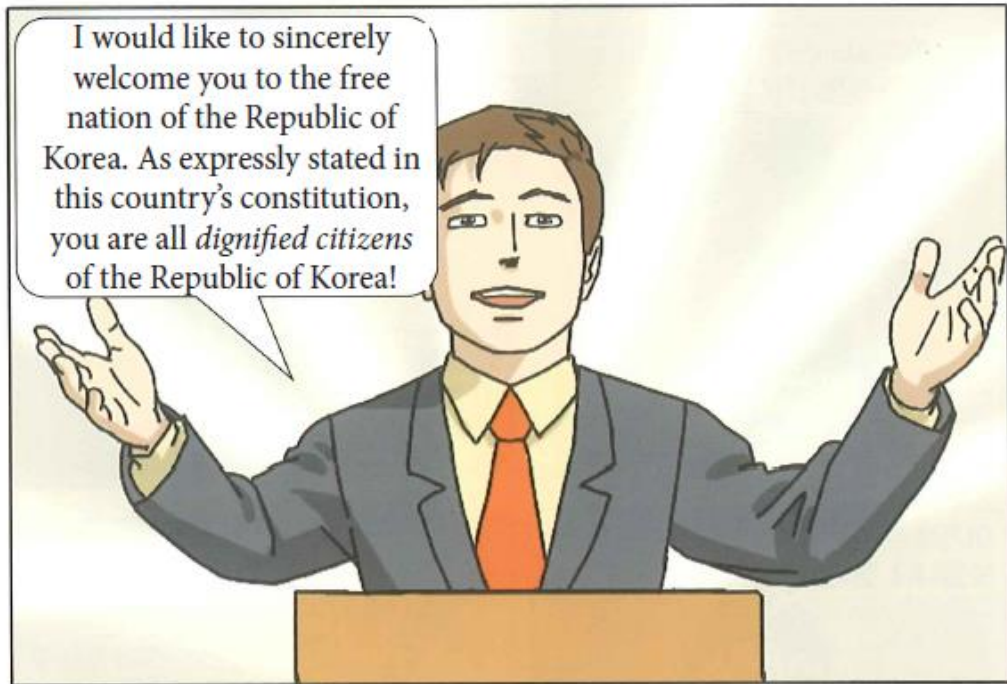
Are they

protest striking
against me??



Please, put down
your hands.
Why are you all
brandishing your
fists??



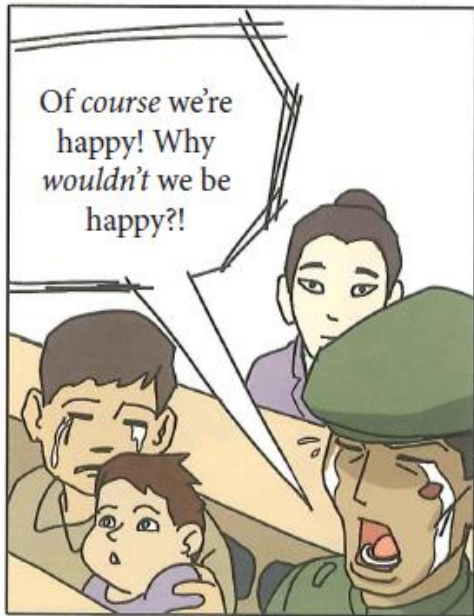




Oh man...the tears just keep coming today...



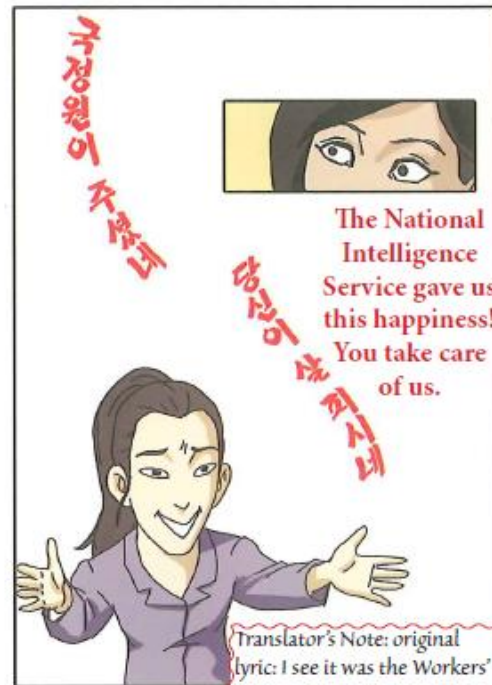
Everyone... are you not happy?



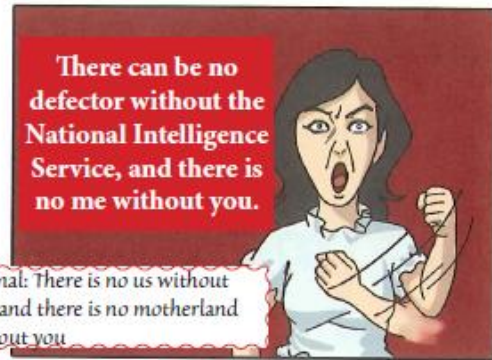
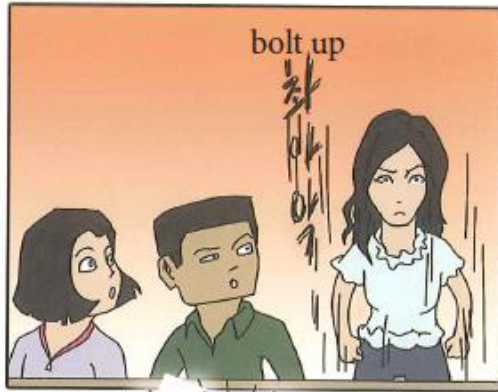
Of course we're happy! Why wouldn't we be happy?!



This is the free Republic of Korea, where we have freedom of expression!



Translator's Note: original lyric: I see it was the Workers' Party/I see it was our Great Leader



North Korean song "No Motherland Without You" ver.



2016! The global hip hop loyalty competition starts! SHOW ME THE LOYALTY

Show Me the Money 5 "Jung Joon-Ha" ver. (from first round on the floor to Simon D)

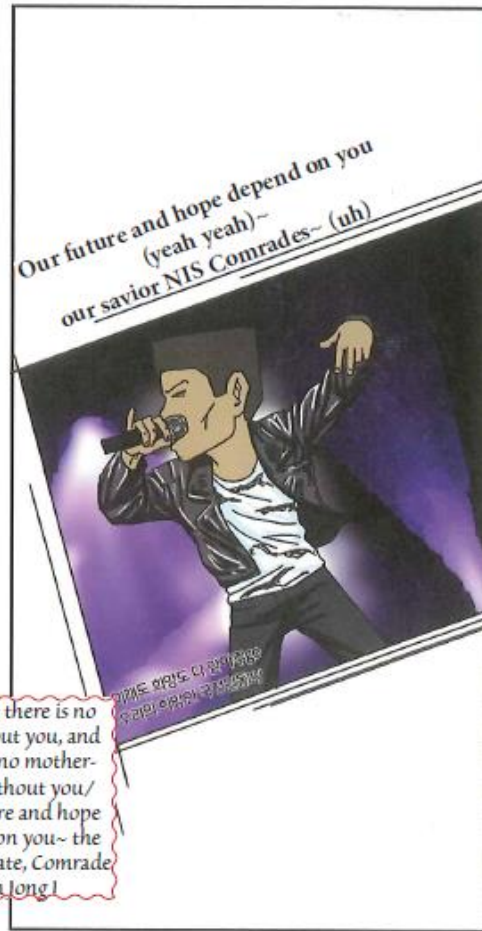
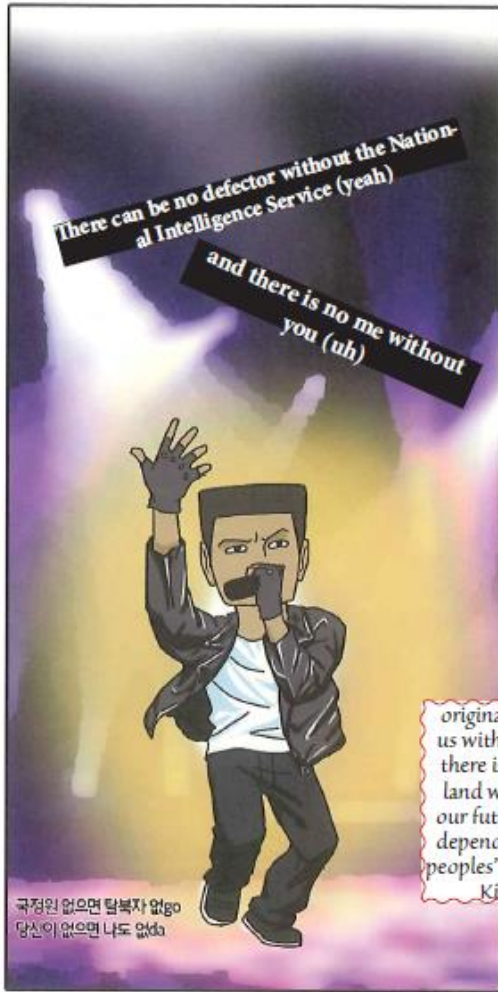


Translator's Note: Show Me the Money is an ongoing very popular hip hop/rap competition TV show in South Korea. It is elimination-style and anyone can sign up but few make it to the final rounds.

SHOW ME THE LOYALTY



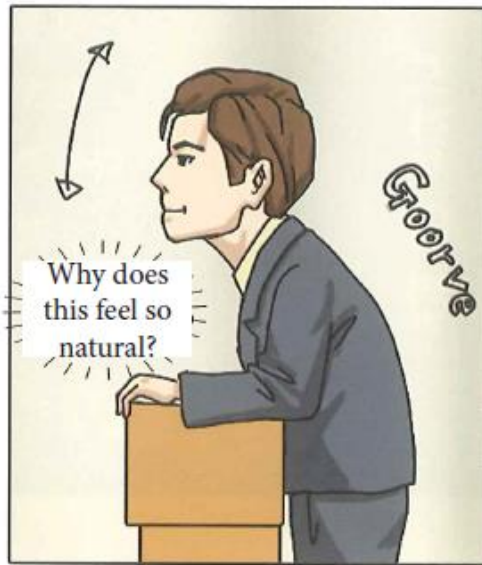
Show Me the Money 5
"Jung Joon-Ha" ver.



original: there is no us without you, and there is no motherland without you/ our future and hope depend on you~ the peoples' fate, Comrade Kim Jong!



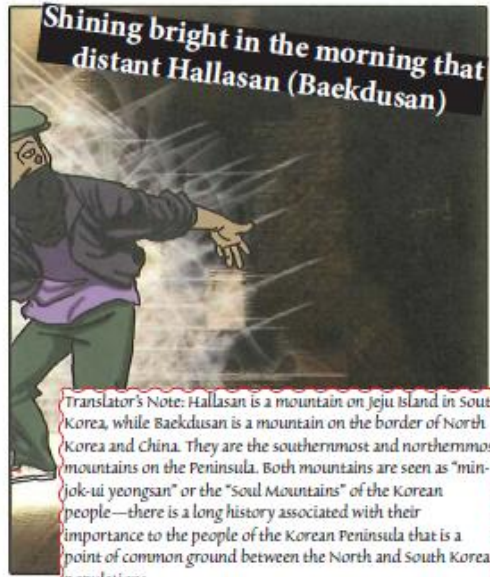
What?! That's completely South Korean-style!



whoosh

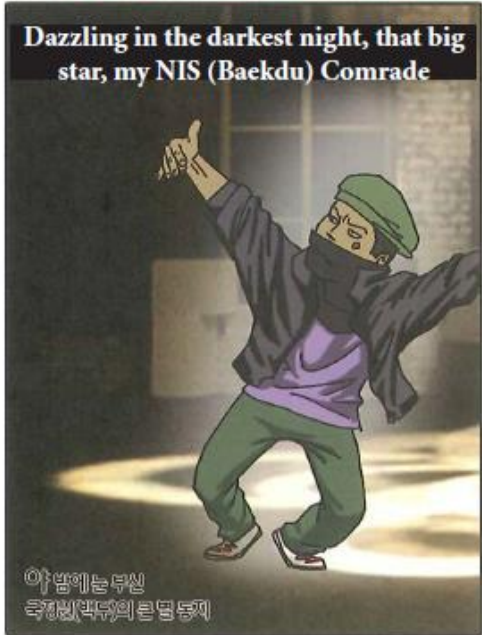


Of course! My position was instructor on South Korea! I can't just sit back! I'll show them loyalty!



Shining bright in the morning that distant Hallasan (Baekdusan)

Translator's Note: Hallasan is a mountain on Jeju Island in South Korea, while Baekdusan is a mountain on the border of North Korea and China. They are the southernmost and northernmost mountains on the Peninsula. Both mountains are seen as "min-jok-ui yeongsan" or the "Soul Mountains" of the Korean people—there is a long history associated with their importance to the people of the Korean Peninsula that is a point of common ground between the North and South Korean populations.

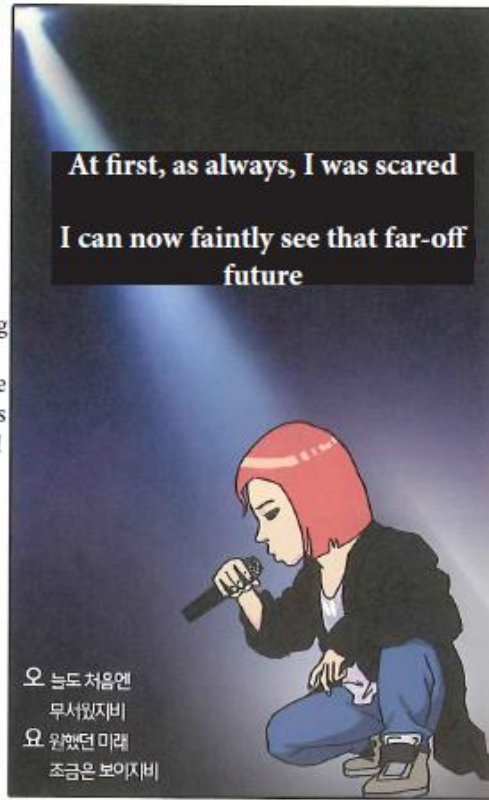
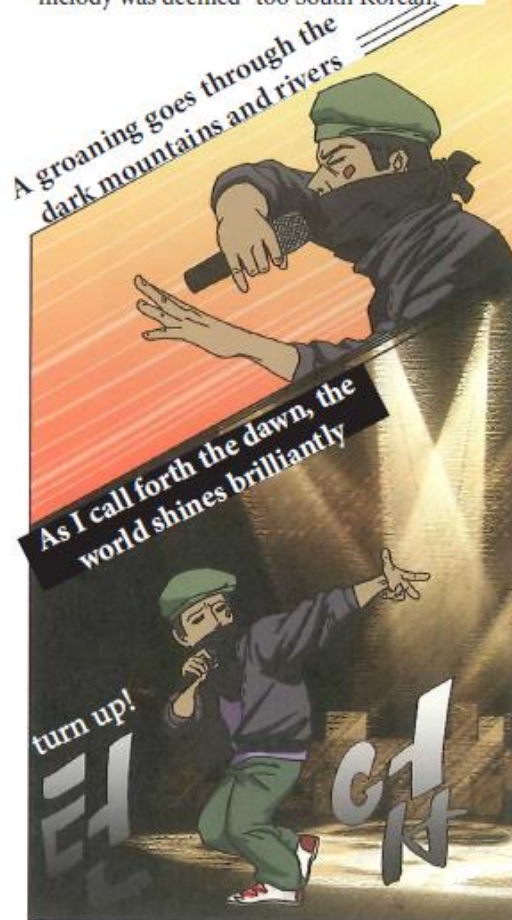


Dazzling in the darkest night, that big star, my NIS (Baekdu) Comrade

야밤에는무심
국경선(북두)의 큰 별 동지



*The song "Ah yah Eo yeo" was popular in North Korea at one point on the basis that a South Korean dedicated the song to Kim Il-Sung. However, it became a banned song because the melody was deemed "too South Korean."

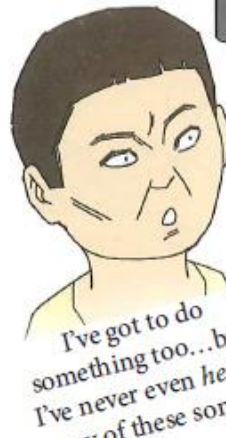


Oh~ awesome!
오~ 대박!

clap
clap



At this rate won't I be the only one eliminated??



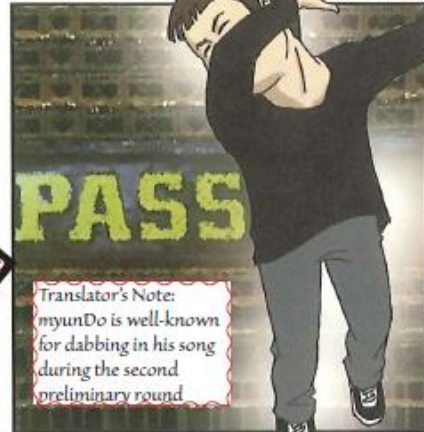
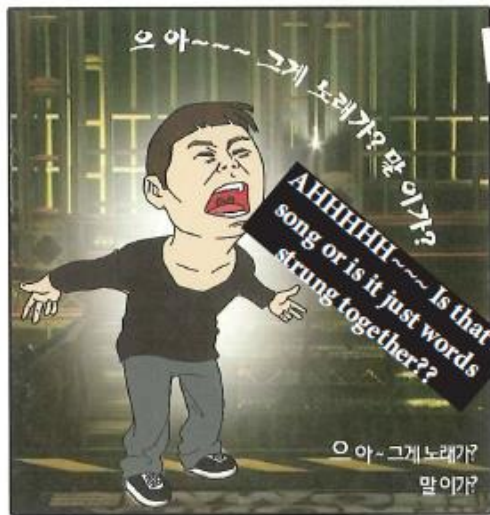
I've got to do something too...but I've never even heard any of these songs



Ah screw it

I may not know music like that but I'm great at loyalty

Yeah~



Translator's Note: myunDo is well-known for dabbing in his song during the second preliminary round

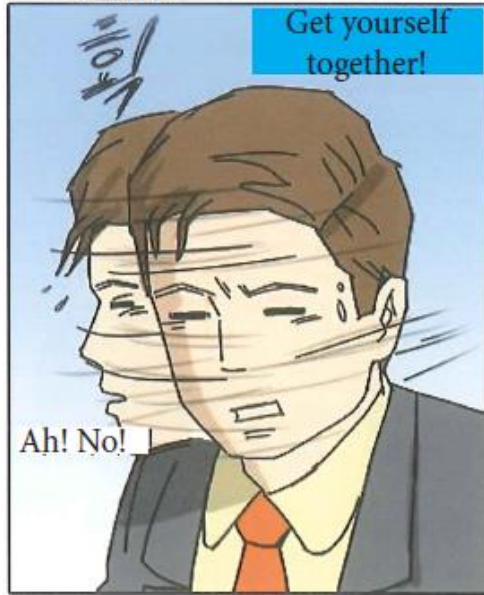
Show Me the Money 5 "myunDo" ver.



SMT LOYALTY



whoosh



whoosh



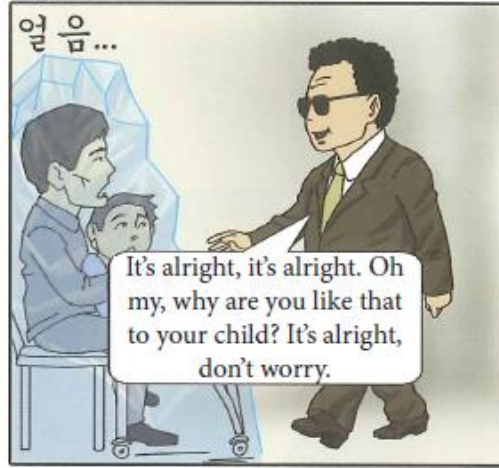
It's Kim Jung Il!!



flinch



frozen...



I'm telling you, whenever I put on these sunglasses people mistake me for Kim Jong Il! Haha!

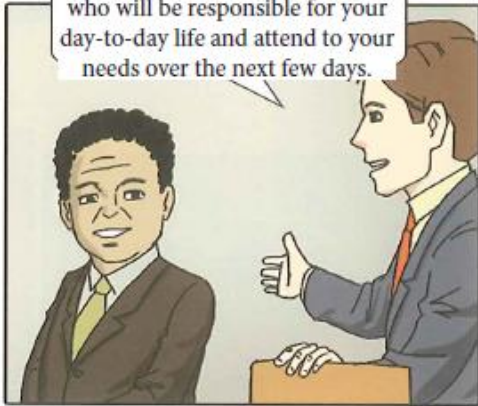


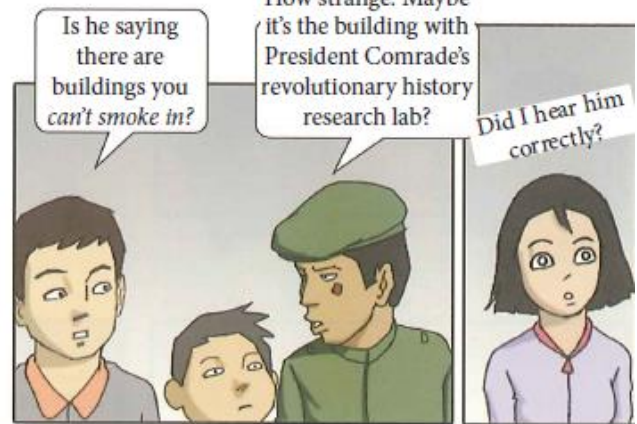
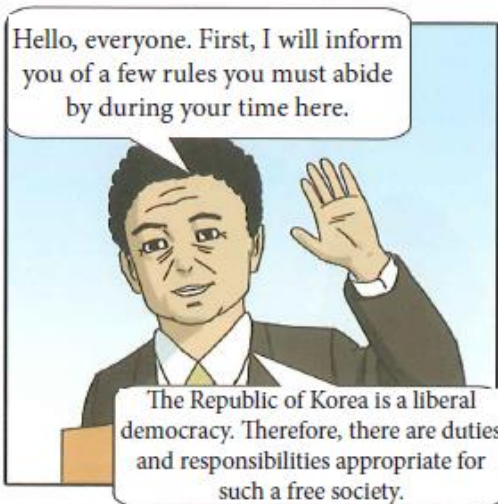
Oh wow, he really does look like him. His accent even sounds kind of North Korean, huh?

I don't think so. It sounds a bit off, don't you think?

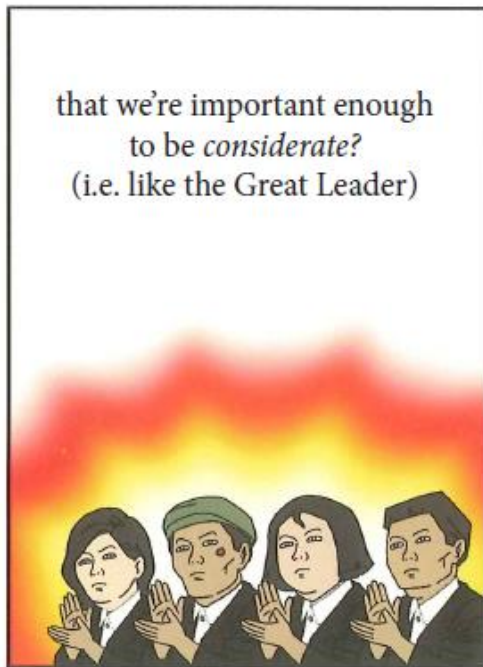
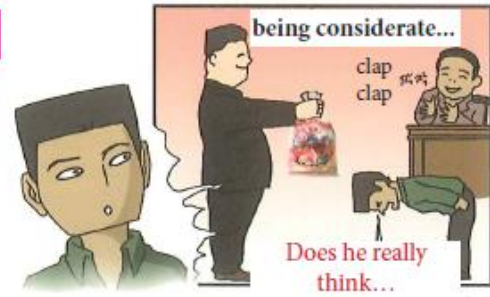


Allow me to make introductions. This is our department head, who will be responsible for your day-to-day life and attend to your needs over the next few days.





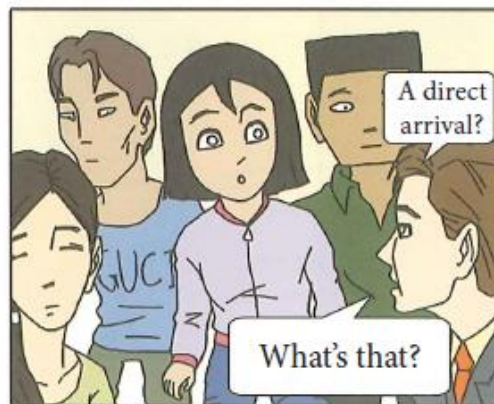
Translator's Note: Mansegyo Bridge= A bridge in Hamheung (a city in Hamgyeong Province) that military trains use





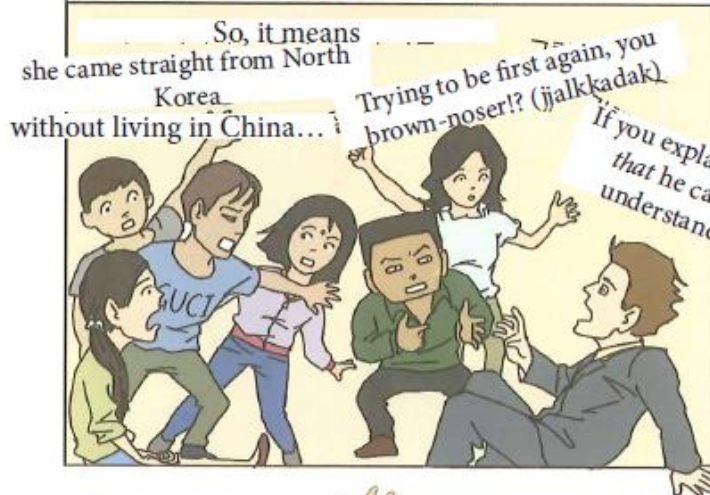
To be continued...

The Taste of Home





So he really doesn't know. If I can explain first, he might remember me and give me more responsibilities...



So, it means she came straight from North Korea without living in China...

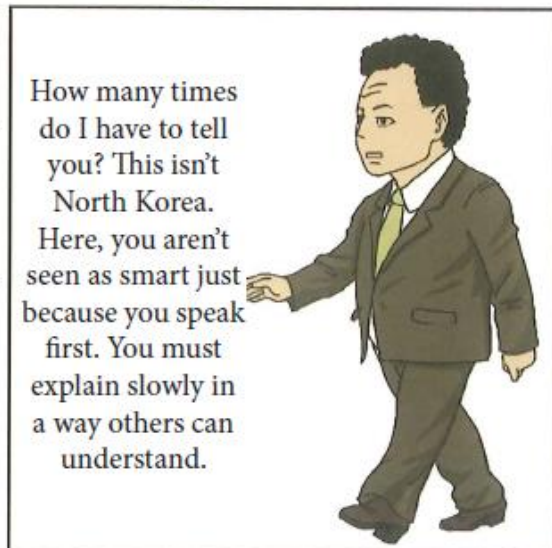
Trying to be first again, you brown-noser!?! (jjalkkadak)

If you explain like that he can't understand!

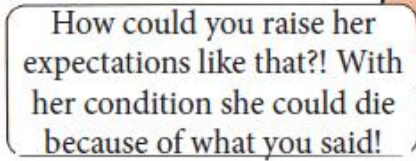
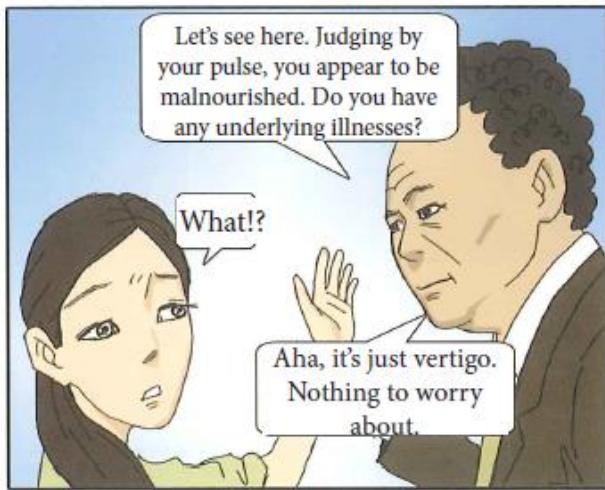
They're not actually fighting...

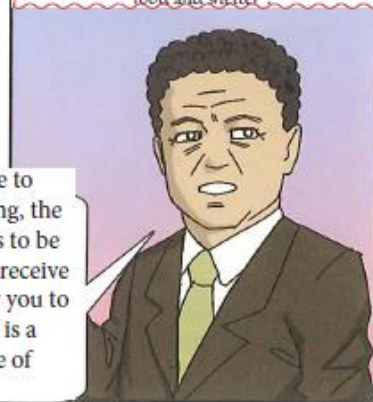
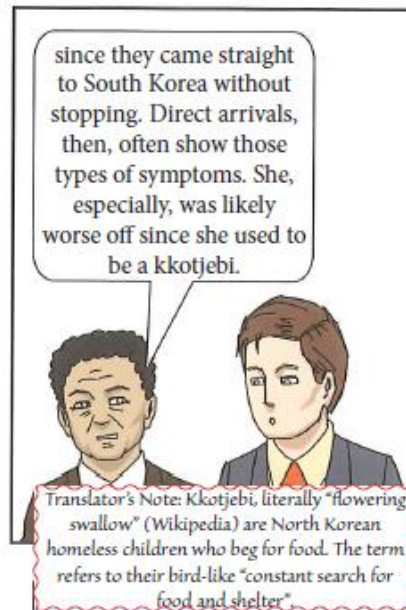


Now hold on just a minute!



How many times do I have to tell you? This isn't North Korea. Here, you aren't seen as smart just because you speak first. You must explain slowly in a way others can understand.

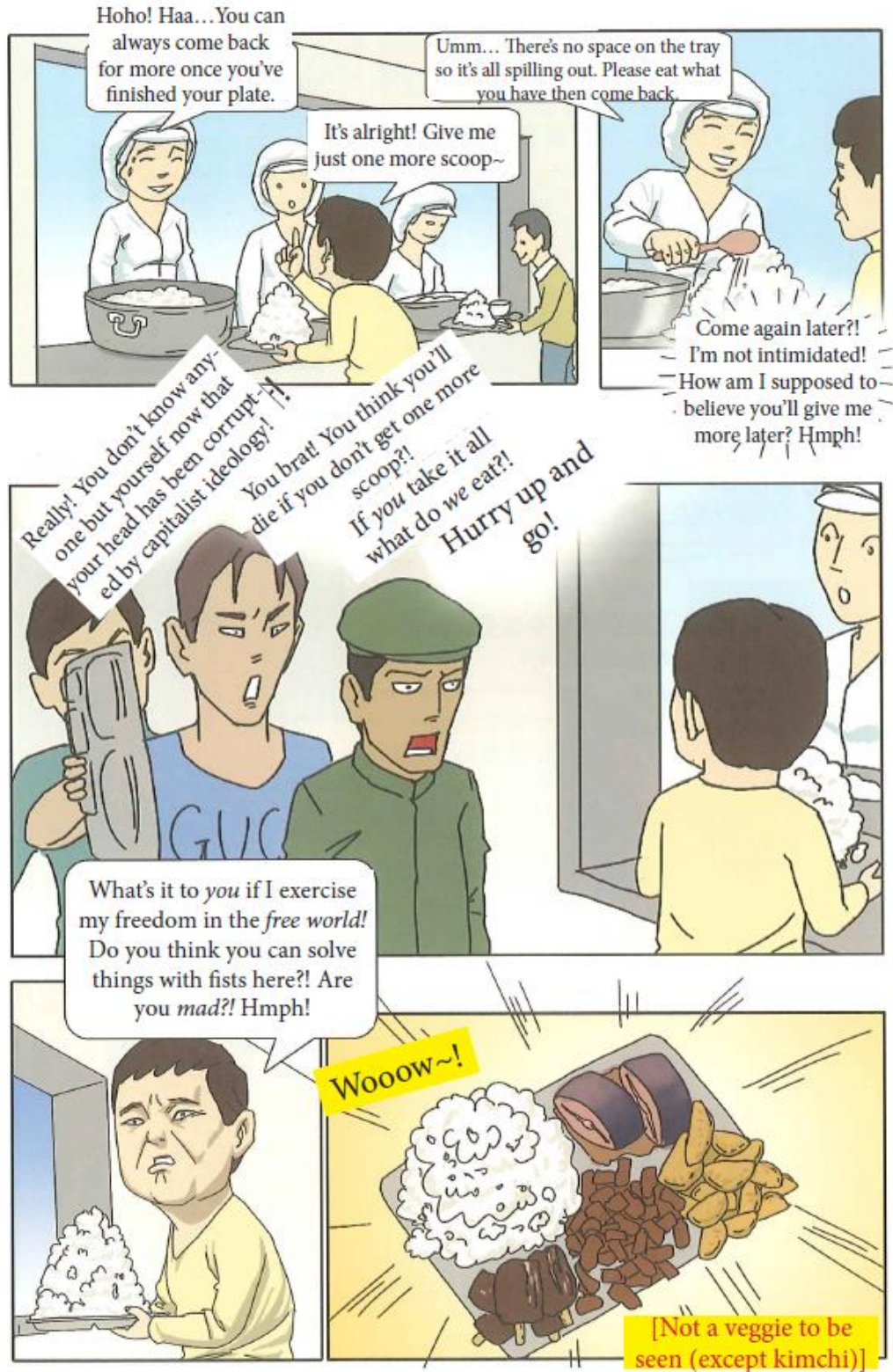




Just one more scoop, please.

