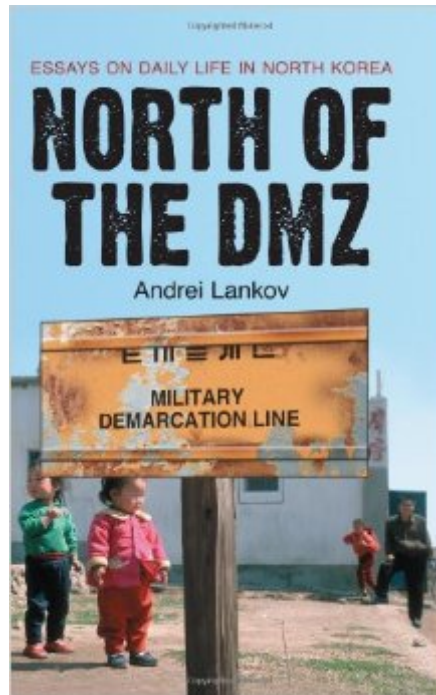


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North Of The DMZ: Essays On Daily Life In North Korea



Synopsis

The Kim dynasty has ruled North Korea for over 60 years. Most of that period has found the country suffering under mature Stalinism characterized by manipulation, brutality and tight social control. Nevertheless, some citizens of Kim Jong Il's regime manage to transcend his tyranny in their daily existence. This book describes that difficult but determined existence and the world that the North Koreans have created for themselves in the face of oppression. Many features of this world are unique and even bizarre. But they have been created by the citizens to reflect their own ideas and values, in sharp contrast to the world forced upon them by a totalitarian system. Opening chapters introduce the political system and the extent to which it permeates citizens' daily lives, from the personal status badges they wear to the nationalized distribution of the food they eat. Chapters discussing the schools, the economic system, and family life dispel the myth of the workers' paradise that North Korea attempts to perpetuate. In these chapters the intricacies of daily life in a totalitarian dictatorship are seen through the eyes of defectors whose anecdotes constitute an important portion of the material. The closing chapter treats at length the significant changes that have taken place in North Korea over the last decade, concluding that these changes will lead to the quiet but inevitable death of North Korean Stalinism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For years now, Western observers of North Korea have tended to use absolutes in describing the country. It is, for example, said to be the last Stalinist nation on earth and the world's most secretive, isolated, autarkic society, while its leader (Kim Chong-il) is characterized and caricatured as odd and ruthless in the extreme. None of these descriptors is necessarily wrong, but individually and

collectively they tend to obscure the fact that a great deal has changed over the past several decades. Riding to the rescue, so to speak, is the distinguished Russian scholar Andrei Lankov, who has gathered together in "North of the DMZ: Essays on Daily Life in North Korea" articles originally printed in the "Korea Times" and "Asia Times." Lankov brings to his musings and this book exceptional skills and credentials: he writes beautifully, has a fine sense of humor, attended Kim Il-sung University several decades ago, knows South Korea as well as its northern counterpart, and has personally experienced growing up in a Communist country. The resulting book is a delight to read and certainly one of the most valuable primers ever published on North Korea, with its 100-plus essays at once both anecdotal in tone and exceptionally well-researched. Lankov's main focus in "North of the DMZ" is the life of everyday North Koreans, and in this regard the essays cover everything from the arts, media, social structure, and recreation to love and marriage, transportation, education, and food supplies. Another large portion of the essays cover policies and control systems that the government has tried to impose, with the emphasis here on how poorly these are actually working.

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