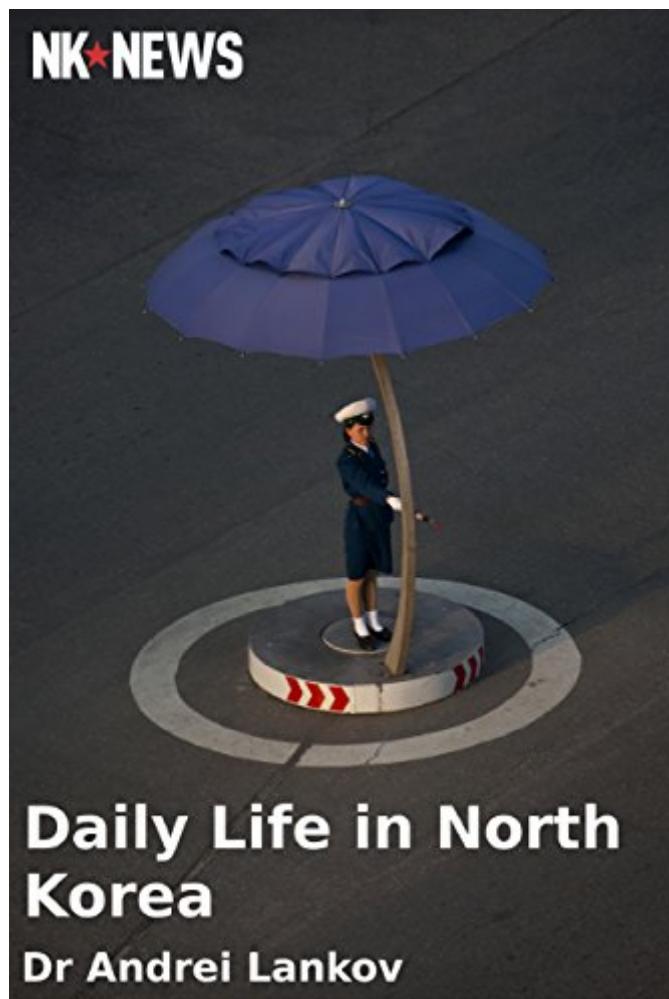


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Daily Life In North Korea



Synopsis

From the surprisingly placid criminal gangs of Pyongyang, to the rules of decorum that apply to women, to the decline in army recruitment as black market entrepreneurs grow increasingly wealthy: these articles cover all aspects of North Korean society. One of the rare foreigners to have studied in North Korea, Dr. Andrei Lankov is in a unique position to interpret North Korea's culture and society to a foreign audience. Accepted into the prestigious faculty of Oriental Studies at Leningrad State university during the declining days of the Soviet Union, Lankov had originally hoped to study Chinese. Instead, he found himself specialising in North Korean studies, an eccentric option even within the Soviet Bloc. The Faculty of Oriental Studies was world apart from the daily life of the average Soviet citizen, in which well-paid Professors avoided their students as much as they possibly could and took refuge from current political troubles in obscure corners of classical philology. Even within this world, North Korean studies were a minority interest. As Lankov himself put it: "Most of the time, Korean departments played host to undergraduates deemed not good enough to be accepted to more prestigious and competitive majors like, say, Japanese and Arab studies. This meant that interest in things Korean was present but not necessarily enthusiastic. It did not help, of course, that North Korea, with its bizarre political system, hysterical propaganda and crazy personality cult was seen as a laughing stock in the entire socialist bloc of the time." Despite this, Lankov pursued his studies and was eventually dispatched to Pyongyang to study at Kim Il Sung University. Here he gained first-hand experience of life in North Korea: restrictions on movement, ideological proselytizing, corruption and black-market trading. After graduating he taught Korean history and language at his alma mater before moving on to the Australian National University and Kookmin University in Seoul and bringing his knowledge of the closed world of North Korea to a wider audience via a variety of media outlets, including NK News. In this volume we bring together a selection of Andrei Lankov's most popular columns for NK News, illustrated with luminous photographs by Eric Lafforgue.

