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CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

Introduction

Virtually all of the nearly 25 million citizens living in the isolated nation of North Korea are ethnic Koreans who share a common background, culture, and language.¹ Their nation-state came into existence after the victorious World War II Allies divided the Korean Peninsula approximately in half at the 38th parallel, ending 1,000 years of territorial integrity. The 1945 division was intended to be temporary. However, it remains one of the most heavily militarized boundaries in the world.²



© Morning Calm News / flickr.com
North Korea from DMZ

The partitioning of the country North Koreans refer to as Chosun and South Koreans call Hanguk created two mutually hostile states, the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the North and the U.S.-backed Republic of Korea (ROK) in the South, in competition for recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Korean people.³ The split had more than political implications. The North has a plentiful resource base including 200 different types of minerals.⁴ The agricultural South traditionally served as the peninsula's breadbasket.⁵ At the time of partition, the North was wealthier.⁶ Through the 1960s, the DPRK was more industrialized than the ROK and claimed a higher per capita income as well.⁷ Now it is routinely described as one of the poorest nations in the world, while the ROK may supplant Japan as Asia's second largest economy.⁸



© WanderingSolesPhotography
East coast of North Korea

Area

Located in eastern Asia, North Korea occupies the northern section (approximately 55%) of a peninsula that extends south

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Korea, North: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 12 April 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html>

² Philip Walker, "The World's Most Dangerous Borders," *Foreign Policy*, 24 June 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/24/the_worlds_most_dangerous_borders?page=0,8

³ Michael Breen, "Korea Should Change Its Name," *The Korea Times*, 24 September 2009, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2012/07/170_52440.html

⁴ Choi Kyung-soo, "North Korea's Mining Prospects," East Asia Forum, 30 August 2011, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/08/30/north-koreas-mining-prospects/>

⁵ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "Famine, Marketization and Economic Reform in North Korea," 06 December 2005, 2, http://www.aeaweb.org/assa/2006/0107_0800_1502.pdf

⁶ Robert Guest, "Introduction: The Curse of Isolation," *Borderless Economics: Chinese Sea Turtles, Indian Fridges and the New Fruits of Global Capitalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

⁷ Soo-Bin Park, "The North Korean Economy: Current Issues and Prospects," (revised version of paper presented at the Association of Korean Studies in Canada held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 3-4 October 2003), 3, <http://www1.carleton.ca/economics/ccms/wp-content/ccms-files/cep04-05.pdf>

⁸ "A Game of Leapfrog," *The Economist*, 28 April 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21553498>

between two seas.⁹ The Sea of Japan (East Sea) borders North Korea's eastern shore and the Yellow Sea (West Sea) its western shore. South Korea lies immediately to the south of North Korea; their border is 238 km (148 mi) in length. On its northern side, North Korea shares a border with China (1,416 km / 880 mi), and on its far northeastern side, it shares a short border with Russia (17.5 km / 11 mi).¹⁰

Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

North Korea consists mainly of mountains and highland areas, divided by narrow valleys. Lowland plains are found on the western side of the country. On the eastern side, a narrow coastal plain fringes the steep mountains that drop toward the shoreline.¹¹

The Kaema Highlands, called the roof of the Korean Peninsula, extend across the northeastern part of the country, with an average elevation of 1,000 m (3,281 ft).¹² Mount Paektu, with an elevation of 2,744 m (9,003 ft), is the highest mountain on the peninsula.¹³ Lake Chon-ji (Heaven Lake) lies inside its volcanic crater.¹⁴ The mountain, which straddles the border with China, is venerated as the ancestral home of all Koreans.¹⁵ According to legend not widely accepted outside North Korea, Kim Jong Il was born in a camp on Mount Paektu in the 1930s where his father was fighting the Japanese.¹⁶ Prior to his death in late 2011, the evening news bulletin broadcast into every home began with an emotional ballad detailing the leader's mythical qualities; making reference to his birthplace. In the words of a scholar, "[t]his kind of flowery language... does reflect a uniquely North Korea[n] understanding of the connection between territory and race."¹⁷



© Mark Scott Johnson
Mount Paektu and Lake Heaven

Forming a steep slope from the eastern side of the highland plateau downward to the Sea of Japan (East Sea), the Hamgyong Mountains run in a north–south direction. Referred to as the Korean Alps, they are the highest mountain range in the Korean Peninsula, and Mount Kwanmo

⁹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “North Korea,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea>

¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “Korea, North: Geography,” in *The World Factbook*, 12 April 2012,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html>

¹¹ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 61-63,

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

¹² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Kaema Highlands,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/309507/Kaema-Highlands>

¹³ Helen Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 61-62,

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

¹⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “North Korea: The Land,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea>

¹⁵ Jean H. Lee, “NKorea's Bethlehem in the Birthplace of Kim Religion,” *Cybercast News Service*, 07 April 2012.

<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/nkorea-bethlehem-birthplace-kim-religion>

¹⁶ Associated Press, “Mt Paektu Holds Key Role in N Korean Lore,” *Taipei Times*, 9 April 2012,

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2012/04/09/2003529904/1>

¹⁷ Lucy Williamson, “Delving Into North Korea's Mystical Cult of Personality,” *BBC News Asia*, 27 December 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16336991>

is their highest peak, at 2,540 m (8,333 ft).¹⁸ At the southern end of the Hamgyong Mountains, the Nangnim Mountains also extend north to south. Dividing the country between east and west, they are the largest mountain range in the central-north part of North Korea. Farther to the west lie the Kangnam Mountains, near the border with China. Extending from north to southwest, they are structurally linked to the Nangnim Mountains. Large plains and valleys formed by rivers lie between the Kangnam (Diamond) Mountains and other smaller ranges in the west, and lowland plains stretch through the western side of the country.¹⁹

In southeastern North Korea, the Taebaek Mountains stretch 500 km (300 mi) along the eastern coast into South Korea.²⁰ The highest peak in this range is Mount Kumgang, at 1,638 m (5,374 ft) elevation. Since ancient times, this mountain has been famed for being one of East Asia's most picturesque landscapes. The area surrounding it includes pillars of eroded stone, a variety of trees, and waterfalls flowing into ponds. Over 100 Buddhist temples dot the landscape.²¹

Climate

Cold, dry winters and hot, humid—often rainy—summers characterize North Korea's continental climate.²² Over half the precipitation throughout the country occurs in the summer (June–September), when total annual rainfall is approximately 1,000 mm (39.4 in).²³ Average temperatures in North Korea generally decrease the further north one goes, although elevation and proximity to the coast are modifying influences to this trend. Higher elevation locations also see greater extremes between daily highs and lows. Because of ocean currents and the mountain ranges that hug North Korea's eastern coast, winter temperatures there tend to be some 3° to 4°C (5° to 7°F) warmer than North Korea's western coast.²⁴ At Pyongyang, located in the southwestern part of the country, the average temperature in July is 29°C (84°F) but in January falls to an average of -13°C (8°F).²⁵



© comradeanatolii / flickr.com
Slick city street

¹⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Hamgyōng Mountains," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/253341/Hamgyong-Mountains>

¹⁹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "North Korea: The Land," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea>

²⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Taebaek Mountains," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/580148/Taebaek-Mountains>

²¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Kangwŏn," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/311115/Kangwon>

²² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "North Korea: Climate," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea>

²³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Country Profile: North Korea; Climate," July 2007, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/North_Korea.pdf

²⁴ World Weather and Climate Information, "Average Weather and Climate in North Korea," 2012, <http://www.weather-and-climate.com/average-monthly-Rainfall-Temperature-Sunshine-in-North-Korea>

²⁵ "Weather Pyongyang," *BBC Weather*, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/1871859>

Rivers

Amnok (Yalu) River

At approximately 800 km (500 mi) in length, the Amnok River (Yalu River) is the longest river in North Korea. Beginning from its headwaters at Mount Paektu, the river flows in a general southwesterly direction along much of North Korea's border with China, the northeastern region of Manchuria. It empties into Korea Bay, an arm of the Yellow Sea on the west coast. The river has three main tributaries in North Korea and is navigable by small craft for 678 km (421 mi).^{26,27} Since the 1950s, silting has greatly increased, and large ships have much more difficulty traveling upstream from the mouth of the river. From November through February, the river is covered with ice and closed to shipping.²⁸



© Elizabeth Thomsen
Children swimming in Yalu River

Tumen River

North Korea's second longest river (521 km / 324 mi) is the Tumen River. It is navigable for only approximately 81 km (50 mi).²⁹ Like the Amnok, it begins at Mount Paektu, but it flows in a northerly direction, tracing the country's northern border with China. It then turns to the southeast and follows North Korea's northeastern border with both China and Russia before it empties into the East Sea (Sea of Japan). The Tumen River flows through mining districts as well as mountainous regions covered with heavy forests. Iron is mined near Musan, and coal along the middle stretch of the river. Sites with mineral resources are located farther downstream, and near the mouth of the river, a railway line connects the North Korean town of Unggi to Kraskino, Russia.³⁰

Taedong River

At 397 km (247 mi), the Taedong is North Korea's third-longest river. It has a navigable length of 245 km (152 mi).³¹ The Taedong River begins in the Nangnim Mountains of central North Korea and flows toward the southwest. It passes through Pyongyang and discharges into a long, narrow inlet of West Korea Bay, the Yellow Sea that lies to the west of North



© Mark Fahey
Boat on Taedong River

²⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Yalu River," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651445/Yalu-River>

²⁷ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 64, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

²⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Yalu River," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651445/Yalu-River>

²⁹ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 64, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

³⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Tumen River," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/608794/Tumen-River>

³¹ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 64, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

Korea's western border.³²

Major Cities

Pyongyang

Pyongyang, which literally means “flat land,” lies on the banks of the Taedong River, approximately 48 km (30 mi) to the west off the Yellow Sea. Although Pyongyang's recorded history begins when a Chinese trading colony formed in 108 BCE, according to legend it is one of the nation's oldest cities, founded in 1122 BCE.³³



© Will De Freitas
Pyongyang Juche Tower

Pyongyang has a tumultuous past, synonymous with much of the nation's history. Invading Chinese forces overran the city in 668 CE. In 1592, it came under Japanese control, and in the 17th century it was destroyed by the Manchus. Out of this, a suspicion of foreigners took root among Koreans. Still, foreigners were allowed entry in the 16th century. By the 19th century, Pyongyang had become a base for intensive proselytizing by Western Protestant missionaries. The city saw renewed destruction in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), but when Japan occupied Korea (1910–1945), Pyongyang was reinvigorated as a center of industry. Although virtually destroyed during the Korean War (1950–1953), the city was gradually rebuilt with aid from both China and the Soviet Union.³⁴ The skyline is dominated by buildings that are either functional residential and workplace complexes or monumental architectural testaments to the regime like the Juche Tower that rises over the city.³⁵

The national capital, Pyongyang is also the DPRK's largest city, its economic and cultural center and transportation hub. It is the entry point of most international visitors, who are invariably struck by the nation's isolation.³⁶ Yet residence rights are a privilege reserved for those considered most loyal to the regime. They enjoy a standard of living not found elsewhere in the country. North Koreans refer to their capital as a “city within a park.” The three largest parks account for one quarter of Pyongyang's total area.³⁷



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Hamhung

Hamhung-Hungnam

Hamhung, near the coast of the Sea of Japan, was northeastern Korea's administrative and commercial center from 1392 to 1910. In 1928, with the construction of a fertilizer plant at the seaport city of nearby Hungnam, Hamhung began to develop into an industrial center. The

³² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Taedong River,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/580155/Taedong-River>

³³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “P'yŏngyang,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/484693/Pyongyang>

³⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “P'yŏngyang,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/484693/Pyongyang>

³⁵ Meuser, Philipp. *Architectural and Cultural Guide Pyongyang* (Berlin, Germany: Dom Publishers, 2012).