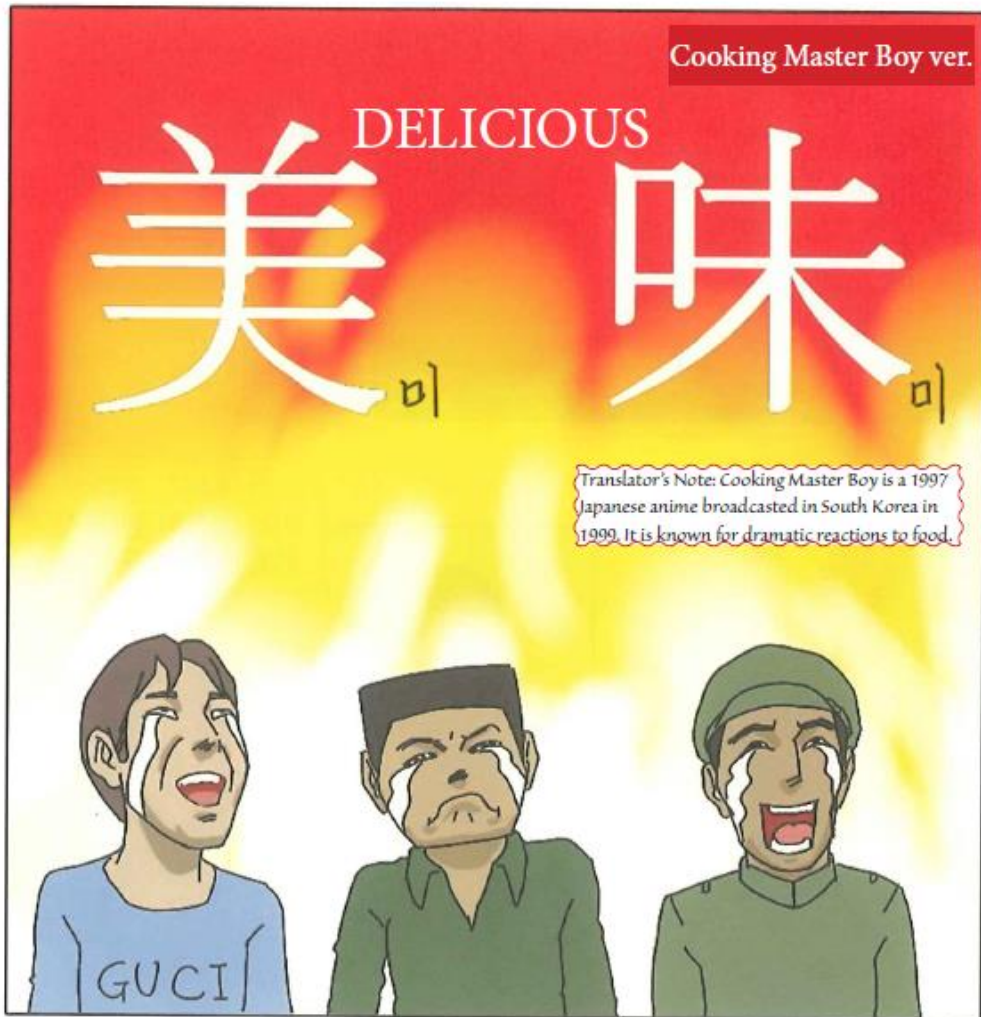
떡볶이 (짜짜) 짜짜이

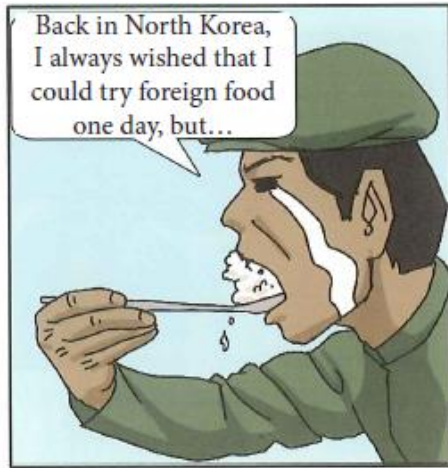






Ah~ the taste of *home*! I never realized it could be this delicious!

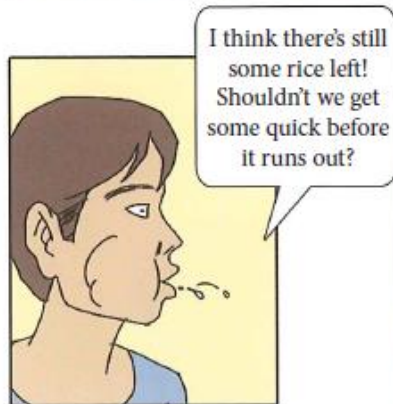


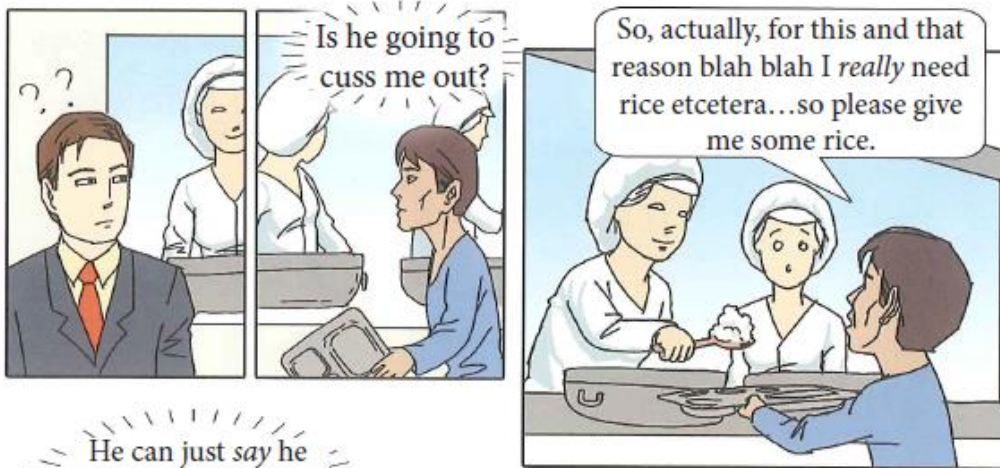


I actually wished for that too



Ugh, what a hick! What do you take South Korea for?! You may not be aware, but they have the ability to feed us like this for at least three days or so~



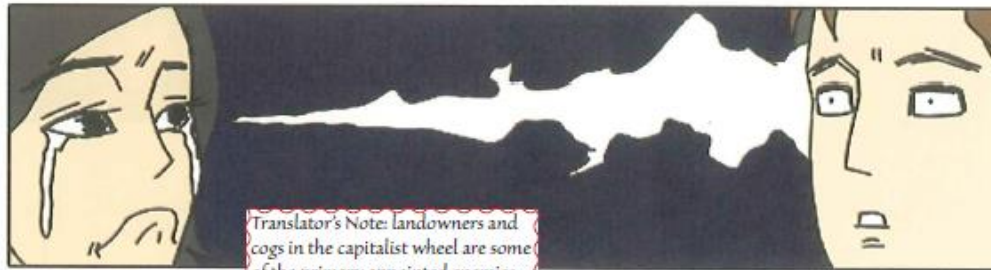


In North Korea, during group meals you can be abruptly called to attention and ordered to stop, even if some haven't finished eating. This is but one example of totalitarianism's "one for the sake of many" mentality.





You must show gratitude like this for...ack!



Translator's Note: landowners and cogs in the capitalist wheel are some of the primary appointed enemies of the North Korean Communist/Socialist state

Why are you making me do this in front of this many people?? Do I look like a woman with no *revolutionary principles* or *self-respect* just because I left my homeland and asked for a *little* more rice?!

Why are you *insulting* me like this?! Do you see me as just a *slave* to South Korean landowners and capitalists?! Do you think I defected from North Korea just to be treated like this?!



There'll be more and more things you won't understand from here on out. This is only the beginning!



I was so worried you'd get the belt! How could it be he didn't hit you *once*?? It's so weird!



Right?? Could it be because he's low ranked?

I bet that's why he's supervising us, too. At any rate, we should take this opportunity and eat as much as we can!

You're so *brave*, Eonni! You talking back to him like that really hit the spot! You did good.

I know! He spoke so gently and didn't swear *once*!

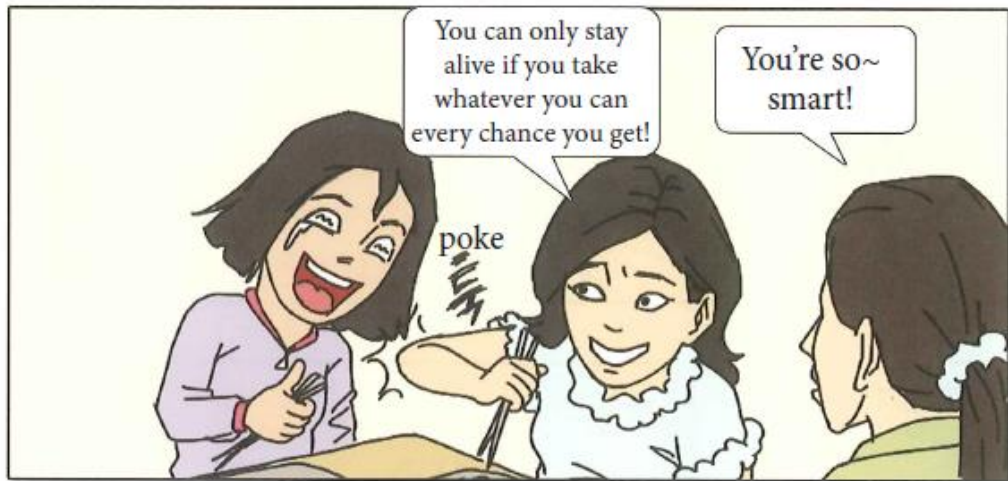
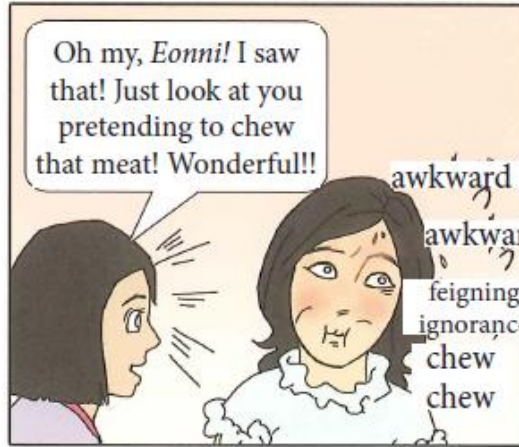


snap

whoosh

sneak

챙!
thwop!



Words from the Author

작가의 말

Today, I'm leaving work past 12am as usual.
I get tired, but still I'm always happy.

Why~?

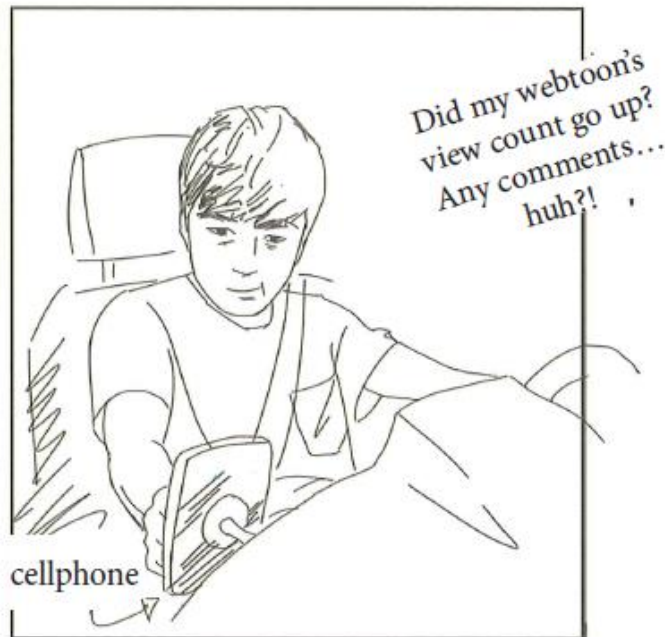


Opinions

BEST comments | All comments

BEST Pretty Girl
Mr. Choi, you're my style...
luv you!

BEST

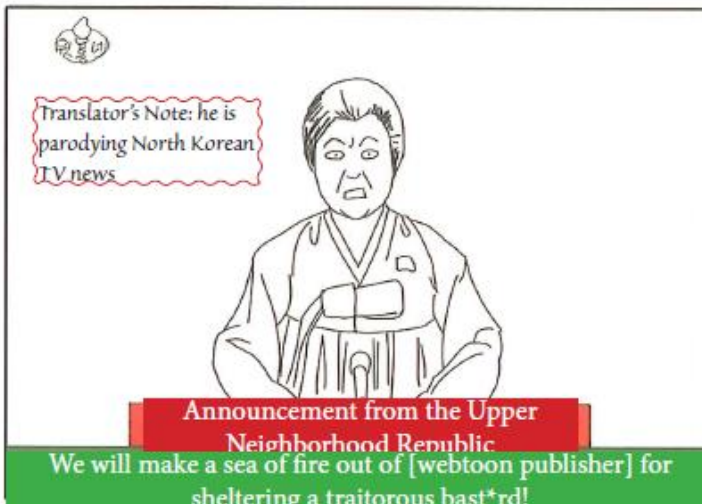




Ha...
hacking?!

No way...

no, it
couldn't
be...

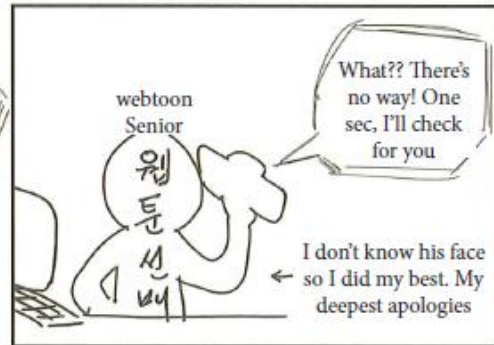
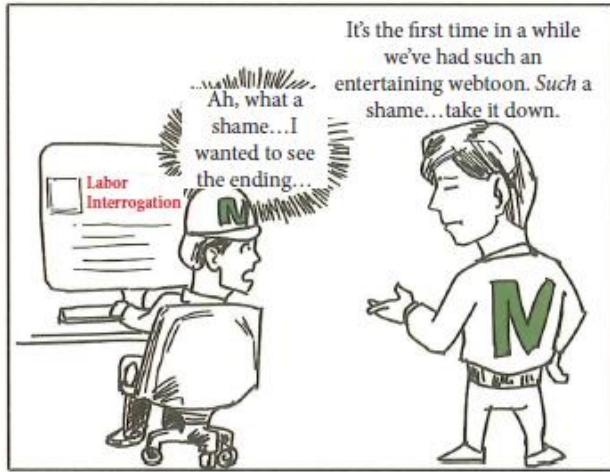


Translator's Note: he is
parodying North Korean
TV news

**Announcement from the Upper
Neighborhood Republic**

**We will make a sea of fire out of [webtoon publisher] for
sheltering a traitorous bast*rd!**

Ah, did they
blackmail the
publisher?!





이 웹툰이 여러분께 재미있게 보이기 바랍니다. 열심히 그려드리겠습니다.

How do I repay
 you, my South
 Korean
 comrades~?!
 Thank you!! I
 will work hard to
 make this
 webtoon *even*
more entertaining!



Is this Real?



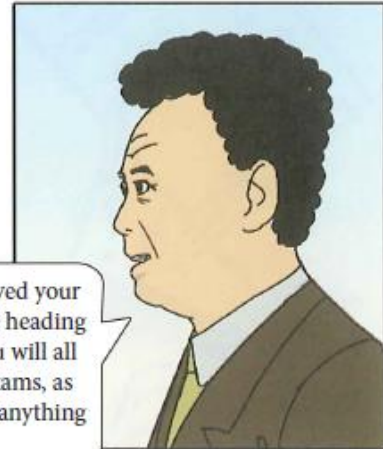
skch

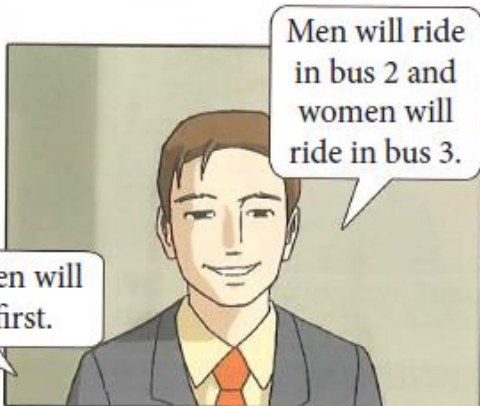


Yes, understood.



I hope you all enjoyed your meals. Now we'll be heading to the hospital. You will all receive physical exams, as well as treatment if anything is wrong.





We hadn't realized, but
now that the time had
come to part ways...

The women will
depart first.



we were sad...



Hoo! Good riddance!
Now I'll be able to relax without someone making me talk all the time (I'm sad that I won't have you to talk to)



You're telling *me*.
What a relief.
(Actually, I'll be lonely without you)

we were wistful...



What are *you* looking at? Is this your first time seeing a human being? (Don't just look...flirt a little!)



You were walking in front of me and I was just looking forward!
(You're so pretty!)

we wished we could go together...



(I want to go with you)



Goodbye
(Don't go)

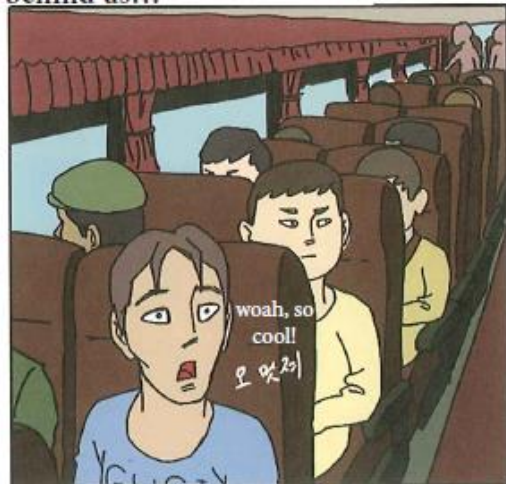


We all had buried our painful stories of hardship deep in our hearts and together faced countless near-deaths and crossed the borders of China and Laos before finally coming to South Korea. Each of these connections was a miracle...

So we comforted each other,
So we felt like we knew each other...
So we hated to say goodbye...

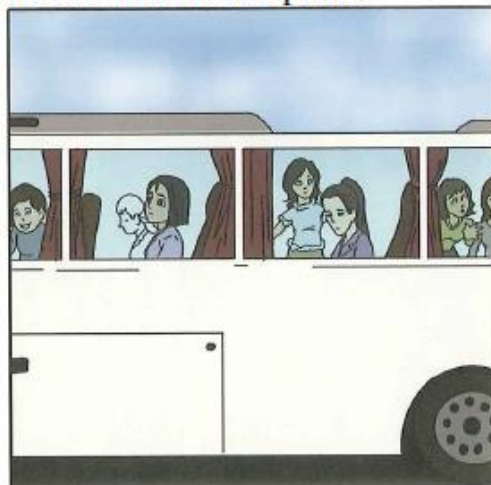
Comrades with whom we shared life and death experiences.

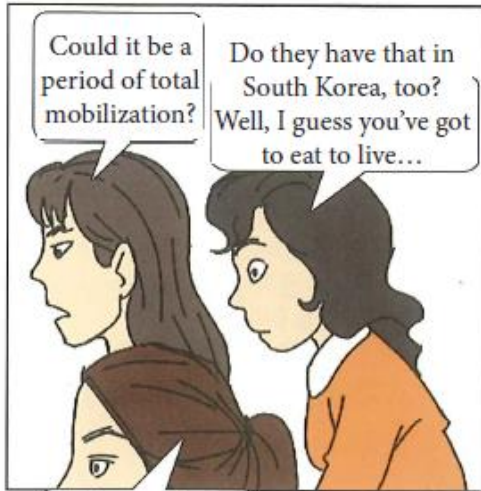
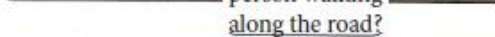
For now, we put our regrets behind us...



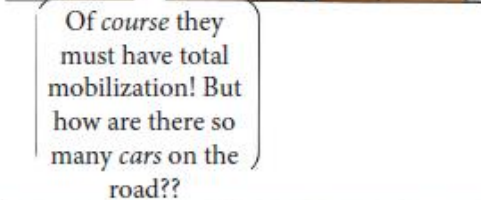
woah, so cool!
오 멋지

and headed to the hospital...





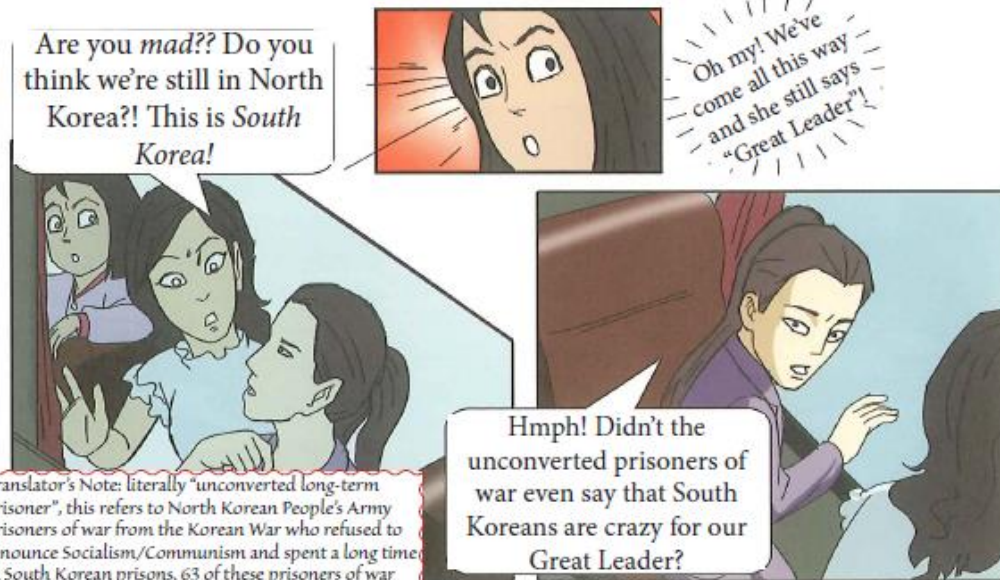
***Period of Total/Full-Scale Mobilization:**
a period (generally in spring and fall) when the entire population of North Korea is mobilized for one task: farming. This recruitment of all citizens is designed to support the nation's agriculture. During this time, police will catch anyone out on the street and put them to work.





***First Event:** an event in which the nation's leader features. Whenever the Kims make an appearance, it is referred to as "First Event." All the nation's people must prepare as for a grand ceremony, appear festive and, of course, attend.

***Period of Mourning:** The month of Kim Il-Sung's death is referred to as the "period of mourning." Therefore, every July the whole country observes this period by paying respects to his statues and images. Kim Jong-Il's death is also commemorated in this way.



Translator's Note: literally "unconverted long-term prisoner", this refers to North Korean People's Army prisoners of war from the Korean War who refused to renounce Socialism/Communism and spent a long time in South Korean prisons. 63 of these prisoners of war were returned to North Korea in the year 2000.



The Great General's Jacket Fad in South Korea.avi



I just don't get it! Do they not arrest spies in South Korea?



Really...there are so many apartments, too. How many floors even is that?



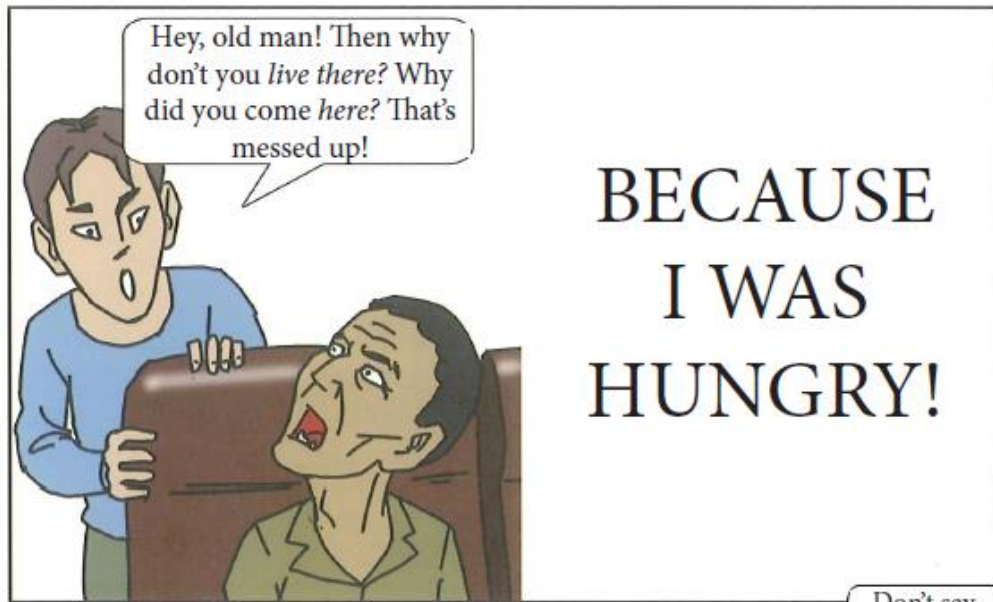
Then is that apartment *fake*?

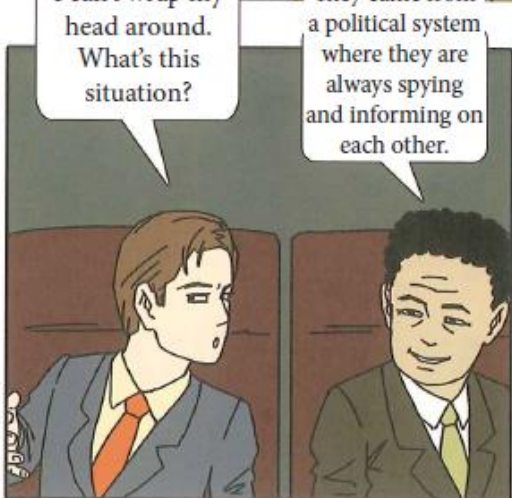
No matter how hard we tried, we just couldn't believe such sights...





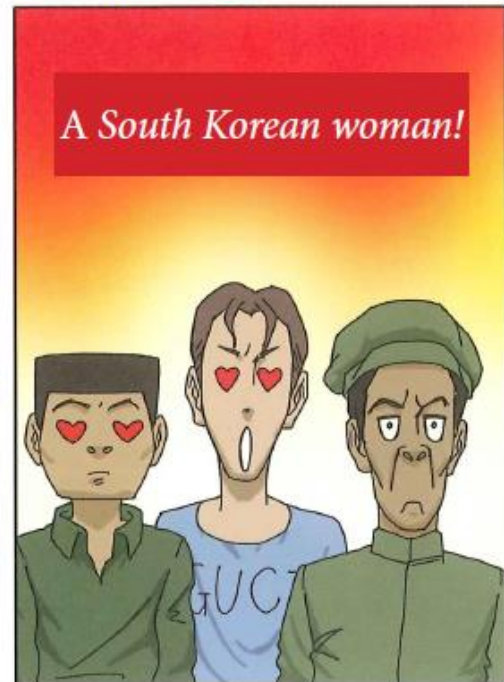
"Huiparam ("whistle") Car:
 A car assembled in the North Korean port city of Nampo's Pyeonghwa Motors Factory. South Korea holds 70% of Pyeonghwa Motors Factory's shares, while North Korea's Joseon Minheung Corporation has 30%. The cars are assembled using components imported from the Republic of Korea.





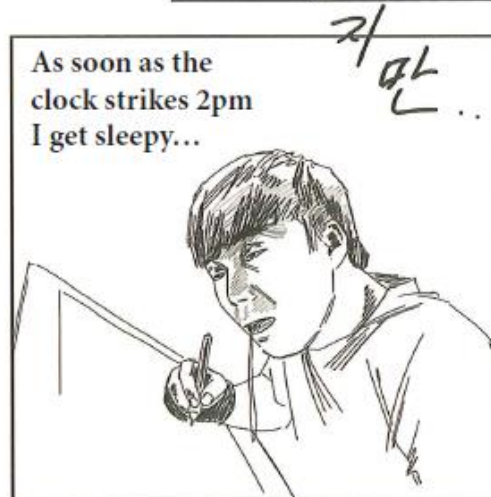
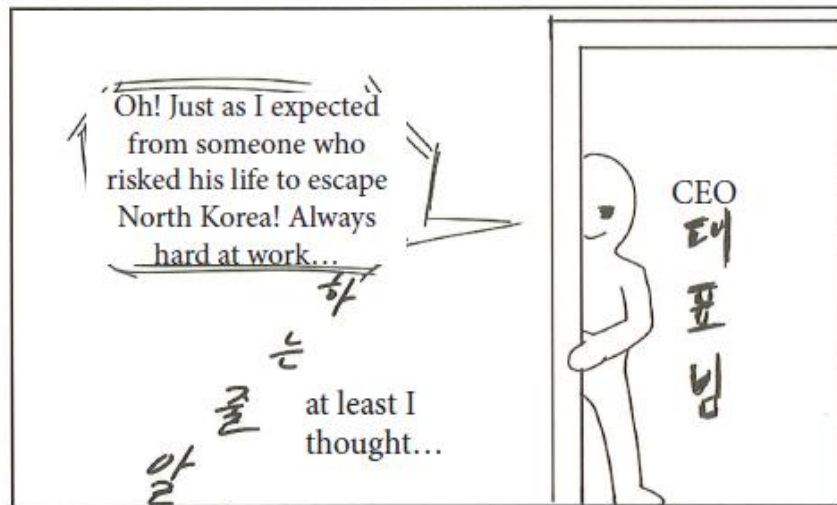


Translator's Note: Gyeonggi Province is the province surrounding Seoul.



Words from the Author

작가의 말



BEST 조함 (jy1****) 2016-07-05 20:42

Super fun ha

BEST 마스크라 (st01****) 2016-07-05 22:41

It's fun! I hope it gets promoted to an official published webtoon~~

BEST 동근 (gale****) 2016-07-05 20:27

Congrats congrats^^

BEST 브라이튼 (brig****) 2016-07-05 23:01

Ah you're so cute!! Haha I'm a man but I think I'm falling for you hahaha

BEST 여우니 (soha****) 2016-07-05 22:02

So fun T.T I binged it all in one breath<3

BEST (dmda****) 2016-07-05 22:37

This is such a fresh comic! I'm rooting for it to be officially serialized~^^

I can't believe I'm getting so much *praise*! Ah! I'm so happy...



Oh, there's a question too?



Therefore, I have prepared
for you...

*North-South
Comments Summit*

Question from the South

BEST jisoo (kaed****) 2016-07-05 22:03

I don't understand why saying "thank you" would make you a slave haha. Could you explain in the next episode?

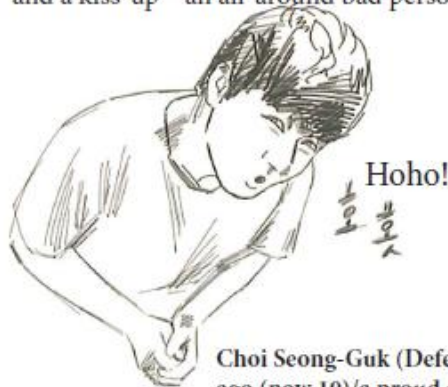
How do I answer this? I
can't talk politics...



Answer from the North

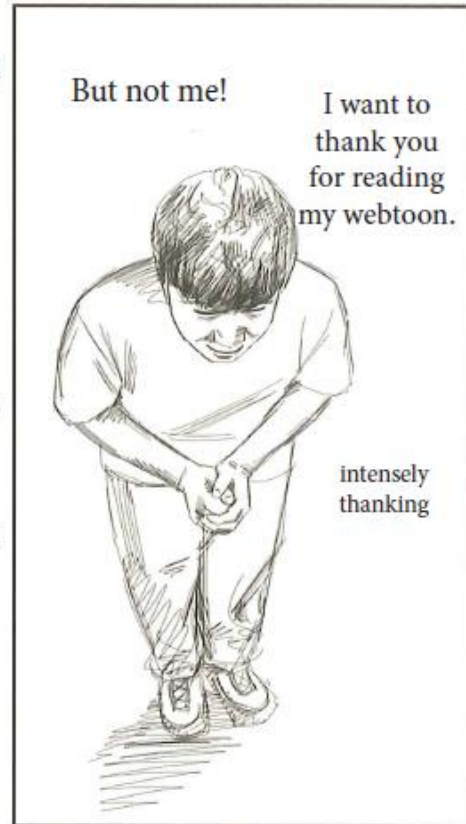
It is because of socialism. In North Korea, socialism is described as an advanced system. Positive things are exaggerated and negative things are swept under the rug. If you live in a place like this, bluffing, formality and convention all become second nature. Therefore, if someone is well-mannered, formal, reserved, dignified, and doesn't show what they're thinking, they are seen as reliable and trustworthy.

Then there are people who are too friendly, who greet you and say things like "thank you" easily, and express their thoughts openly... This kind of person is seen as frivolous, easy, undignified, untrustworthy, and a kiss-up—an all-around bad person.

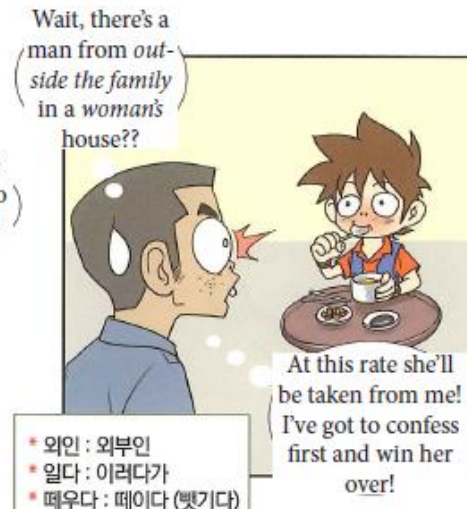


Choi Seong-Guk (Defected 6 years ago (now 10)/a proud capitalist man)

so I'll try to answer with
caution.



Thank you!



Young South Korean Ryu Si-Jin's North Korea Travelogue

This is what I want to say! I want to devote my youth and love to you as we follow the path of the Party! I want to bloom together with you, Comrade!

What say you? Tell me quickly!

Oh my, have you got a screw loose?

* 땡 빠지다 : 나사 빠지다. 가능하지 않은 엉뚱한 생각이나 행동을 할 때 해주는 말.

What's the problem? Do you think I won't be able to provide for you? No problem! Don't worry about that!

I don't need you to provide for me! Try again somewhere else!



Huh? Are they confessing love or fighting?

Um, I enjoyed the meal. I'll do the dishes.

Oh my, that's quite alright!

My word, a man thanking me so openly and even doing the dishes??

This must mean he really loves me!



Myeong-Suk, since ancient times a woman must not reveal her heart, even if she has interest in a man.



Really, Mother. That was the feudal age! This is the era of the Party-led, Juche North Korea! Shouldn't we love and fight for that love??



I should at least give the man a hint...

Why have you been hesitating?? If a man likes someone, he should say so clearly!

How do you plan to win victories in the revolution and construction of a new era when you are so hesitant?!



What?! Revolution, construction, victory??

Relationships in North Korea!

When it comes to love in North Korea, the one who wins over their object of affection is the winner. A trick when confessing love is to mention the Great Leader, the Party, or something else the other person can't refuse.

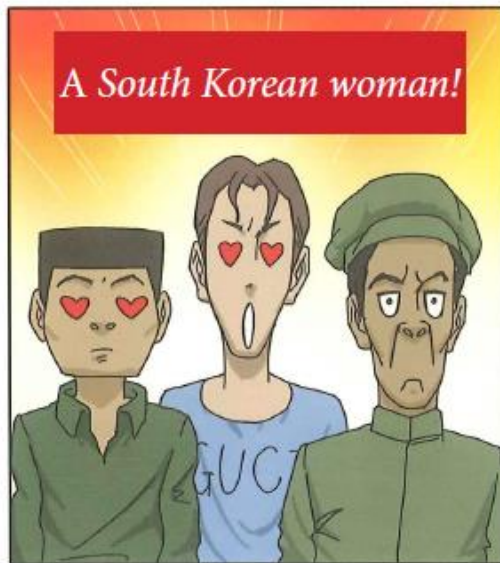
However, the masters win through their economic ability and through South Korean-style manners.