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Customer Reviews

Dr Andrei Lancov's book allows us not only a rare peek into a closed society, but a readily offered interpretation of cultural and social customs as well. He had started his study as an average Soviet student, in the world where professors avoided their students as much as they could, taking refuge in the obscure corners of classical philology. Not a prestigious corner in the Oriental Studies, most students were not really enthusiastic, having landed there mainly for their lack of ability to be accepted in more prestigious departments, but Lankov found himself enthralled, until eventually sent to finish his studies in Kim Il Sung University, gaining the first hand experience, despite the restriction of movement, ideological proselytizing, corruption and black market trading. Later on, professor Lancov had taught Korean language and history in various worldwide locations, helping to close the gap and aid better understanding of the closed North Korean world. This book of his I found extremely knowledgeable and yet surprisingly easy to read, fascinating, an eye opener.

If you are somewhat ignorant of life in DPRK this may be meant for you. Very grim existence full of propaganda and starvation. Quite depressing but factual recollection of a nightmare world.

Peace in Asia? There are winds of change occurring as news from the outside world of leaked to the younger generation.

Interesting insight, very different to the accounts of people that managed to escape. I wonder if the different view is due to soviet indoctrination?

It's very informative and interesting. Gives facts and information on North Korea.

I like this essay by Russian writer Andrei Lankov. He has studied NK and in this short piece he gives a good look at what the DPRK is evolving into today and what it was like for past generations. Interspersed with the chapters are scenes from North Korean life. Lankov discusses the coming capitalism in North Korea started by people setting up small markets on the street outside their homes selling homemade foods and other goods. He also goes into some detail on housing and real estate, which has changed from the days of Kim il-Sung. Traditionally all housing has been owned by the government and people applied through it for housing. North Korea has built so many homes and high rise apartment buildings, especially in the capital of Pyongyang. These sell for much more than they do in other areas because Pyongyang is filled with the moneyed and the elite only. Apartments are not built with anything in them, so new owners must install their own faucets and sinks and paint or wallpaper. Since power is sporadic in NK, the lower floor apartments are more expensive than upper floors because when the power goes out the people living on high floors have to walk the steps all the way up twenty-some stories in some cases. Women are not allowed to drive but they are allowed to ride bicycles now. Under the older leadership they were not to ride bikes because it was unbecoming and immodest. Dress codes have eased up a bit but the government still frowns on women wearing slacks and at certain times they have people watching for women in slacks to pick them up and they usually have to go to a shaming session. There is a lot more to read but it is a short read for the amount of information you get from it. I've ordered another book of essays that contain some by Andrei Lankov.

Having recently read B. Demick's very interesting, but "outdated" book on North Korea (NK), "Nothing To Envy", I was very pleased to stumble upon this more recent book, which is essentially a collection of analytical articles on various aspects of NK culture and society. And, for the most part, I think the author did a great job of clearing up some of my mis-perceptions stemming from my earlier reading. I particularly appreciated his explanatory style of providing historical and other context to issues he was presenting. However, like the Deming book, this book suffered from a "time frame vagueness". Although this (current) book was published in 2015, the publication dates of the individual articles were not included; their contents suggested their being written 1-2 years earlier. For me as a reader, I think it is very important, particularly when reading about social/political issues, to be given a time frame to which the discussion applies: "old news" is not necessarily bad,

but you need to know its "old" and that its application to the present may, or may not, be relevant. Overall, I do think this book did enhance my knowledge/understanding of the NK lifestyle, and I would definitely be interested in reading other articles by this author - I'd just like to see them dated.

I have read many many books on people who have gotten out of North Korea and they all tell you the same thing how they lived on bark off of trees and Sawdust in their food and grass just to fill the stomachs of their children this book is nothing but a bunch of propaganda

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