³⁶ Sharon LaFraniere, “Visitors See North Korea Still Stunted by Its Isolation,” *The New York Times*, 26 December 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/27/world/asia/27nkorea.html?pagewanted=all>

³⁷ “City Planning,” <http://www.macalester.edu/courses/geog261/tkreit/cityplanning.html>

construction of hydroelectric plants on nearby rivers also contributed to Hamhung's development. During the Korean War, U.S. bombing raids destroyed much of the city's industrial infrastructure. After the war it was rebuilt. In addition, Hamhung added light industry to its industrial capacity.³⁸

Kaesong

Kaesong is located close to the South Korean border, just south of the 38th parallel. Seoul, South Korea, lies approximately 70 km (45 mi) to the southeast. For over 400 years (935–1392), Kaesong was the capital of Koryo, the unified kingdom of the Korean Peninsula. Formerly named Songdo (City of Pine), Kaesong is one of Korea's oldest cities and was constructed as a castle fortification, surrounded by a stone wall with gated entries. Since ancient times, it has been a source of "red" ginseng, a medicinal herb, which remains a sought after variety today. During the Korean War, communist forces overran Kaesong, and the first truce negotiations took place here in 1951.³⁹ Some researchers estimate the city lost approximately 40% of its population during the war. In the case of families who were split, and those who chose not to flee bore the stigma of having kin viewed by the regime as traitors.⁴⁰



© ksevik / flickr.com
Kaesong

Nampo

Only 50 km (31 mi) southwest of Pyongyang, Nampo is located at the mouth of the Taedong River. Historically little more than a fishing village, in 1897 it began to open to foreign trade and is now the nation's main seaport. Although the harbor is frozen in wintertime, ships as large as 20,000 tons can use the port when the water is free of ice. Nampo has transportation connections to the nation's interior by means of railway and by shipping up the Taedong River. It has an industrial base that includes shipbuilding, production of glass and electrodes, and refining of gold and copper. The city also markets shellfish and other marine products, and high quality apples are grown on the land that surrounds the city.⁴¹

Chongjin

Located in northeastern North Korea along the coast of the Sea of Japan (East Sea), under Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) Chongjin was developed as an iron and steel production center. After the establishment of the DPRK, the city's strategic location and transportation links to both the Soviet Union and China helped ensure its strategic importance. The industrial base was expanded to include shipbuilding, synthetic textiles and chemicals. Residents describe the city's economic



© Raymond K Cunningham Jr.
Chongjin

³⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Hamhŭng," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/253344/Hamhung>

³⁹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Kaesŏng," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/309518/Kaesong>

⁴⁰ Robert Collins, "Marked for Life: Songbun, North Korea's Social Classification System," *The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea*, 2012, 13, http://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Songbun_Web.pdf

⁴¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Namp'o," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/402343/Nampo>

decline in the 1990s as more devastating than the Korean War.⁴² It is unclear how many of those industries have resumed production or are able to pay worker salaries.

Imperial History and Colonization

Ancient History

Around 4000 BCE, the Neolithic period, archeologists have documented that people from what are now China, Mongolia, and Russia migrated to the Korean Peninsula.⁴³ All Koreans trace their ancestry to a semi-divine emperor called Tangun who descended from Mount Paektu in 2333 BCE to build a palace near Pyongyang and founded the kingdom of ancient Korea.⁴⁴

Following the demise of this early kingdom, various independent states ruled parts of the peninsula for centuries. In 918, the Koryo Dynasty was established. Profound social and cultural changes followed, including the introduction of a civil service examination system which led to the creation of a scholar-gentry class (*yangban*) that dominated the aristocracy. The Koryo gave way to the Chosun Dynasty in 1392.⁴⁵



© yeowatzup / flickr.com
Tomb of King Tongmyong

In 1894, the Chosun rulers confronted an internal uprising against official corruption known as the Donghak Rebellion. They sought Chinese assistance to subdue the rebels. The Japanese took advantage of the moment and sent their forces into Korea, vanquishing both the Donghak rebels and the Chinese troops. Meanwhile, Russia was also attempting to expand into the region, precipitating the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. Japan won, the first Asian power to defeat a European army in modern times. In 1910, Korea was annexed into the Japanese empire.

The Origins of Korean Nationalism

Under colonial rule, the use of Korean was banned and Japanese was made the official language. Koreans were expected to profess allegiance to the Japanese emperor and adopt Japanese cultural norms like worshipping at Shinto shrines. They were required to take Japanese surnames as well.⁴⁶ To serve Japanese needs, traditional subsistence agriculture was reorganized into cash crop production. Harvests increased, though Korean consumption decreased.⁴⁷ When the global depression hit in 1929, the price of rice dropped dramatically.⁴⁸ This left many Korean farmers hopelessly in debt. Several million were forced to seek off-farm employment in factories in

⁴² Felix Abt, "North Korea's Not as Crazy As Everyone Says," *Global Post*, 31 October 2012,

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/commentary/north-korea-defectors-real-life>

⁴³ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Korea: Korea to c. 1400," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/693609/Korea>

⁴⁴ Bruce Cumings, "Chapter 1: The Virtues," in *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/c/cumings-korea.html>

⁴⁵ Bruce Cumings, "Chapter 1: Historical Setting," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 3-29, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

⁴⁶ UCLA Language Materials Project, "Korean," <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/profile.aspx?langid=76&menu=004>

⁴⁷ Kenneth B. Lee, "Chapter 13: Establishment of the Colonial Government," in *Korea and East Asia: The Story of a Phoenix* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 151.

⁴⁸ Edwin Gragert, "Chapter 7: The Depression Years 1929-1935: Maelstrom of Change," in *Landownership Under Colonial Rule: Korea's Japanese Experience, 1900-1935* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 140-141.

Japan and across the peninsula.⁴⁹ In 1931, Japan created a puppet state in Manchuria, present-day northeast China, and Koreans went to work there as well.

The Tangun legend allowed the Korean people to maintain a claim to being a distinct race and strengthened their resolve to resist colonial efforts to make them Japanese.⁵⁰ Inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and similar action in China on behalf of the working class and peasant class, Korean nationalism grew stronger in the face of colonial rule. In the 1920s, the Koreans established a multitude of underground communist organizations to resist the Japanese. Guerrilla groups carrying out attacks on the Japanese came to include Soviet or Chinese communists who were also fighting the Japanese. It was during this time that the Korean fighter Kim Song Ju, later renamed Kim Il Sung, based in Manchuria gained a reputation as a guerrilla fighter with notable leadership skills.⁵¹



© Michael Sean Gallagher
Statue of nationalist in Seoul

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Division of Korea

After the Japanese were defeated in 1945, the Soviet Union occupied the northern half of the peninsula, secured the border at the 38th parallel, and set about creating social and political administrative structures similar to their own.⁵² Amongst the local population, they found a number of candidates for leadership, including a leftist Presbyterian deacon. Instead, they chose 33-year old Kim Il Sung, who had returned home by Soviet ship a month after the war ended. The scion of a Christian family that settled in Manchuria, he had spent 20 years away from the peninsula and no longer spoke Korean like a native.⁵³ He reportedly rehearsed his initial speeches in front of Soviet advisors. This was part of Moscow's exhaustive grooming process to prepare him for civilian leadership.⁵⁴ On 9 September 1948, when the DPRK was formally founded, Kim Il Sung was declared premier. The following year the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) was established by merging other organizations into a single communist party.



© yeowatzup / flickr.com
Mural of Kim's Homecoming

⁴⁹ Kwon Tai-Hwan, "Population Change and Development in Korea," Asia Society, <http://asiasociety.org/countries/population-change-and-development-korea>

⁵⁰ B.R. Myers, "Chapter 1: The Colonial Era, 1910-1945," in *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves—And Why It Matters* (Brooklyn: Melville Publishing House, 2010), 27.

⁵¹ Jae-Chon Lim, "Chapter 2: Formative Period (1942-1964)" in *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea* (New York: Routledge 2009), 14.

⁵² Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives," (Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 8, November 1993), 16, <http://slantchev.ucsd.edu/courses/nss/documents/weathersby-soviet-aims-in-korea.pdf>

⁵³ Victor Cha, "Chapter 3: All in the Family," in *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 70.

⁵⁴ Anatoly Medetsky, "N. Korea/Soviet Union: Kim Il Sung's Soviet Image-Maker," *Moscow Times*, 31 July 2004, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1182674/posts>

Kim, who was elected chairman, would make skillful use of the KWP to eliminate rivals for power.⁵⁵

The Korean War

Border clashes and fighting along the 38th parallel followed almost immediately after establishment of the DPRK, which followed the founding of the southern ROK by one month. On 25 June 1950, war broke out when North Korea invaded South Korea in a surprise attack. The socialist system set up by the Soviets enabled Pyongyang to efficiently identify and call up all eligible men for military service.⁵⁶ The Soviet Union provided supplies, armaments, and counsel to North Korea. China also joined the North Korean effort. The UN and 16 member nations, including the US which had withdrawn its forces a year earlier, fought on behalf of South Korea under the UN Command (UNC). The conflict assumed a see-saw configuration, with the armies of each side traversing nearly the entire length of the peninsula. Authority over Seoul changed hands four times.⁵⁷ After three bloody years, on 27 July 1953, the North Koreans, the Chinese People's Volunteers, and the UN Command signed an armistice. The war resulted in a stalemate. Korea remains divided into North and South at the 38th parallel.

The war did nothing to diminish Kim Il Sung's standing despite the fact it left his country in tatters. However, very few North Koreans were aware that their army had attacked the South, thereby precipitating a conflict in which Koreans killed Koreans. Instead, they were led to believe the North had been attacked by southern soldiers as part of an imperialist orchestrated plot. The North Korean People's Army, which Kim helped to set up, had heroically beaten back the enemy.

The Kim Family Dynasty

Kim Il Sung

After the war, Kim Il Sung's authority was solidified through the creation of a personality cult of such unprecedented proportions that it troubled others in the communist bloc, since it crowded out Marx and Lenin.⁵⁸ To sustain the myths surrounding his leadership, Kim ordered all references to Soviet support, which had been critical to his rise to the top, excised from the public record.⁵⁹ In 1955, he unveiled the concept of *juche* (independent self-reliance). Referred to as the nation's guiding ideology in North Korea, *juche* established Kim Il



© Mark Wang
Kim Il Sung monument

⁵⁵ Nobuo Shimotomai, "Pyongyang in 1956," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 16 (Spring 2008): 456, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin16_p51.pdf

⁵⁶ Charles K Armstrong, "Chapter 8: The People's State," in *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 234-235.

⁵⁷ Michael Ray, "An Uneasy Truce: The Korean War," *Encyclopedia Britannica Blog*, 27 July 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2011/07/uneasy-truce-korean-war/>

⁵⁸ Mitchell Lerner, "'Mostly Propaganda in Nature:' Kim Il Sung, the *Juche* Ideology, and the Second Korean War," (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Working Paper No. 3), 12, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Lerner%20WP%20web.pdf>

⁵⁹ Victor Cha, "Chapter 3: All in the Family," in *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 72.

Sung as a *suryong*, or monarch, destined to unite Korea and lead its people toward a bright socialist future.⁶⁰

Initially, the industrial economy performed well under central planning and Kim made frequent factory visits.⁶¹ Despite the government's claims to self-reliance, the Soviets continued to provide critical material and technical support.⁶² In 1972, as South Korea's economic growth was challenging North Korea's state-socialist model, the DPRK switched to a presidential system enshrined in a new constitution.⁶³ Kim Il Sung became president, a position that afforded him absolute authority over the KWP, the government and the military. This was consistent with *suryong* leadership.⁶⁴ Though he failed to reunify the two Koreas by the time of his death in 1994, Kim Il Sung remains a revered figure in North Korea. In 1998, four years after his death, the office of president was eliminated in the DPRK. Kim Il Sung was posthumously declared "eternal president of the republic."⁶⁵

Kim Jong Il

Kim Jong Il was officially designated his father's successor in 1980.⁶⁶ When he came to power in 1994, he inherited an economy that was essentially on life support. Shortages and inefficiencies characteristic of planned economies were already evident in the 1980s. Lacking the funds to import new technology, the DPRK's infrastructure fell into disrepair and its machinery became obsolete.⁶⁷ The abrupt withdrawal of coal, steel and subsidized oil imports after the Soviet Union was disbanded in 1991 coupled with natural disasters made a bad situation

⁶⁰ Stephan A. Juetten, "North Korea's Juche Ideology and the German Re-Unification Experience," (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, June 2008), 14-15,

http://calhoun.nps.edu/public/bitstream/handle/10945/4122/08Jun_Juetten.pdf?sequence=1

⁶¹ Byung-Yeon Kim, Suk Jun Kim and Keun Lee, "Assessing the Economic Performance of North Korea, 1954-1989: Estimates and Growth Accounting Analysis," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 35 (May 2007): 572
<http://www.nkeconwatch.com/nk-uploads/assessingnkeconperf.pdf>

⁶² Seung-Ho Joo, "Chapter 10: North Korean Policy Toward Russia," in *North Korea's Foreign Policy Under Kim Jong Il: New Perspectives*, eds. Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 127.