Should I have another go at it in that South Korean style all the girls like?



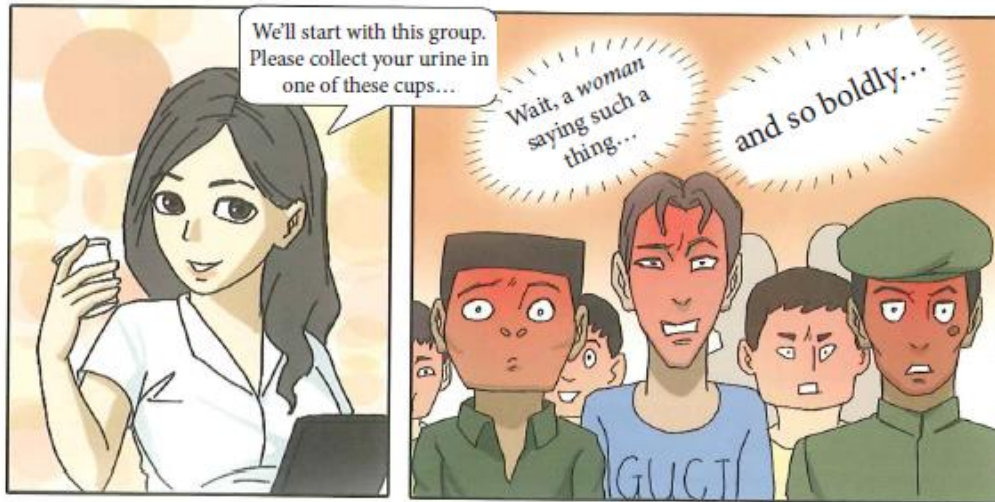
Chapter 11
Stories of the National Intelligence Service 7

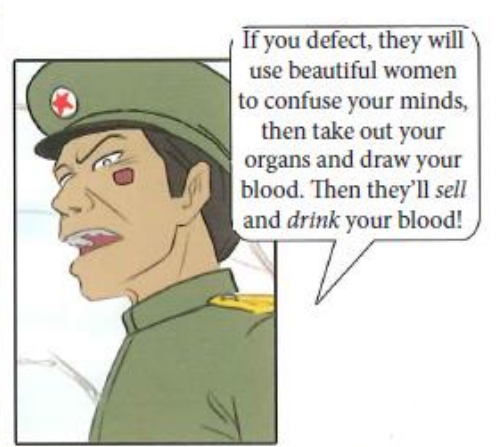
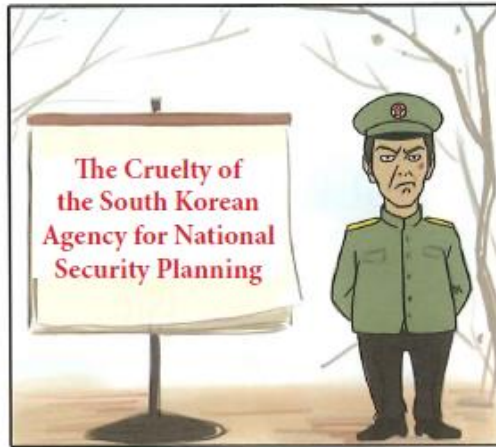
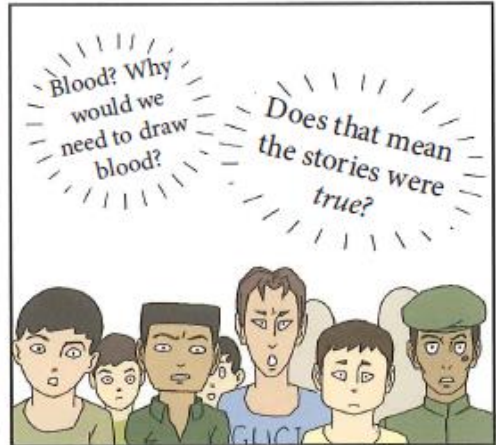
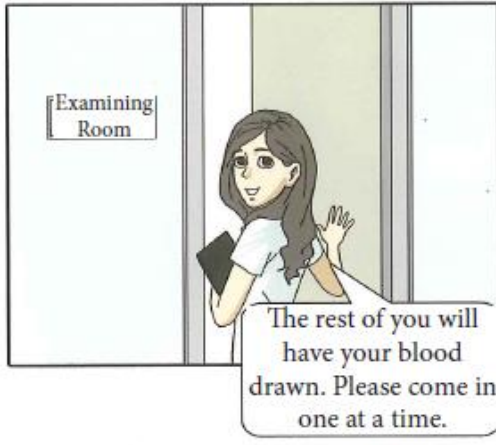
As Expected of South Korea?!

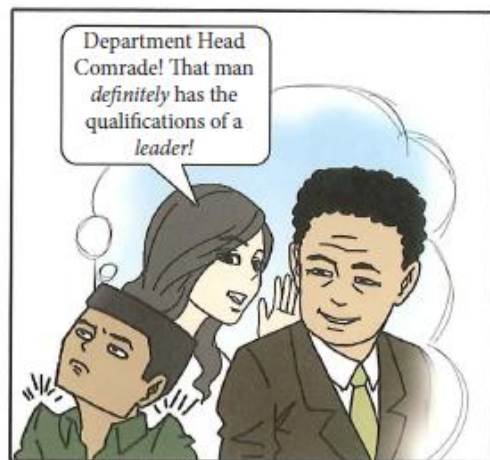
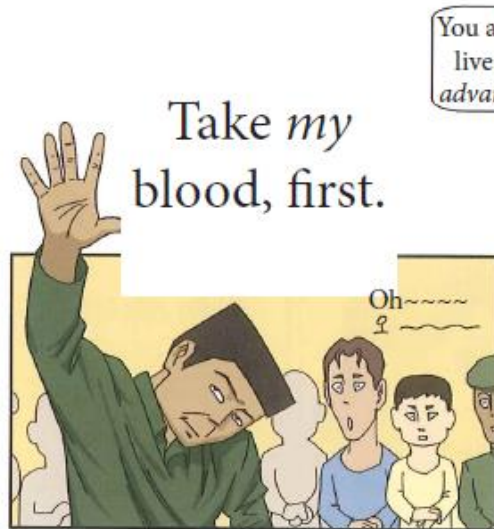


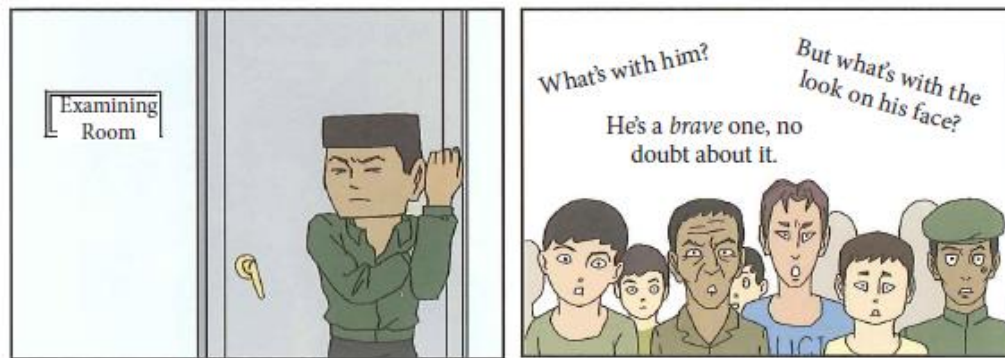
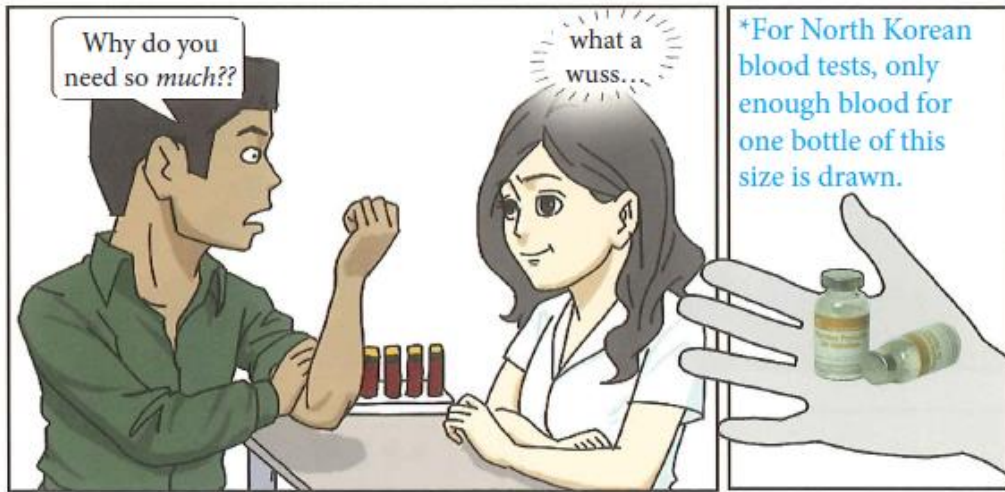
We will begin with some simple tests. There are a lot of people to get through, so please split up into groups...

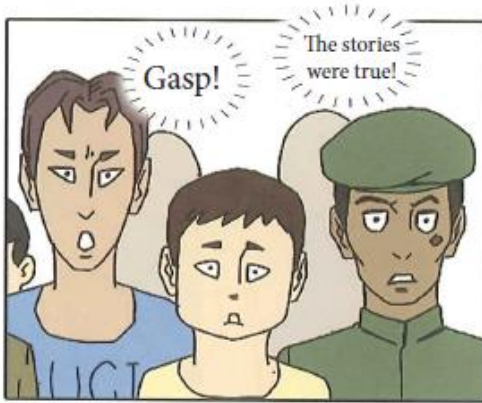
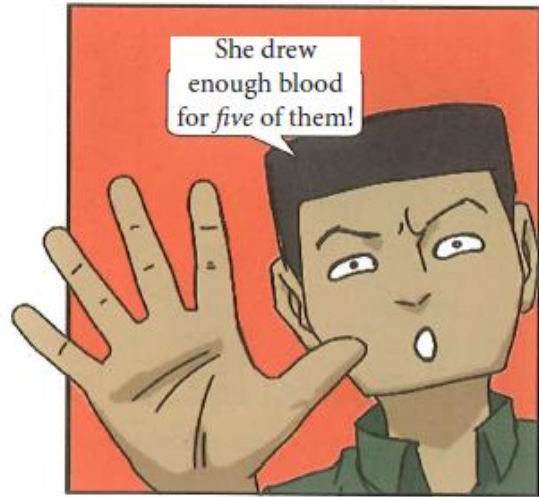
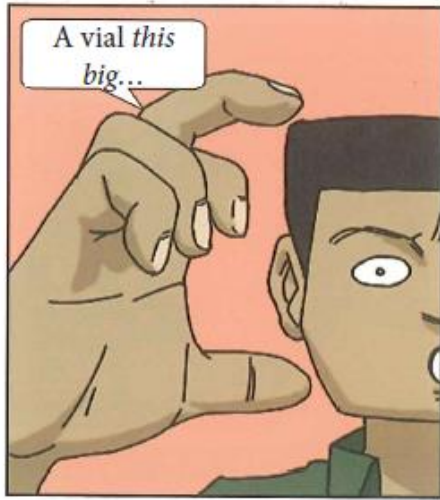










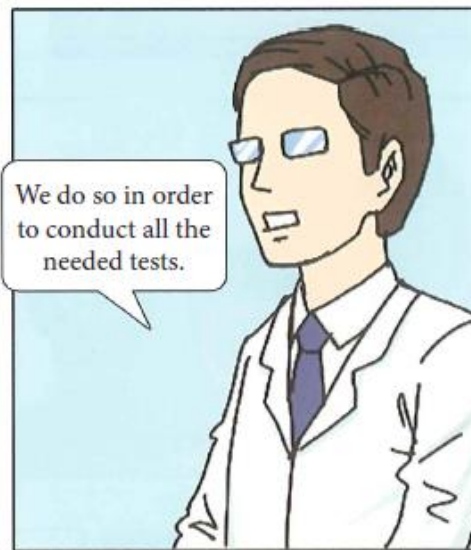


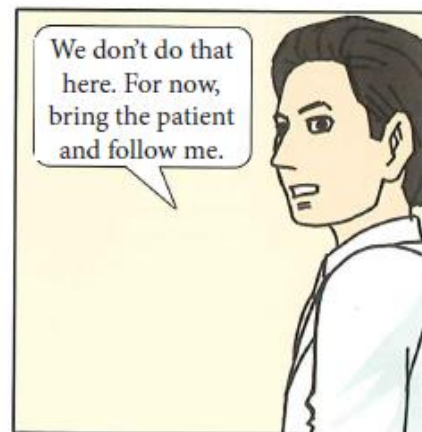
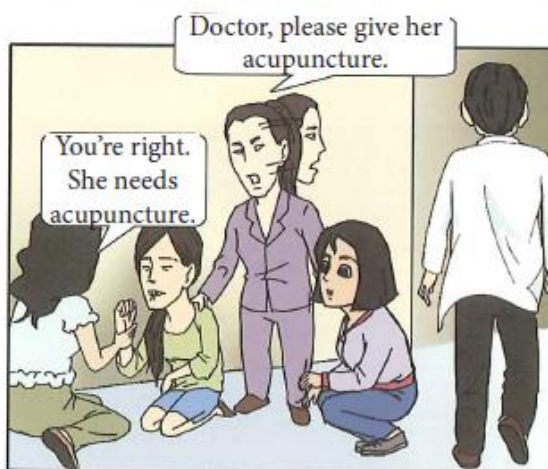
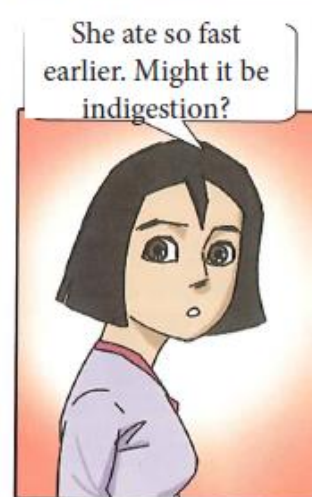
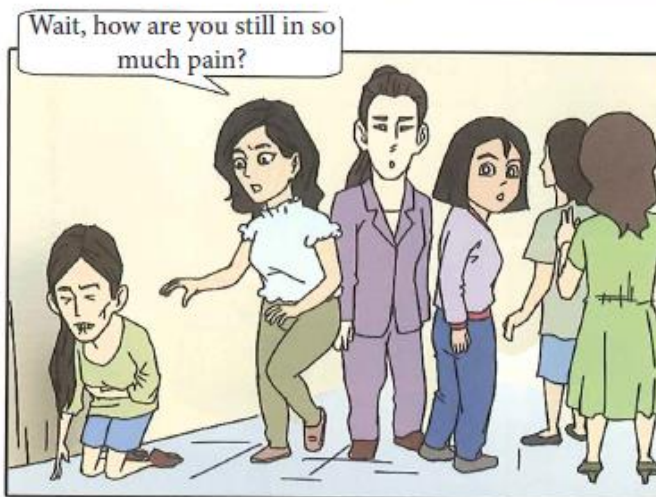
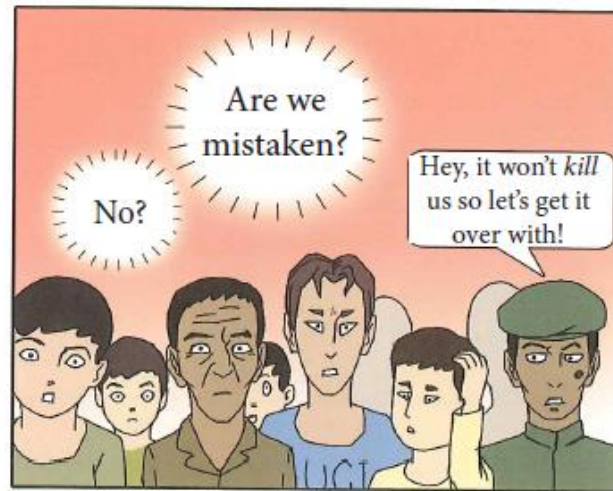
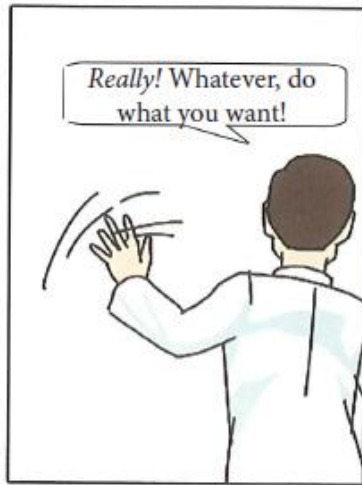
Never forget the US Imperialist wolves!!

*From a young age, North Korean children learn that the "class enemy" relishes human blood. Here, "class enemy" refers to the landowning, capitalist high class, as opposed to workers and peasants (much like the phrases "enemy of the people" or "enemy of the working class" used in Stalin era USSR). The United States and South Korea, especially, are declared "the enemy" and all things related to them are rejected and purged. North Korea, being a Communist state, supposedly has no hierarchy and class system, thereby ridding the country of a landowning, capitalist high class. The government owns and allots land, and all are equal under the state (in theory)



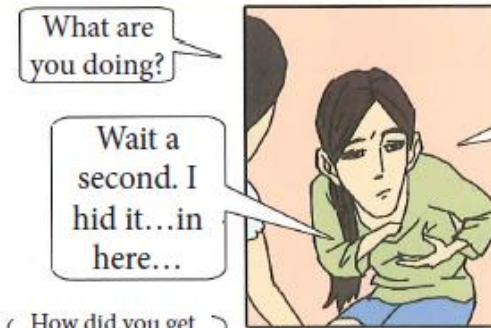
I knew it! Is it really true? There's no way...



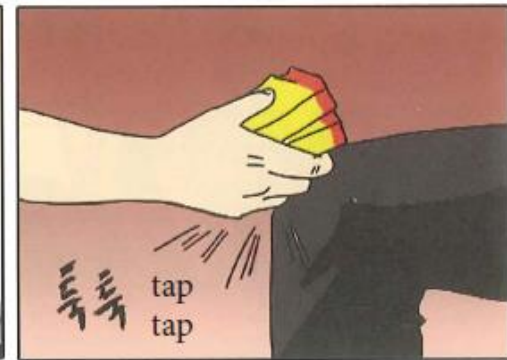
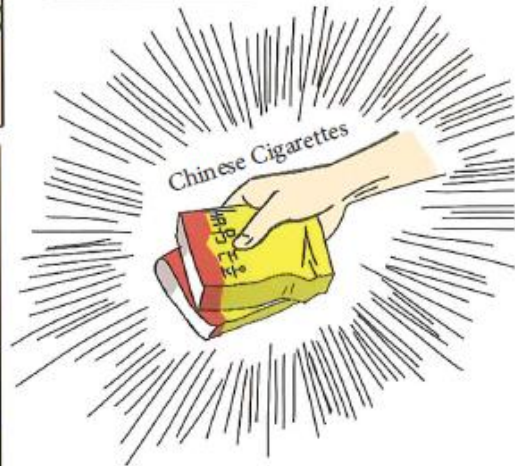
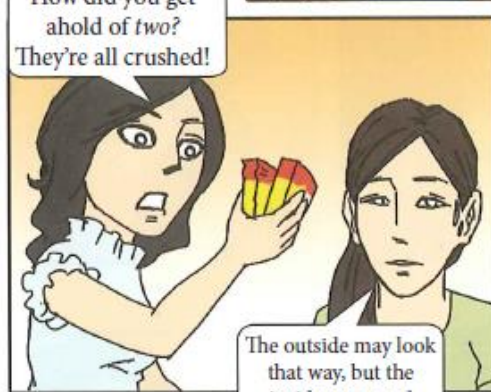


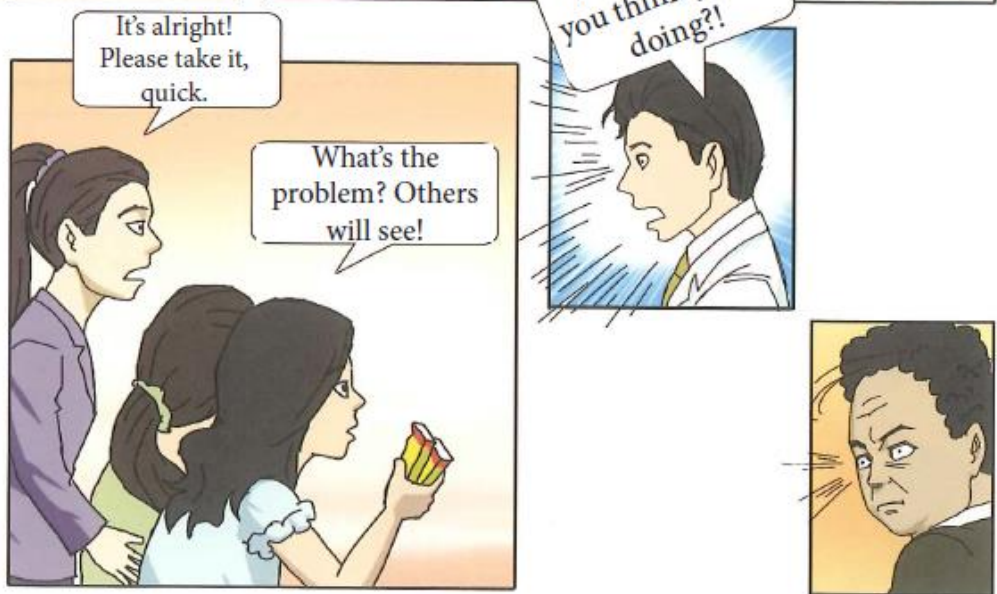
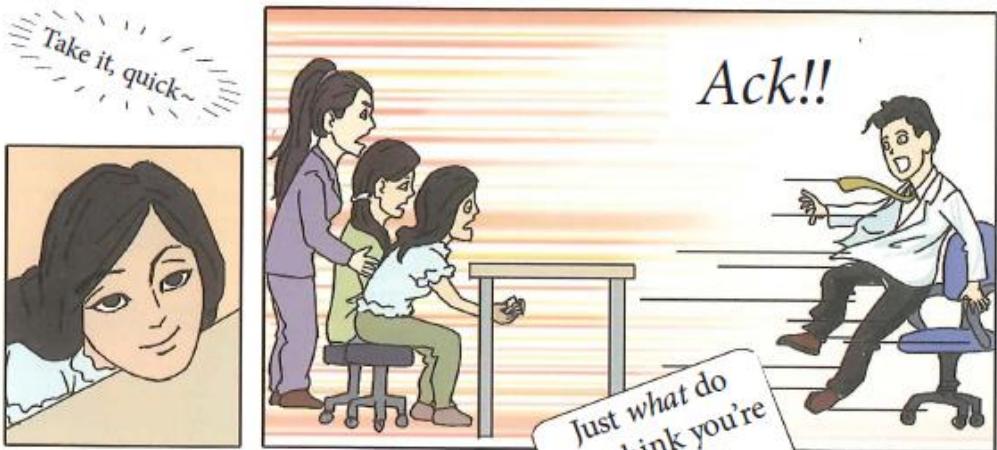


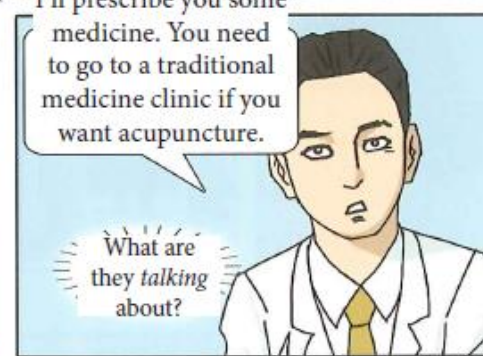
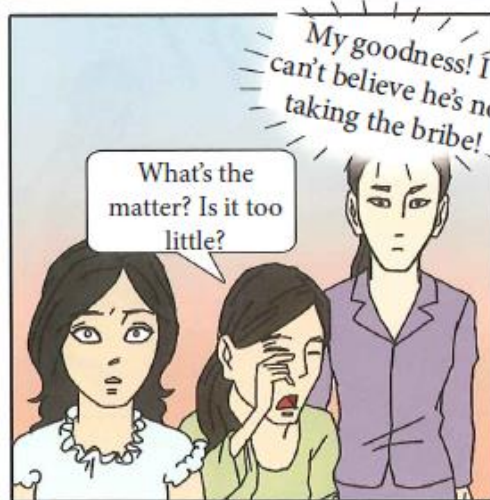
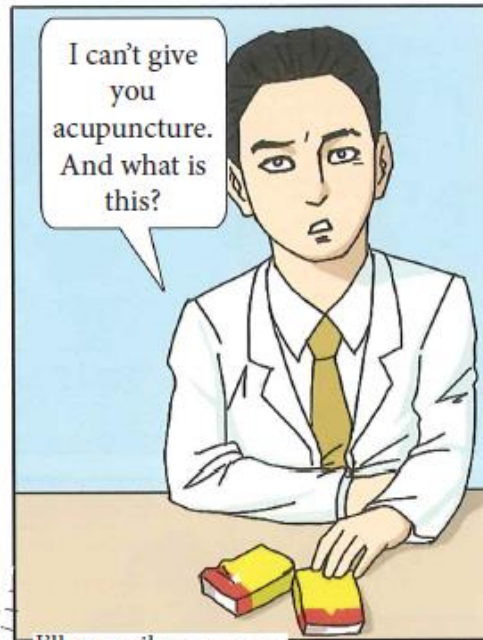
*Isaac Newton laid out three laws of motion. There is a saying on Newton's fourth law of motion that came to be popular among North Koreans. "If one person gives a bribe to a second person, the person who received the bribe will move/act."



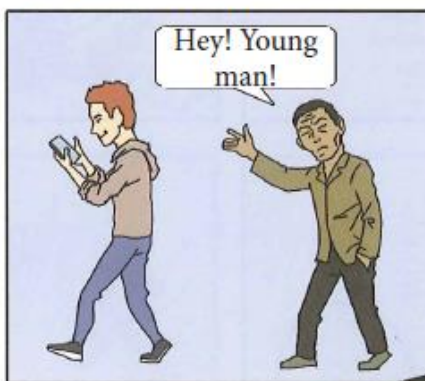
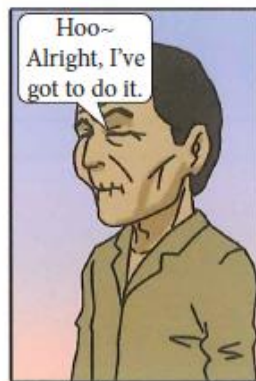
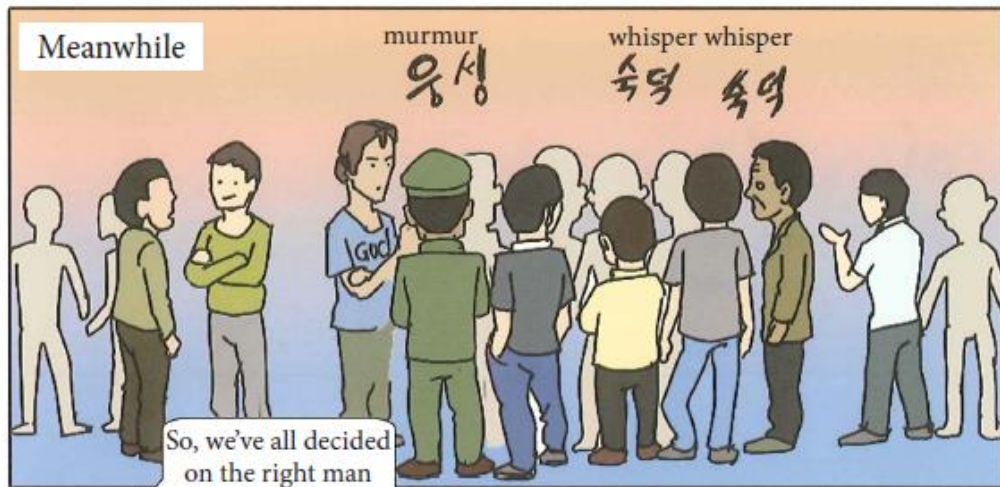
This! These are expensive cigarettes in China, so let's try to get his attention with these.



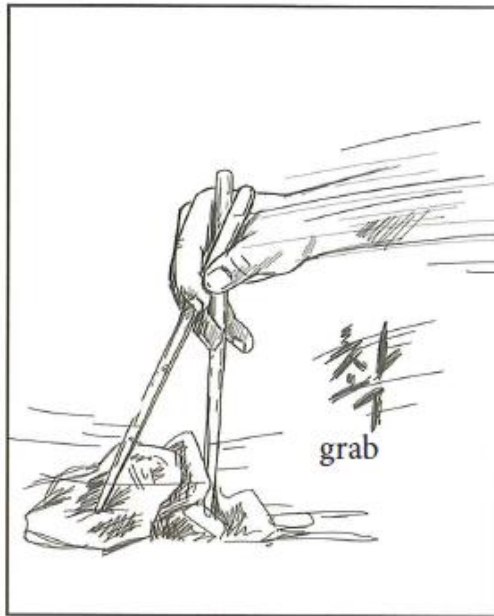


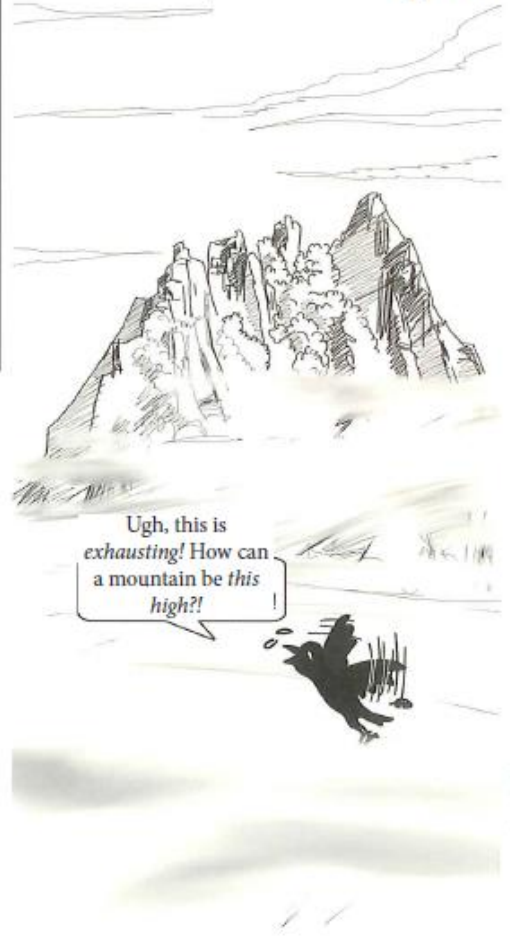


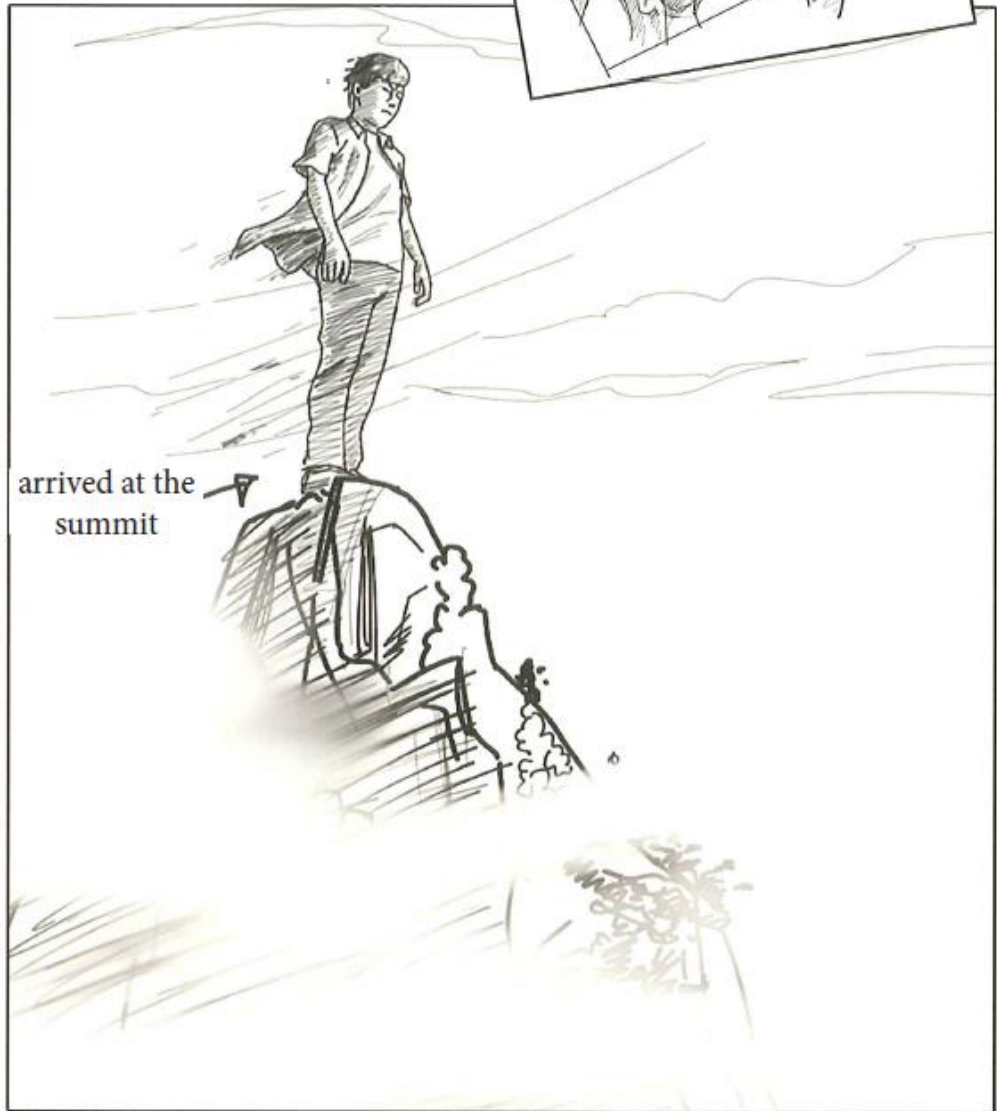
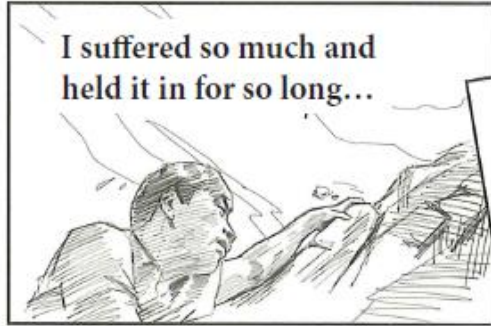
There are no separate clinics for modern (Western) medicine and traditional (Korean) medicine in North Korea, as there are in the South. Hospitals practice traditional and modern medicine together. Furthermore, indigestion is typically resolved using acupuncture rather than drugs. And at all medical institutions you absolutely need to use bribes for anything to get done.

