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TECHNOLOGY

Nuclear Silk Road: Koreanization of Nuclear Power Technology
Kim Byung-koo
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Three Stars (out of Five)

It takes an odd sort of courage to state that the tragic Chernobyl accident of 1986 "turned out to be a blessing for Korea." But that is what nuclear engineer and author Dr. Kim Byung-koo does in this book about his country's rise to prominence in the controversial nuclear power industry.

Byung-koo knows what he is writing about because he was present for much of the history he is relating. When "BK," as the author likes to be called, mentions a dizzying myriad of names, he is not simply giving readers a litany of the players who created and continue to advance Korea's nuclear power industry, he is also sharing the contents of his address book. These politicians, scientists, bureaucrats, professors, and corporate executives are more than names—they are BK's bosses, benefactors, mentors, colleagues, and in many cases, friends.

Much of *Nuclear Silk Road* reads like congratulatory homage from a mutual-admiration society, yet to dismiss it as such would be unfair. BK is immensely proud of what he and his comrades have accomplished, and, as he explains in great detail, they have every right to be.

The Republic of Korea is one of the premier designers, builders, and exporters of nuclear power plants. The path it took to get there, writes the author, is a "shining example of how an inexperienced but well motivated and educated" people overcame great hardship. BK says he hopes to not only "demystify" what some call "a miracle story," but also to offer hope and provide a blueprint for "other developing countries with nuclear power ambitions" that he believes "could benefit from the Korean lessons."

Parts of this book are good, solid, by-the-numbers, history. The who, what, why, where, when, and how of Korea's progress from war-ravaged backwater to economic powerhouse is clearly presented. There are heroes and villains aplenty, and these sections are organized and explained in a simple and concise manner. However, there are chapters that are decipherable only to readers already thoroughly versed in the topic and familiar with the mind-boggling acronyms of the organizations involved.

Fortunately for the lay reader, the author can also write for a more general audience

when he chooses to do so, and it is in these sections the book truly shines. When BK explains how Korea took advantage of the “nuclear dark age” that arose in reaction to the Chernobyl accident, he does so with honesty and candor. He admits it is “ironic that the Korean nuclear power technology owes a lot to the Chernobyl accident,” yet also notes quite jauntily that this is “a classical example of turning crisis into opportunity.”

Overall, the book’s positive attributes outweigh its weak points. Dr. Kim Byung-koo has done his colleagues, his country, and the world a service in providing a candid insider’s view of the rise of the Korean nuclear power industry.

Mark G. McLaughlin