⁶³ Bradley K. Martin, "Chapter 9: He Gave Us Water and Machines," in *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2006), 155.

⁶⁴ Young Chul Chung, "The Suryong System as the Center of the *Juche* Institution: Politics of Development Strategy in Postwar North Korea," in *Origins of North Korea's Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 107.

⁶⁵ Bruce G. Cumings, "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Postwar Period," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 54-57,
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

⁶⁶ Sabine Burghart, "Charismatic Leadership, Succession, and Legitimacy: Political Pragmatism in North Korea and China?" (20th ASEN Conference "Nation and Charisma," London School of Economics and Political Science, UK, 13-15 April 2010), 5,

http://www2.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/ASEN/Conference/conferencepapers2010/Sabibne_Burghart.pdf

⁶⁷ Soo-Bin Park, "The North Korean Economy: Current Issues and Prospects," (revised version of paper presented at conference of the Association of Korean Studies in Canada, University of British Columbia, October 3 – 4, 2003),
<http://www1.carleton.ca/economics/ccms/wp-content/ccms-files/cep04-05.pdf>

considerably worse.⁶⁸ Per capita income plummeted from USD 2,460 in 1991 to USD 719 by 1995.⁶⁹ A looming food shortage developed into a full-blown famine within a few years.

In response, Kim Jong Il declared North Koreans were undergoing an endurance test that he called the Arduous March, borrowing the name used to describe the efforts of Kim Il Sung and his guerrilla fighters against the Japanese in the late 1930s. By appropriating the name, Kim Jong Il linked the current period of hardship to the earlier revolutionary one.⁷⁰ The message was clear: He expected the people to make the same sacrifices his father's generation did. Complaints would be interpreted as disloyalty. By the end of the 1990s, the worst of the famine was over. Estimates put the death toll at anywhere from 600,000 to three million people.⁷¹ Others fled. Of the thousands that cross into China every year, some 24,000 citizens of the DPRK have successfully secured refuge in South Korea.⁷²



© Joseph A Ferris III
Kim Jong Il joins father

Kim Jong Un

In December 2011, Kim Jong Il died. According to the local media, it was not only the North Korean people who mourned his passing; a crane circled a statue of Kim Il Sung before landing on a nearby tree to hang its head in sorrow.⁷³ Swiss-educated Kim Jong Un, now referred to as Supreme Leader, succeeded his father, who was given the posthumous title of KWP “eternal general secretary.”⁷⁴



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Kim Jong Un

Though he had little preparation for assuming leadership of the country, Kim Jong Un's striking resemblance to his grandfather, whose 100th birth anniversary involved several months of commemoration in North Korea early in 2012, appears to have aided his transition. Like his grandfather, he frequently makes public addresses, something his reclusive father never did.⁷⁵ He has turned up at entertainment venues with his fashionably dressed wife, unprecedented

⁶⁸ Meredith Woo-Cumings, “The Political Ecology of Famine: The North Korean Catastrophe and Its Lessons,” (Asian Development Bank Institute Research Paper 31, January 2002) 24,

http://202.4.7.101/files/2002.01_rp31.ecology.famine.northkorea.pdf

⁶⁹ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 7: Two Beer Bottles for Your IV,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 115.

⁷⁰ Bertil Lintner, “Chapter 2: The Famine and the *Juche* Idea,” in *Great Leader, Dear Leader: Demystifying North Korea Under the Kim Clan* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2005), 40.

⁷¹ Andrew Natsios, “The Politics of Famine in North Korea,” United State Institute of Peace, August 1999, <http://www.usip.org/publications/politics-famine-north-korea>

⁷² Choe Sang-Hun, “Fleeing North Korea is Becoming Harder,” *The New York Times*, 4 January 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/05/world/asia/crackdowns-make-fleeing-north-korea-harder.html>

⁷³ Josh Vorhees, “North Korea Names Kim Jong-un ‘Supreme Leader,’” *Slate*, 29 December 2011, http://slatest.slate.com/posts/2011/12/18/kim_jong_il_is_dead_north_korean_state_media_report_longtime_ruler_is_dead.html

⁷⁴ Bruce Klingner, “Leadership Succession On Track... For Now,” 38 North, US Korea Institute at SAIS, 21 April 2012, <http://38north.org/2012/04/bklingner042112/>

⁷⁵ Ben Ascione, “Kim Jong-Un And the Future of North Korea,” East Asia Forum, 20 October 2012, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/20/kim-jong-un-and-the-future-of-north-korean-reform/>

behavior for a North Korean leader.⁷⁶ Yet in April 2012 he referred to the DPRK as the “Kim Il Sung nation,” indicating he does not intend to dismantle the cult of personality created by his grandfather.⁷⁷ One visitor saw a triptych of Kim family tributes, observing the middle panel, devoted to Kim Il Sung, was the largest. He explained, “[t]hat is just a visual way of showing the message, which is that the whole country’s legitimacy rests on the Kim Il Sung myth.”⁷⁸ It remains to be seen whether Kim Jong Un can perpetuate the political system he inherited. Analysts, however, have continually predicted the imminent demise of the DPRK.⁷⁹ The fact they have been repeatedly proven wrong reflects the difficulty of understanding a people governed by a regime that has skillfully exploited Korean cultural norms to remain in power.⁸⁰

Government

North Korea dropped Marxism-Leninism from its constitution in the 1990s.⁸¹ Nonetheless, its governance system is similar to other state socialist countries where power emanates from a political party to which the administrative apparatus is subordinate. Mass campaigns are launched through the KWP, which is symbolized by a Leninist hammer and sickle, representing workers and farmers, that flank a traditional Korean writing brush representing intellectuals, in this context technocrats, a three-group alliance. Under Kim Jong Il, the military assumed a more important role in national affairs, reflected in his “military first” (*songun chongchi*) reorientation, that is presumed to have come at the KWP’s expense.⁸² The names of military figures were listed before top party officials in rankings and public events. The current chief of state is his son, Kim Jong Un, appears to be restoring the KWP as the center of political gravity.⁸³ Approximately 12-14% of the populace are KWP members.⁸⁴ A popularly elected 687-member Supreme People’s



© groucho / flickr.com
Korean Workers Party monument

⁷⁶ Michael Madden, “Kim Jong Un’s Baby Mama,” *Foreign Policy*, 23 November 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/11/23/kim_jong_uns_baby_mama

⁷⁷ Robert Kelly – Asian Security Blog, “North Korea as ‘Kim-Land’: My Op-Ed on NK in the *Joong Ang Daily*,” 19 October 2012, <http://asiansecurityblog.wordpress.com/2012/10/19/north-korea-as-kim-land-my-op-ed-on-nk-in-the-joongang-daily/>

⁷⁸ Chico Harlan, “North Korea Invokes Great Leader, Kim Il Sung, in Power Transfer to Grandson,” *The Washington Post*, 24 December 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/north-korea-invokes-great-leader-kim-il-sung-in-power-transfer-to-grandson/2011/12/23/gIQAUVDDFP_story.html

⁷⁹ Armin Rosen, “The Long History of (Wrongly) Predicting North Korea’s Collapse,” *The Atlantic*, 6 August 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/08/the-long-history-of-wrongly-predicting-north-koreas-collapse/260769/>

⁸⁰ Robert Kelly – Asian Security Blog, “Guest Post: Dave Kang – ‘Confucian North Korea,’” 31 July 2012, <http://asiansecurityblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/31/guest-post-dave-kang-confucian-north-korea/>

⁸¹ Gi-Wook Shin, “Chapter 4: Socialism Our Style,” in *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 94.

⁸² Ken E. Gause, “Chapter 2: The Role and Influence of the Party Apparatus,” in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 24-25.

⁸³ Ken E. Gause, “Kim Jong Un Tightens His Grip,” CNN News, 6 December 2012, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/12/06/kim-jong-un-tightens-his-grip/>

⁸⁴ Jae-Jung Suh, “Making Sense of North Korea: *Juche* as an Institution,” in *Origins of North Korea’s Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 14.

Assembly (SPA) only meets once or twice a year and some years not at all.⁸⁵ The head of the SPA is the titular head of state and represents North Korea in foreign relations.

Media

While North Koreans generally read communal newspapers, personal radio and television ownership is the norm. Traditionally procured through a state distribution system, these devices can only be tuned to official programming. Paper seals are placed over the buttons to alert authorities to tampering. Defectors have detailed harrowing unannounced visits from security officials to make sure the seal had not been damaged, which would indicate someone tried to listen or watch unapproved programming.⁸⁶ There are two state-run television channels that broadcast intermittently during the day, with a third on weekends that shows old Chinese movies.⁸⁷ North Koreans can now buy radios and television sets on the free market that have been retrofitted to allow for adjustable tuning.⁸⁸ DVD players, initially smuggled in from China, are now manufactured locally. Department stores in Pyongyang stock LCD TVs and USB drives.⁸⁹ Surveys suggest that as many as 50% of those who cross the border have watched unapproved entertainment and 25% listened to foreign broadcasts before leaving North Korea.⁹⁰ In another development, the Associated Press (AP) opened a bureau in Pyongyang in January 2012, giving foreign journalists and photographers regular access to the country.



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Metro station newspaper board

Telecommunications

Most of North Korea's 1.1 million landline phones are for official use.⁹¹ By contrast, cell phones are largely for personal use. Residents of areas close to the Chinese border are able to contact people outside the country with prepaid account phones smuggled in from China, though this is illegal. Despite the high cost for domestic cellular service and complicated application procedures and payment process, there are now over 1 million subscribers to the North Korean 3G mobile phone network called Koryolink that covers Pyongyang and a few other areas.⁹² So great is the demand that a black market has developed where middlemen supply phones

⁸⁵ Donald Kirk, "The North Korean Guessing Game," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 August 2012,

http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-kirk-north-korea-20120803_0,5208507.story

⁸⁶ Barbara Demick, "Chapter 13: Frogs in the Well," in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 192-193.

⁸⁷ Keith B. Richburg, "Reclusive North Korea Opens Its Doors A Crack For Tourists," *The Washington Post*, 15 November 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/reclusive-north-korea-opens-door-a-crack/2011/11/10/gIQAXj7ePN_story.html

⁸⁸ "North Korea's Tightly Controlled Media," *BBC News*, 19 December 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16255126>

⁸⁹ Kim Yong Hun, "The Lure of Currency Driving Food Revolution," *Daily NK* (Seoul), 13 December 2011, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=8528>

⁹⁰ Nat Kretchun and Jane Kim, "A Quiet Opening: North Koreans in A Changing Media Environment," (report by InterMedia group, May 2012), 8, http://static3.volkskrant.nl/static/asset/2012/A_Quiet_Opening_FINAL_261.pdf

⁹¹ Marcus Noland, "Telecommunications in North Korea: Has Orascom Made the Connection?" 8 September 2008, <http://www.iie.com/publications/papers/noland1208.pdf>

⁹² Christopher Green, "Barriers to Entry: Cellular Telephony in the Digital DPRK," *SinoNK*, 25 November 2012, <http://sinonk.com/2012/11/25/barriers-to-entry-cellular-telephony-in-the-digital-dprk/>

registered in other people's names.⁹³ For those unable to secure a real phone, fake ones are reportedly available in the market that can be carried around for show.⁹⁴

Koryolink operates with technology provided by an Egyptian company that has negotiated exclusive rights to the market until 2015.⁹⁵ Users are not able to retreat into a private world; *Rodong Sinmun*, mouthpiece of the KWP, sends out daily texts of approved news to subscribers.⁹⁶ While ordinary citizens do not have access to the internet, the DPRK has a domestic equivalent, known as the intranet (*kwangmyong*). It includes a search engine, news groups, and an email program that operates with Red Star, North Korea's homegrown alternative to Windows.⁹⁷



© Joseph A Ferris III
DPRK cell phone user

Foreign tourists were long required to either deposit their mobile devices at the airport or place them in a pouch that could not be opened until they left the DPRK. In early 2013, the regulations changed. International visitors can now hold on to their phones while in country and even purchase a Koryolink SIM card to make international calls, including to the US. They cannot, however, connect to any Korean subscriber.⁹⁸