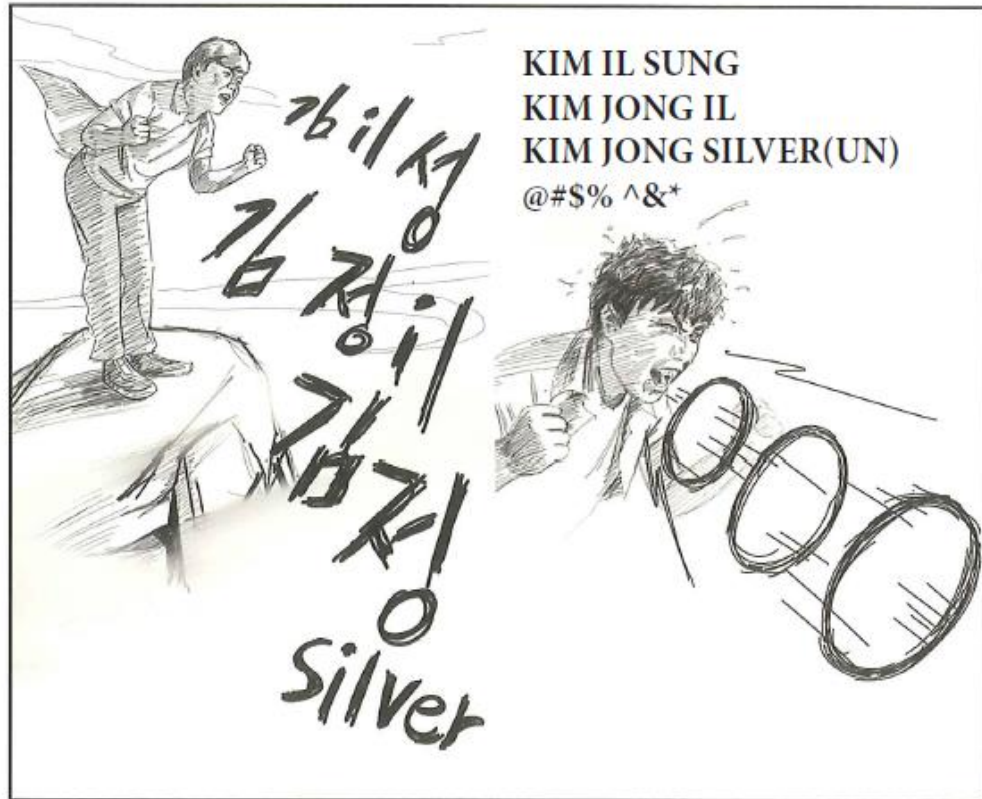


작가의 말
Words from the Author









*North-South
Comments Summit*

Question from the South

쿠암 (7moo****) 2016-07-13 11:23 | 신고
I trust that you'll read this comment, Mr. Choi. Let's verify your ideology. North Korea and South Korea are in a ceasefire, so still at war. Kim Jung Un is our enemy. So are the North Korean bast*rds who panhandle from our country. I don't know whether you're a North Korean or whether you just have North Korean acquaintances, but I dare you to say it out loud! Say that Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un are @#\$\$%^&*.

👍 7 | 🗨️ 6

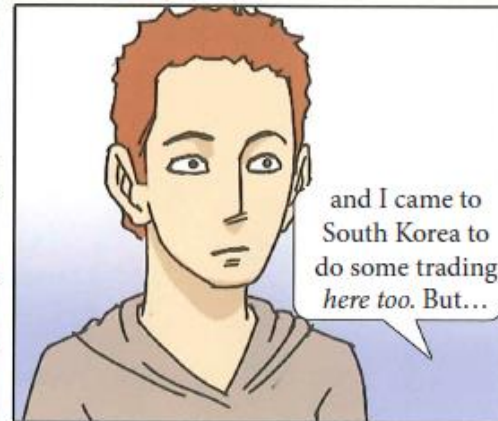
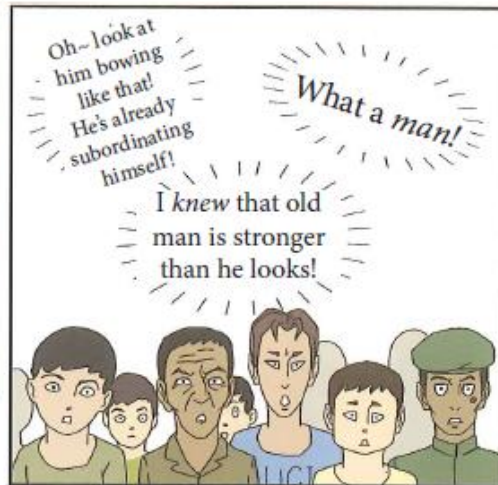
Answer from the North

complete!

Now *that* was refreshing!

Preemptive Strike: Intimidation





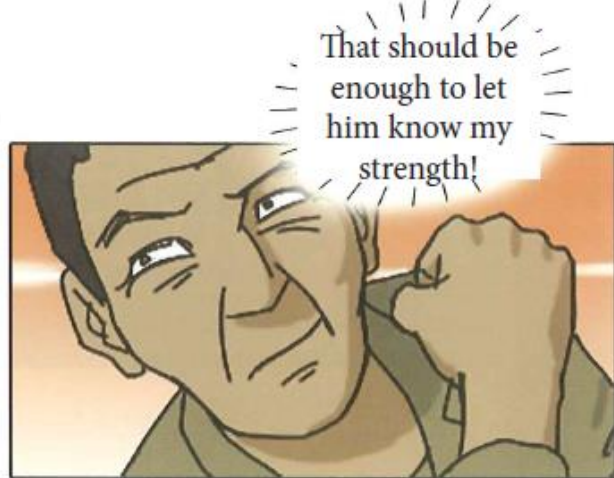
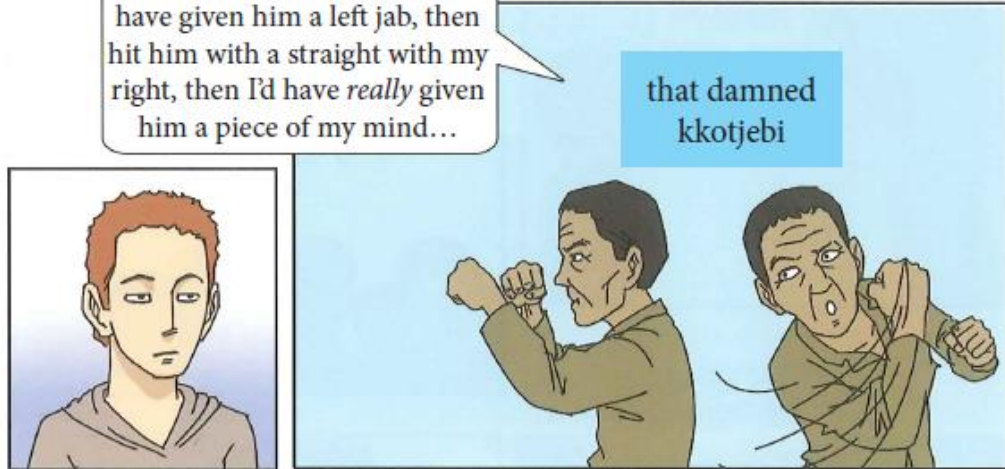
Explanation: In North Korea, "successful" jobs include foreign trading, truck driving, etc.

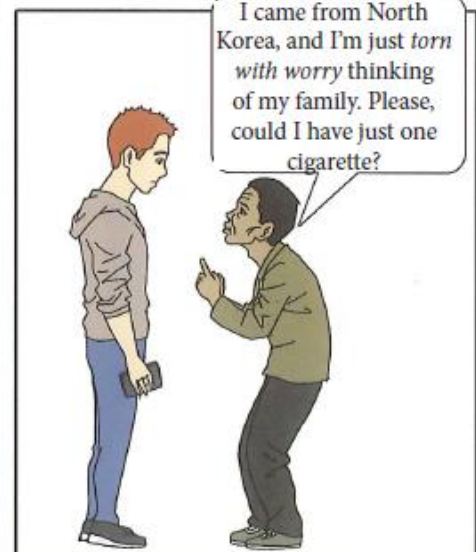
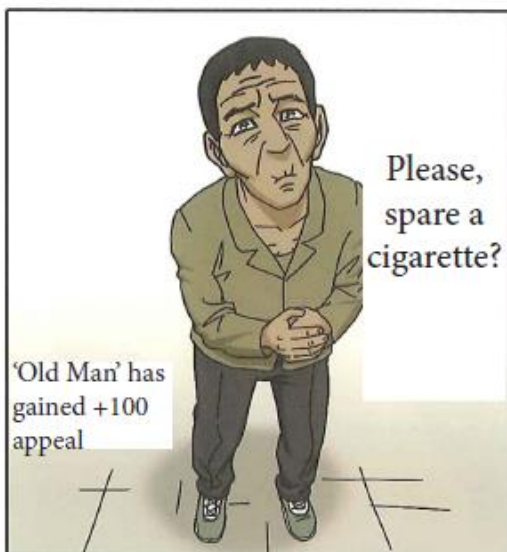
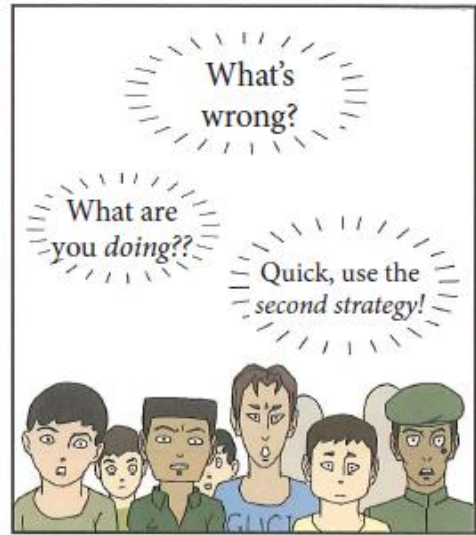
Translator's Note: Kkotjebi, literally "flowering swallow" (Wikipedia) are North Korean homeless children who beg for food. The term refers to their bird-like "constant search for food and shelter".

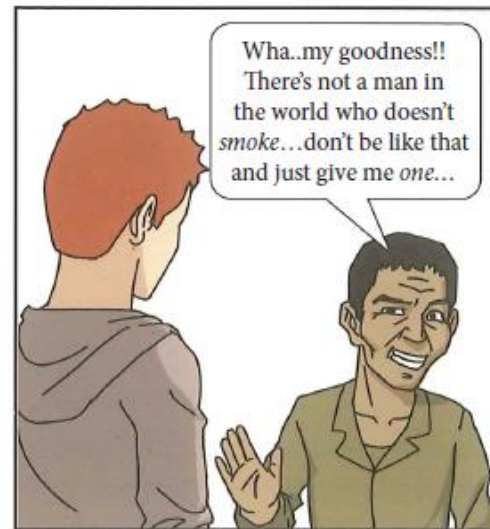
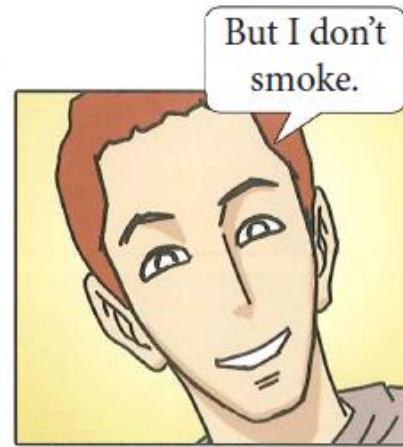


If I had got ahold of 'im I'd have given him a left jab, then hit him with a straight with my right, then I'd have *really* given him a piece of my mind...

Of course, I have more back home~



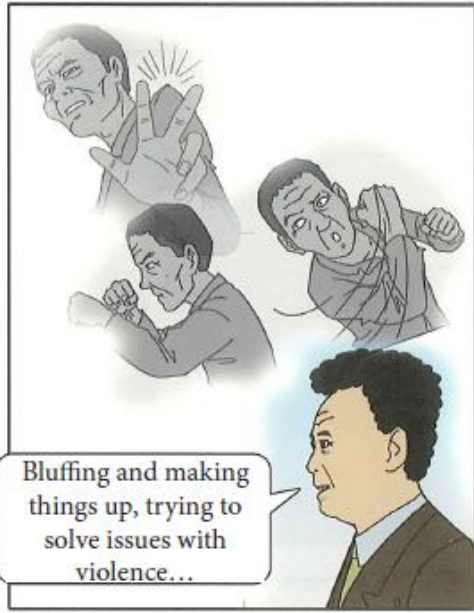


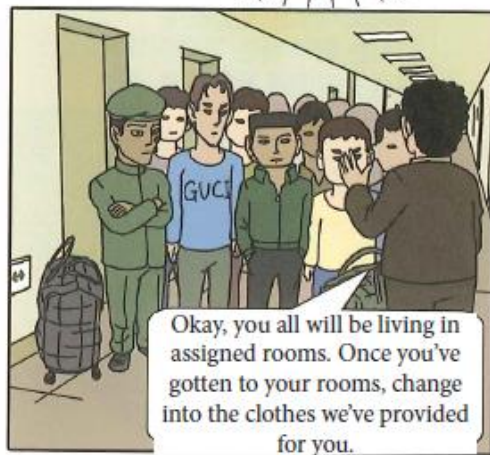
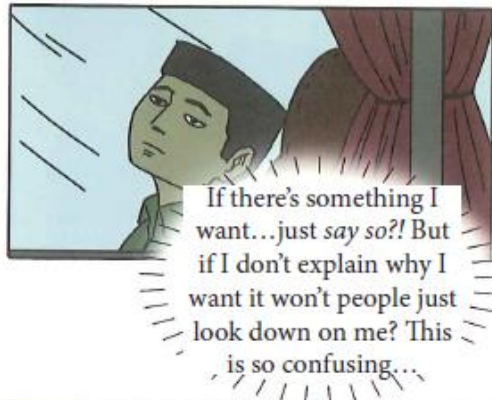
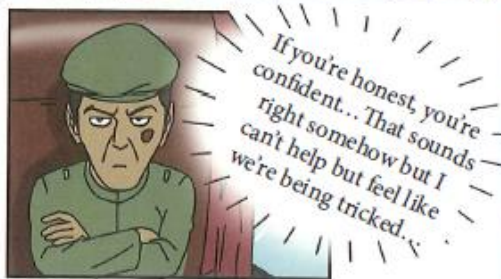




No, I even tried the pitiful act. But...

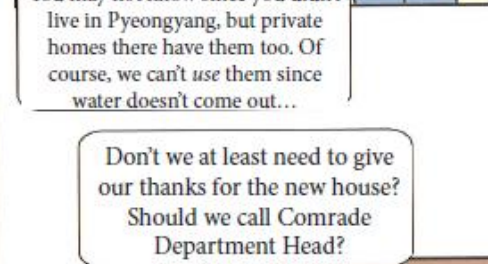
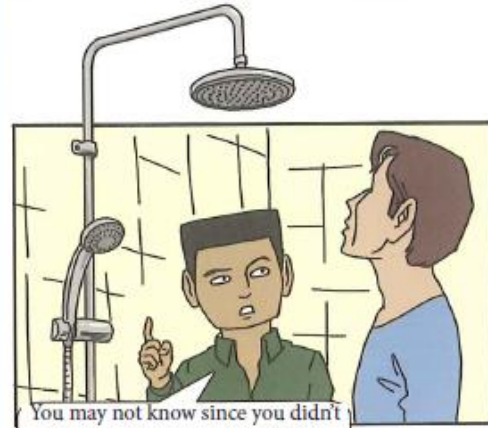
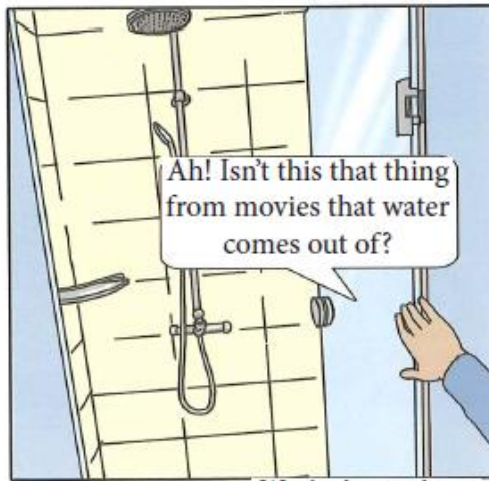




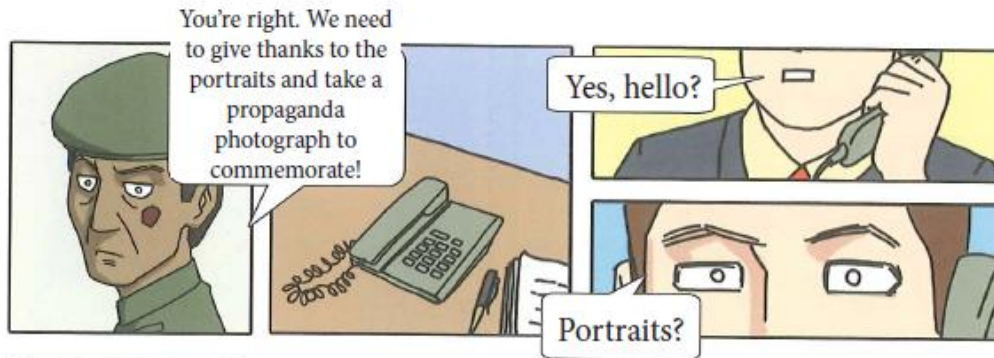


You'll have to leave behind all the things you brought with you when you go out into society at the end of your stay here. You brought these things to South Korea with much difficulty, but it is better to get rid of things you don't need earlier rather than later.

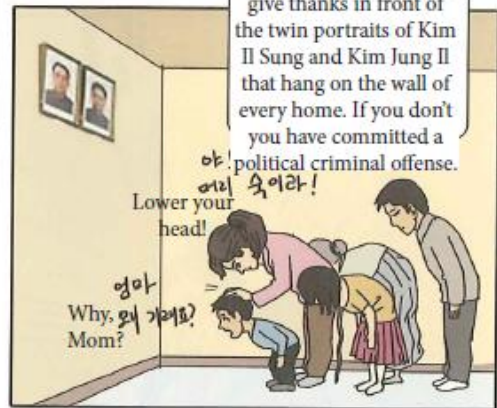




Explanation: To be treated like a person in North Korea, you need one of three identification cards: a simin citizen card (for Pyongyang residents), a gongmin citizen card (for provincial residents), or a birth certificate (for children). If you receive a gyohwa reformation card (for criminals), you are stripped of all qualifications and from that point on you are no longer seen as a person.



And...they take staged photographs for the government to use as propaganda.



Day of Receiving a House Gift (feat. a whole hour spent just at the entrance).jpeg

Ah~ My Throat is Choked with Tears at this Great Love (feat. The roses of Sharon have bloomed).jpeg

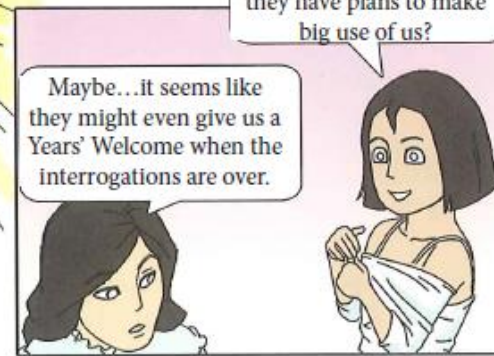




Eonni



Translator's Note: Jang Do-Yeon is a South Korean comedian (in)famous for her wild, eccentric red carpet poses.

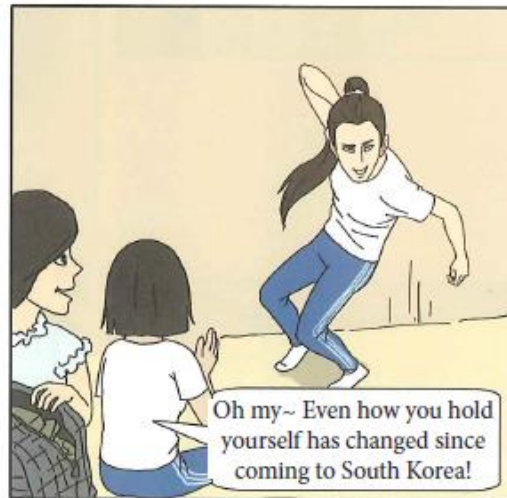


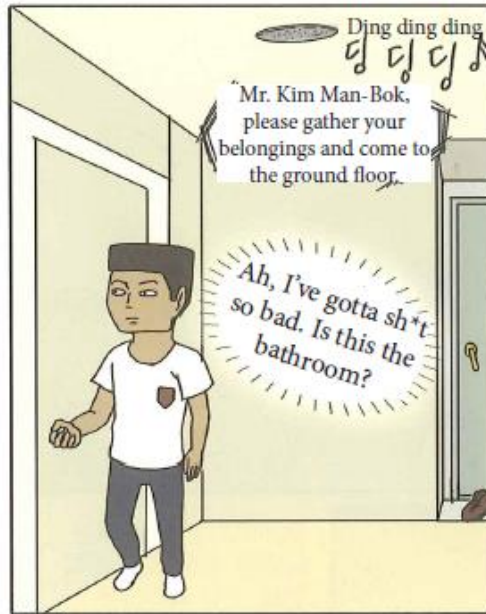


Explanation: A Years' Welcome is a welcoming event with big crowds in the streets for people who have done service to the Great Leader or the country.

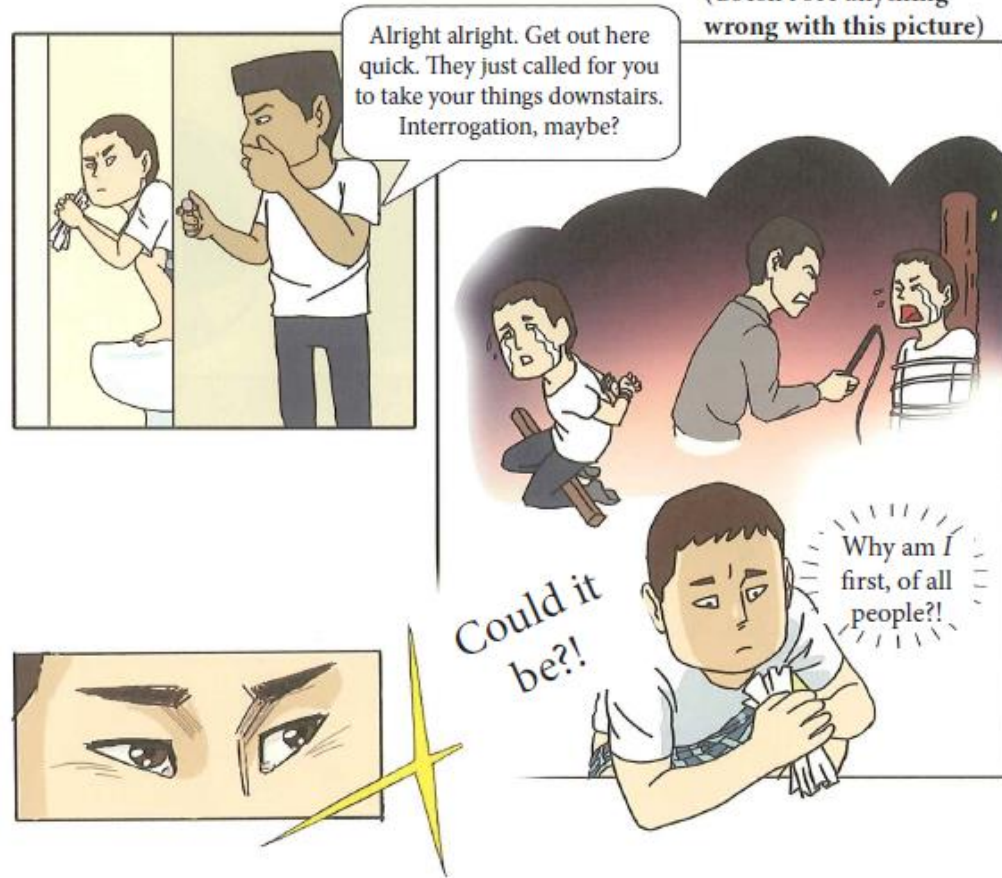


This event is held in North Korea for the leader, people who have done a huge service to their country, or people who will be used by the government.





(doesn't see anything
wrong with this picture)

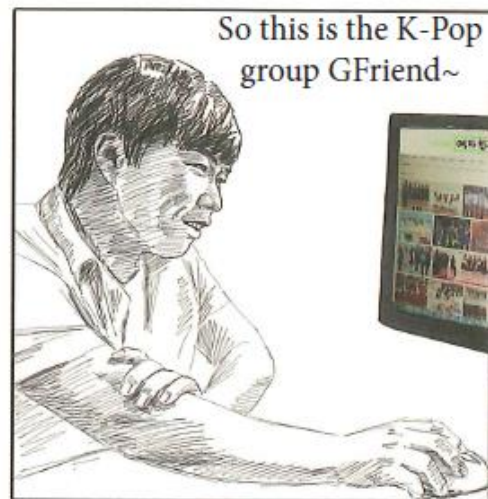


작가의 말
Words from the Author

PM 14:00



Ah...No, no. I should be looking at *comments on my webtoon.*



But wait...



this!!!

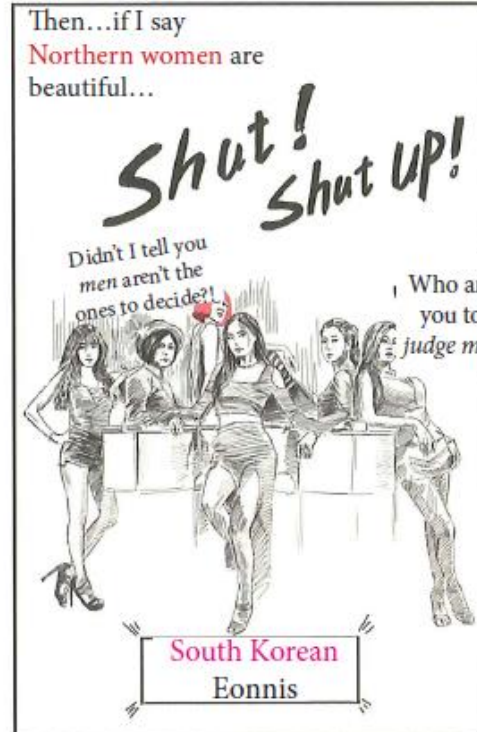
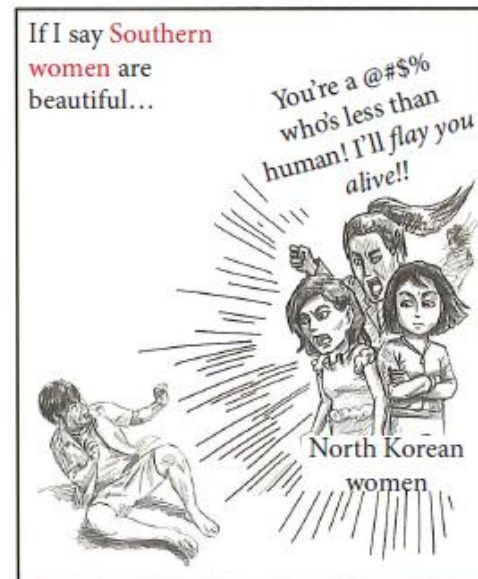
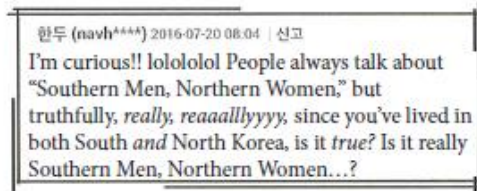
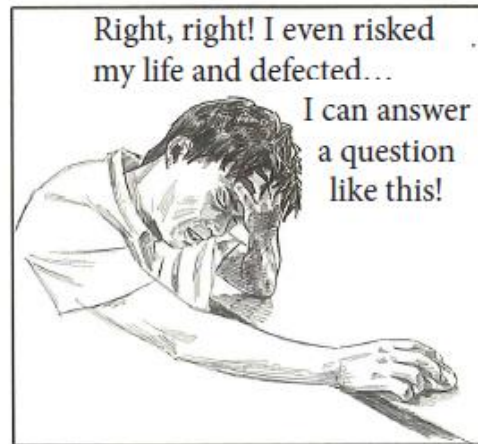


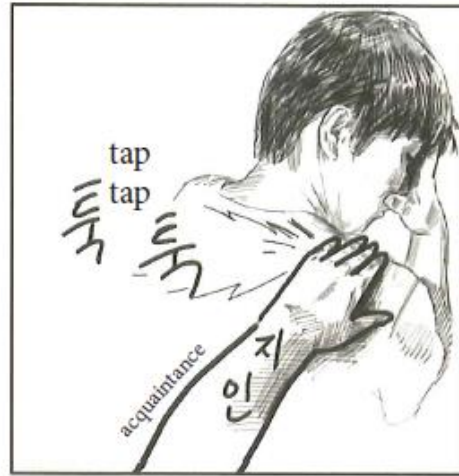
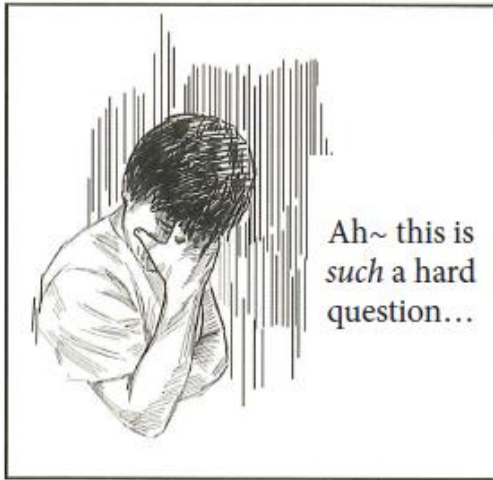
Ah~ such a difficult question...



North-South Comments Summit

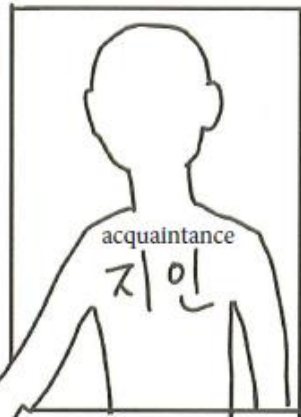
Question from the South





Are you not dating anyone?
Should I introduce you to
someone?

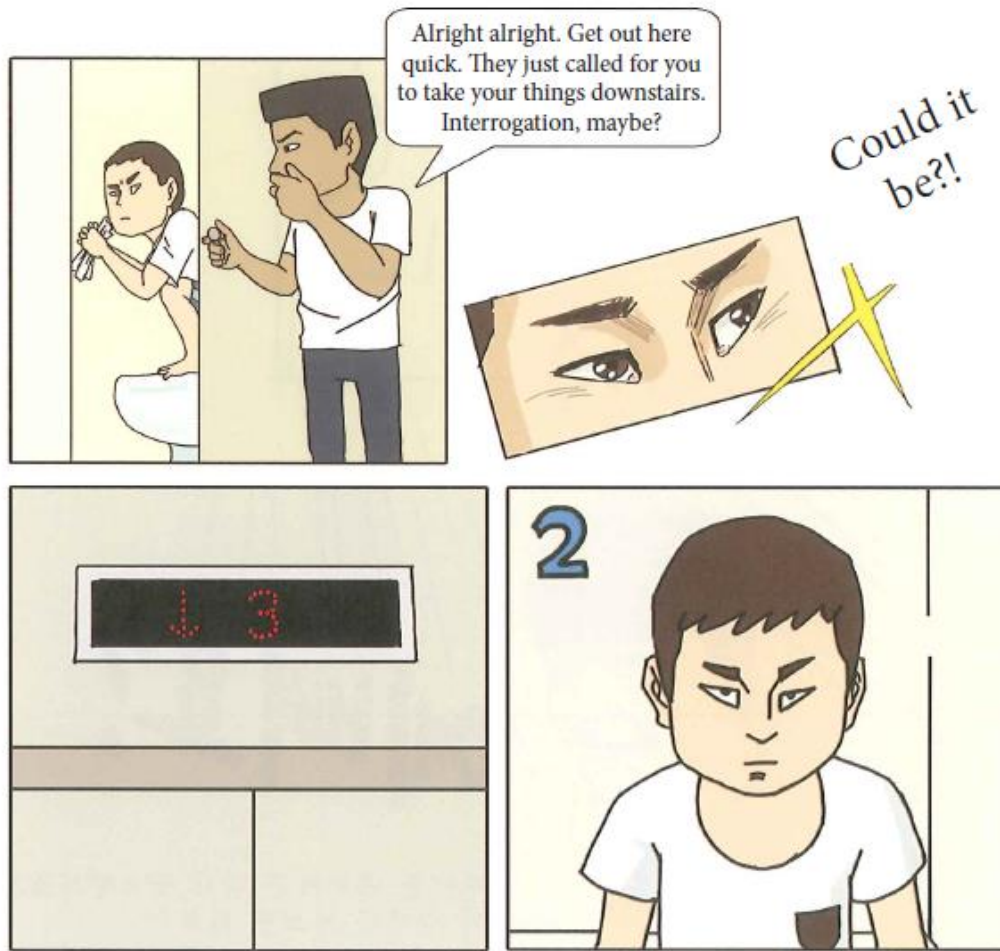
(BGM. Sanctus)



Is she pretty?

North Korea, South Korea, what does
it matter? All that *really* matters is if
you think she's pretty^^

Man-Bok's Single Room

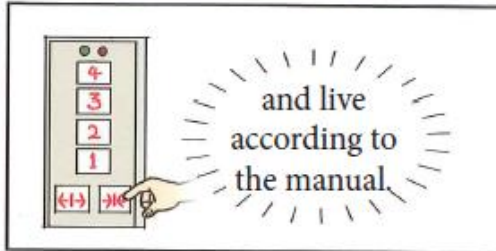




Ding



Well, I am starting a new life in the South. Better learn how to close the doors properly...



and live according to the manual.



Oh, it's closing. I've got to get out before it closes all the way.



Why's it opening again? It didn't break, did it??

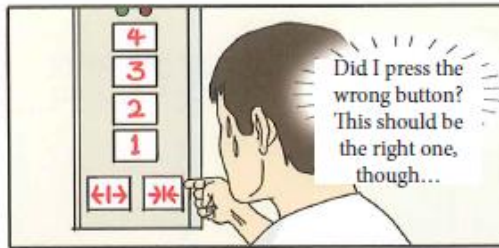


Wait, why right when I get in!...



