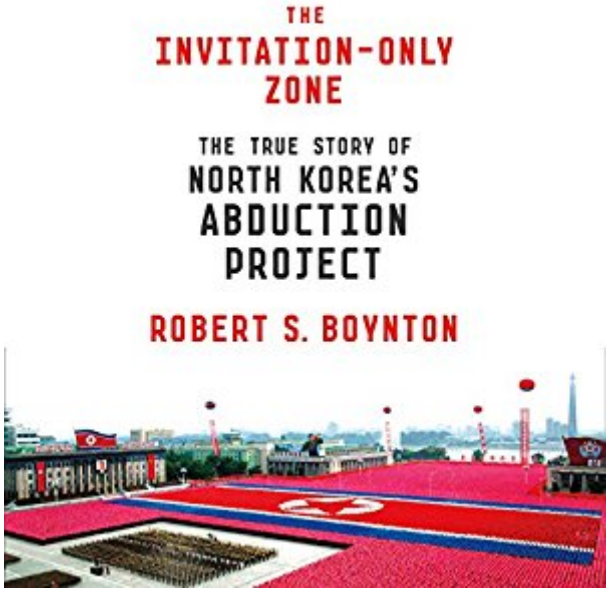
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The Invitation-Only Zone: The True Story Of North Korea's Abduction Project



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Synopsis

Throughout the late 1970s and early ’80s, dozens of Japanese citizens were abducted from coastal Japanese towns by North Korean commandos. In what proved to be part of a global project, North Korea attempted to reeducate the abductees and train them to spy on the state’s behalf. When the project faltered, the abductees were hidden in a series of guarded communities known as "Invitation-Only Zones" - the fiction being that these were exclusive enclaves, not prisons. In 2002, Kim Jong Il admitted to kidnapping 13 Japanese citizens and returned five of them (the other eight, he said, had died). From the moment that Robert S. Boynton first saw a photograph of these men and women, he became obsessed with the window their story provided into the vexed politics of Northeast Asia. In The Invitation-Only Zone, he untangles the logic behind the kidnappings and shows why some Japanese citizens described them as "their 9/11". He tells the story of how dozens were abducted and reeducated; how they married and had children; and how they lived anonymously as North Korean citizens. He speaks with nationalists, diplomats, abductees, and even crab fishermen, unearthing the bizarre North Korean propaganda tactics and the peculiar cultural interests of both countries. A deeply reported, thoroughly researched treatise on the power struggle of one of the most important areas in the global economy, Boynton’s keen investigation is riveting and revelatory.

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Customer Reviews

Having read quite a few accounts of North Korea, I found "The Invitation-Only Zone" a unique look

into a program that is often briefly highlighted in other books. The Abduction Project pursued by North Korea in the latter part of the twentieth-century appears to be something ripped from the pages of a novel. Mr. Boynton does a superb job of highlighting both the details and scope of the project, all the while humanising those who were affected by it in one way or another.Aside from the abduction program, Mr. Boynton goes on to put the program into a larger geopolitical context. He provides a thorough, interesting account of the history of Korea that led to the ultimate creation of Kim Il Sung's "Juche" ideology. Especially considering recent events over the past few years, I consider this a great introductory book for anyone looking to learn about the psyche of the North Korean regime that has remained closed off from the rest of the world during the twentieth century. The accounts are alarming, thought-provoking, and occasionally entertaining. A short, quick read, it is suitable for those looking who have no basic knowledge of the regime to those looking for an overview of this fascinating subject.

In the course of telling this story - a story almost too strange to be true - the author takes us through important elements of the inter-relationship between Korea and Japan post-Meiji - we really don't see why until the story completes; as the author notes, he didn't realize how important this was either. The telling of this history with the story of the abductions is not meant to excuse the acts, nor is the introduction of numerous Leftist characters. (If you read the fiction or history in fiction books by W. F. Buckley you will know that communists all come from somewhere very human; they are not really spawn of Satan). The only disappointment is one I am sure the author shares: why did the kidnappings happen? For what purpose? There are many who speculate but we may never know. The return of abductees is central to Japanese politics these days; it should also be noted that many non-Japanese were also abducted, and many many more duped into going North and never being allowed to leave again.

Fascinated and gripping. A thoroughly researched yet highly readable account of the abductions of Japanese (and other) citizens by the bizarre, inscrutable North Korean regime. I could not put this down. Boynton writes with authority yet also with humility, focusing on the gentle souls whose lives were stolen.

The author does an amazing job of providing context to a fairly unknown history to the west. The truth of why North Korea acts the way it does is hidden behind layers and years of mistreatment by its previous oppressor and colonizer, Japan. They paid the price by way of kidnappings and

abductions throughout the years.I'm fascinated by all things North Korea and I couldn't put this book down as I discovered new layers to an already complicated story. I loved every minute of it.

Most of us know that North Korea is a secretive nation with a chip on its shoulder. What I learned from this book is how they got that way. The way this author describes the relationship between the Japanese and Koreans, even today is fascinating. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the minds of those living in North Korea under a tyrannical leader. I could not put it down until I was finished. The names of the people are not as hard to deal with as had anticipated. The photos throughout the book help put names and faces together. It also shows how perception is everything and how we can triumph in the face of absolute terror. The victims of the abductions did what had to be done to survive, or not.

Fascinating study of the relationship of the repressive North Korea and the attitude that their leader takes what they want with no remorse. Well written, especially the exploration of the study of the residents from Korea who though living in Japan remain in a state of suspension from true Japanese citizenship.,

As other posters have noted, North Korea has become almost a publishing industry. This work, however, fills a gap in our knowledge. By interviewing Japanese abductees who lived in North Korea for several decades, the author skillfully weaves a narrative of personal survival against the backdrop of geopolitics and a regime that, when it belatedly admitted abducting Japanese nationals, used then as pawns in what became a sensational story in Japan. One of the abductees speaks poignantly of the reverse culture shock he experienced after returning home. In the process, he offers insights into Japanese-Korean cultural differences.

This is a fascinating story and a great read. Boynton's prose is elegantly wrought, and richly textured. Weaving together 6 years of reporting, from sources across the globe, this book is hard to put down.

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