Economy

Contradictory trends best characterize the North Korean economy today, where annual per capita income stood at USD 1,241 at the end of 2011.⁹⁹ There are reports of localized and potentially widespread hunger nearly every year in various parts of the countryside.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, Pyongyang is undergoing a building boom and private automobile ownership is evident.¹⁰¹ Repeat visitors report that residents of the capital are increasingly fashionably dressed.¹⁰² Once an informal economy emerged and, over time, supplanted the rationing distribution system that privileged officialdom, it became important to have access to cash. Civil servants and law

⁹³ Kim Kwang Jin, "Free Market Solution to Koryolink Dilemma," *DailyNK* (Seoul), 1 December 2012, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=10089>

⁹⁴ Shirley Lee, "The 10 Things No North Korean Can Live Without," *NK News* (Seoul), 17 January 2013, <http://www.nknews.org/2013/01/the-10-things-no-north-korea-can-live-without/>

⁹⁵ Simon Montlake, "Pyongyang Calling for Egyptian Telecoms Tycoon Naguib Sawiris," *Forbes*, 18 November 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/simonmontlake/2012/11/18/pyongyang-calling-for-egyptian-telecoms-tycoon-naguib-sawiris/>

⁹⁶ Scott Thomas Bruce, "The Information Age: N. Korean Style," *The Diplomat*, 11 November 2012, <http://thediplomat.com/2012/11/11/the-information-age-north-korean-style/2/>

⁹⁷ Dave Lee, "North Korea: On the Net in World's Most Secretive Nation," *BBC News*, 10 December 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20445632>

⁹⁸ David Colker, "Tourists' Cellphones Now OK in North Korea – But Not Local Calls," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/business/money/la-fi-mo-phone-north-korea-20130122,0,159888.story>

⁹⁹ Associated Press, "North Korea's Trade With China Jumps While South Korea Trade Declines in 2011," *The Washington Post*, 27 December 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/north-koreas-trade-with-china-jumps-62-percent-in-2011/2012/12/27/1a411738-4ffe-11e2-835b-02f92c0daa43_story.html

¹⁰⁰ Bill Powell, "The Next Great North Korean Famine," *Time*, 6 May 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1737780,00.html>

¹⁰¹ John Feffer, "North Korea's Wealth Gap," *Asia Times*, 14 March 2012, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/NC14Dg01.html>

¹⁰² Aubrey Belford, "Tiramisu Time in Pyongyang," *The Global Mail*, 27 February 2012, <http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/tiramisu-time-in-pyongyang/88/#>

enforcement officers accept and, in many cases, actively solicit bribes.¹⁰³ North Korea now ranks as the second most corrupt nation in the world, after Somalia.¹⁰⁴ This represents a vicious circle. To gain access to scarce goods or essential services, North Koreans need to pay bribes, forcing them to moonlight to raise cash which in turn sets them up for shakedowns by the police.

Prospects for Reform

In late 2009, Kim Jong Il announced a currency devaluation. In one week's time, 1,000 North Korean *won* (NPW) would be worth 10 NPW.¹⁰⁵ The news prompted unheard of protests when people realized their bank balances would be wiped out since the amount they were allowed to convert into new *won* was limited. One defector reported his family's life savings, equivalent to USD 1,560, was reduced to USD 30.¹⁰⁶ Though intended to tame inflation and presumably undercut private traders who had amassed monetary wealth, it caused a buying panic as people spent every old *won* they had before their money became worthless. Citizens would henceforth seek to keep their funds in foreign currencies, effectively rendering the new *won* worthless.¹⁰⁷ A newspaper noted, the situation "combines one thing North Korean authorities don't like (markets) with another thing they wish they didn't need (foreign cash)."¹⁰⁸



© Paul Bailey
North Korean won

Given the importance of *juche* ideology to the regime's legitimacy, it has yet to undertake significant economic reform that would integrate North Korea into the global economy, in contrast to neighboring state socialist countries like China and Vietnam. The latter, however, were primarily agrarian economies that could liberalize the agricultural sector and realize immediate productivity gains. By contrast, moribund state industry dominates the North Korean economy, which more closely resembles Cold War Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union where privatization proved more difficult.¹⁰⁹

Employment Trends

North Korea has experimented with establishing special economic zones in border areas. The most successful is the Kaesong Special Industrial Zone, a joint venture between the two Koreas

¹⁰³ Andrei Lankov, "North Korea's Culture of Bribery," *Asia Times*, 13 July 2012,

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/NG13Dg01.html>

¹⁰⁴ Byung-Yeon Kim, "Markets, Bribery, and Regime Stability in North Korea" (working paper, East Asia Institute Security Initiative, Seoul, April 2010), http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/2010040811122565.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Michael Bristow, "North Korea Currency Change Sparks Panic," *BBC News*, 4 December 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8394987.stm>

¹⁰⁶ Sharon La Franiere, "Views Show How North Korea Policy Spread Misery," *The New York Times*, 9 June 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/world/asia/10koreans.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

¹⁰⁷ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "The Winter of Their Discontent: Pyongyang Attacks the Market," (policy brief, Peterson Institute for International Economics, January 2010), 2-3, <http://www.iie.com/publications/pb/pb10-01.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Chico Harland, "In North Korea, Role of Foreign Currency Grows," *The Washington Post*, 15 February 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-north-korea-role-of-foreign-currency-grows/2012/02/05/gIQAcRLdFR_story.html

¹⁰⁹ Marcus Noland, "The Future of North Korea," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* (2002): 1-2. <http://www.iie.com/publications/papers/noland0502.pdf>

started in 2004, which now employs more than 50,000 local workers.¹¹⁰ An analyst cautions, however, such initiatives should be seen as an effort to boost the economy without undertaking fundamental reform.¹¹¹ Indeed, Pyongyang has repeatedly shown its willingness to sacrifice the success of the Kaesong complex through military provocation against the South.¹¹²

Though rich in mineral resources, including a large number of rare earth metals, it is estimated that North Korean mines operate at less than 30% of capacity.¹¹³ Lack of electrical power and poor transportation infrastructure pose significant obstacles to increasing production. The DPRK simply does not have the resources to exploit a sector estimated to be worth USD 6 trillion by the South Korean government in 2009.^{114,115}



© Joseph A Ferris III
Fertilizer Plant in Hamhung

Since its material exports are negligible, North Korea sends an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 workers abroad to earn hard currency and ease unemployment.¹¹⁶ According to a business analyst, “sending groups of people to foreign countries where they don’t speak the language and can be sequestered in barracks or factory dorms is a much safer option than granting to foreign investors in North Korea the kind of freedom and mobility they demand.”¹¹⁷ Men take up logging work in Siberia and do construction jobs in the Middle East. Attractive young women are recruited to staff overseas restaurants Pyongyang has set up where meals can run USD 100 per person.¹¹⁸ In 2012, China took the unprecedented step of offering work visas to 40,000 unskilled North Korean laborers.¹¹⁹ At the same time, China serves as an unofficial conduit for remittances from North Korean defectors working in South Korea that is estimated to be worth USD 10 million annually. Neither Seoul nor Pyongyang authorizes these transfers, but they have not clamped down to stop

¹¹⁰ Kim Kyu-won, “Business is Booming at Kaesong Complex,” *The Hankyoreh*, 2 February 2012, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/517170.html

¹¹¹ Leonid Petrov, “North Korea’s New Special Economic Zone Going Nowhere,” *East Asia Forum*, 4 July 2012, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/07/04/north-korea-s-new-special-economic-zone-going-nowhere/>

¹¹² Sandra Choi, “Will Rason Bring Peace to the Korean Peninsula?” *Foreign Policy Journal*, 18 December 2012, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2012/12/18/will-rason-bring-peace-to-the-korean-peninsula/>

¹¹³ Scott Thomas Bruce, “North Korea’s Six Trillion Dollar Question,” *The Diplomat*, 30 August 2012, <http://thediplomat.com/2012/08/30/north-koreas-six-trillion-dollar-question/>

¹¹⁴ Choi Kyung-soo, “The Mining Industry of North Korea,” Nautilus Institute, 4 August 2011, <http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/the-mining-industry-of-north-korea/>

¹¹⁵ Andrei Lankov, “Cheap at Any Price,” *Foreign Policy*, 12 July 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/07/12/cheap_at_any_price

¹¹⁶ Ju-min Park, “North Korea’s Economic Dreams are, Well Dreams,” *Reuters*, 5 November 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/05/uk-korea-north-economy-idUSLNE8A400K20121105>

¹¹⁷ Simon Ostrovsky, “Profit From Its People: North Korea’s Export of Shame,” *The Independent* (UK), 14 October 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/profit-from-its-people-north-koreas-export-shame-2370220.html>

¹¹⁸ Sebastian Strangio, “For North Korean State Waitresses Abroad, Lives of Rigor and Temptation,” *The Atlantic*, 7 June 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/06/for-north-korean-state-waitresses-abroad-lives-of-rigor-and-temptation/239943/>

¹¹⁹ Barbara Demick, “China Hires Tens of Thousands of North Korea Guest Workers” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 July 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jul/01/world/la-fg-china-workers-20120701>

them. Ethnic Korean Chinese citizens who cross the border acting as couriers can deliver the money in as quickly as 24 hours after it is sent from South Korea.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Ju-min Park, “Insight: A Secret Plea For Money From A Mountain in North Korea,” *Reuters*, 11 July 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/12/us-korea-north-money-idUSBRE86A1AR20120712>

Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Cold, dry winters and hot, wet summers characterize North Korea's climate.

True

Cold, dry winters and hot, humid—often rainy—summers characterize North Korea's continental climate. Over half the precipitation throughout the country occurs in the summer (June to September).

2. The Tumen River is navigable for approximately half its length.

False

The Tumen, North Korea's second longest river (521 km/324 mi), is navigable for only approximately 81 km (50 mi).

3. Both North and South Koreans trace their ancestry to Emperor Tangun.

True

All Koreans trace their ancestry to the semi-divine Tangun who descended from Mount Baeku to build a palace near Pyongyang.

4. The major port city of Hungnam (Hamhung-Hungnam) is on the nation's west coast near the Yellow Sea.

False

Hungnam, officially part of the city of Hamhung, is near the coast of the Sea of Japan on the country's east coast.

5. Mount Kwanmo is the highest mountain in North Korea.

False

The Hamgyong Mountains are the highest mountain range in the Korean Peninsula and Mount Kwanmo is their highest peak, at 2,540 m (8,333 ft).

CHAPTER 2: RELIGION

Introduction

The Korean Peninsula has a diverse religious heritage that includes shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In contrast to the rest of Northeast Asia, Christianity made rapid inroads on the peninsula. While today South Korea claims some of the world's largest Christian congregations, before World War II two-thirds of Korean Christians lived in present-day North Korea.¹²¹ In 2002, Pyongyang estimated there were some 12,000 Protestants, 800 Catholics and 10,000 Buddhists in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).¹²² According to more recent Pew Forum surveys, Christianity is gaining adherents. There may be as many as 480,000 Christians inside the country.¹²³ They presumably worship in illegal, underground house churches or within their own homes. One defector explained her family worshipped together every Saturday evening, emphasizing, "We had to be very quiet. We whispered when we prayed, sang songs or read the [banned] Bible. We often covered our heads to muffle the noise."¹²⁴



© Nicor / Wikipedia.org
Pictures of leaders

In the early 1970s, the government issued pictures of Kim Il Sung, which all North Koreans were ordered to hang in their homes.¹²⁵ Later, one of his sons and successor, Kim Jong Il, was added. No family photos could be hung on that wall.¹²⁶ Defectors describe homes where the twin portraits were dutifully dusted every morning in preparation for family members to perform their daily bows.¹²⁷ They were expected to offer ceremonial greetings to the Kim dynastic leadership before honoring any deceased member of their own family. After Kim Il Sung died in 1994, food offerings were left for him and his son, despite the fact Kim Jong Il was alive and therefore ineligible to receive traditional Buddhist offerings intended to provide sustenance for the spirits of the dead. His death in 2011 liberated "North Korean households from this contradiction in their domestic ritual life."¹²⁸

¹²¹ Jane Lampman, "How Korea Embraced Christianity," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 7 March 2007, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0307/p14s01-lire.html>

¹²² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Korea, Democratic People's Republic of: July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report," 13 September 2011, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168360.htm

¹²³ Doug Bandow, "Confronting Religious Persecution in North Korea," *American Spectator*, 23 December 2011, <http://spectator.org/archives/2011/12/23/confronting-religious-persecut>

¹²⁴ George Thomas, "Secret Worship: N. Korean Defector Tells of Survival," *CBN News*, 21 September 2012, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2012/February/Fleeing-N-Korea-Persecuted-Christian-Starts-New-Life/>

¹²⁵ Andrei Lankov, "Potent Portraits in North Korea," *Asia Times*, 3 May 2012, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/NE03Dg01.html>

¹²⁶ "Cult of Personality," http://www.macalester.edu/courses/geog261/tkreit/personality_cult.html

¹²⁷ Barbara Demick, "Chapter 14: The River," in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 205.