Ugh, this is driving me nuts! I just started my life in South Korea and I'm already being punished?!

How come this door doesn't have a doorknob?!



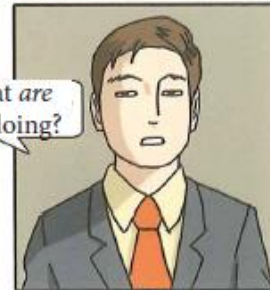
Did I press the wrong button? This should be the right one, though...



What's taking Man-Bok so long?



(has been going in and out of the elevator the whole time)

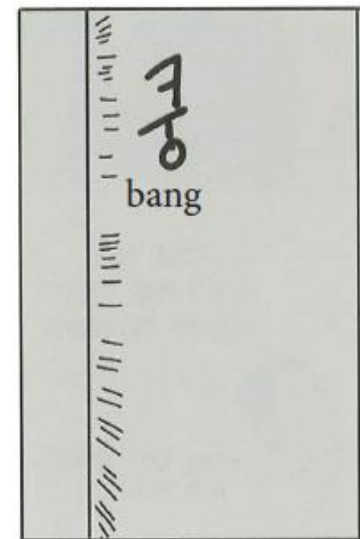


What are you doing?



not a freeze-frame

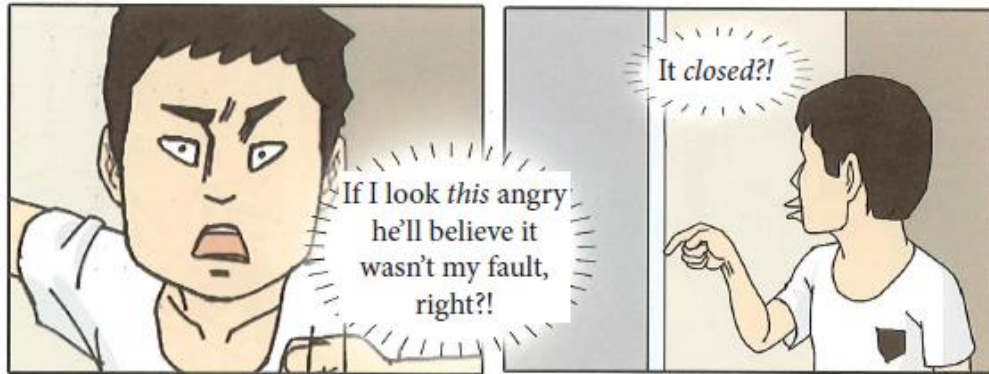
Ack! I've been caught red-handed! I should raise my voice first if I want to seem confident!

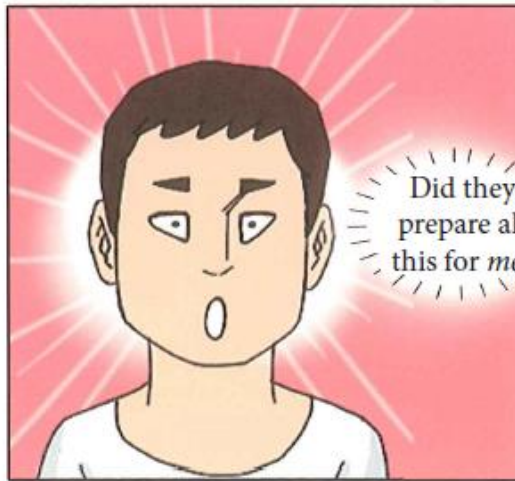


What am I doing? This door has been acting strange all on its own so I was observing it! It's so weird!

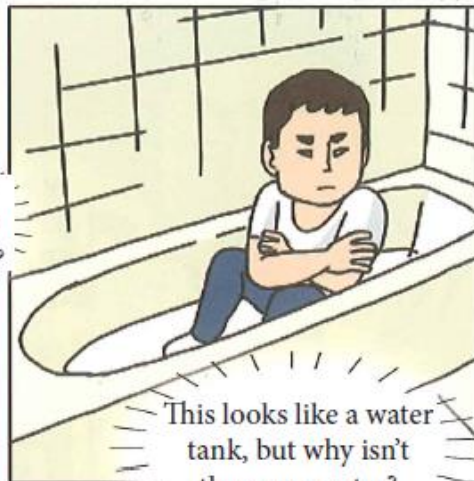
Why is the door acting like this when I didn't do anything?!







Did they prepare all this for me?



This looks like a water tank, but why isn't there any water?



Is this an accordion-style desk lamp?

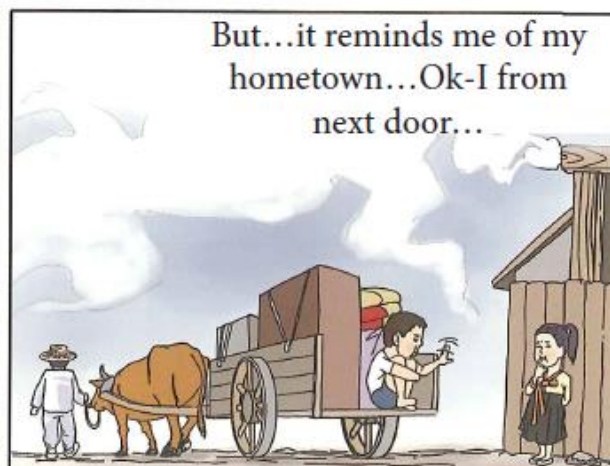
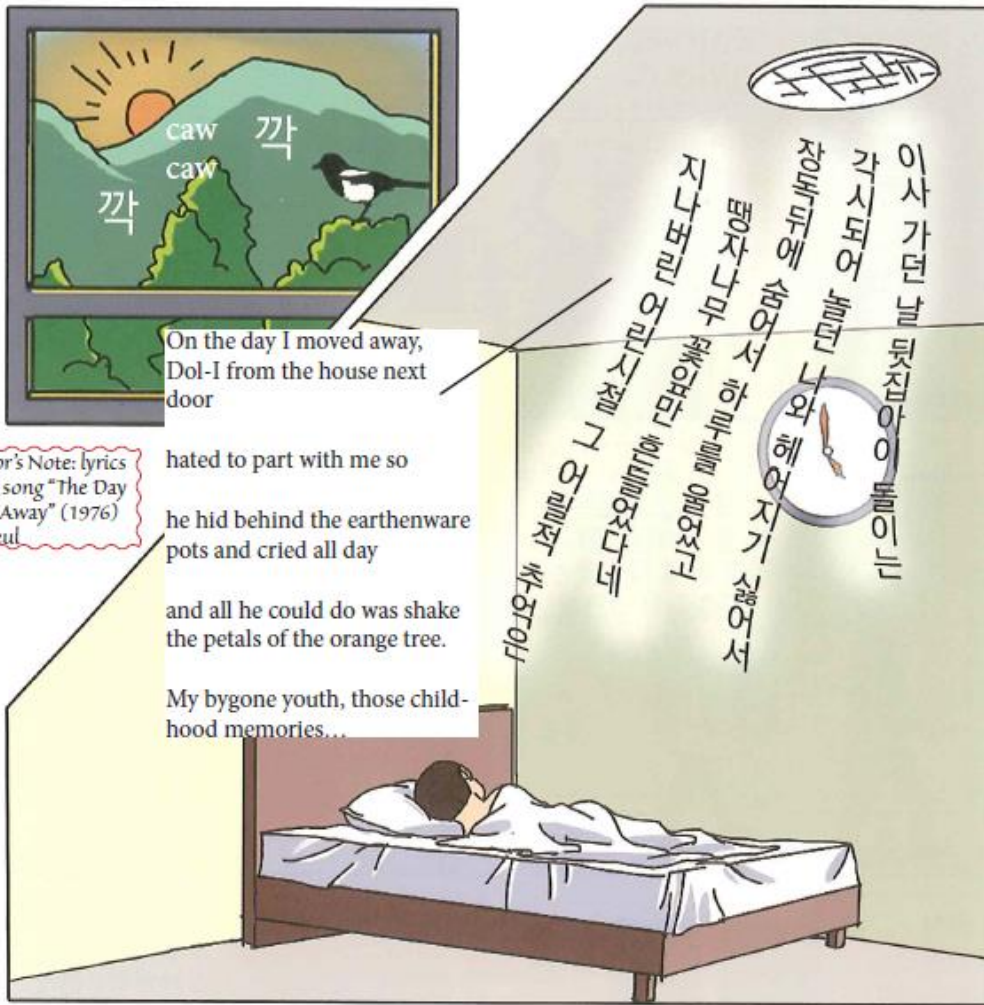
Explanation: In North Korea, people store water in water tanks (duh), but also washbasins, rice bowls, soup bowls, and anything else that can hold water. This is because water is in very short supply.

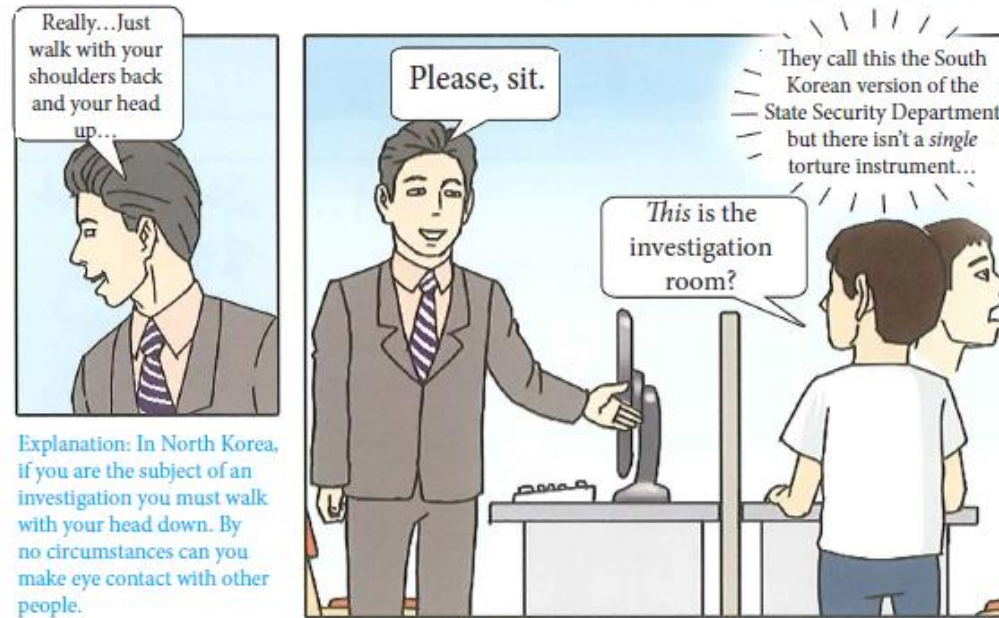
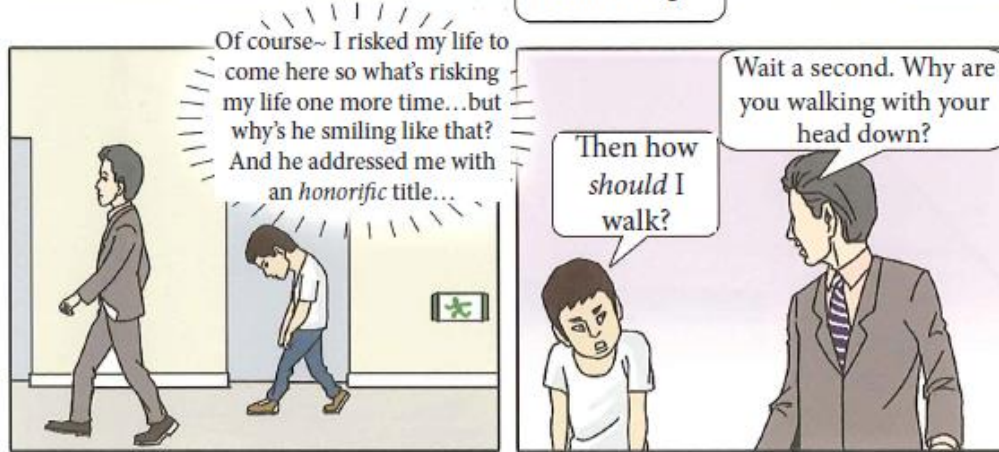


This is great!!

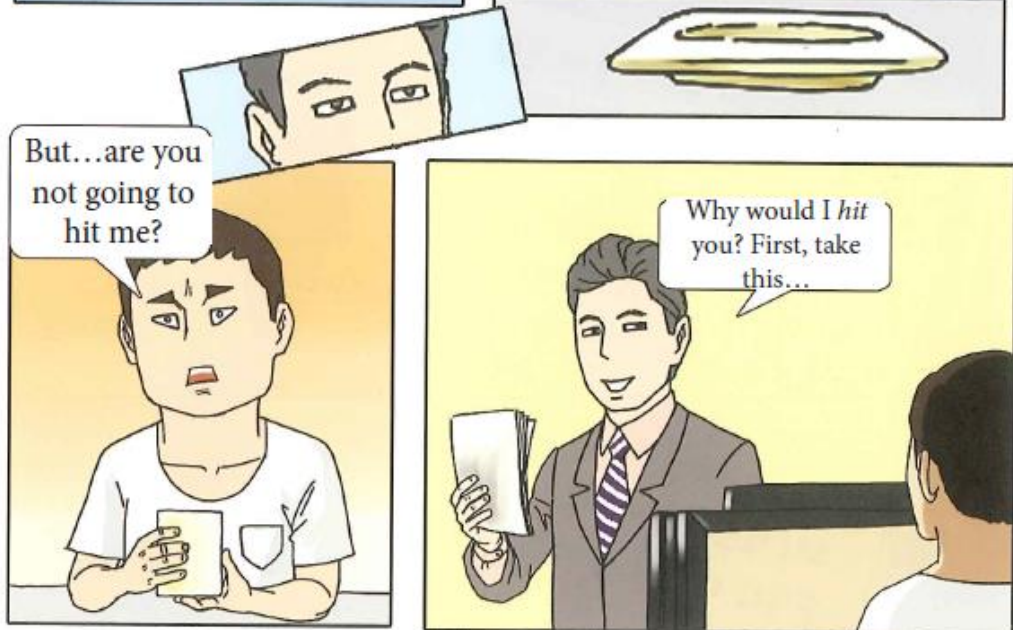
Who would have thought I'd get to lie in a real bed...

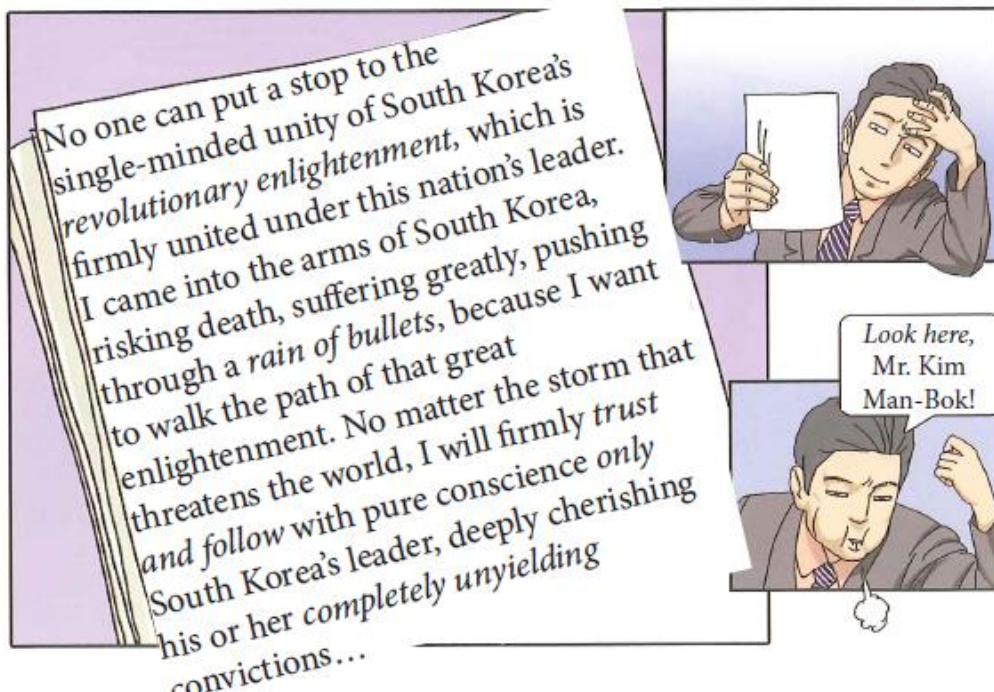
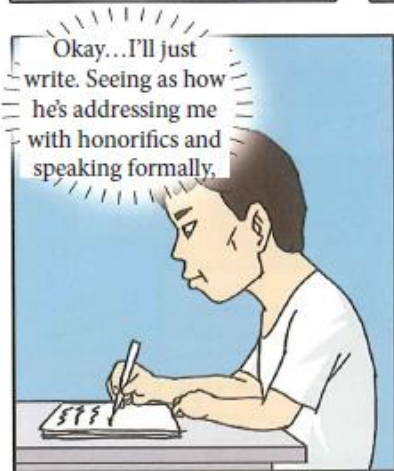
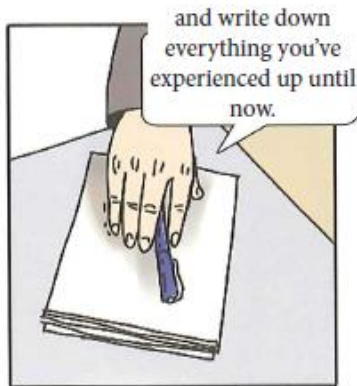


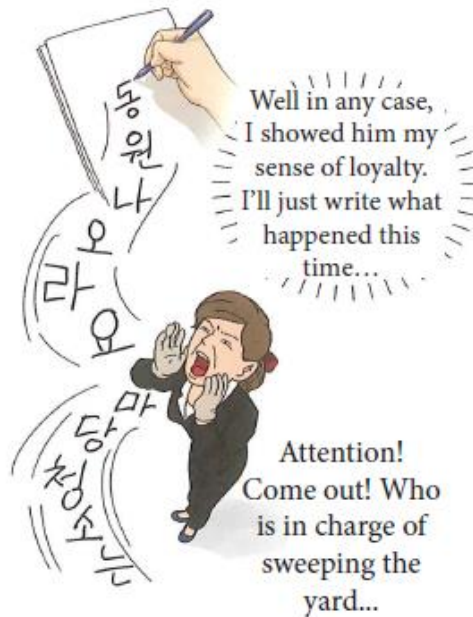
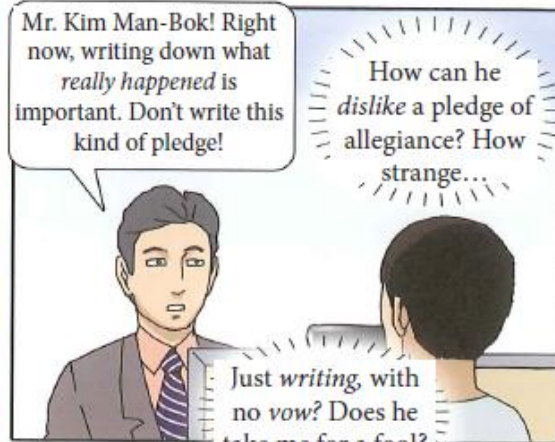
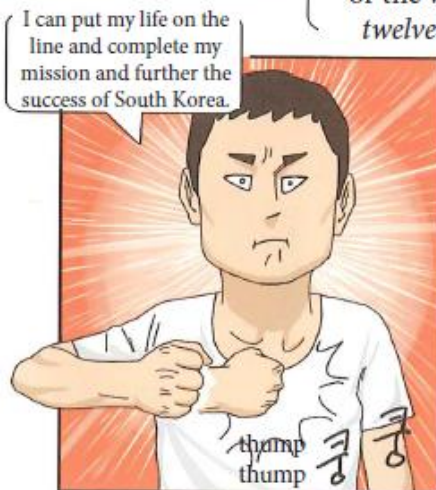
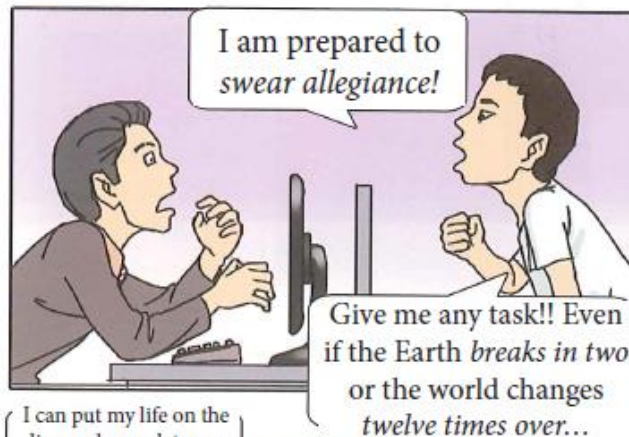




Explanation: In North Korea, if you are the subject of an investigation you must walk with your head down. By no circumstances can you make eye contact with other people.







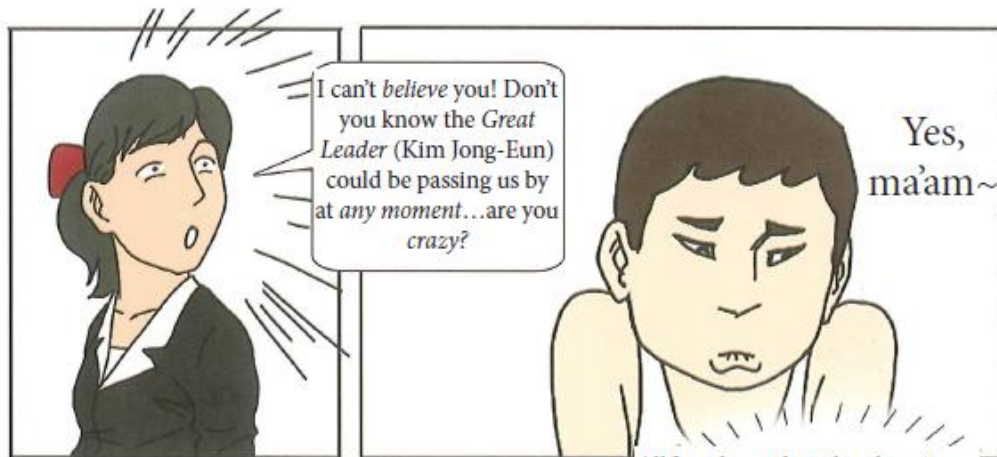


So it was *Man-Bok's* turn to sweep the yard! He's so dense he's probably *still* sleeping!!

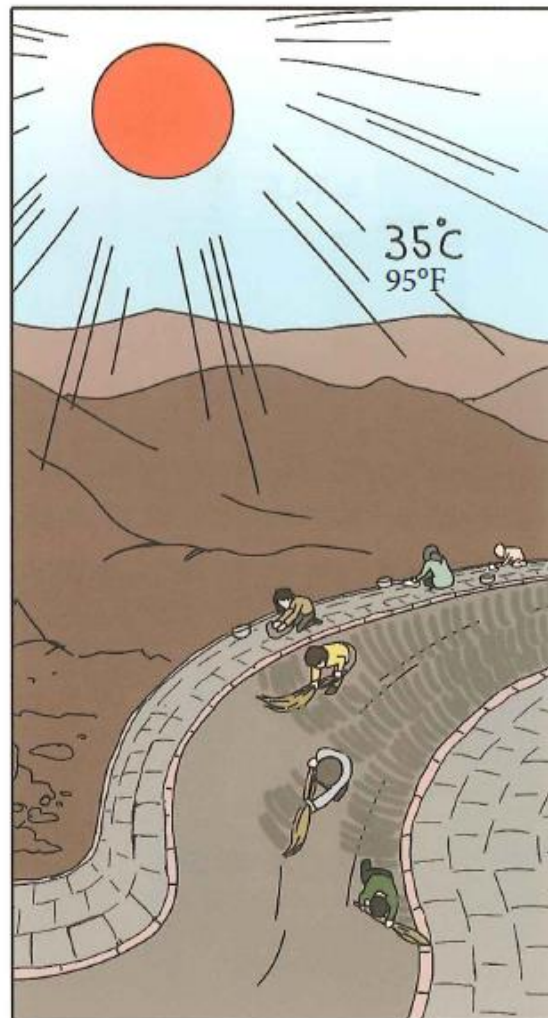
Explanation: Tinplate sheets are attached to wooden doors to keep out thieves. It is very much essential.

'Yard Sweeping Tag' Explanation: There are no street cleaners (sanitation workers) in North Korea, unlike South Korea. Rather, it is up to the residents to clean and sweep the neighborhood yards. A "yard sweeping" tag is passed among the residents each day for this purpose.





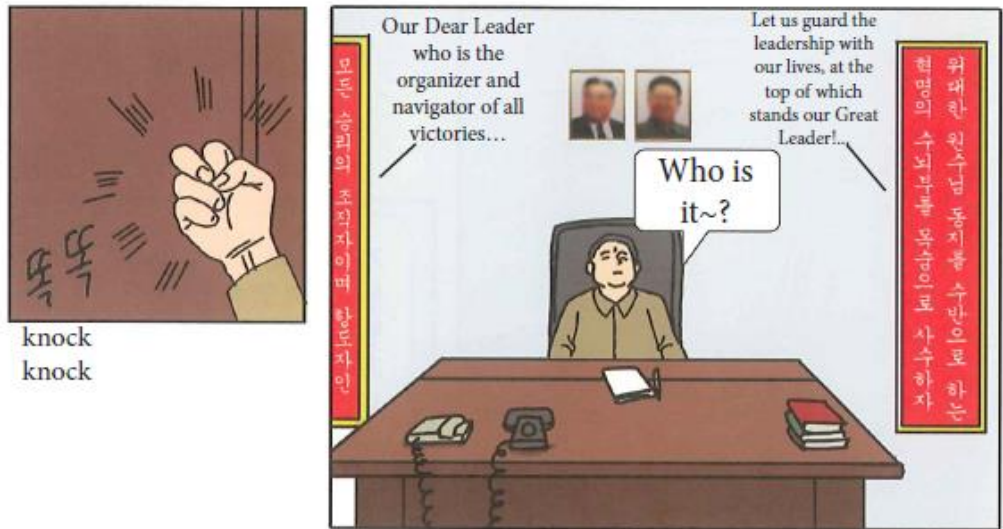
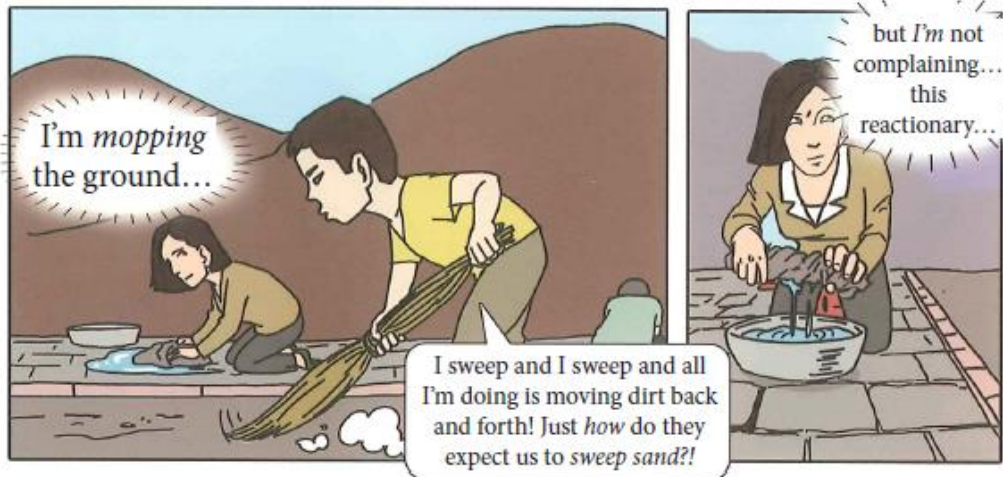
All I said was that it's *exhausting*...
There she goes again, connecting every single thing to the Great Leader... Scaring the wits out of me like that! Who says I'm not *loyal*?! Hmph!

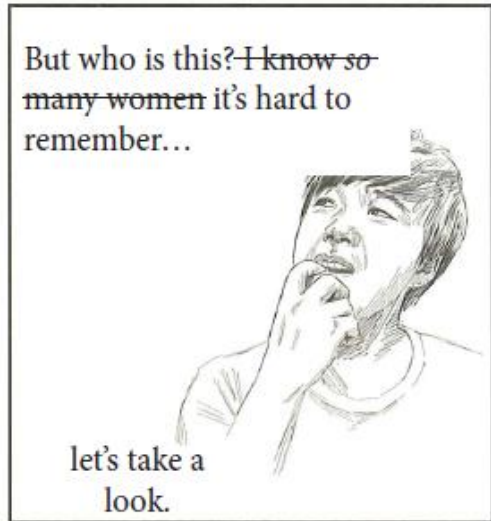
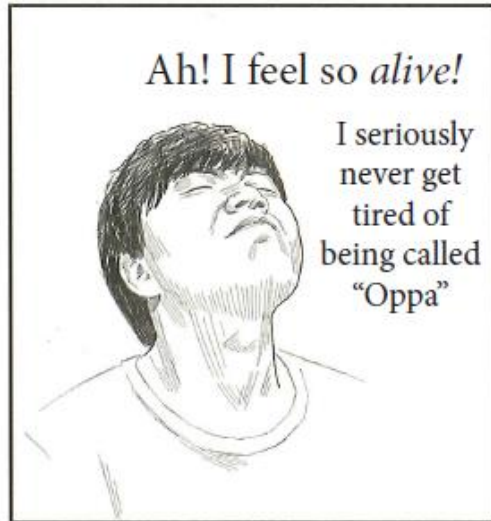


Now, whenever you feel tired just think of the Great Leader and muster your energy! Let's clean this road, which the Great Leader could pass by at *any moment*, so thoroughly that you can even pick up a piece of fallen candy off the road and eat it!



shaa





No...I shouldn't. I saw *plenty* in middle and high school. I should look at comments on my webtoon...



North-South Comments Summit

Question from the South

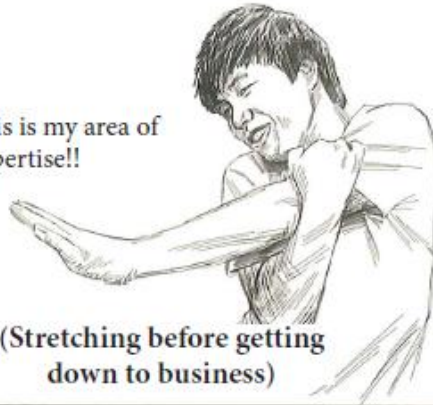
나용용 (y2n2****) 2016-07-27 14:40 | 신고

This webtoon is so funny lmao I was reading it and laughed so much! Here, in middle and high school friends get together and watch porn lmao do people in North Korea do that too?? Aren't people the same everywhere? And that's the age when we're especially hot-blooded lolol

👍 7 🗑️ 0

Ah...*this*...I just *have* to answer!!!

This is my area of expertise!!



(Stretching before getting down to business)

Answer from the North

In North Korea, porn is called "adult recording" or "naked film." The viewing and distribution of such material is against the law. Distribution in particular is a serious felony.

However, while selling CDs of films I found that there is a demand(!) and so sold these too. Typically adults(parents) buy these CDs but their children will take and watch them secretly without their parents' knowledge, too. (Yes, North Korean adolescents are also people haha)

What would we have done *without him*?

Wow~ Thanks to him the world has opened its eyes!



He is truly a Great Leader, who has opened our eyes to a whole *new world*(?!)

Saenghwal Chonghwa

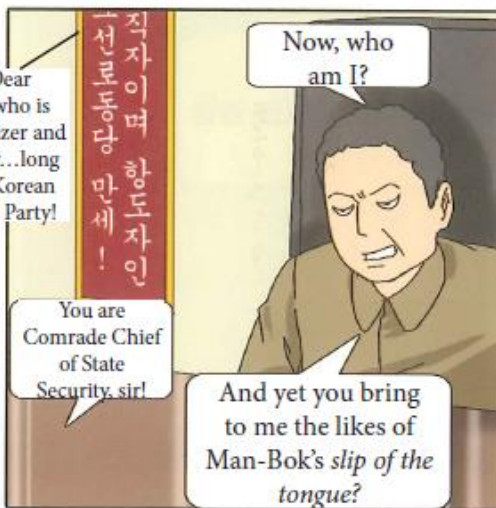


Translator's Note: This is a very unique North Korean term and culture, which can be translated as Self-Criticism, Self-Reflection, Self-Correction, and literally means Harmonization of Everyday Life. In North Korea, all people are members of an organized group (whether it be through work, school, etc.). This group meets weekly to bring harmony to group and individual life through criticism. In such a session each person must, in front of the collective, self-reflect and self-correct on their words and actions, as well as criticize something someone else has done.





Our Dear Leader who is the organizer and navigator...long live the Korean Workers' Party!



Now, who am I?

You are Comrade Chief of State Security, sir!

And yet you bring to me the likes of Man-Bok's slip of the tongue?

A bast*rd like him is *worthless* no matter how much we beat him, no matter *how much* we dig up! How dare you come to me with something you could have just told a State Security *officer*!?



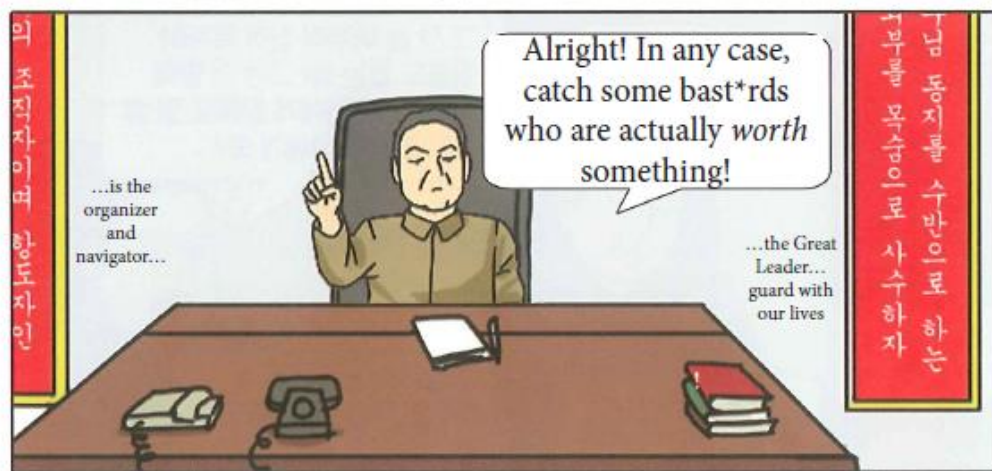
Catch someone *big enough* to actually make a *profit* out of!