¹²⁸ Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung, "Chapter 5: Gifts to the Leader," in *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 143.

Historical Religious Background

Shamanism is Korea's earliest documented faith. Common among hunting and gathering cultures, it is predicated on the belief that a shaman (*mudang*) can contact or influence gods and demons in the spirit world. There are still shamanists in South Korea today.¹²⁹ It is unknown how many people subscribe to such beliefs in North Korea.



© Roger Shepherd
Painting of mountain spirit

Confucianism became part of the Chinese imperial state's ideological foundation as early as the 2nd century BCE.¹³⁰ It spread to surrounding countries, including Korea.¹³¹ According to Confucius, centralized political control and a well defined set of hierarchical relationships are the key to social harmony and political stability. The Confucian aspects of the Kim family's leadership are well known.¹³² For example, those higher in the hierarchy are supposed to motivate those below through positive example. Kim Il Sung's frequent visits to factories and farms, where he provided "on the spot guidance," are well documented in propaganda paintings. Kim Jong Il, a cinephile, is reported to have provided similar guidance to nearly 12,000 film projects.¹³³

Christianity was introduced in the 18th and 19th centuries. Pyongyang, in particular, became an active center of Christian missionary work. So successful were the missionaries that the present-day capital of the DPRK became known as the "Jerusalem of the East."¹³⁴ During the Japanese occupation, authorities repressed Christianity, and by the end of World War II, the foreign missionaries were gone. Land reform enabled the North Korean government to appropriate the property of religious groups. Buddhism had been introduced to Korea in the 1st century CE, and Buddhist monasteries quickly came to acquire vast tracts of crop and forest land.¹³⁵ Without land holdings, however, Buddhist monks had no means to support themselves and were forced to leave their often remote monasteries.¹³⁶

Chondogyo

Chondogyo is a religion indigenous to Korea that mixes Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, shamanism, and even some Roman Catholicism into a monotheistic belief system that was

¹²⁹ Choe Sang-Hun, "Shamanism Enjoys Revival in Techno-Savvy South Korea," *The New York Times*, 7 July 2007,

¹³⁰ Wei-Ming Tu, "Confucius and Confucianism," in *Confucianism and the Family*, eds. Walter H. Slote and George A. De Vos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 3-36.

¹³¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Confucianism," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/132104/Confucianism>

¹³² Nicolas Levi, "The Importance of Confucian Values to Kim Jong Il's System: A Comparison with Kim Il Sung's System," Poland Asia Research Center, 15 June 2012, <http://sinonk.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/levi-on-kim-jong-il-confucianism-icks-2012.pdf>

¹³³ Michael Mordine, "The Movies of Kim Jong Il, Now Available Via Bootlegs and Youtube," *LA Weekly*, 10 January 2013, <http://www.laweekly.com/2013-01-10/film-tv/kim-jong-il-movies/>

¹³⁴ Kwang-Tae Kim, "North Korea Executes Christian for Distributing Bible: Rights Group," *Huffington Post*, 24 July 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/24/north-korea-christian-execution_244340.html

¹³⁵ Robert E. Buswell, Jr. "Chapter 1: Buddhism in Contemporary Korea," in *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 34.

¹³⁶ Andrei Lankov, "Another Korea: Buddhism in North Korea," *Korea Times*, 15 January 2007, <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=89,3618,0,0,1,0>

founded in 1860 by a Confucian scholar. He quickly gained a large number of followers. Chondogyo did not incorporate the idea of an “eternal reward” for one’s good deeds, focusing instead on securing righteousness in the material world and in everyday life. Motivated by this vision, many practitioners tried to improve and reform society. They participated in both the 1890s Donghak Rebellion and the March 1st Movement of 1919, a series of nationalist demonstrations that called for Korean independence.¹³⁷ Though its influence has waned in both Koreas, at international religious conferences, Chondogyo groups, along with Buddhist and Christian organizations approved for participation, sometimes represent the DPRK.¹³⁸



© Courtesy of Wikimedia
Donghak rebels

The Role of Religion in the North Korean Government

The DPRK is officially an atheist nation.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, the constitution “grants freedom of religious belief and guarantees the right to construct buildings for religious use and religious ceremonies.”¹⁴⁰ In reality, Pyongyang severely restricts religious activity to a few approved churches where visitors note the absence of children among the worshippers who are not allowed to bow their heads or close their eyes during services. Individuals who attempt to privately practice a Christian faith risk arrest and imprisonment. North Korean nationals caught proselytizing have been executed.¹⁴¹



© David Stanley
DPRK Pohyon Temple

At the same time, food shortages have forced the government to accept humanitarian aid. Some of that assistance is delivered by Christian groups, who are also heavily involved in helping North Korean refugees reach South Korea.¹⁴² Within the DPRK, one group operates ambulances emblazoned with a “Christian Friends of Korea” logo.¹⁴³ Missionary groups report growing interest in Christianity, even though the mere admission one is a Christian is a significant

¹³⁷ Kirsten Bell, “Pilgrims and Progress: The Production of Religious Experience in a Korean Religion,” *The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 12, no. 1 (August 2008): 83-102.

¹³⁸ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment; Religion,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden ed. (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 120, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

¹³⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of: July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report,” 13 September 2011, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168360.htm

¹⁴⁰ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment; Religion,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, Robert L. Worden ed. (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 115, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

¹⁴¹ Kwang-Tae Kim, “North Korea Executes Christian for Distributing Bible: Rights Group,” *Huffington Post*, 24 July 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/24/north-korea-christian-exe_n_244340.html

¹⁴² Choe Sang-Hun, “Fleeing North Korea is Becoming Harder,” *The New York Times*, 4 January 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/05/world/asia/crackdowns-make-fleeing-north-korea-harder.html>

¹⁴³ Issac Stone Fish, “Preaching the Gospel in the Hermit Kingdom,” *Foreign Policy*, 6 January 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/01/06/preaching_the_gospel_in_the_hermit_kingdom

crime.¹⁴⁴ To circumvent the authorities, practitioners create mobile congregations. According to a missionary, “A Christian goes and sits on a bench in the park. Another Christian comes and sits next to him. Sometimes it is dangerous even to speak to one another, but they know they are both Christians, and at such a time, this is enough.”¹⁴⁵

Cult of Personality

In practice, the only official worship allowed among the population is the cult of Kim Il Sung (known as Great Leader) and Kim Jong Il (known as Dear Leader) along with other family members including the older Kim’s parents and wife.^{146, 147} During his four-plus decades in power, state propaganda organs promoted the Great Leader as “superior to Christ in love, Buddha in benevolence, Confucius in virtue, and Mohammed in justice.”¹⁴⁸ White Head Mountain



© David Stanley
Kumsusan Palace

(*Paektusan*), the purported place of Kim Jong Il’s birth where his father heroically fought against the Japanese, has assumed an almost spiritual significance in North Korean lore.¹⁴⁹ According to an Asia-based journalist, “If you read North Korean propaganda, Kim Il Sung is God and the son is Jesus. When he was born, there is a star that heralded his birth and then a rainbow. There is a reason they banned the Bible, it’s because they’ve plagiarized it.”¹⁵⁰

In the 21st century, Pyongyang spends as much as 40% of the national budget on Kim-family deification, up from 19% in 1990. It is the only area of the budget that increased even as other areas, including defense spending, were cut.¹⁵¹ The funds underwrite maintenance for more than 30,000 Kim Il Sung monuments now expanded to include statues of his son, towers of eternal life found at all major crossroads, historical sites, and commemorative events.

All visitors to the Kumsusan Palace mausoleum, which contains the bodies of both father and son, are required to bow at the feet and arms of each glass-encased sarcophagus to show their

¹⁴⁴ Public Broadcast System, “North Korea Refugees,” an interview with Lucky Severson for Religious and Ethics Newsweekly, 6 January 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/january-6-2012/north-korea-refugees/10055/>

¹⁴⁵ Melanie Kirkpatrick, “A Christmas Prayer for North Korea’s Christians,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 December 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324461604578191830052549850.html>

¹⁴⁶ Donald M. Seekins, “Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment; The Role of Religion,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, 4th ed., edited by Andrea Matles Savada (Washington, DC: GPO, Library of Congress, 1994), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+kp0049%29>

¹⁴⁷ Sunny Lee, “God Forbid, Religion in North Korea?” *Asia Times Online*, 12 May 2007, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/IE12Dg01.html>

¹⁴⁸ Victor Cha, “Chapter 3: All in the Family,” in *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 73.

¹⁴⁹ Julian Rydall, “Analysis: North Korea’s Bizarre Personality Cult and Why It Has Worked – So Far,” *The Telegraph*, 31 January 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/8292930/Analysis-North-Koreas-bizarre-personality-cult-and-why-it-has-worked-so-far.html>

¹⁵⁰ Michal Christine Savage, “Journalist Speaks to Students About North Korea,” *The Digital Universe*, 25 July 2012, <http://universe.byu.edu/beta/2012/07/25/journalist-speaks-to-students-of-north-korea/>

¹⁵¹ Robert Marquand, “N. Korea Escalates ‘Cult of Kim’ To Counter West’s Influence,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 January 2007, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0103/p01s04-woap.html>

respect.¹⁵² Many defectors continue to sing the elder Kim's praises.¹⁵³ An expert explained, "When North Koreans talk about Kim Il Sung, there can be no doubt the emotion is genuine... When they talk about Kim Jong Il, [however], the language becomes more formulaic than stylized, and they begin to use the slogans."¹⁵⁴

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

According to those who have travelled to North Korea and spoken with representatives of state-sanctioned religious organizations, "some members are genuinely religious" but "others appear to know little about religious doctrine."¹⁵⁵

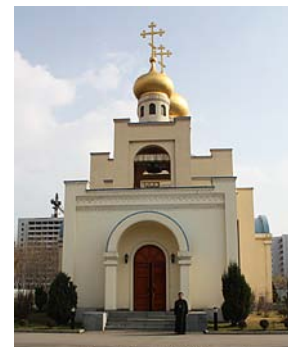
When taken to Buddhist temples, for example, visitors have encountered elderly caretakers who are introduced as monks. This is met with skepticism since many of these "monks" do not wear traditional monastic garb and appear to be married in violation of the celibacy pledge maintained by most Korean Buddhist orders.¹⁵⁶ In sum, although some of the religious activities carried out by practitioners seem authentic, many seem "staged" for visitor consumption.¹⁵⁷



© John Marcus III
Visitor with Buddhist monk

Buildings of Worship

There are four showcase Christian house of worship (two Protestant, one Catholic and one Orthodox) in Pyongyang. The newest, the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, opened in 2006, apparently commissioned by Kim Jong Il after his 2002 visit to an orthodox cathedral in Russia. Scattered throughout the country, 60-some Buddhist temples, out of



© Lazyhawk / Wikimedia.org
Orthodox Church in Pyongyang

¹⁵² Mark Johanson, "Kim Jong-Il's Tomb: 'All the Dramatic Doom and Gloom You Can Imagine,'" *International Business Times*, 22 January 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/kim-jong-ils-tomb-all-dramatic-doom-gloom-you-can-imagine-1032064>

¹⁵³ Choe Sang-Hun and Norimitsu Onishi, "North Korea's Tears: A Blend of Cult, Culture and Coercion," *The New York Times*, 20 December 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/21/world/asia/north-korean-mourning-blends-emotion-and-coercion.html>

¹⁵⁴ Chico Harland, "North Korea Invokes Great Leader, Kim Il Sung, in Power Transfer to Grandson," *The Washington Post*, 24 December 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/north-korea-invokes-great-leader-kim-il-sung-in-power-transfer-to-grandson/2011/12/23/gIQAUVDDFP_story.html

¹⁵⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Korea, Democratic People's Republic of: July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report," 13 September 2011, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168360.htm

¹⁵⁶ Barbara Demick, "Buddhist Temple Being Restored in N. Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/02/world/fg-temple2>

¹⁵⁷ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Korea, Democratic People's Republic of: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011," 2012, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27775.htm>

approximately 300, are authorized to hold religious services.¹⁵⁸ All clergy, regardless of denomination, are employees of the state.

Temple restoration is ongoing. Preservation of North Korean cultural relics rather than rehabilitation as places of worship is the official objective. One such ancient Buddhist site, the *Shingye* or *Singyesa* (Holy Valley) Temple, a wooden structure destroyed in the Korean War, was restored in 2007. It is part of the Mount Kumgang Tourist Zone located just north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The Unification Ministry of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and foreign visitors provided the USD 10 million in funds to complete the work. During reconstruction, a South Korean monk took up residence in the temple. The opening ceremonies were attended by 300 South Korean Buddhists.¹⁵⁹

While South Koreans can visit, the government has barred North Koreans from entering the grounds.¹⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the regime has found ways to use the temple, which was twice visited by Kim Il Sung, for propaganda purposes. A stone monument proclaims, “[t]he architectural beauty of our ancestors was destroyed by the brutal air bombing of the American imperialists,” thereby legitimizing it as an eventual pilgrimage destination for citizens of the DPRK.¹⁶¹

Behavior in Places of Worship

Statues and images of the Buddha should be approached quietly and with a respectful attitude. They represent North Korea’s cultural heritage.

Exchange 1: May I enter the temple?

Soldier:	May I enter the temple?	kyowey turaw gadoo tamneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

Visitors should be neatly attired and not bring food or drink into a temple, nor should they deliberately point their feet directly at a Buddha statue or symbol. Everyone should remove shoes before entering and refrain from touching paintings or statues.^{162,163}

Exchange 2: Must I take off my shoes inside the temple?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the temple?	kyowey trawgaltey sinbarul pasoyaa hamneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

¹⁵⁸ Andrei Lankov, “Another Korea: Buddhism in North Korea,” *Korea Times*, 15 January 2007, <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=89,3618,0,0,1,0>

¹⁵⁹ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Chapter 9: In the Palace of the Murdered Queen: Seoul,” in *To the Diamond Mountains: A Hundred-Year Journey Through China and Korea* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 153.

¹⁶⁰ James Brooke, “Restoring Bonds at a Korean Temple,” *The New York Times*, 2 October 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/02/world/asia/02iht-temple.html>

¹⁶¹ Barbara Demick, “Buddhist Temple Being Restored in N. Korea,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/02/world/fg-temple2>

¹⁶² Rough Guides (firm), *Make the Most of Your Time on Earth: The Rough Guide to the World* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 764.

¹⁶³ Cecilia Hae-Jin Lee, *Frommer’s Seoul Day by Day* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2011), 163.

Visitors also need to be aware of North Korea’s restrictions concerning general religious conduct, whether inside places of worship or outside of them. They should avoid behavior that could be considered proselytizing and not distribute religious materials or even give them away occasionally to a local person.¹⁶⁴ Visitors should not engage in conversations about religion and avoid any kind of religious socializing in groups, unless the government sanctions it. Finally, if visitors wish to attend a religious service or presentation, they can do so only if it is state-approved.



© Tatyana / flickr.com
Orthodox priest in Pyongyang

¹⁶⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of: July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report,” 13 September 2011, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168360.htm

Chapter 2 Assessment

1. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Christian missionaries were particularly successful in gaining converts in Pyongyang.

True

So successful were the Christian missionaries that Pyongyang became known as the “Jerusalem of the East.”

2. There are no constitutional or other legal guarantees of religious freedom in North Korea.

False

The North Korean Constitution grants freedom of religious belief but in practice, the government prohibits such freedoms.

3. Chondogyo does not incorporate the idea of an “eternal reward” for one’s deeds.

True

Chongdogyo is an indigenous faith that includes no concept of eternal reward. Adherents focus on bringing righteousness and peace to the world.

4. The North Korean government has successfully barred foreign religious groups from providing food aid inside the country.

False

Foreign religious groups are openly represented among the numerous organizations providing aid inside North Korea.

5. The South Korean government partially paid for the USD 10 million restoration of North Korea’s Holy Valley Temple.

True

Foreign tourists paid for the remainder. The temple was destroyed during the Korean War.

CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS

Introduction

“Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung” is the first phrase North Korean parents train their toddler children to repeat.¹⁶⁵ Literally, every piece of information these children encounter as they grow up has been designed to deify the Kim leadership and underscore the benevolence of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP).¹⁶⁶ It is unclear whether the regime can sustain the pretense, as the citizenry gains greater access to information from the outside world. In April 2012, the government took the unprecedented step of admitting a satellite launch had failed. Two previous attempts to launch a satellite also failed. In both instances, government propaganda claimed they were successful. Moreover, state media informed the North Korean people these circling satellites were broadcasting songs singing the praises of the Kim leadership.¹⁶⁷



© Mark Fahey
Children's Palace monument

The political ideology of *juche*, expounded by Kim Il Sung, fomented a race-based nationalism and, by extension, wariness of outsiders.¹⁶⁸ According to *juche*, human civilization originated on the peninsula and this makes Korea the chosen land.¹⁶⁹ While there is now general awareness that South Koreans have achieved a high standard of living due to their integration into the global economy, they are officially depicted as having shed their “Koreaness” in the process. A scholar explained the government’s position, “If the [North Korean] people must endure some hardship in order to maintain a Korean way of life, that’s a small price to pay.”¹⁷⁰ They should emulate the winged horse of Korean lore known as Chollima, which could leap 1,000 *ri* (250 km or 150 mi), and complete their assigned tasks in record speed.¹⁷¹ *Juche*, in sum, not only legitimizes the regime’s pursuit of political self-determination, reflected in its promotion of cultural and economic autarky, but also impels citizens to maintain unwavering faith in the revolutionary cause.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ David Hawk, “‘Thank You Father Kim Il Sung’: Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion in North Korea,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, November 2005, <http://www.davidrhawk.com/ThankYouFatherKimIlSung.pdf>

¹⁶⁶ Hugo Mercier, “How Gullible Are North Koreans?” *Psychology Today*, 23 September 2011, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/social-design/201109/how-gullible-are-north-koreans-0>

¹⁶⁷ Choe Sang-hun and David Sanger, “Rocket Failure May Be Test of North Korean Leader’s Power,” *The New York Times*, 13 April 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/14/world/asia/international-condemnation-follows-north-koreas-failed-rocket-launch.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁶⁸ B.R. Myers, “Chapter 1: The Colonial Era, 1910-1945,” in *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves—And Why It Matters* (Brooklyn: Melville Publishing House, 2010), 46-47.

¹⁶⁹ Don Oberdorfer, “Chapter 1: Where the Wild Birds Sing,” in *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, revised edition (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 19.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Kelly – Asian Security Blog, “Guest Post: Dave Kang – ‘Confucian North Korea,’” 31 July 2012, <http://asiansecurityblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/31/guest-post-dave-kang-confucian-north-korea/>

¹⁷¹ Daniel Schwekendiek, “Chapter 4: Economic Perspectives,” in *A Socioeconomic History of North Korea* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 125.

¹⁷² Charles Armstrong, “Chapter 1: The Role and Influence of Ideology,” in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 3-18.

Honor and Values

Loyalty to the regime is the highest value in North Korea. Citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and their immediate kin pay a high price if they are deemed disloyal. Among the most feared forms of official reprisal is a downward adjustment in the social classification system known as *songbun*.¹⁷³ The government assigns each North Korean citizen a *songbun* at birth. Infants typically inherit their parents' *songbun*. Because it is a major determinant of opportunities in life, it would be unthinkable to marry someone with a radically lower *songbun*. The three main categories of loyal, wavering, and hostile are further divided into 51 subcategories.¹⁷⁴ Loyal citizens can live in Pyongyang, enjoy priority access to scarce goods like food vouchers, and are eligible for admittance to top educational institutions and the best jobs. Those in the second category are presumably on the lookout for an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime and improve their status. The government consigns members of the hostile group to the bottom in perpetuity, where they languish in the least desirable professions.¹⁷⁵ Many of those who have fled North Korea were classified as members of the wavering and hostile classes and therefore consigned to lives with limited opportunity.¹⁷⁶



The categories are slightly less meaningful since the regime's exclusive power over the distribution of essential goods collapsed during the late 1990s. The emerging private sector allows those with hostile *songbun* to develop alternative employment. In addition, North Koreans can now receive, without official harassment, remittances funneled through China from family members who have fled to South Korea.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 1: Songbun," in *Kim Il-Song's North Korea* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 3.

¹⁷⁴ Gordon Chang, "'Marked for Life' in North Korea," *World Affairs*, 19 June 2012, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/gordon-g-chang/%E2%80%98marked-life%E2%80%99-north-korea>

¹⁷⁵ Robert Collins, "Marked for Life: *Songbun*, North Korea's Social Classification System," The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012, http://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Songbun_Web.pdf

¹⁷⁶ Phil Robertson, "The Problem of North Korean Refugees in China and Possible Solutions," (Paper presented at the 2nd KINU Chaillot Human Rights Forum 2012 on "International Cooperation to Improve North Korean Human Rights Conditions under the Kim Jong-Un Regime," Seoul, South Korea, 14 June 2012), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/19/problem-north-korean-refugees-china-and-possible-solutions>

¹⁷⁷ Barbara Demick, "Chapter 20: Reunions," in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 272.

Greetings

Greetings among Koreans tend to be formal, accompanied by a bow. The younger or otherwise lower status individual initiates the bow, and the other person (of higher status) either bows or offers to shake hands.¹⁷⁸

Exchange 3: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	kaajuktul modu chal chineysaayo?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	ney modu chal chineyko isimneetaa kamsaa hamneedaa

Handshakes differ according to gender and status. A man offers his right hand using his left hand to support or grip the wrist of his right hand as a gesture of respect. When women greet each other, they extend both of their hands so that they are holding both of each other's hands. A bow of the head accompanies handshakes for both men and women. When a child greets an adult, the child always bows.¹⁷⁹ When a visitor initiates a greeting, it is customary to bow and offer to shake hands with the eldest person first.¹⁸⁰ If a man is shaking hands with a woman, the grip should be very light and short.



© kwramm / flickr.com
Handshake with foreign tourist

Exchange 4: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	chohun achimneedaa
Local:	Good morning.	chohun achimneedaa

Koreans consider direct eye contact disrespectful, similar to an invasion of privacy. For this reason, they may look beyond the person or downward as they express their greetings, or they may hold minimal eye contact.¹⁸¹

Exchange 5: Good afternoon.

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	chohun ohu imneedaa
Local:	Good afternoon.	chohun ohu imneedaa

Conversational exchanges should not be overly direct, as Koreans may perceive this as invasive. This is also true when asking questions of a Korean person. The questioner should be indirect.

¹⁷⁸ ProQuest, "North Korea," *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012, http://online.culturegrams.com/pdf/world_pdf.php?id=117

¹⁷⁹ ProQuest, "North Korea," *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012, http://online.culturegrams.com/pdf/world_pdf.php?id=117

¹⁸⁰ ProQuest, "North Korea," *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012, http://online.culturegrams.com/pdf/world_pdf.php?id=117

¹⁸¹ "Rebecca S. Merkin, "Cross-cultural Communication Patterns: Korean and American Communication," *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 20 (May 2009), <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr20/merkin.htm>

Exchange 6: Good night!

Soldier:	Good night!	anyonghee chumusaayo
Local:	Good night!	anyonghee chumusaayo

For instance, it can appear rude and abrupt to ask, “Do you understand me?” Instead, the questioner should say something like, “Does this seem reasonable?” or “Is this how you would see it?”¹⁸² When addressing a Korean person, use his or her honorific title and the family name (surname).

Exchange 7: Hello!