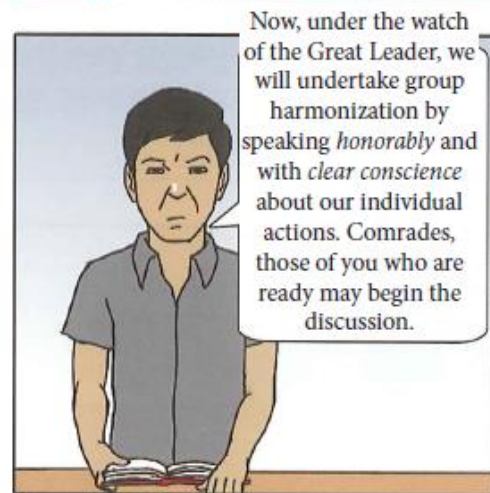
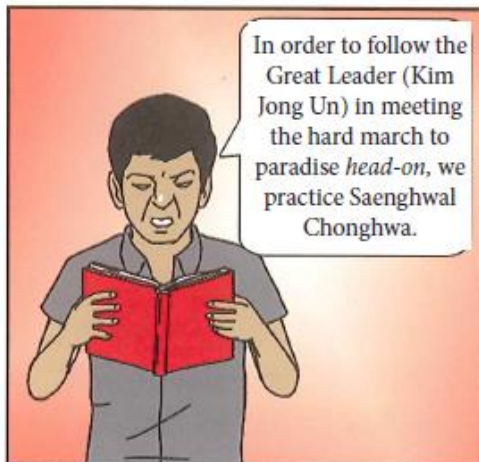
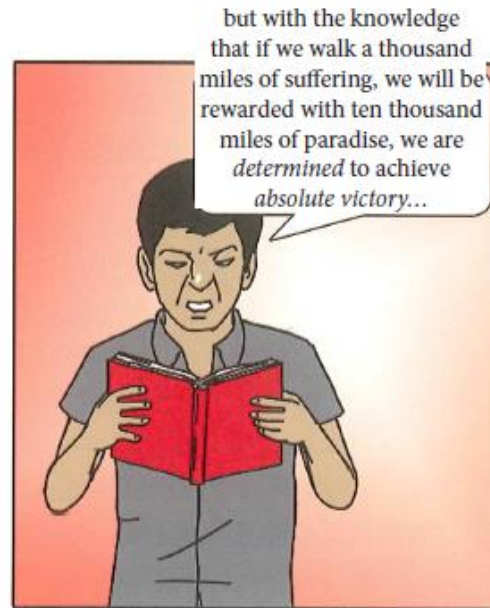


There's no one around me who's that important, sir...

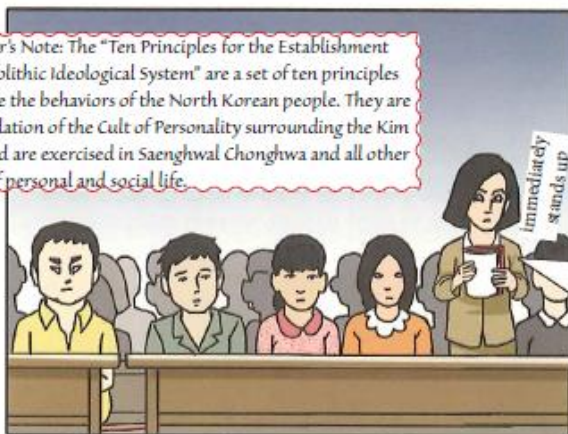


But please, *please* release my husband, even if just for recognition of my passion and zeal!





Translator's Note: The "Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System" are a set of ten principles that guide the behaviors of the North Korean people. They are the foundation of the Cult of Personality surrounding the Kim family and are exercised in Saenghwal Chonghwa and all other aspects of personal and social life.



I will join in the discussion. Rule 8 Clause 6 of the Party's "Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System" reads as follows: One must push towards revolution by devoting oneself to the fulfillment of one's revolutionary duties and participating earnestly and sincerely in this work.



In light of this, I acknowledge that I have committed a fault that is *by no means* small.

Fault: I have stumbled, *erred*, in my dedication to our Great Leader, who is *even now* working tirelessly day and night in order to provide the people with a better life. I had a *Capitalist thought* for a brief instant, using the excuse that the weather was hot and I was hungry.

Statement: While I mopped the asphalt road this morning, I told Kkotsun-I that recently Chinese people are buying North Korean coal and that *I want to get into the business*.

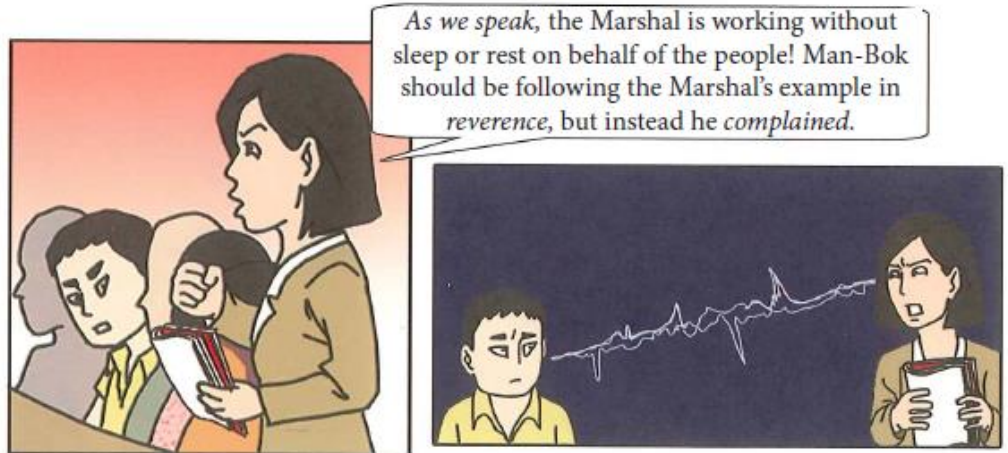
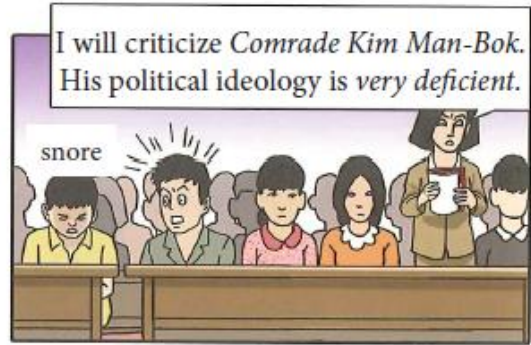
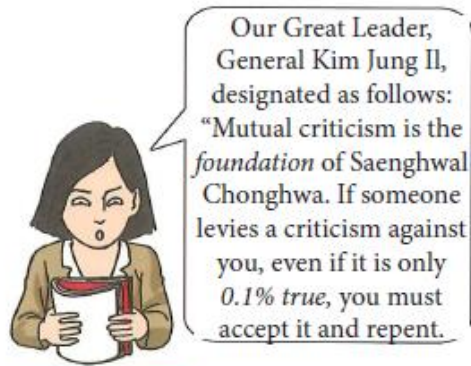
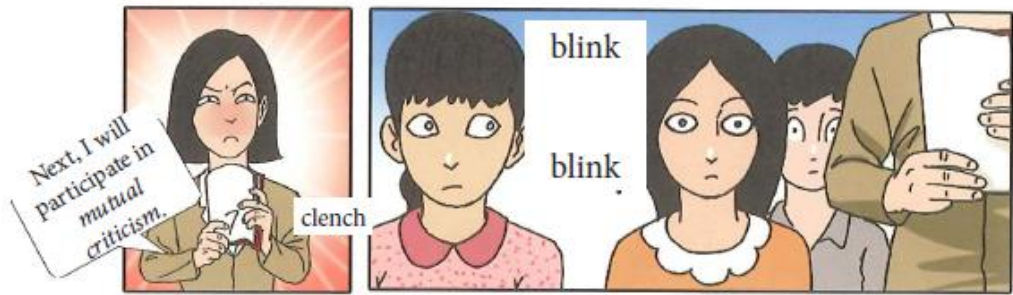
Cause: I committed this fault because my *ideological mentality* is as yet immature, and because I am lacking in the will to *overcome hardship*. However, the *biggest* reason is...sniff sniff~

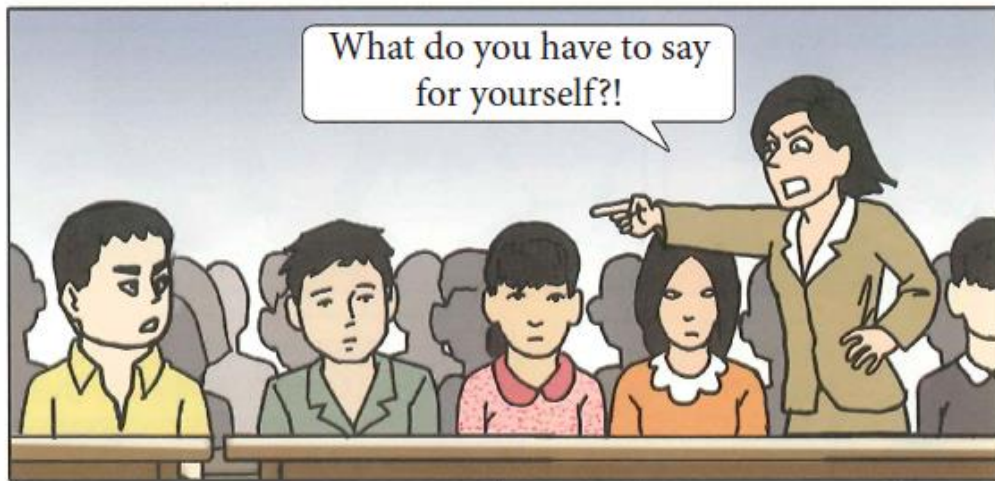


I looked for another way to survive because I didn't have the *firm belief* that if we have the Great Leader, the world will make it through *any storm* that could come our way.

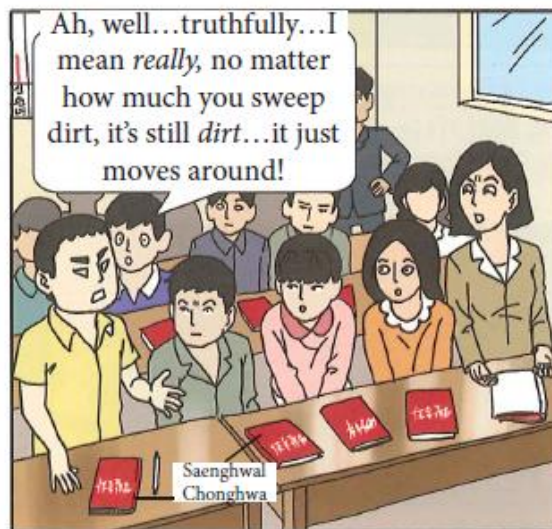
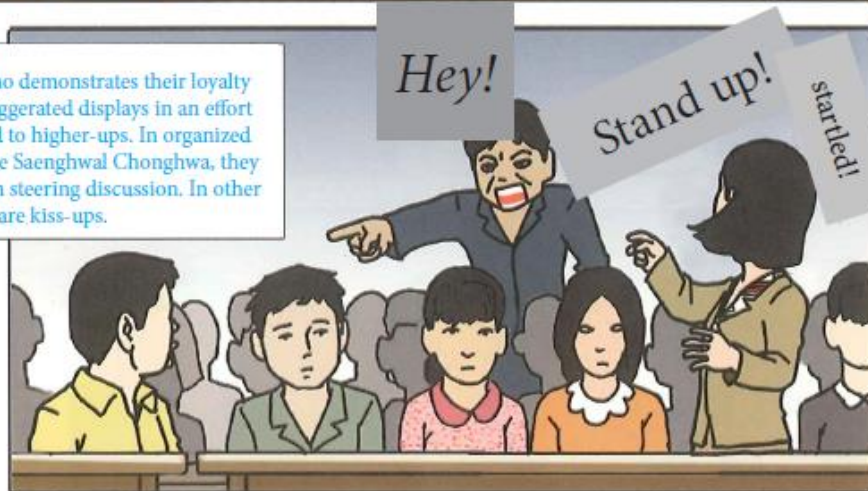
Countermeasure: I will strengthen my convictions, morality, and sincerity and further integrate my loyalty to our Great Leader (Kim Jong Un) into my everyday life. I will assume the *rule of unconditionality* to everything related to the Great Leader.



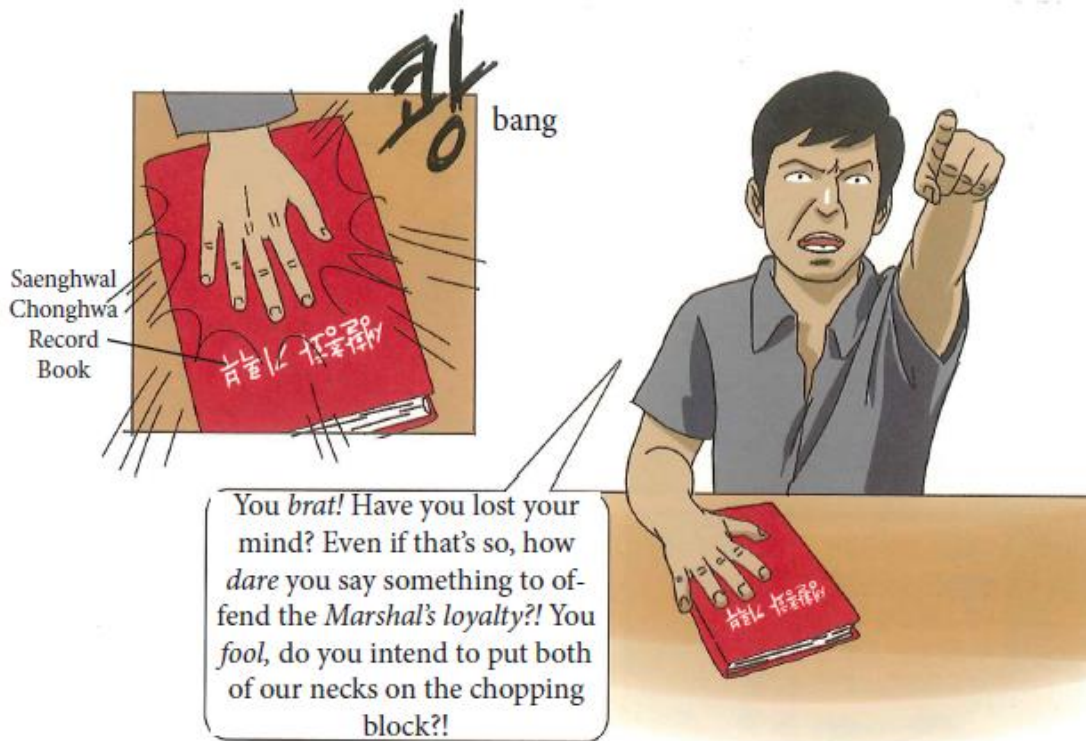




Jalkkadak:
 someone who demonstrates their loyalty through exaggerated displays in an effort to look good to higher-ups. In organized meetings like Saenghwal Chonghwa, they play a role in steering discussion. In other words, they are kiss-ups.



하나 One
 Two
 Three 셋



You *brat!* Have you lost your mind? Even if that's so, how *dare* you say something to offend the *Marshal's* loyalty?! You *fool*, do you intend to put both of our necks on the chopping block?!

In any case...this mess is all because Man-Bok is just too *honest*. How does he expect to live in this world, being so honest all the time?

That's why he's always getting cussed out... It's a relief he hasn't gotten himself *executed*.

Man-Bok! What did the General (Kim Jong Il) say while he was alive? He said that even if the criticism you receive is only *0.1%* true you must accept it! But you *dare* to give excuses?!



I don't think we'll need to keep our promise to criticize each other today.

Yeah. Won't he just make us do a focused criticism on Man-Bok again?!



The self-criticism session has ended. For the rest of today's Saenghwal Chonghwa, we will conduct a focused criticism of Man-Bok. Begin.

I will criticize Comrade Man-Bok. Comrade, do you have *any* thoughts at all in that head of yours? I mean *really*, I don't understand your logic. Etc...

stand...

Comrade Man-Bok!
Have you lost your mind?
Nothing is impossible in the name of *loyalty*. How can you attribute *reason* and *functionality* to loyalty??
Etc. ...

Hey, lower your head! Why are you holding your head up high like that?! This is Saenghwal Chonghwa, prepared for us by the *General* (Kim Jong Il)! Do you have anything to say for yourself?!

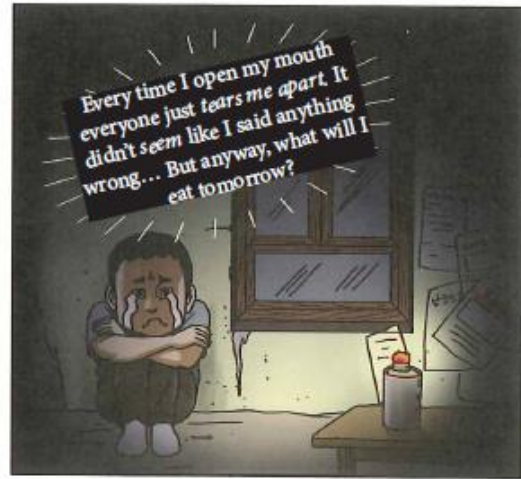
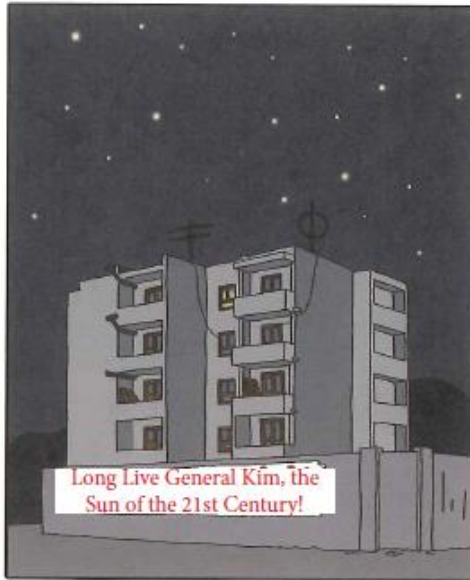
stand
startled

Comrade Man-Bok, how could you say something so *outrageous*? That road could be traveled by the Marshal (Kim Jong Un) at *any moment*...

droop

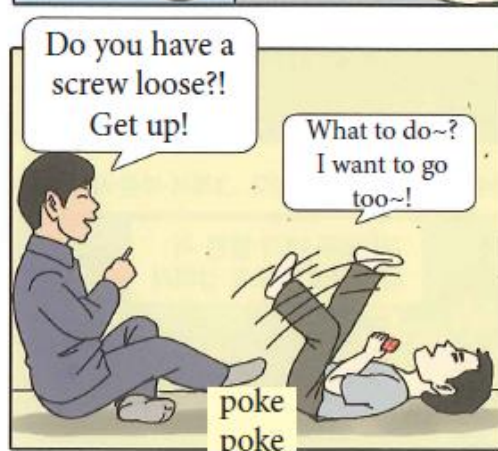
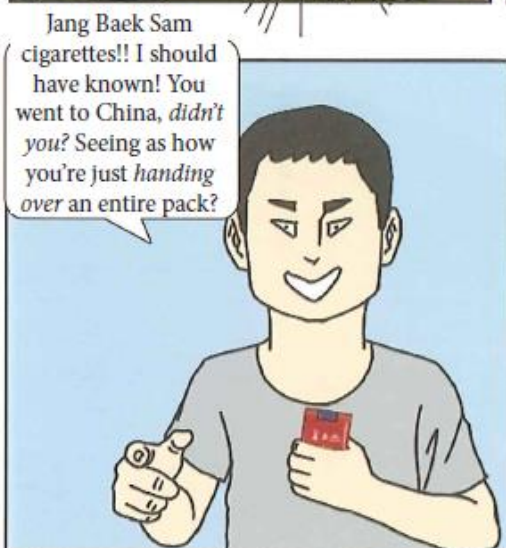
Subject
of
Focused
Criticism

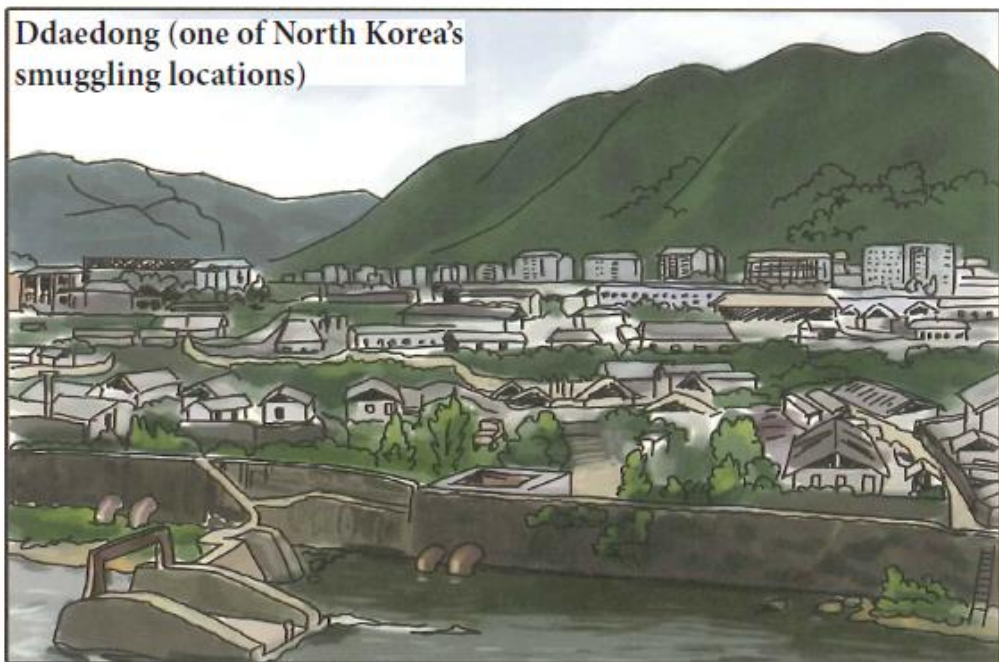
Subject of Focused Criticism:
Focused Criticism is a session wherein everyone in the group concentrates on and criticizes one person who committed a crime.





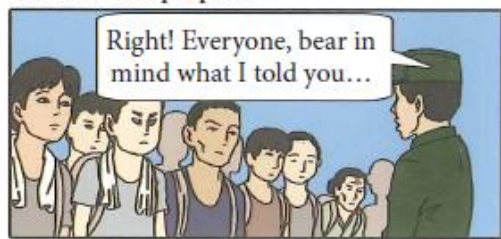
Malacho:
 a cigarette made by drying and cutting up unprocessed tobacco leaves, rolling them up, and smoking them. Many North Koreans grow tobacco in their kitchen gardens. They roll them up using pages from the *Rodong Sinmun* (the Korean Workers' Party newspaper).

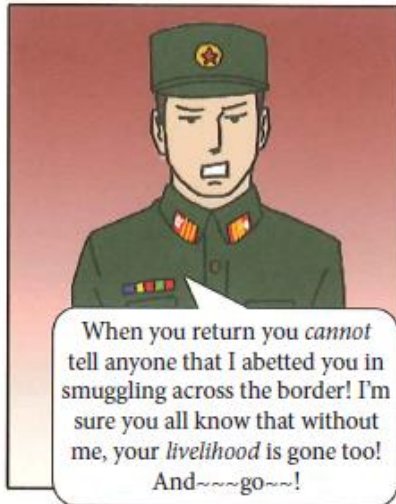




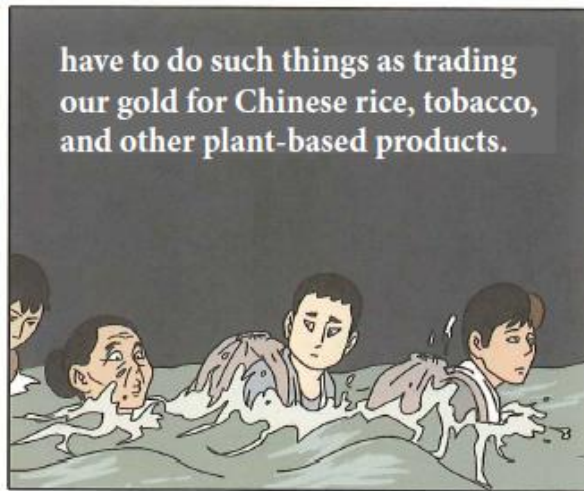
Even right now, a huge amount of North Korea's natural resources...

are being sold at a low price to China. So the North Korean people...

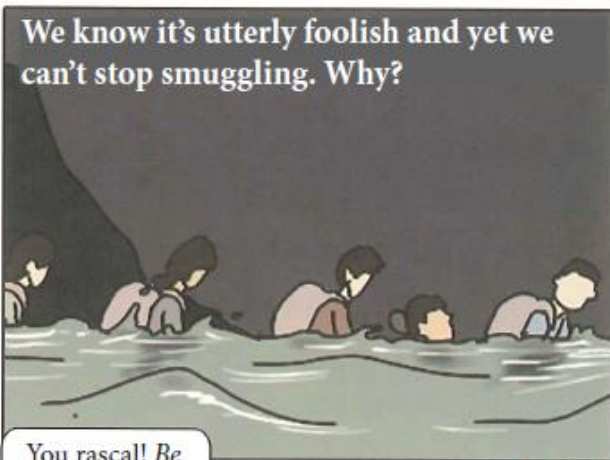




When you return you *cannot* tell anyone that I abetted you in smuggling across the border! I'm sure you all know that without me, your *livelihood* is gone too! And~~~go~~~!



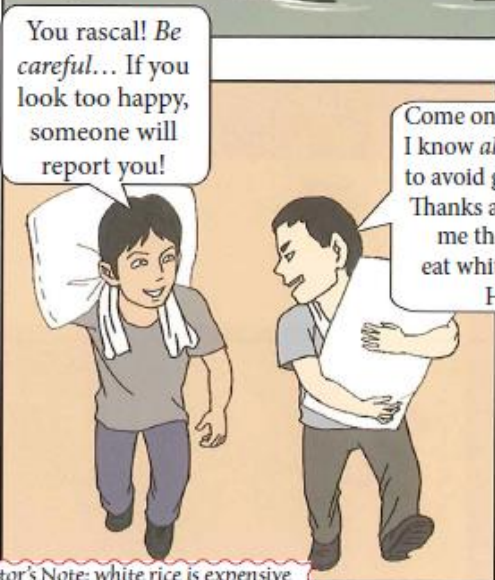
have to do such things as trading our gold for Chinese rice, tobacco, and other plant-based products.



We know it's utterly foolish and yet we can't stop smuggling. Why?



Hao hao



You rascal! *Be careful...* If you look too happy, someone will report you!

Come on~ don't worry! I know *all* the strategies to avoid getting caught. Thanks a lot for giving me the chance to eat white rice, huh?! Heehee

Because it's a matter of survival...If we can't smuggle we'll starve...

White rice and corn rice (the staple food of North Korea; corn that has been ground to look like grains of rice), please!

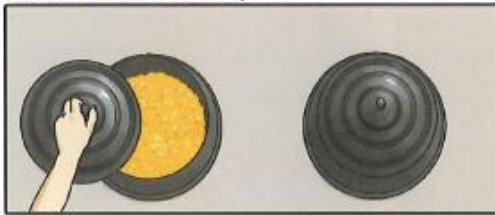


Translator's Note: white rice is expensive and thus a luxury in North Korea.

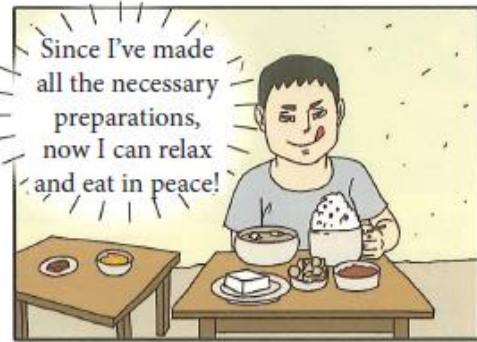
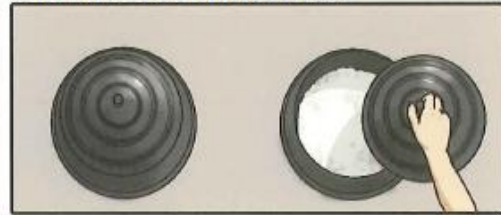


so I've got to have two kinds of rice...

Corn rice as a decoy...



and white rice to eat! heheh

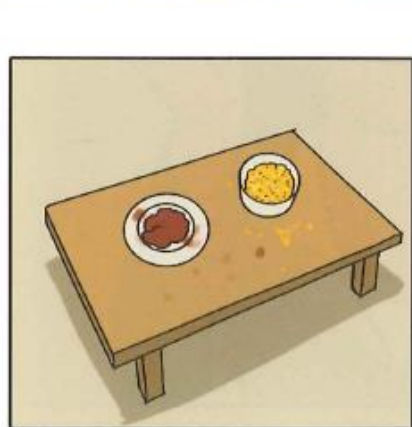


bang

bang

bang







Oh my~ Isn't this *white rice*? Is there white rice mixed in with your corn rice?

You didn't receive any *rations* of white rice... so where could it have come from? Don't you think it *interesting*, Comrade State Security Officer~?

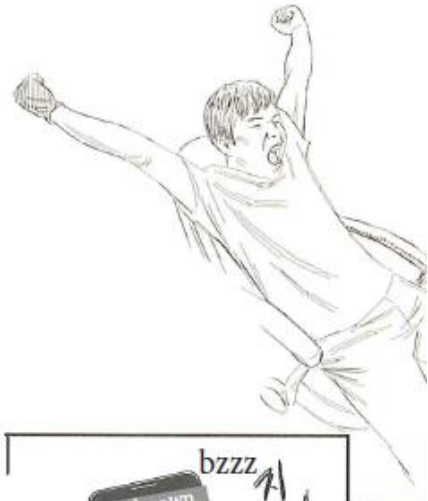


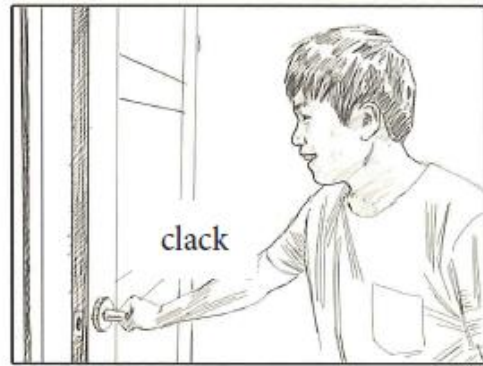
Continued in the next Volume

작가의 말
Words from the Author

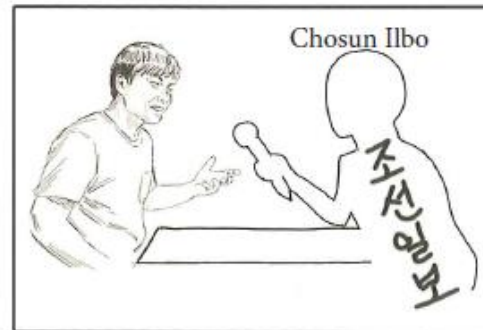
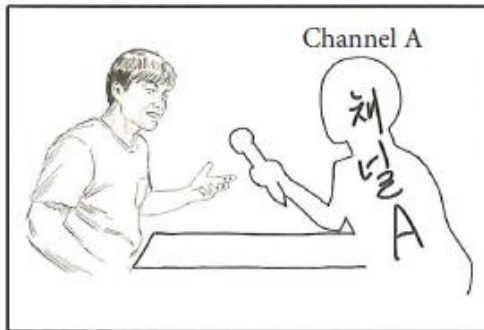
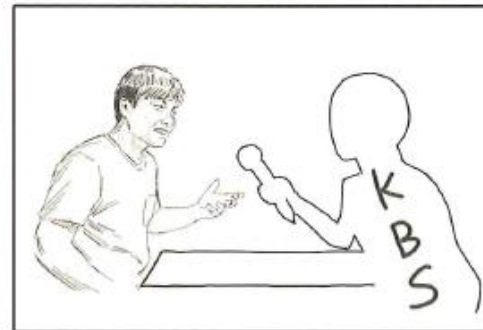


Ah, this is so *exhausting*...
I want to rest a bit...

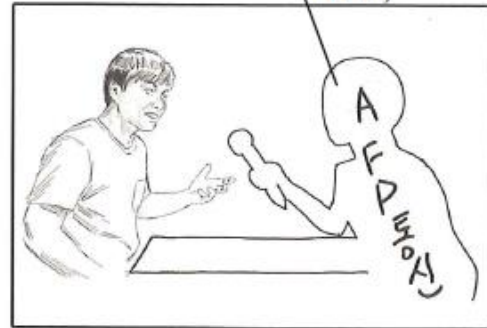




Shortly after...



AFP News Services
(Agence France
Press)



And...

North-South Comments Summit

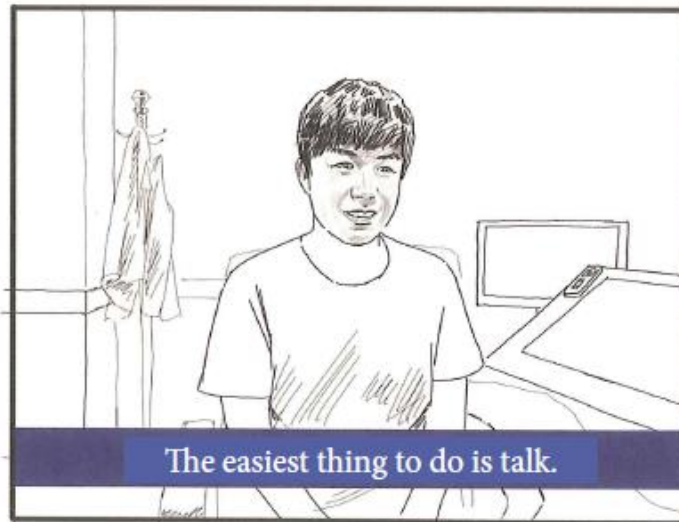
Question from the South

토토 (eun_****) 2016-08-03 08:21 | 신고
It's so hard waiting for new chapters each week! I know you must be super busy. It seems like you must not have much time to rest, but I'm curious what you do when you have spare time~~^^

4 0

Answer from the North

Thanks to all the readers of my webtoon, I am being interviewed by many media outlets. Thanks to that, I am resting(?) well in my free time.



여기는 대한민국 댓글 모음



본 웹툰에 뜨거운 관심을 가져주시고 성원의 글을 올려주신 독자 여러분께 진심으로 감사의 마음을 드립니다. 지금까지 약 1만여 건에 달하는 댓글을 보내 주셨습니다. 다양하고 진심어린 응원과 바램, 격려의 글을 읽으면서 커다란 사명감, 의무감과 함께 더 좋은 기획, 더 좋은 내용, 더 좋은 그림으로 독자분들께 보답해야겠다는 다짐을 합니다.