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Kim.	kim sansongnim, anyong aaseyo
Local:	Hello!	anyong
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	chal chineysaayo?
Local:	Yes.	ney

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Unannounced home visits for social purposes are rare in the DPRK, and even arranged social visits are infrequent.¹⁸³ North Korean men enjoy drinking, with traditional rice wine (*soju*) being a particular favorite. However, the possibility of saying something that could be deemed critical of the government or Kim leadership in the relaxed confines of home looms large.

Exchange 8: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	singangsaa jooshin gaat namoo kamsaa hamneedaa
Local:	It is nothing.	pyul mal sim-ulyo

A British man who worked in Pyongyang for seven years (1986-93) enjoyed exactly one meal in a colleague’s home. It was a heavily orchestrated affair involving all international staff at the publishing house that employed him. He observed the host’s child did not know how to eat shellfish, indicating the food was not normal fare for the family.¹⁸⁴

Exchange 9: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	omsigey maasee namoo chwaayo
Local:	Thank you.	kamsaa hamneedaa

In the event one has the opportunity to visit a North Korean home, it is cultural protocol to remove one’s shoes before

¹⁸² Suk-hyon Kim, “Korean Cultural Codes and Communication,” *International* (Spring 2003): 100, <http://ias.sagepub.com/content/6/1/93.full.pdf>

¹⁸³ ProQuest, “North Korea,” *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012, http://online.culturegrams.com/pdf/world_pdf.php?id=117

¹⁸⁴ Michael Harrold, “Chapter 5: First Lessons,” in *Comrades and Strangers: Be Korea* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 169-170.



© Jon Dunbar
Gift shop

entering. The guest should bring a gift and offer it to the host with both hands. It can be a souvenir from one’s home country, so long as it lacks political overtones, or a locally purchased edible like fruit. The value of the gift is less important than the act of offering it.¹⁸⁵ The recipient may have to be pressed several times to accept it.

Exchange 10: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	sanmul paatey saayo
Local:	I cannot accept this.	chan paatul so abseyo

Eating Customs and Habits

Eating customs vary but generally, conversations during meals are limited. North Koreans avoid, wherever possible, using their fingers to touch the food as eating with hands or fingers is impolite. They typically slurp their soups and drinks. It is an acceptable way to cool hot dishes rather than blowing on them. They use chopsticks to eat all foods except rice, for which a spoon is used. North Koreans consider it poor manners to eat while walking on the street.¹⁸⁶



© Mo Riza
Eating with chopsticks

Severe food shortages in recent decades have seriously affected the daily diet.¹⁸⁷ Spring is the lean season for farmers. Little is left of the previous year’s harvest while the current year’s crops have not yet matured.¹⁸⁸ Households typically mix wild foods with grain to stretch out their resources.¹⁸⁹ Only the elite have assured access to staple foods. Most North Koreans consume less than half of the recommended daily caloric requirements, and in 2012, nearly one-third of all children suffered from malnutrition and protein deficiencies.¹⁹⁰

Traditional Dishes

Soy sauce, red pepper, ginger, and sesame are commonly used spices in Korean cuisine. *Kimchi* (fermented cabbage) is a staple along with rice, resources permitting. The rest of the meal,



© Cift / flickr.com
Panchon

¹⁸⁵ ProQuest, “North Korea,” *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012, http://online.culturegrams.com/pdf/world_pdf.php?id=117

¹⁸⁶ ProQuest, “North Korea,” *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012, http://online.culturegrams.com/pdf/world_pdf.php?id=117

¹⁸⁷ Sonia Ryang, “North Korea: Food and Economy,” in *Countries and their Cultures, Vol. 2*, eds. Melvin Ember and Carol R. Ember (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2001), 1204-1205, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/North-Korea.html>

¹⁸⁸ Erich Weingartner, “My First Monitoring Trip,” 38 North, US Korea Institute at SAIS, June 2011, <http://38north.org/2011/06/weingartner062411/>

¹⁸⁹ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, “Famine in North Korea Redux?” *East-West Center Working Papers*, 97 (October 2008): 15,

<http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/5479/ECONwp097%5B1%5D.pdf?sequence=1>

¹⁹⁰ World Food Programme, “Korea, Democratic People’s Republic (DPRK),” 2012, <http://www.wfp.org/countries/korea-democratic-peoples-republic-dprk>

typically soups and vegetable side dishes, is referred to collectively as *panchan*.¹⁹¹

Exchange 11: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	omsigee naamoo maaseesaayo
Local:	It's Bulgogi.	pulgogey eemneedaa

Raengmyon is a cold noodle soup, the signature dish of North Korea. Preparation varies family to family.¹⁹² Noodles and noodle dishes are now typical in cities along the northeast coast. In cities like Hamhung and Chongjin, noodles are likely to be made from potatoes as well as the traditional buckwheat varieties seen in the capital.

Exchange 12: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	moosin umsig yeyo?
Local:	This is Bibimbob.	pipim paapimneedaa

Due to the scarcity of meat, much of the diet is vegetarian. Tofu is a common meat-substitute. A popular traditional dish that few North Koreans are in a position to enjoy is *Bulgogi*, marinated beef strips broiled over charcoal. Official sources report ordinary citizens have been moved to tears when presented with *bulgogi* by Kim Jong Il.¹⁹³



© Courtesy of Wikimedia
Cold noodle soup

Exchange 13: What ingredients are used?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make Bulgogi?	pulgogiye mosee turaagamneekaa
Local:	Meat, soy sauce sugar, wine, garlic, mushrooms, green onions, syrup	kogee, kanjhang, sultang, changchoo, maanul, paasat, paa, buljachee turaa kamneedaa

Dress Code

The DPRK dress code covers everything from proper attire to grooming schedules. Citizens are given Kim Il Sung badges that they wear on the left side of their upper garments, close to the heart. In addition to reflecting loyalty to the regime, badges are a form of social delineation.¹⁹⁴ There are approximately 20 designs in circulation.¹⁹⁵ According to an expert, “an experienced observer can guess the official association and approximate position of a North Korean simply

¹⁹¹ Vivienne Mackie, “Korea: Kimchi ... Gimchi, Korea’s National Dish,” *Globalfoodie*, 9 October 2009, <http://globalfoodie.com/2009/10/korea-kimchi-gimchi-koreas-national-dish/>

¹⁹² Elaine Love, “Korea’s Taste of Summer is a Long, Cool Slurp,” *The New York Times*, 19 July 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/19/dining/19noodles.html?_r=0

¹⁹³ “NK Soldiers Thank Kim Jong-il for Bulgogi,” *The Korea Times*, 25 July 2011, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/sports/2011/07/116_91555.html

¹⁹⁴ Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung, “Chapter 5: Gifts to the Leader,” in *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 142.

¹⁹⁵ Kwon Yong Il, “The Boom and Bust World of Kim Badges,” *Daily NK* (Seoul), 24 February 2012, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk02900&num=8872>

by looking at his/her badge.”¹⁹⁶ Badges are reputedly a target of pickpockets in a country where people typically don’t wear jewelry or carry a lot of cash.¹⁹⁷

Exchange 14: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	myowaasur iboyaa hamneekaa?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes, which cover your body.	hanaa naagey mahnin holing anosree eepooseyo

Somewhat at odds with other state socialist revolutionary governments like China, where clothing was unisex prior to the economic reforms, the North Korean government has long promoted traditional female attire.¹⁹⁸ Women are encouraged to wear the *choson-ot*, a long, full, wrap-around skirt and short jacket known as *hanbok* in the South. The dress, in short, is a tangible manifestation of a way of life that is uniquely Korean.¹⁹⁹



In any event, they were long expected to wear skirts or dresses; the prohibition against females wearing slacks has only recently been lifted.²⁰⁰ In the summer, women routinely carry umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun. Pale skin is considered a sign of feminine beauty.

Exchange 15: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	eeyosil eebado taayo?
Local:	Yes.	ney

Men need to take care their hair is not too long, an indication they are unduly influenced by Western youth culture. While it is now common to see casual clothing adorned with roman letters, jeans remain synonymous with capitalist decadence and citizens of the DPRK are not permitted to wear them.²⁰¹ Visitors should dress conservatively to show respect for local norms.

Non-Religious Holidays

In 2012, there were 14 official holidays in North Korea. National public holidays are listed below in order of date:

¹⁹⁶ Luke Herman, “Brace Yourselves, The Kim Jong Un Badges Are Coming,” *NK News*, 15 November 2012, <http://www.nknews.org/2012/11/brace-yourselves-the-kim-jong-un-badges-are-coming/>

¹⁹⁷ Paul French, “Chapter 1: A Normal Day in Pyongyang,” in *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula: A Modern History* (New York: Zed Books, revised edition, 2007), 16.

¹⁹⁸ Suk-Young Kim, “Dressed to Kill: Woman’s Fashion and Body Politics in North Korean Visual Media (1960s-1970s),” *Positions* 19, no 1 (2011): 2010-28.

¹⁹⁹ Robert Kelly – Asian Security Blog, “Guest Post: Dave Kang – ‘Confucian North Korea,’” 31 July 2012, <http://asiansecurityblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/31/guest-post-dave-kang-confucian-north-korea/>

²⁰⁰ Choe Sang-hun, “North Korea Experts Can See A Lot in a Hemline,” *The New York Times*, 15 July 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/16/world/asia/experts-on-north-korea-can-see-a-lot-in-a-hemline.html?ref=world>

²⁰¹ Bona Kim, “Producing Jeans in Jeans-Forbidden State,” *Daily NK* (Seoul), 4 December 2008, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00100&num=4341>

- New Year's Day (01 January)
- Day of the Shining Star (Kim Jong Il's birthday is 16 February but celebrated on 17 February)
- Day of the Sun (Kim Il Sung's Birthday, 15 April)
- Army Day (25 April)
- Labor Day (01 May)
- Victory Day (27 July)
- Liberation Day (15 August)
- National Day (09 September)
- Korean Workers' Party Founding Day (10 October)
- Constitution Day (27 December)

Other celebrations include a three-day holiday for the Lunar New Year or *Seollal*, (a variable date in January or February), *Surinal* (a spring festival formerly called *Dano*, on a variable date in May or June), and *Chuseok* (the Harvest Moon Festival, on a variable date in September or October).²⁰² While South Koreans spend time with family and visit their ancestral graves during three days of Harvest Moon festivities, North Koreans are expected to pay their respects to the Kim leadership and those buried in the national martyr's cemetery. *Chuseok* was recognized as a one-day holiday in the DPRK in 1988.²⁰³ The Arirang Mass Game Festival commences around Kim Il-Sung's birthday, and authorities stage events for two months.²⁰⁴

Dos and Don'ts

Do be aware of all official regulations and follow them.

Do remove your shoes before you enter a temple or a private home.

Do use only your entire right hand to summon a person. Keep your palm down and wave downward.

Don't show disrespect to images or statues that represent state leaders, state authority, or the *juche* ideology.

Don't criticize or show any disrespect to North Korean officials or citizens.

Don't criticize or show any disrespect, direct or implied, to members of the Kim family.

Don't engage in open expressions of affection with the opposite sex.

Don't touch a North Korean person casually; it is a violation of personal space.

Don't deliberately point your foot at or show disrespect to statues or images of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, or any members of the Kim family.

Don't deliberately point your foot at an image or statue of the Buddha.

Don't discuss religion or try to promote any religious ideas to North Koreans.

Don't point to anybody with a finger. Use the entire right hand instead.

²⁰² Alter Ego Services (firm), "North Korea Public Holidays 2012," *Q++ Worldwide Public Holidays Database*, 2012, http://www.qppstudio.net/publicolidays2012/north_korea.htm

²⁰³ Kay Aviles, "Chuseok – A Festival With Two Faces," *International Business Times*, 10 September 2011, <http://www.ibtimes.com/chuseok%E2%80%94festival-two-faces-311692>

²⁰⁴ "In Pictures: Arirang Festival," *BBC News*, 30 April 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1959610.stm>

Don't point upward with the middle finger. It is obscene in the U.S. and equally so in North Korea.

Don't use obscene or indecent language within earshot of North Korean citizens. Some may be familiar with American slang.

Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Only Korean Workers' Party members wear Kim Il Sung badges.

False

All adult North Koreans wear Kim Il Sung badges, although the badges are different for party members.

2. North Koreans consider direct eye contact disrespectful.

True

Direct eye contact is disrespectful in North Korea, particularly toward a person of higher social status. Thus, North Koreans may look beyond the person or downward during exchanges with strangers or superiors.