올려주신 글 중의 일부를 다른 더 많은 독자와 공유하고 싶은 마음으로 여기에 소개해 드립니다. 지면의 제한으로 모든 분들의 글을 다 신지 못함을 너그러이 양해해 주시기 바라며, 연이어 발간될 다음 편에 계속하여 실어 드릴 것을 약속드립니다.

다소 생소한 북한이야기라니 기대됐네요!! - 스페이스공(ange****)

이런 만화는 처음 봐서 신선하네요 ㅎㅎ 앞으로도 계속 봐야겠습니다
- 머리끈두두(alex****)

남북한 사람들의 이질감을 줄여 줄 통일만화~ 기대가 큼니다! - 수수보리(epoc****)

넘 재미 있어요 통일만화가 남북한주민을 친근하게 만들어줄것 같습니다 많이 응원해 주세요 - 농리밥상(rox****)

첫 시작부터 원가 흥미진진합니다. 탈북자분들이 뭘 어려워하는지 어떤점을 불편해하는지 궁금해지네요. - (none****)

너무 재미있어요. 완전 모르는 세계를 보여줘서 후에 어떤 내용을 나왔는지 기대해요!!
ㅋㅋ - 307동살아요(daju****)

한국인이 모르거나 전혀 못 느낄수 있는 한국에 대한 단상 (짧은 생각) 이나 탈북민 만
이 느낄수 있는 피부에 와 닿는 한국살이 많이 그려 주세요 . 최성국 씨 화이팅 ~ 기대되
네여 - (hang****)

이런 웹툰을 통해서 북한의 실상을 쉽고 재밌게 설명할 수 있게 되길 바랍니다.
- (boy****)

우와아 두근두근!! 잘 보겠습니다ㅎㅎ - 제리피커 (not****)

꿀잼입네다 - (dgel****)

우와 이런 만화 참이네요! - 위우(free****)

오오 정말정말 중요한 만화입니다. 많은 사람들이 보고 남북의 문화차이를 이해하는
데 도움이 되었으면 합니다. - cool2 (pjt****)

북한 사람들과 남한 사람들의 일반적인 생각 차이를 비교하는거 너무 좋습니다 이런 웹
툰 감사합니다!! - 여왕님 (s_nu****)

정주행시작 - Ethel (naha****)

오와 독특하네. 이런 만화가 앞으로 더 많이 나와서 서로 이해하는데 도움이 되면 좋겠
어요 - 레음 (sun****)

북한 동포들도 이제 많으니 서로도 많이 협력해서 새로운 일들도 많이 하시길~ 작가님
잘 적응하시고 평안하고 즐겁게 사시길 바래봅니다. - 시로 (may****)

앞으로 많이 기대 하겠습니다. 남북이 서로를 이해하는 다리의 역할을 기대 해봅니다.
^^ - 뽕은악마 (man****)

관심 만땅.. 저의 첫 관심등록 웹툰임다. 물론 댓글도 이게 참♡
- 하하네지킴이 (ggha****)

오오 북한이 궁금했는데 이거 봐야겠다 - 밤하늘별하나 (cper****)

앞으로 북에서 오실분들한테 미리 배우는 교과서 되겠어요 성국씨같은 분겐 공감음...
고조 남조선사람에겐 재미를 잃든 모두에게 웃음과 배움을 주겠네요! 빅 맨되겠습니다당
~ 파이팅!!! - (roun****)

말로 표현하는 것 보단, 그림으로 보니깐 정말 막~와 닿습니다. 정말 점 있어요.
- OM (mwlr****)

완전 대박에감인데요! 앞으로 북에서 오실분들한테 미리 배우는 교과서 되겠어요 성국
씨같은 분겐 공감음... 고조 남조선사람에겐 재미를 잃든 모두에게 웃음과 배움을 주겠

네요 빅 팬디갔습니당~ 파이팅!!! - (roun****)

소통할 수 있는 방법이 하나 늘었습니다. -엘리 (ygy****)

북한주민들을 잘 이해할 수 있는 좋은 만화같아요! 앞으로도 많은 이야기 잘 그려주세요 ** - 빅 (ppak****)

이런만화가 있어야 북한사람들에 대한 이질감 없어질듯! - (sasp****)

하하 이거 제 마음이 다 쿵쿵거리고... 문화적 차이로 인한 남북한 간의 연애감정을 진솔하게 잘 표현하셨네요 다음호가 자꾸만 기대돼네요^^ - (biss****)

정말 신기하네요. 사과의 차이가 이렇게도 큰가요? 발리 통일이 되지 않으면 북한 사람들이 중국의 조선족, 러시아의 고려인, 일본의 재일동포 등과 같이 완전히 다른 민족으로 느껴질 수도 있겠습니다. - 저지르지 (moyo****)

두리둥둥 기카디요 - 스갱쓰 (love****)

순수해서 좋네요 ㅎㅎㅎ - 디유링 (skdb****)

나보고는 부산에서 왔다고 부산사투리 써보라고 맨날 그러던데ㅋㅋㅋㅋ 그래도 별로 서운하거나 하진 않음ㅋㅋ부산 출신인게 칭찬한것도 아니고 내 개성이고 특징인데 뭐 - Jess (soat****)

이 웹툰 진짜 좋은 것 같습니다! 남한 북한이 더 어우러질 수 있는 계기가 되어 유익해요!! - 유희 (yuhu****)

남과 북에 이런 문화의 차이가 있군요^^ 많이 배웁니다^^ - (tkan****)

ㅋㅋㅋ 알수없음 ㅋㅋ 넘 웃기지만 슬프네요 ㅜㅜ ㅋㅋ 저런 오해가 생길수 있디니.. ㅋ 북한에서 온 분들을 더 잘 이해하도록 노력해야겠어요~ - Arnying (ksy9****)

뭔가 차원이 다른 감동적이기까지 한 순수함!!!ㅋㅋ 게다가 작가님이 연젠가 용철씨였었다는걸 생각해보면 그것도 감동인 것.. 로동신문 너무나 재미나서 눈물나요 앙영ㅜㅜ ㅜㅜ 남녀북남 케미도 은근히 매력있네요 앞으로 많겠습니다ㅋㅋ - kooche (just****)

재밌네요.이런경험도 이렇게 문화차이를 느끼는것 자체도 색다른 재미와 인생의 맛 아닐까요?? 물론 많은 오해들이 있겠지만 그 또한 나중엔 추억의 소중한 한페이지겠죵^^ - nosagazi (sh****)

와ㅋㅋㅋㅋ 이렇게 생각할 수도 있구나. 제 친구도 새터민인데, 첫인상부터 항상 공격적으로 대꾸하길래 오해했었는데 이 만화를 통해 오해가 풀렸어요!ㅎㅎ - 앙망얏얏 (shkg****)

와.말 뜻이 정말 다르네요. 놀랐어요..어떻 좋아ㅋㅋ - EUNice (thak****)

ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ 할아버지께서 북에서 내려오셔서 낯설지 않고 반갑다. ㅋ
- 쿠꾸우 (just****)

탈북민의 남한 정착이 얼마나 어려운것인지 만화로 쉽게 알 수 있어 공감이가고 좋습니다.
작가님 계속 좋은 만화 부탁드립니다. - 송태 (mpo****)

앗 댓글에도 탈북하신 분들이 많네요!! 이런 웹툰 정말 소중한 거 같아요! 문화차이 극복
에 좋아요! - Bella Willow (dam****)

아 이번 편은 슬프네요. 탈북자들이 정착 초기에 느낄 이 사회와 동떨어진 감정, 소외감
을 잘 느낄 수 있네요. 적응해 나가기가 얼마나 어려웠을까요. 대한민국의 모든 탈북자
분들 파이팅입니다! - 영랑갈 (yet****)

탈북민들의 한국정치의 교육자료로도 사용해도 좋을것 같습니다. 앞으로도 옹철이가 겪
는 한국생활 기대하도록 하겠습니다. - (bsyo****)

이만화 참 소중하네요 재미도 있고 남북을 이해하는데도 탈북민들이나 모든 남한주민들
에게 교육적이고 소통하고 이해하는데 좋은거 같아요 통일후에도 서로의 차이를 이해하
는데 도움이 될듯 합니다. 평평사당 완전 웃겼어요ㅋㅋㅋ - nossagad (ul****)

응원합니다:) 정말 좋은 웹툰이에요! 우리 민족의 아픔을 잘 여겨줄 다리가 될 것 같아요
ㅎㅎ - 유희 (yuh****)

짧은 내용이지만 보는내내 슬펐어요. 그래도 지금은 처음보다 많이 적응하고 좋아지고
있는거 맞죠? 응원합니다. !! - 간간이와플순이영마 (synh****)

북한의 생활상이나 문화, 사투리 등 다양한 것들을 디테일하게 알려 주시니 북한에 대한
공부가 많이 됩니다. 볼거리도 많고 스토리도 탄탄하고 대한민국 최고의 북한출신 만화
가세요^^ - 자유로운시선 (biss****)

"재밌게 그리고 의미있게 보는 1인입니다^^ 만화를 책으로 내시면 좋을것 것 같습니다.
교육 자료로도 좋겠구요. 허구가 아니고 실화이니깐요. 밥술까지 가지고 탈북했다고 하
는데.. 그만큼 삶에 절박한 것이라 생각합니다. 남한 사람들은 이 만화를 보면서 많이 알
게 될 겁니다. 가재도구를 국정원에 까지 들고 오는 사람은 없겠지요. 가재도구까지 쟁
쟁 거머 들고 탈북한 사실에 대해서는 다른 화에서 다루어 주시고 언제 버렸는지 알려
주세요 ㅋㅋ(웃을 일이 아닌데..) 모든 탈북 자유인과 남한 사람과 하나가 되어 훌륭한 나
라를 만들기 원합니다~ 탈북 자유인 모두 잘 적응하고 당당하시길 바랍니다. 탈북 자유
민 청소년들은 통일세대의 지도자가 될 것이니 가족지 말고 화이당~!! 응원합니다." -
익스트리트 (man****)

보위부 아제도 국정원에 왔군 거래~ㅋㅋㅋ - 리브타이완 (news****)

보위부아저씨도 탈북한건가여?? - 카망당 (nerl****)

할 국정원에 가야하는것도 몰랐고 무서워하는지도 몰랐음. 세삼 내가 행복하고 자유롭고 안전한곳에서 살고있구나 실감이 난다. - 귀 (ede****)

오~ 은혜로운 형제님. 정말 감동입니다. - 영랑갈 (yett****)

그 무시무시한 북한 보위원이 귀여워보이는 만화라니. 새롭네요 - 다슬기 (dsnu****)

형제를 구하려고 자신을 희생하는 분이 계시군요. 감동입니다. - odysseus (odys****)

저렇게 목숨 걸고 탈북자를 도와주는 사람들이 있구나 - 고구마 (gore****)

만약 사실이라면 믿기 힘들 정도의 스토리네요. 탈북을 도와주시는 분들 존경스럽습니다. 그리고 처음 들어보는 북한 단어가 많네요. 오히려 신기하고 재미있습니다. - 강박성 (ahic****)

탈북민들께서도 사랑받기 위해 태어난 사람이죠. 한국에서 그 사랑을 많이 느끼는 행복이 가득하길! - 정해지 (mycr****)

100명 중 한 명만이 성공한다는 게... 정말... 아파 죽겠다. 실패하면 그 생사육이나 다름없는 땅굴에 보내질 테지. - Fog (ehdd****)

저근육질에 총탄통고 구해주는사람들 누군지 압니다. 우리나라 국정원이나 그런소속 아니고 독실한 북한지교회 선교회 목사님 전도사 분들입니다. 실제로 캐나다 미국 교포출신으로 대한민국 국민이 아니기때문에 북한에 들어갈수있어서 감시망을피해 북한탈북자를 구해줍니다. 비용은 전부 자비와 한국기독교에서 북한선교지원기금으로 들어가는게 다그런데쓰입니다. 실제로도 저런일하는 젊은 선교사들은 탈북에 위험한 일을 겪어야하기때문에 체력충고 몸충고 합니다. 저도 몇분일어요. 왜 목숨걸고 저런일을 하나구요? 하나님께서 주신 사명이기때문에 그렇죠. 저걸바로 신념이라고 합니다. 북한지교회 선교회 사이트찾아서 들어가보세요 그리고 조금이라도 후원해주세요. - 존스 (jynl****)

아- 대단합니다. 성국씨는 통일주춧돌을 만화로 놓고 있네요. - 알리 (yigy****)

사선을 넘어오셔서 고생 하셨습니다에서 저도 모르게 눈물이 났네 - 이승호 (vipn****)

쇼미더충성심 ㅋㅋㅋㅋ - 호해비 (yde5****)

하루빨리 많은사람들이 이만화 봤으면. - 김진혁 (wisg****)

대한민국에 정착하는 탈북자분들 모두 화이팅! - Hohenzollern (wvcl****)

와 남과 북인데 이렇게 문화가 다르네요 정주형 했는데 너무 재미있습니다. 하루빨리

통일 되어서 남과 북 다 잘 살았으면 좋겠네요 ㅎㅎ - (p3****)

남한사람들 ㄱ고생해서 세금내고 그런게 저기에도 들어가는구나 - (wh45****)

진짜 영적이네요 많은 사람들이 더 보길! - Belle Willow (darn****)

감동적이고 따뜻한 이야기네요. ㅌㅌ - 해밀 (ypur****)

국정원에 가면 아픈 사람도 다 나아서 나온다고 하는데..병원 치료를 잘 해주는 것도 있지만 영양가 많은 식사 때문에 다 건강해진다고 하더라고요. 맛나게 드세요-ㅎㅎ
- 한글벌명 (duce****)

하루빨리 많은사람들이 이만화 보으면. - 김진혁 (vkg****)

대한민국에 정착하는 탈북자분들 모두 화이팅! - Hohenzollern (wjd****)

재밌네요^^ 북한과 남한의 문화차이가 크다 보니 밥을 쌓는 징인에서 안타까운 마음이 들기도 하네요.. ㅌㅌㅌ - 레몬 (bevo****)

방금 정주행했는데 북한말을 잘 이해하지 못하는 어려움이 조금씩 있긴 하지만, 정말 좋은 웹툰인 것 같습니다. 탈북자들의 남한 정착기를 통해, 북한 내부의 문제점도 산발하게 다뤄지겠군요. 요즘 젊은 친구들 중 북한 정부가 얼마나 위험하고 악랄한지를 모르는 친구들이 너무 많아 걱정인데, 이 웹툰이 좋은 역할을 해줄 수 있으리라 기대합니다. 작가님, 화이팅!!! - skarob (mayb****)

북한말씨 계속 따라 읽는 거 저 분이 아니지요?ㅋㅋㅋㅋ신기하고 재밌어요
- 이슬비 (ain****)

이걸 보면서 다시한번 통일에 대해 생각하게 됩니다. 고등학생인데도 우리나라가 너무 걱정돼요. 문화나 경제가 너무 많이 달라서, 지금처럼 북한주민들이 한국에 동화되도록 하는 정책을 쓰는 것과 달리 통일한국은 그것의 조화를 만들어야 할텐데, 말안 걸지 의미는 너무나도 다르네요ㅌㅌㅌ 통일을 하기 전에 하루빨리 문화, 경제적 교류가 많아졌으면 좋겠어요. 북한에서 오신 분들도 고유어를 자랑스럽게 여기고 북 사투리도 당당하게 쓸 수 있게 되면 좋겠고요. 지금 너무 적은 교류와 남한 국민들의 통일에 대한 인식들을 생각해 보면 나중에 급하게 통일돼서 겪을 수많은 통일한국의 문제점을 생각하니 너무 걱정되네요. 지금보다 더 큰 사회적 갈등이 생기고 차별이 생길 것 같아서요ㅌㅌㅌ 왜 자주 눈물이 나는지 모르겠네요ㅌㅌㅌ - 기개 (h2ma****)

오늘 정주행 완료하고 친구들한테도 추천했어요! 내용이 너무 유익하고 좋습니다ㅎㅎ 급식받던 여성분이 왜 우는지는 이해가 안 가서 새터민 친구에게 물어보니, 북한에서는 인사 자체를 잘 안 하고 밥 줄 때 인사하는 건 거제나 하는 것이라고 생각한다고 하더군요ㅌㅌ 작가님 만화 통해서 제 오해도 풀 수 있고, 덤으로 재미까지 가져가니 행복합니다^^ 앞으로는 계속 언제 부탁드립니다- - 망명음향 (dkg****)

신선하고 재밌다!!! 모르는 세계를 알아가는 흥미도 있고 (부끄
러워) 슬픈역사를 만화로써 쉽고 가까이서 느낄 수 있다는 점
(한 주제를 더 딱딱하게 풀면 재미가 없을텐데 특유의 유쾌함으
로) 사네요. 그런데 태그에 왜 기인84, 이말년이 뜨는지??? ㅋㅋ

- Peon @aga****)

요, 좋은 만화 그려주셔서 정말 감사합니다. 작가님 만화 보고
이해하고 싶습니다. 아직 서투르지만 북한 동포들 만날 준비하고
다리고 있습니다. - 열린하늘 (@ny****)

드셨을까 생각하니 마음이 아프기도 하지만 그 안에 깨알같
면서 뵈어요^^ 왓동네 성명 아나운서분 너무 실감나요 ㅋㅋㅋ
왜 왜 거부감이 있으실까요..? 여기서는 인사성이 없으면 무례

있거든요. 체제가 다르니 생각도 차이가 나나 싶기도 하네요.
기름 주셔서 감사해요^^ - 님이 (@mi****)

무 재밌네요 ㅎㅎㅎ 요즘 헌법 공부하면서 더욱 북한이탈주민
의 사실을 깨닫고 있는데 한편으로는 아직도 그곳에서 고통을
겪는 ㅈㅈㅈ 계속 만화 응원할게요 - 히히 (@hi****)

3내어 좋은 웹툰 감사합니다^^* - 쉼티 (@it****)

이분에 북한에 대해 더 이해할 수 있게 됐습니다. 재미도 있는데
- ty0310 (@tyca****)

2면 좋겠네요 - 최영 (@hy2****)

기기에 이전 감동까지 전해주시는군요. 당신의 밤, 노력, 열정
이고, 더욱 흥미진진하면서도, 감동과 울림이 있는 작품 기대하
고 응원하는 ㅈㅈㅇ - 연 (@yo****)

배우빨리 잘 적응하도록 도와야 할것 같습니다 무분별한 다문
화인 정책에 대한 이해와 협조가 절실해보입니다 그리고 작가님
! 순수하누새터민이야기로 꾸러가시길 바랍니다 - 예슈아소앙

교회 (@cl****)

이 정말 문화의 차이가 크구나를 느끼게 되네요. 마지막 작가의
는 항상 작가님을 지지합니다^^ - 자유로운시선 (@bi****)

알려주셔서 고맙습니다. 이거야말로 통일대박 향한 길이 아닐
- 답씨드 (@pa****)

1 소설을 봤지만 웹툰은 처음이네요. 솔직하게 다양한 경험

꼭 느낌을 그려주셔서 잘 보고 있습니다. 앞으로도 좋은 작품!

- 국야남 (shoc****)

작가님..너무 재미있습니. 웹툰으로 교육자료 만들어도 될것같

- 프머 (sah****)

아 더보고 싶다. 만화책이라면 당장에 사 볼텐데.. - 배영준 (qodu****)

어서 통일이 되어서 북한주민이 배부르고 따뜻하게 살수있게 되

-심동이따루에 (haq****)

진짜 상황을 너무 재밌게 묘사해주셔서 잘 보고있습니다! ㅎㅎ

어떻게 하면 북한에서 오신 분들에게 잘 전달될 수 있을까요... - (homo****)

남북한이 이렇게 기본사고구조가 다르다는게 충격이네요. 남조

정말 축하드립니다. 남북한의 문화의 차이에 대해서 그리고 탈북

서 정말정말 중요한 웹툰을 그려주시고 감사합니다. 앞으로 계속

- coc2 (gje****)

인사, 배려, 이런 맨날 쓰는 말들이 엄청나게 다른 의미로 받아

- oo (l_mk****)

정말 재밌게 잘 보고 있어요! 대학생때 새터민 과외 봉사활동을

해줄 기회가 있었는데, 그 친구들 생각이 나네요! 만화 보고있

고 싶네어 ~ - 구은영기 (baq****)

아렸을때 읽었던 북한책이 생각 나네요. 재밌게 보고 있습니다. - 배민아별아라 (mami****)

피타게 시험공부해야하는 사람인데..... [로동심문] 너무 재미

고 있습니다. 작가님..... 책임지시러요.....^^ - (jema****)

와.. 그럼 잘그리시네요. 그림이 계속 늘어가네 북한사람은

이 있었는데 생각해보니 일본 애니 외주 많이 받는곳이 북한

라고 보니 문화 선동 때문에 북한이 예술은 기가 막히게 잘

요. 통일되면 잘 그리는 웹툰 작가들 엄청 쏟아질것 같은데. ㅎㅎ

- 썬스 (6ox****)

이제서야 보게된 네티즌입니다 처음엔 호기심에 봤는데 재미

가 생각보다 크네요 뭔가 슬프네요. - 예쁜이가영마 (kda****)

대단하세요. 만화 너무 재밌고, 이 만화를 통해 새터민분들에

게 되는 것 같아요. - 노습기 (shim****)

올해 최고의 수작이지 않을까 싶네요 소재도 신선하고 순수한

- 안상 (berc****)

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가장 최근의 논문과 연구자료 수록!

그의 동양평화는 세계평화로 외연이 확대된다. 곧 안중근의 「동양평화론」은 한국의 독립을 전제로 하는 동북아의 평화, 그리고 아시아의 평화, 나아가 세계의 평화를 추구한 것이다. - 유명철 전 국사편찬위원장

필자는 무수의 피해자를 낳게 한 식민지 지배를 마음속에 되새기며 안중근에 대한 일본의 불법한 재판, 되돌릴 수 없는 불법한 행위를 깊이 반성하며 100여 년 전의 안중근의 큰 외침에 응답하고 싶다.

- 도츠키 에쓰로(戸塚悦朗) 前 일본 류고쿠대학 법학부 법과대학원 교수

그의 위국헌신(爲國獻身) 정신과 투쟁은 일제의 패망과 조국의 광복, 대한민국수립 및 국군창설의 원동력이 되었고, 그의 「동양평화론」은 오늘날 동아시아 평화체제 구축을 위한 유효한 정책적 대안으로 떠오르고 있으니, 그를 어찌 "위대한 대한민국인", "아시아의 영웅"이라고 부르지 않을 수 있겠는가!

- 김승기 국방부 군사편찬연구소 국방사부 부장, 전 국방대학교 함침대학 교수

안중근의 애국魂을 찾아 미국 중국 일본을 가다!
현지 직격 인터뷰 내용 수록

- 미국 거주 안중근 의사 직계 증손자 안도용
- 중국 허얼빈시 안중근의사기념관 간립 비화
- 미국 안중근의사기념사업회 윤자성 회장
- 일본 규슈 동양평화기념비와 시가현 사람들

Discussion

History and Sociopolitical/Cultural Context

To understand North Korea, we need to understand not only the current situation, but the history of the nation and the sources of its aggression. Korea is “one of the very few places in the world where territorial boundaries, ethnicity, and language have been consistent for well over a millennium.”⁷ As the Sino-centric world Korea inhabited collapsed and a formerly closed Korea was pried open “in the name of progress”⁸ at the end of the nineteenth century, a new question of identity and where Korea stood in the global community emerged. Koreans found their answer in Western notions of the nation-state, and a “powerful ethnic nationalism” that was “unencumbered by racial or linguistic minorities, regional separatism, or strong sectarian identities”⁹ took shape. This modern Korean national identity and nationalism, while new, found its building blocks in an already strong sense of identity fueled by centuries of shared history and culture on the peninsula. This sense of identity was violated once in 1905 with Japanese annexation, and again in 1910 with full colonization.

It is important to recognize just how far-reaching the consequences of Japanese imperialism were for Korea’s modern history and the national identities of North and South Korea. The relationship between Japan and Korea is “more akin to that between Germany and France or England and Ireland than to that between Belgium and Zaire or

⁷ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (Modern Library, 2010), 17.

⁸ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 95.

⁹ Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 301.

Portugal and Mozambique.”¹⁰ The two nations are neighbors (as opposed to the colonizer being a far-off land), have a long shared history of cultural, political, and linguistic influence from China, and under this centuries-long Sino-centric world order Japan was “never more than Korea’s equal.”¹¹ This made Japan’s intrusive and oppressive colonization all the more unbearable, and neither of the Koreas have forgiven or forgotten. The very ideological divide observed in North vs. South Korea had its beginnings during this thirty-year period of colonial rule. Nationalism, which had taken root in the 1890s, flourished in the 1920s and split into factions of those who advocated for working within the confines of the colonial framework to achieve gradual reform, bringing Korea into the modern era and eventual liberation, and those who sought to overthrow the regime and those who benefited from it.¹² The latter were heavily inspired by socialism and, later, Communism. Kim Il Sung himself took part in a guerrilla insurgency in Manchuria in the 1930s, fighting for liberation from Japan. This endowed him with the anticolonial credentials that later served to his advantage in legitimizing the DPRK as the one “true” Korea in the eyes of his followers. To this day, in North Korea “the resistance to Japanese imperialism is still so prominent that one would think the war [WWII] just ended.”¹³

By 1945, when Korea gained independence, there was already a strong ideological divide between left and right. Independence, however, was tumultuous, short-lived, and came with military occupation. The Peninsula became the stage for

¹⁰ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 140.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 95.

¹² Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 58, 59, 62.

¹³ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 407.

early clashes of Cold War ideology, Soviet Communism and American Democracy commandeering the fight between indigenous factions. Five days before the order for Japanese surrender, two American colonels were given roughly thirty minutes to divide Korea. The result was an arbitrary line across the middle of the country—the 38th parallel; the Soviet Union would occupy the North, and the United States the South. This decision paved the way for the separate establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1948, and ultimately set the stage for the Korean War. American officials did not consult or take into consideration the wishes of the Korean people or those vying for leadership of the newly independent nation (among whom stood Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee). Bruce Cumings, a leading American scholar on North Korea, writes that “in the American Civil War the Americans would never have tolerated for a single moment the setting up of an imaginary line between the forces of North and South, and there can be no doubt as to what would have been their reaction if the British had intervened in force on behalf of the South.”¹⁴ Over the course of the war, Kim Il Sung crosses the 38th parallel in a move that is vaulted as “Koreans invad[ing] Korea”; later, after containing North Korean forces Americans cross the 38th parallel in an attempt to take the North. The U.S. ambassador to the UN justifies this by calling the parallel “an imaginary line”. Cumings puts forth the question, “Why is it aggression when Koreans cross the 38th parallel, but imaginary when Americans do the same thing?”¹⁵

¹⁴ Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 34

The Korean War officially took place over a three year period from 1950 to 1953, but in actuality it began much earlier and never ended. Over those three years, South Korea sustained over 1 million casualties, Americans roughly 40,000, and North Korea 2 million casualties, of which 1 million were civilians.¹⁶ Further, North Korea's estimated destruction was "proportionately greater than that of Japan in the Second World War."¹⁷ The extraordinary destruction and loss of life North Korea underwent is in large part due to a US campaign of carpet-bombing that razed cities, towns, and sources of agriculture. To this day this event, which North Korea claims is America's greatest war crime,¹⁸ remains a deep wound and for North Korea a source of animosity towards the United States. Only through a "combination of tremendous work and sacrifice on the part of the North Korean people, generous economic and technical assistance from the 'fraternal' socialist countries, and the advantage of a pre-war industrial infrastructure more developed than that of South Korea"¹⁹ was North Korea able to rise from the rubble. About the war, Cumings writes that "the true tragedy was not the war itself, for a civil conflict purely among Koreans might have resolved the extraordinary tensions generated by colonialism, national division, and foreign intervention. The tragedy was that the war solved nothing: only the status quo ante was restored, only a cease-fire held the peace."²⁰ The North Korean regime, then, may be built upon pseudo-Communist Socialist ideology and a militaristic nationalism, but it is

¹⁶ Ibid, 45-46

¹⁷ Charles K. Armstrong, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950–1960," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 6, no. 51 (2010), 1.

¹⁸ Armstrong, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea," 1.

¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

²⁰ Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, 46.

also founded on decades of brutal history and grievances against its perceived outside aggressors: Japan and the United States²¹.

Both Koreas have desired reunification since their instatement; this can be seen in all forms of media and in the very founding tenants of North and South Korea. Reunification as a primary political goal is clearly written in the South Korean constitution,²² and North Korea holds the same sentiment. The relationships between national identity, state ideology, national history, and attitudes, however, form a complex knot that prevents each side from fully attempting to understand and work with the other. Each government defines itself as “the only legitimate sovereign entity on the peninsula,” with the South even defining the DPRK as an “anti-ROK organized entity,”²³ not a state in its own right. Politically, reunification is ultimately a zero-sum game—the political elite on both sides expect that giving up power would mean losing everything else along with it. Furthermore, the results of a study on national identity and attitudes toward out-groups demonstrate that “despite alleged common belief in ‘one nation, two countries’ among South Koreans and undeniable ethno-cultural similarities between North and South Koreans, political division for the past seven decades and its concomitant ‘small differences’ have led South Koreans to regard North Korea and its citizens as a completely different out-group, which is not much distinguishable from non-coethnic immigrants.”²⁴ Attitudes towards North Korean

²¹ Ibid, 52

²² Shang E. Ha and Seung-Jin Jang, “National Identity in a Divided Nation: South Koreans’ Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors and the Reunification of Two Koreas,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 55 (2016), 111.

²³ Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 505.

²⁴ Ha and Jang, “National Identity in a Divided Nation”, 116.

defectors are also less than favorable. Choi's *Labor Interrogation* attempts to combat this by plainly displaying the humanity of North Korean defectors in a way that is accessible to the South Korean public.

For the last seventy years, the two Koreas have grown apart. North Korea evolved in such a way that it barely resembles a real Communist state, its structures of government and society becoming more militaristic under Kim Jong Il and its people suffering through famine and economic decline after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and further isolation of the DPRK in the 1990s. On the other hand, South Korea fought tooth and nail for democracy through two coups, a bloody student uprising, and decades of military dictatorship, all the while developing further and faster than anyone in the Western world anticipated. This stark contrast in modern historical developments has led to a widening cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic divide that is not un-noticed by the South Korean population. What, then, of those North Koreans who make their way to South Korea to begin new lives, and are forced to navigate a society that views them simultaneously as the same and the 'Other'? North Korean defectors are saddled with a crisis of identity in the south, and thus a major theme of defector assimilation is the search for self-identity. The beginnings of this search can be seen throughout *Labor Interrogation*, as the characters come into contact with new and utterly foreign ideas, norms, and objects, their preconceptions and past notions of South Korean society and the world are turned on their heads, and they have at turns wonderful and less than savory interactions with South Koreans. I will therefore focus my analysis of the webtoon under the lens of the search for self-identity and defectors' navigation of South Korean society.

North Korean Defectors' Search for Identity in South Korea: Themes of North Korean Defector Identity in *Labor Interrogation*

The majority of *Labor Interrogation*'s first fourteen chapters takes place at Kukjeongwon, the National Intelligence Service (South Korea's version of the CIA) facility. Every North Korean defector who steps foot in South Korea is required to spend three months at Kukjeongwon, where they are investigated and begin to learn how to survive and assimilate into South Korean society. Here, defectors begin picking up the pieces of their identities and figuring out how they fit into this new society, and this sets up the rest of their lives in South Korea. The NIS program is therefore a preview of what is to come in the defector experience, and *Labor Interrogation*'s portrayal of defectors going through the program is a window into the emotions and thoughts of defectors right at the end of their long defection journey and the beginning of their journey to build an identity in this new country.

Each episode at Kukjeongwon contains snippets of the struggles that defectors go through to create and maintain a new identity: figuring out language, culture, an entirely new system of economy (namely, capitalism), social hierarchies, etc. This process shares much with any immigrant outgroup, disenfranchised and privileged migrant groups alike. *Labor Interrogation* shows its South Korean readership what the defector experience is like—how difficult and completely disorienting it can be.

Labor Interrogation explores many complex and rich topics, including but not limited to gender in North-South Korean relations, everyday North Korean life, the vast gap between Pyongyang and the rest of North Korea, the influence and impact of South Korean media on North Koreans, and the theory versus practice of ideology. In

my analysis, I look at how *Labor Interrogation* explores themes of identity and argue that language, cultural norms, and societal attitudes towards defectors are obstacles for defector identity-building in South Korea.

Language and Identity

Language and identity are integrally and inescapably linked. The language you speak informs your cognition and how you view the world, and how others see *you* is informed fundamentally by how you speak. South Koreans are often struck by just how different North Korean dialects are to their own. This difference is often unknown by outsiders and therefore its impact can go unappreciated in the larger picture of South and North Korean relations, defector experiences, and imaginations of peninsular reunion. But 70 years of mutual isolation has resulted in enough differences in South versus North Korean dialects that language now poses a stumbling block for defector adaptation to South Korea. The North Korean dialect marks defectors as having a certain identity in the eyes of South Koreans, who then follow with certain assumptions and attitudes about that perceived identity. In trying to adapt, therefore, choosing whether to embrace or attempt to bury that marker of “other”-ness is a key aspect of identity building. Everyone uses language to build their identities, and North Korean defectors are no different.

South Koreans have certain stereotypes about what North Korean language sounds like. South Korean films and TV dramas with North Korean characters typically reflect these stereotypes and are rife with South Korean actors imitating how South Koreans think North Koreans talk.

The side-story “North Korea FYI” sprinkled in between chapters of *Labor Interrogation* features a cheeky play on this dynamic. The mini-series follows Yu Si-Jin, a South Korean boy shipwrecked in North Korea, as he meets a North Korean woman and learns about everyday life in the North. In its first chapter, titled “*Hallyu* ‘Korean Wave’ in North Korea,” the North Korean woman (named Myeong-Suk) observes Si-Jin’s looks and mannerisms and concludes he is following South Korean trends picked up from watching pirated dramas. She follows suit, mimicking what she thinks South Korean speech sounds like, in order to show she can be just as trendy as he can. But, in fact, Si-Jin is actually trying to pretend to be North Korean by mimicking what *he* thinks North Korean speech sounds like—to comedic results. Significantly, in introducing himself he changes his last name from YU to RYU. South Korean standardized language follows what is referred to as the “beginning sound rule” (*dueumbeobchik*) or “initial law” wherein words cannot begin with certain consonants (such as R and L sounds). North Korean standardized language does not follow this law, so many words in North versus South Korean language have the same meaning but differ in the presence or lack of certain starting consonants (Take the word “labor,” for instance. In South Korea, it is *nodong* with an N, but in North Korea it is *rodong* with an R—like the title of the North Korean *Labor Newspaper* and our very own *Labor Interrogation*). The significance of this rule lies in its noticeability—it clearly marks North Korean versus South Korean language. It is so conspicuous, in fact, that if a South Korean person learns someone’s name is Ryu (as opposed to Yu), they can immediately peg that person as North Korean and adjust their behavior and judgements accordingly. This small yet significant detail in “North Korea FYI” therefore

demonstrates how the two Koreas' languages are diverging, the consciousness of both peoples of this divergence, the stereotypes they hold about each other's speech (and the associated "hip" factor in North Korea), and how instantly judgements of identity are made based off language.



How, then, do South Koreans view this language difference when it comes to North Korean defectors? In Chapter 7 of *Labor Interrogation*, "Freedom of Expression," the newly arrived group of defectors meet the new hire at Kukjeongwon. This new hire has not yet gained much experience working with defectors as is often the vehicle for readers' questions—"why are defectors *like this*?" and "why did they do *that*?" He represents the culture shock of the average South Korean interacting with defectors in a comical, relatable way.

During this first meeting, the new hire is up against a vocabulary mismatch between North and South Korean language. He tries to get the defectors' attention and is taken aback by a room of raised fists—he worries that they are issuing a strike against him. In fact, the defectors thought he was telling them to raise their fists due to a phonological differentiation between the words for "attention" and "fist" present in the

South Korean but not the North Korean dialect. When he realizes the miscommunication, he laughs but is met with silence. He thinks, “Ah, they really don’t give much reaction, huh? How oppressed must their lives have been...ah, I’m tearing up” (81).²⁵ His first reaction to this mutual miscommunication is to pity the defectors. Their lack of amusement at the situation furthers this feeling of pity, and he wonders just how oppressed they must have been not to laugh. He associates their emotions with their oppression.

Emotions can be described as “cultural artifacts and moral acts that negotiate aspects of social reality” and are thus “culturally constituted expressions of meaning.”²⁶ They can reveal differences in culture and norms of morality between peoples. In interviews with North Korean high school students in South Korea, Yoon Young Kim found that “while I viewed North Koreans as cold because they did not smile, they saw me as insecure, a possible swindler or imposter who hid an intention to cheat them behind my smile.”²⁷ Something as simple as the presence or lack of a smile can elicit judgements of character. The new hire at Kukjeongwon, too, wonders at the absence of laughter and amusement and assumes it a result of their oppression rather than cultural differences.

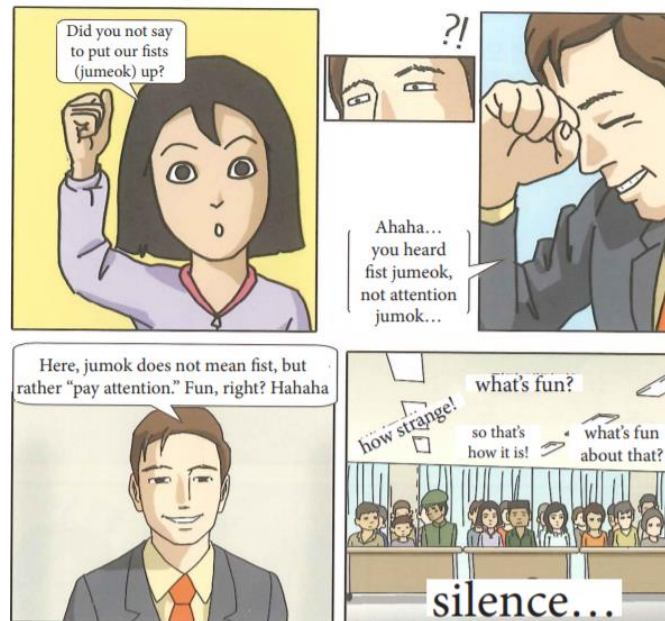
The new hire’s sentiments—being glad for your own circumstances by thinking about how bad others have it and finding inspiration in their “overcoming” those circumstances—are well within the power dynamic of interactions between

²⁵ From here on I will be referencing the translation pages in parentheses in the body of the text.

²⁶ Yoon Young Kim, “Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea,” *Int. Migration and Integration* 17 (2016), 1018.

²⁷ Yoon Young Kim, “Negotiating Cultures and Identities”, 1018.

disenfranchised peoples and the powerful majority. This particular interaction at Kukjeongwon is a comedic, dramatized version of how much of South Korean society sees these mutual misunderstandings—not as a mutual mismatch, but as one side not understanding the obvious and this being a result of their “oppression.” It reflects a popular narrative that North Korean defectors are “helpless victims of the ruthless North Korean regime who are in desperate need of assistance from the South Korean government.”²⁸



North Korean defectors often try to hide their identity as North Korean in the South, adopting the standard Seoul dialect in order to attempt to blend in or “pass” as South Korean. Young-a Park notes that in interviews with defectors at South Korean resettlement centers, “more than half of North Korean parents I interviewed do not share their experience with their children out of fear of discrimination. The parents

²⁸ Young-a Park, “North Korean Migrants in South Korea: 'Multicultural' or 'Global' Citizens?,” *Korean Studies* 44 (2020), 142.

often experience discrimination from colleagues and clients at their workplaces solely based on the fact that they are from North Korea. By withholding the information on their North Korean background from their children, the parents hope that their children will be shielded from the discrimination they confront daily.”²⁹ This concern of discrimination based on identity is common across marginalized groups, and in situations where the marginalized people are the same ethnicity as the dominant group as with defectors in South Korea, blending in can be more feasible. However, it is not always as easy as it could appear at surface level.

When North Koreans arrive in South Korea, there are immediately observable stumbling blocks where language is concerned. One such hurdle is the aforementioned phonetic differences in certain words. Another is foreign loan words. One of the main ways in which South and North Korean dialects have diverged is the huge influx of English words into the South Korean language—words for concepts as simple as “ice cream” and as fundamental as “computer” or “apartment”. Defectors, therefore, like migrant workers of other ethnicities and farmers’ brides, take Korean language classes in order to survive. These sorts of language differences, among other things, can make it difficult to blend in and “sound” South Korean.

We see this in *Labor Interrogation*’s main character, Yong-Cheol, in “Let’s Get Married: My First Job.” Yong-Cheol makes a house call for a client and, in talking to her, makes efforts to mask his speech and keep his identity as North Korean secret. However the client, later known as Hye-Mi, catches on to his speech style right away and asks him if he is in fact from the North. She means no harm, but Yong-Cheol is

²⁹ Young-a Park, “North Korean Migrants in South Korea”, 138.

mortified that she found out since he tries to “pass” as South Korean. He informs the reader, “Actually, I wanted to hide the fact that I was North Korean. I hated the prejudices when people found out. It was embarrassing. It was hard on my self-esteem” (16). He replies, “Yes, but I can still do everything like anyone else...,” hinting at past negative interactions he may have had with South Koreans who rushed to judge his competence and reliability. Hye-Mi, on the other hand, is excited that she has met someone from North Korea for the first time. She thinks to herself how “cool” his dialect is and asks for his phone number to brag to her friends. While she means no harm, she clearly views him as someone very different from herself, a novelty. And while this is not actively damaging, it reinforces the perception of North Koreans as an “other.”



At the end of “Let’s Get Married” ‘s four chapters, Yong-Cheol addresses readers about communication problems while settling in South Korea. It is telling that the first arc of *Labor Interrogation* ends with such ruminations on communication and

miscommunication between defectors and the South Korean populace. “Let’s Get Married” contains many hilarities and is uproariously entertaining, but it also addresses concretely some of the cultural and linguistic barriers defectors face in daily life as members of South Korean society. The same differences in language that prompt Hye-Mi to think to herself, “I don’t understand a word he’s saying,” are also what cause Yong-Cheol such anguish and heartbreak at the end of the arc: he is confused and disoriented by the differing cultural norms and language meanings, feeling unsure of himself and like a fool in this new country.



Yong-Cheol wonders “whether it’s South Korea that has changed, or North Korea that hasn’t changed” (42). In reality, South *and* North Korean languages have changed in the last 70 years of separation—as populations of finches evolve separately in isolation, so do dialects. Choi demonstrates throughout *Labor Interrogation* that this divergence has led to language becoming an obstacle in defector identity-building in South Korea. How a person views their own language is important for how they view themselves and their self-identity. This impacts the decision to embrace or hide their language or dialect, in turn influencing how they form the identity they present to the

world and how the world sees them. In South Korea, a defector's native dialect is a source of shame and embarrassment, even their name a possible flag for South Koreans, pointing to their background and position as the "other". Language, one of the primary building blocks of identity, is also one of the main things about themselves that defectors try to hide or train out in South Korea. Even when South Koreans mean well, they often see this difference as a source of pity or interest, and the differences can cause issues that prevent relationships from developing. In the end, it is not a one-sided issue of North Koreans being unable to adapt, but rather a two-sided one in which South Koreans are just as culpable in language-related misunderstandings.

Culture and Identity

Arriving in South Korea is a very jarring experience for North Korean defectors. As they go through the NIS program and start their lives in this new country, they start to question everything they were taught or thought they knew about South Korea, their beliefs, and the ways of the world. When you begin to question yourself, naturally, your identity comes into question—who am I, how should I act, where is my place in society and the world, and how do I navigate my identity between the world I've come from and the world I'm trying to enter?

This shaking of the foundations of what defectors think they know occurs as early as the characters' first bus ride after their briefing. In the charter bus, the defectors are in awe of their surroundings—towering apartment buildings stretching into the distance and highways full of cars. It is difficult for them to believe, and some

wonder whether the buildings are fake or whether every car in South Korea has been brought out to show them as propaganda for the political regime (118).



These foundations of knowledge are shaken again at the hospital. The men are shocked when they learn they have to have their blood drawn, and again when they see how much, concluding that the stories they heard about South Koreans selling and drinking North Korean blood must be true. Choi explains that North Korean children learn that the “class enemy” (landowning, capitalist high class) in South Korea and the United States relish human blood. On the other hand, the women, after being denied Eastern-style medicine, conclude that South Korean hospitals must abide by “Newton’s Fourth Law” as North Korea does—“If one person gives a bribe to a second person, the person who received the bribe will move” (136). In reality, South Korean hospitals simply do not provide Eastern medicine, which is provided at specialized clinics, while in North Korea Western and Eastern medicine are practiced at the same institutions. They try to bribe the doctor and are shocked when he does not accept. In both cases, the defectors are operating on their base of knowledge that has served them up until now and finding out that the reality in South Korea is very different. Its norms are

different from North Korean society, and the stories the defectors were told in North Korea turned out to be false.



Thus, a pattern forms of attempting to solve a problem or understand a situation using knowledge built up over a lifetime and that knowledge turning on its head. In the following chapter, “Preemptive Strike: Intimidation,” the men elect the oldest member of the group to solicit cigarettes from a young South Korean man. At first the old man tries intimidation, talking tough to demonstrate how strong he is, detailing how his bag was stolen and what he would have done to the thief if he got his hands on him. When it appears the young man doesn’t buy his story, he tries a second tactic: appealing to his sense of compassion—“I came from North Korea, and I’m just *torn with worry* thinking of my family. Please, could I have just one cigarette?” (147). This strategy works, but the young man politely informs him that he doesn’t actually smoke and therefore cannot lend him a cigarette. The defectors are shocked, exclaiming that all real men smoke and

therefore he must be lying. At this, the head of the NIS defector program addresses the group: “If you want to live in South Korea, you’ll have to give up the methods you are used to. For example, bluffing and making things up, trying to solve issues with violence, or purposely cutting a pitiful figure and begging, not believing what someone says, and the like. These types of behaviors do not work in South Korea. If you want something, you must express yourself confidently and *honestly*.”



This leads into a major turning point for the characters’ identity-building and navigation of society in *Labor Interrogation*: what does it mean to “speak your mind”? The defectors are incredulous, defensively saying “Have only one or two people died of being honest?! That’s a perfect way to get yourself *killed!*” (151), wondering what he could mean by “confident”, feeling like it makes sense but worrying it could be a ploy, and feeling mixed emotions and confusion. Yong-Cheol looks pensively out the window and thinks, “If there’s something I want...just *say so!*!” It does not take merely flipping a switch to “speak your mind.” Just as the NIS head said, the defectors have to “throw out” their previous knowledge in order to survive in South Korea, a place with very different societal norms. Man-Bok was punished for speaking his mind at the detriment of his perceived loyalty to the Kim regime in North Korea (as seen in

Chapter 14), but the circumstances are different now that he and the other defectors are in South Korea. They are starting completely from scratch, and things that seem as basic to comprehend and embrace to someone from a wealthy, democratic, capitalist nation as freedom of expression can in fact be incredibly jarring to someone who grew up in a society where the norm is hiding your true feelings and distrusting others.

This mismatch in norms and the ensuing mutual confusion and misunderstanding can be seen in the aptly titled chapter, “Freedom of Expression.” The new recruit, *Labor Interrogation*’s vehicle for its South Korean audience, proudly welcomes the assembled defectors to South Korea, and announces that they are citizens under the constitution. The defectors are silent, holding back tears. He then asks, “Everyone, are you not happy?” Crying, they exclaim that yes, of course they are happy. He replies, “Then express it to your heart’s content! This is the *free Republic of Korea*, where we have freedom of expression!” He is confused as to why the defectors show so little reaction and are not jumping for joy, interpreting their silence to mean that they are repressing their feelings. But the defectors interpret the word “expression” as their cue to demonstrate—express—their loyalty to the South Korean regime, kicking off the elimination battle “Show Me the Loyalty,” a parody of rap contest TV sensation “Show Me the Money.” The defectors see his urgings to express themselves, and the briefing as a whole, as empty formalities. Empty or not, however, this rhetoric quickly enters the defectors’ repertoire: when rushed by other defectors at dinner, Man-Bok fires back, “What’s it to *you* if I exercise my freedom in the *free world*! Do you think you can solve things with fists here?! Are you *mad*?! Hmph!” (102). This demonstrates

the process of defectors (or immigrants in general) taking in new information and norms and applying them to their advantage as they adapt to South Korean society.

This process can be seen in the aftermath of an infamous incident in 2003 between North Korean and South Korean high schoolers at an integrated school. South Korean students beat up two North Korean students and the next day thirteen North Korean students teamed up to get revenge, leading to a violent fight. In the end, only the North Korean students were fined for the bodily damage inflicted on the South Korean students. Afterwards, they still did not understand why the South Korean students were not fined when they started the whole thing. One student later came to a striking conclusion: he explained that in North Korea the communist state provides free medical care so North Koreans consider determining who started an incident most important in placing fault; in South Korea, the need to pay money for medical care is at the root of finding fault in whoever causes physical harm. The norm of how blame is placed in the two societies is different and leads to different norms regarding tolerance of violence. “He believed that South Koreans refrain from violence not because they are moral people who live by a universal code of ethics but because they must pay for the medical treatment of anyone they injure—in addition to being fined for attacking the person.”³⁰ This understanding of the event came to impact the entire North Korean defector community in South Korea, transforming defectors’ “actions and emotional behaviors”³¹ in regard to violence and the capitalized morality of South Korea. North Korean parents began telling their children not to hit their friends because “if you do,

³⁰ Yoon Young Kim, "Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea," *Int. Migration and Integration* 17 (2016), 1022.

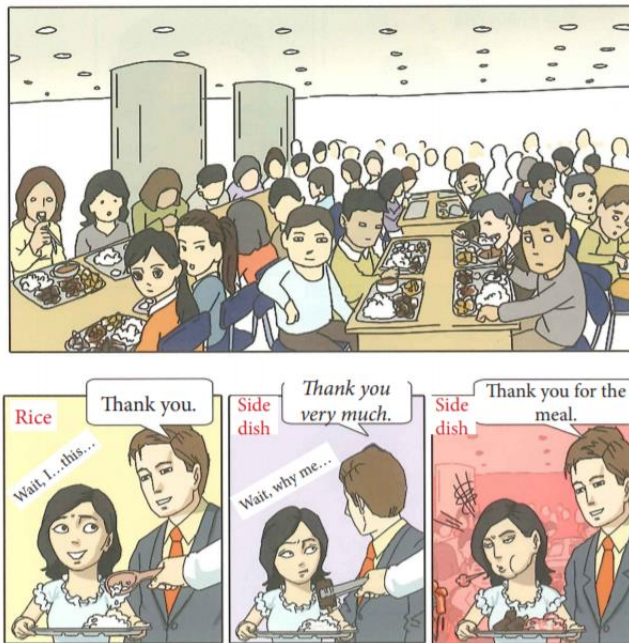
³¹ Yoon Young Kim, "Negotiating Cultures and Identities", 1023.

we have to pay heavy fines,”³² and new defectors learned this norm faster than those who defected before 2003. The defector community therefore approaches and interprets this norm in a manner very different from South Koreans, who are taught that violence is unjust for moral reasons and understand it in a way devoid from the role of money in this norm in capitalist society. As seen in *Labor Interrogation* and in this incident, in navigating society defectors take in new information and norms and interpret them based on how they view the world and society and use that to form their identities.

The confusion and disconnect associated with differing cultural norms is shown again in “The Taste of Home”. The defectors are treated to their first cafeteria meal at the facility. The new recruit at the NIS observes the defectors receiving their food and going back for seconds, giving excuses for why they must have more food but not saying thank you to the servers. He thinks to himself, “He can just *say* he wants more rice...what’s with all the explanation? And they’re all about *swearing loyalty* but can’t say a simple *thank you*? Haa...I just don’t get it” (103). He decides to teach the defectors about saying thank you and pulls aside the next person who comes up for seconds. He addresses the group, saying “In South Korea, saying things like ‘thank you’ is more important than proving any kind of *loyalty*. It’s not difficult. Just do it like so” (104). He accompanies the woman he pulled aside down the line, saying “thank you” and (somewhat patronizingly) emphasizing each demonstration of gratitude. But he stops when she starts crying. She exclaims, “Why are you making me do this in front of this many people?? Do I look like a woman with no *revolutionary principles* or *self-respect* just because I left my homeland and asked for a *little* more

³² Ibid, 1023.

rice?! Why are you *insulting* me like this?! Do you see me as just a *slave* to South Korean landowners and capitalists?! Do you think I defected from North Korea just to be treated like this?!” (105). Making her say thank you so many times was demeaning, in her eyes. The NIS employee is thoroughly taken aback. He thought he was educating the defectors on showing gratitude as befits the social norm in South Korea, but the woman he happened to pick assumed he was singling her out and making an example of her in front of everyone. His confusion is mirrored by Choi’s audience in the following “Words from the Author” section, in the “North-South Comments Summit.” A reader asks Choi why saying thank you could make you a “slave.” In his response, he explains that it is because of North Korea’s form of socialism, where “bluffing, formality and convention all become second nature.” He continues, “If someone is well-mannered, formal, reserved, dignified, and doesn’t show what they’re thinking, they are seen as reliable and trustworthy. Then there are people who are too friendly, who greet you and say things like ‘thank you’ easily and express their thoughts openly. This kind of person is seen as frivolous, undignified, untrustworthy, and a kiss-up—an all-around bad person” (125). This explanation is telling: the very way in which a person is judged from a simple “thank you” differs greatly in North vs. South Korea due to the different cultural norms and government system. This goes to show how frustrating and difficult it can be to learn how to live in a new society. Negotiating the myriad differences in cultural norms, attitudes, societally agreed upon ideas of what constitutes “common sense” and the like between North and South Korea is therefore another obstacle for defector adaptation to South Korea and impacts identity building and conceptions of the self.



This type of tension resulting from mismatched cultural conventions is a more frequent occurrence than one might think. My friend told me a personal anecdote about a gas station in Ilsan, northwest of Seoul, that is run by defectors. It is the cheapest gas station in the area so it has a steady flow of customers, but since the workers do not greet customers or act friendly (following such social norms as smiling and bowing), South Korean patrons do not know what to think—they are confused and feel uncomfortable by this flouting of social rules. This and the examples throughout *Labor Interrogation* demonstrate how prevalent these misunderstandings can be. South Koreans do not have to try to understand the nuances and cultural differences between themselves and defectors, while it is integral to their survival and assimilation that defectors do. Just as Americans abroad are dumbfounded by aversion to small talk in people from other nations, so are any other people when confronted with different societal norms. One North Korean defector had this to say about South Korean expectations about defector abilities to assimilate: "When South Korean people initially

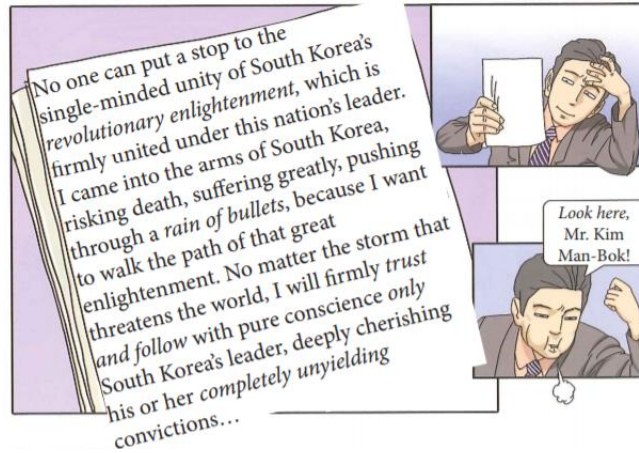
meet us, they are usually very curious about us and wonder how they should treat us. But once we become a little better acquainted, they usually ignore the fact that we were born in and lived in North Korea, and expect us to think and behave just like South Koreans"³³ Taken together, these examples reflect the expectations placed on defectors to follow South Korean social and cultural norms at the same time as being treated like the “other” because of their perceived identity, leading to a confusion of identity and self that haunts North Koreans long after arrival in the south.

The Role of Interrogation in Defector Identity Formation

North Korean defectors in South Korea are subjected to interrogation at the National Intelligence Service, a snippet of which is shown in Chapter 13, “Man-Bok’s Single Room.” The chapter comically details Man-Bok’s fears about his upcoming interrogation and subsequent surprise when he is given a nice room to himself to sleep in and arrives the next morning in an investigation room devoid of torture devices. He is told to write down everything about his life in North Korea and his defection. At first, thinking he has to prove his loyalty, he writes empty praises, using grandiose verbiage to pledge his allegiance to the “enlightened” South Korea. The interrogator implores Man-Bok not to write an empty pledge, but what really happened, and thus *Labor Interrogation* enters into a lengthy description of Man-Bok’s defection story. Choi does a great job of walking the line between serious and humorous here,

³³ Woo Take Jeon, "Issues and Problems of Adaptation of North Korean Defectors to South Korean Society: An In-depth Interview Study with 32 Defectors," *Yonsei Medical Journal* 41, no. 3 (2000), 367.

demonstrating to the reader how frightening and stressful this interrogation experience can be even if it is not as heavy-handed and bloody as in the North.

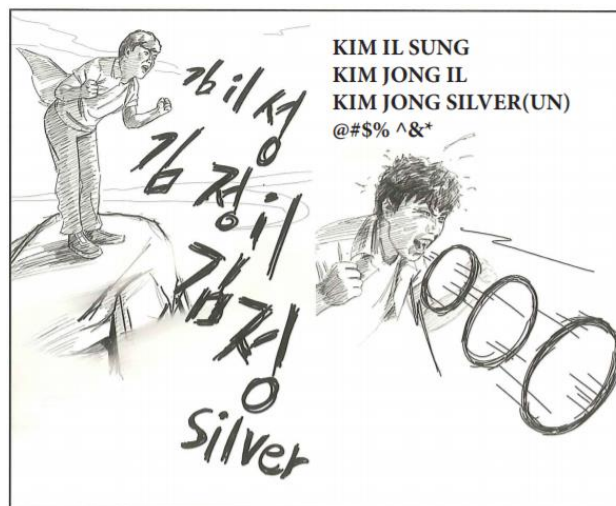


But the literal interrogation defectors undergo at the NIS is not where it ends. Defectors face both literal and more subtle and symbolic forms of interrogation from society at large due to their perceived identity even after their time at NIS ends. Choi and other defectors are often completely ignored by society but face harsh criticism and suspicions from South Koreans at the slightest provocation. “Labor Interrogation,” therefore, is a phrase very relevant to Choi’s life.

The title of the webtoon, *Labor Interrogation (Rodong Simmun)*, is a play on the title of North Korea’s official Workers’ Party newspaper, the *Labor Newspaper (Rodong Sinmun)*. The phonological difference is slight—a change from an “n” to an “m”. However, the weight of the term “interrogation” and the relevance to Choi’s own life becomes clear as soon as you understand the place defectors occupy in South Korean society. Defectors are interrogated by officials upon arrival in the country, but participating in society, defectors are both symbolically and literally interrogated by those around them. Even in the comments (*daetgul*) section of *Labor Interrogation*

chapters on the Naver Webtoon website, readers often questioned Choi's loyalties vocally. The title, in a way, reflects the emotional labor (*kamjeong nodong*) required of stepping on eggshells while trying to educate others about your very humanity.

In one instance, Choi platforms one of these suspicious readers through the "North-South Comments Summit". This commenter wrote, "I trust that you'll read this comment, Mr. Choi. Let's verify your ideology. North Korea and South Korea are in a ceasefire, so still at war. Kim Jong Un is our enemy. So are the North Korean bast*rds who panhandle from our country. I don't know whether you're a North Korean or whether you just have North Korean acquaintances, but say it out loud! Say that Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un are @#\$\$%^&*"⁽¹⁴³⁾. In his witty way, Choi answers by drawing himself eating furiously and declaring, "Yes! I'll show *them!*" He then makes his way up to the top of a mountain and shouts at the top of his lungs, "Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un are @#\$\$%^&*," afterwards declaring "Answer from the North complete! Now *that* was refreshing!" In his own humorous way, Choi thus addresses this societal form of interrogation.



Another example from Choi's own life comes from a situation he brought up during our 2020 August interview. Declaring that "South Korea seems like a free state but in reality I do not feel free", he goes on to detail his experience of drawing a satirical portrayal of current South Korean president Moon Jae-In and being slapped with a citizen petition to "Send Choi Sung-Guk back to North Korea." He continues, "Why? To teach me a lesson. It's ridiculous. They say 'freedom of speech' then turn around and start a petition to forcibly return me to North Korea. ...[reads from the petition] 'Choi Sung-Guk committed the crimes of watching and circulating illegal South Korean films before defecting'—these people grew up watching South Korean films but are calling me a criminal for it!—'but the Republic of Korea took him in. But he does not know how to be grateful...and insulted Moon Jae-In.'...'Purge him from South Korea.' 'He must be purged.' So 2,903 of these crazy b*stards are officially petitioning the government to send me back to North Korea...I can't act freely...In the US, you can satirize him, cuss him out, say whatever you want and it's not a crime. Kim Jong Un. From a defector's perspective, we hate him. So we call him by name, 'Kim Jong Un. Kim Jong Un.' But in Gwangju [a city in South Korea], some people tell us to address him as 'Chairman Kim Jong Un' and not call him by name. But he's someone who killed our families—we can't bring ourselves to call him by an honorific title. We can't. It's too hard. And if we can't, we get cussed out...I'm being sued, 'Defector Choi Sung-Guk, defamation of President Moon Jae-In's honor.'..." This personal, real-life anecdote illustrates the feelings of persecution that can arise from society perceiving defectors negatively. It also shows how Choi's ideal of democracy that is both touted by the South Korean government and desperately hoped for by

defectors has perhaps begun to crack as he experiences the reality of South Korea. Defectors are displaced people, migrants, who must navigate society as any other outsider must, and in the search for identity in the new country find out the hard way how society perceives them. These sorts of experiences influence how they view themselves and their cultural background and can result in a sense of identity that often feels in opposition to—not a part of—South Korean society.

In the first chapter of the “Stories of the National Intelligence Service,” entitled “Kukjeongwon?,” the defectors gathered outside the facility think back to their education from the Korean Workers Party. The lecturer emphasizes on his audience, “Think! How would you feel when there’s nothing to eat in the house and your relatives come begging? You hate them, right? South Koreans think of us like that—there is no reason for them to treat you well!” (59). This is significant, coming from the North Korean-appointed lecturer, and it illustrates well South Korean society’s reception of North Korean defectors.

Conclusion

Labor Interrogation sheds light on the cultural experience of North Koreans living in South Korea through its use of language, its humorous portrayals of cultural mismatches, and even the title itself. Defectors have to relearn language and cultural norms in order to survive and adapt, all the while facing scrutiny, interrogation, and judgements based on perceived identity from South Koreans. The journey of defection to immigration to resident, therefore, is not just a physical journey but one of self-identity. Each step of the way, defectors are navigating their own sense of self.

Choi based *Labor Interrogation* on his and other defectors' real experiences, and through their stories demonstrates the stumbling blocks that exist for defectors who are trying to create new identities in the South. And while North and South Koreans share ethnicity and a common history pre-1950s, it is an unescapable truth that the two have diverged enough to force differences in almost every facet of life. Defectors, then are "co-ethnics who speak the same language and perform almost identical cultural practices, at the same time as being political outsiders who are not accustomed to democratic institutions and free market system."³⁴ And as newly arrived defectors in South Korea come to realize, "difference creates inequality."³⁵ So while South Koreans tout a shared bond with their Northern brethren, studies on defector adaptation, South Korean attitudes towards defectors and unification, and relations between the two

³⁴ Shang E. Ha and Seung-Jin Jang, "National Identity in a Divided Nation: South Koreans' Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors and the Reunification of Two Koreas," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 55 (2016), 111.

³⁵ Yoon Young Kim, "Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea," *Int. Migration and Integration* 17 (2016), 1024.

countries mount a compelling argument to the effect that actual South Korean beliefs and actions do not match this rhetoric.

North Korean defectors living in South Korea thus face a paradoxical situation: they hold rights as citizens of South Korea, but experience “social exclusion and identity problems as the Other” due to a mass media system that perpetuates biased depictions of North Korean defector stories and a largely ignorant and prejudiced society.³⁶ This has led to a “national identity crisis”³⁷ for defectors as well as difficulties adjusting to life in South Korea. This adjustment is sometimes so hard it is described by defectors as “harder than crossing the line between life and death.”³⁸

North Korean defectors that appear on South Korean television are often utilized to reinforce staunch South Korean anti-communist ideologies. Their stories are exaggerated and their criticisms of North Korea result in further negative perceptions among South Koreans. Even programs that largely portray defectors themselves in a positive light, such as those that feature “Northern beauties” who sing, perform, and share their stories, fall prey to cliches and stay within a framework that prevents real, raw, open discourse. And just as often, defectors are portrayed as the “poor dependents”³⁹ of the South Korean government and its populace. This generates a power relationship that is predicated on dependence, prompting such comments from South Koreans as “There are thousands of other poor people here with extremely

³⁶ Jahyon Park, “Webtoon and Intimacy: Reception of North Korean Defectors’ Survival Narratives,” in *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea*, ed. Youna Kim (Routledge, 2019), 314.

³⁷ Shi-Eun Yu et. al, “The Factors Affecting the Development of National Identity as South Korean in North Korean Refugees Living in South Korea,” *Psychiatry Investigation* 9, no. 3 (2012), 209.

³⁸ Young-a Park, “North Korean Migrants in South Korea: 'Multicultural' or 'Global' Citizens?,” *Korean Studies* 44 (2020), 132.

³⁹ Yoon Young Kim, “Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea,” *Int. Migration and Integration* 17 (2016), 1024.

miserable lives. Why does the government spend so much money only aiding North Korean settlers? The money is coming from us, our taxes!”⁴⁰ However, a large portion of society is against affirmative action in universities and employment for North Koreans.⁴¹ This power relationship “between South Koreans as the givers (the possessors, the cultural superiors) and North Korean settlers as the receivers (the possessed, the cultural inferiors)”⁴² is insidious. However, defectors like Choi are using their identities as “North Korean” to subvert this power structure by reversing the roles, thereby reconstructing their identities while gaining credibility as “worthy” citizens of South Korea.⁴³

Choi, through the interactive medium of online web cartoon, undercuts mass media portrayals by directly communicating his and other defectors’ experiences with South Korean audiences. Jahyon Park, in “Webtoon and Intimacy”, demonstrates that the active interactions between Choi and his audience through the comments section of his webtoon “contribute to the alternative discourse on the perception of North Korean defectors in South Korean society, by facilitating North-South cultural exchange ‘from below’ through this intimate form of communication.”⁴⁴ This high level of engagement challenges stereotypes about North Korean defectors as “isolated and otherized” and includes young people, the target audience, in the “crucial discourses about the social integration of North Korean defectors into South Korean society”.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Kim, “Negotiating Cultures and Identities,” 1024.

⁴¹ Hyun Choe, “South Korean Society and Multicultural Citizenship,” *Korea Journal* 47, no. 4 (2007), 140.

⁴² Kim, “Negotiating Cultures and Identities,” 1027.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 1024.

⁴⁴ Park, “Webtoon and Intimacy”, 317.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 318.

The webtoon proved effective in promoting these discourses and encouraging audiences to voice their questions. A unique aspect of the webtoon is that Choi was able to change the structure of his work in accordance with comments and replies on each episode. He tailored later episodes to the information and content his audience wanted to see, and through reading every comment he learned how South Korean audiences reacted to and were influenced by his work. Based primarily off his own experiences and interviews with other defectors, in the comic he delineates cultural differences and difficulties that come with adaptation and integration into South Korean society. This serves to educate not only young South Koreans about these issues in a direct and culturally relevant way through the webtoon format, but it also serves to educate and provide solace for North Korean defectors about the adaptation process and South Korean society.⁴⁶ His work thus provides a space for the formation and exploration of a North Korean identity within the South Korean community that is not solely in opposition with it.⁴⁷ In an interview outlined briefly in Park's chapter, Choi noted that he wanted to encourage communication and cultural connections between North Korean defectors and South Koreans with his work, eventually contributing to cultural reunification between North and South Korea.⁴⁸

Choi also reverses the power dynamic of provider and receiver by being an active agent—in writing *Labor Interrogation*, he takes on the role of educator. South Koreans are almost fully unaware of the defector experience in South Korea, and by demonstrating the language and culture differences these two parts of society share, he

⁴⁶ Ibid, 327.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 328.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 332.

provides a valuable resource. Through detailing the identity-building of new defectors in South Korea, Choi forms his own identity and actively escapes “the dominant viewpoints, pretentious sympathy, and rude arrogance of South Koreans toward the poor and needy.”⁴⁹

Importantly, through “Labor Interrogation” Choi is able to reflect South Korean society itself upon readers. Choi’s portrayal and implicit critiques of South Korean society are nuanced, ambiguous, and far less straightforward than the more or less explicit depictions and criticisms of North Korea and its society. By extension, it is clear that North Korean defectors must work to adapt to South Korean society; how, then, must South Koreans work to accept them? Within any power relation, the complacency of the more powerful group or nation makes social change much more difficult to accomplish. Choi’s work seemingly places North and South Korean societies as mirrors against each other, opening the door to an internal dialogue between the two nations and the humanity that both holds, and creating the space for change in both societies.

⁴⁹ Yoon Young Kim, "Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea," *Int. Migration and Integration* 17 (2016), 1026.

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