3. North Korean women have been barred from wearing slacks in public

True

While the law is sporadically enforced, it remains on the books. The government promotes traditional feminine attire for women.

4. According to *Juche*, human civilization began on the Korean peninsula.

True

Kim Il Sung's philosophy of *Juche* claims human civilization started on the Korean peninsula. This is why North Koreans have to work hard to achieve its greatness.

5. *Songbun* is the name of a North Korean dish eaten on political holidays.

False

Songbun is the name of North Korea's social classification system.

CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE

Introduction

After the Korean War ended, thousands of people in the North Korean countryside migrated to urban areas. Approximately 17.7% of the country's population resided in the nation's cities in 1953 (the year the war ended), according to official statistics. Estimates from the Central Intelligence Agency place that statistic at 60% for the year 2010.²⁰⁵ South Korea, despite claiming better agricultural conditions for farming, was 88% urban in 2010. Demographers expect the differential to accelerate.²⁰⁶



© yuhong Chen / flickr.com
Pyongyang street

North Korea, like other state socialist countries, has incentives to limit rural to urban migration.²⁰⁷ The government must provide urbanites with jobs and housing. In addition, living in Pyongyang is a privilege reserved for the loyal. An analyst noted, "In simply no other country is there such a striking difference between living in one city and living any place else in the entire country."²⁰⁸ Even those deemed worthy of residence permits can find themselves cast out for reasons that have nothing to do with personal conduct. In 2011, a neighboring province annexed the southern part of Pyongyang. This move reduced the capital city's population by about 500,000.²⁰⁹ It occurred after the government had offered cash and rice incentives to motivate residents to relocate on a voluntary basis.²¹⁰ It is unlikely they found sufficient volunteers given the difference in standard of living.

Daily Urban Life

Prior to the 1990s, there was very little need to pay for anything with money and very little to buy with it. Citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) received essential goods through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Allocation varied according to their place of residence and social rank (*songbun*) within the government's 51-grade classification system, which remains in place. High-ranking members of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) fill the top five strata.²¹¹ There are five categories of housing that range from one room with a shared

²⁰⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, "Korea, North," in *The World Factbook*, 20 June 2012,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html>

²⁰⁶ "Two Koreas' Urbanization Gap Likely to Widen Further By 2015: Reports," *Yonhap News Agency*, 2 January 2011, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/01/02/65/0401000000AEN20110102000500320F.HTML>

²⁰⁷ Migration Dialogue, Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics, University of California, Davis, "North and South Korea: Illegals, Visas," *Migration News* 6, no. 5 (May 1999), http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=1811_0_3_0

²⁰⁸ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 14: Pyongyang: Kim's Dream City," in *Kim Il-Song's North Korea*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 122.

²⁰⁹ "N. Korea Reduces Capital's Size: Report," *Agence France-Presse*, 14 February 2011,

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gqyyQCecyQjMKDYNHOi4DKceFgYA?docId=CNG.e4c0f8b05d70ed1feaeb1c2cf03f5035.171>

²¹⁰ Yoo Gwan Hee, "North Korea Trying to Reverse Urbanization," *Daily NK* (Seoul), 3 October 2010,

<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01300&num=6100>

²¹¹ Bertil Lintner, "Chapter 2: The Famine and the *Juche* Idea," in *Great Leader, Dear Leader: Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2005), 34.

kitchen to free standing homes with private gardens.²¹² While all newlyweds are entitled to apply for accommodation, the quality can vary. Some apartments lack running water on the upper floors due to insufficient water pressure. This forces residents to fill containers from street taps and carry them up on a daily basis.²¹³ Defectors report that desirable units can be “bought” by bribing housing management officials.²¹⁴

Exchange 16: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	kaajogee eegosey samneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

In exchange for food and housing, DRPK citizens were expected to devote themselves to the revolutionary cause. Beyond meeting production quotas, workers were required to participate in collective social activities, such as studying the writings of the national leader or participating in mass events.²¹⁵ Mothers would drop their pre-school age offspring at day care centers before 8:00 a.m., where children could also be boarded.²¹⁶ After arriving at their own place of work, they could remain on the job until 8:00 p.m., which might be followed by an additional two hours of study and self-criticism sessions. Annual leave or vacations simply did not figure into the daily lives of urbanites.²¹⁷ A middle-aged defector from the coastal city of Chongjin recalled the rare Sunday when neither she nor her late husband was required to report for work and their four children were not busy with school. They enjoyed only two family outings to the beach despite its extremely close proximity.²¹⁸



© Joseph A Ferris III
Pyongyang housing

Urban Workforce

Most industry is located in or near urban areas, and approximately 64% of the population works in industrial or service jobs, according to 2007 estimates.²¹⁹ Urban residents over the age of 16 are eligible for job assignment. Due to the insolvency of much of the industrial sector, many of these jobs are unpaid or offer only token compensation. Failure to report after being assigned a

²¹² Encyclopedia Britannica Online, “North Korea: Housing,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea/280876/Housing>
²¹³ Christopher Sultan, trans., “A Glimpse of North Korea: Travels in the Empire of Kim Jong Un,” *Der Spiegel*, 2 May 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-visit-to-the-north-korea-of-kim-jong-un-a-830661.html>
²¹⁴ Paul French, “Chapter 1: A Normal Day in Pyongyang,” in *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula: A Modern History* (New York: Zed Books, revised edition, 2007), 14.
²¹⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “2011 Human Rights Report: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” n.d., 22, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186491.pdf>
²¹⁶ *North Korea: A Day in the Life*, online video, directed by Pieter Fleury, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Golden Monkey Enterprises, 2004), <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/fleury160409.html>
²¹⁷ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment; Family Life,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 110, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf
²¹⁸ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 3: The True Believer,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 47-48.
²¹⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Profile: North Korea: Labor,” July 2007, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/North_Korea.pdf

job, however, can result in being sent to a labor camp.²²⁰ Some employees pay a monthly fee to sign in but spend their days toiling off-site. One such employee noted, “How would the companies survive if they didn’t get money from the workers?”²²¹

Non-payment of salaries coupled with the withdrawal of state subsidies for essential goods like food makes life challenging for factory workers. According to former college professor who defected, the average monthly salary of a North Korean worker is approximately KPW 2,000 (USD 15) while 1 kg (2.2 lbs) of rice costs KPW 4,000 (USD 31).²²² North Koreans increasingly rely on ingenuity to survive. At one Pyongyang shoe factory, only about 100 of the 750 workers still show up. While the others remain on the books as employees; they buy the materials from the factory, make the shoes at home and sell them privately. After paying management a fixed amount, they can keep the rest.²²³



© Joseph A Ferris III
Glass factory employee

Marketplace

Under Kim Il Sung, markets where citizens sold goods for money were seen as a vestige of capitalism. They were never entirely eradicated from the landscape, however. Most of the goods sold were second-hand items no longer needed by the seller’s family. Nonetheless, those loyal to the regime often viewed them as sleazy places.²²⁴ One defector recalled her horror when a factory manager suggested to female employees that they find other ways to feed their families due to an impending slowdown that eventually shuttered the factory. She could not imagine becoming a peddler and joining the ranks of women she considered uncivilized.²²⁵

Exchange 17: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	eegowsil kachapkey salpey pul soo isumneekaa?
Local:	Sure.	mul-loneecheeyo

In Confucian cultures, females are heavily overrepresented in the ranks of the peddler class. Confucius viewed traders as disreputable people who rely on tricking customers into paying

²²⁰ “North Korea: Economic System Built on Forced Labor,” Human Rights Watch, 13 June 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/13/north-korea-economic-system-built-forced-labor>
²²¹ Sharon La Franiere, “Views Show How North Korea Policy Spread Misery,” *The New York Times*, 9 June 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/world/asia/10koreans.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>
²²² Brian Gleason, “Poor Professors, State Corruption and the Entrepreneurial Spirit Within the North Korean Economy,” ASAN Institute for Policy Studies, 23 August 2012, <http://sinonk.com/2012/08/23/poor-professors-state-corruption-and-the-entrepreneurial-spirit-within-the-north-korean-economy/>
²²³ Yoshihiro Makino, “Side Jobs, Black Markets Flourish in North Korea,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, 26 December 2011, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201112260001
²²⁴ Andrei Lankov and Kim Seok-hyang, “North Korean Market Vendors: The Rise of Grassroots Capitalists in a Post-Stalinist Society,” *Pacific Affairs* 81, no. 1 (2008): 57, http://www.pacificaffairs.ubc.ca/files/2011/10/article_sample_2.pdf
²²⁵ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 4: Fade to Black,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 61.

more than an item is worth.²²⁶ Hence, it became an activity befitting women who traditionally held lower social status. In North Korea, female employees were the first to be furloughed from state-owned enterprises in the 1990s.²²⁷ In order to make ends meet, they began to trade privately. By contrast, men have been banned from such activities because they should be occupied with more ideologically appropriate work in the eyes of the KWP. They may be involved in transporting goods to the market, but women are responsible for sales.²²⁸

Exchange 18: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	kaasowlun tonul chul soo isumneekaa?
Local:	No.	awbsumneetaa

In 2003, the KWP recognized stall markets (*jangmadang*) as permanent shopping venues.²²⁹ The largest market in Pyongyang boasts 1,500 booths that span 6,000 sq m (64,583 sq ft), divided into food, apparel and electronic appliance sections.²³⁰ Using satellite imagery, scholars identified 200 such markets across the country in 2010.²³¹ Some draw more than 100,000 shoppers a day.²³² Nonetheless, they are generally not visible from artery roads or monuments.



© Marcelo Druck Private shop

Merchants reportedly give discounts to those paying in Chinese RMB currency, known simply as “B” in North Korea.²³³ This is particularly true for street vendors, who ply their wares at what have become known as “frog markets,” since they run off at the first sign of law enforcement.²³⁴

Monitoring and Surveillance

Every urban housing complex is organized into people’s groups (*inminban*) of between 25 to 50 families under the authority of a single individual, typically a middle-aged woman who has several assistants. As the head (*inminbanjang*), she is tasked with organizing all communal

²²⁶ Bertil Lintner, “Chapter 2: Famine and the *Juche* Idea,” in *Great Leader, Dear Leader: Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2005), 46.

²²⁷ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Nolan, “Gender in Transition: The Case of North Korea” (working paper, Peterson Institute for International Economics, June 2012), 5, <http://www.iie.com/publications/wp/wp12-11.pdf>

²²⁸ Gu Gwang-ho, “We Can No Longer Rely On Our Government!,” *AsiaPress*, 25 June 2012, <http://www.asiapress.org/rimjin-gang/archives/2012/06/25155546.html>

²²⁹ Lee Jinsoo, “Jangmadang At The Center of People’s Lives,” *Open Radio for North Korea*, 29 June 2011, <http://english.nkradio.org/news/400?pubno>

²³⁰ “Pyongyang’s ‘Unification’ Market of Today,” Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, 5 April 2006, <http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/pyongyangs-unification-market-of-today/>

²³¹ Curtis Melvin, Chapter 11: The Role of Markets in North Korea,” in *Regional and Urban Policy and Planning on the Korean Peninsula*, eds. Chang-Hee Christine Bae and Harry W. Richardson (Northampton, MA: Edward Edgar Publishing, Limited, 2011), 159.

²³² “Advancing Human Rights and the Prospect for Democracy in North Korea,” (Remarks by Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment of Democracy, Seoul, South Korea, 16 February 2012), 5, <http://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Carl-Gershman-Speech-February%2016.pdf>

²³³ “North Koreans Shun New Won,” *Radio Free Asia*, 23 June 2010, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/won-06232010120048.html>

²³⁴ John Everard, “The Markets of Pyongyang,” *Korea Economic Institute* 6, no. 1 (January 2011): 1, <http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/everard.pdf>

activities like maintenance and sanitation disposal.²³⁵ Her most important responsibility, however, is to ferret out any type of illicit economic activity being conducted on the premises.²³⁶ Though not part of the government herself, she meets on a regular basis with a representative from the state security ministry.²³⁷ In the past, she was rewarded with additional rations and other perks of officialdom. Now that money is needed to buy an array of essential goods, she may be willing to accept cash in exchange for turning a blind eye to routine infractions.²³⁸ In short, the state has become predatory as well as punitive.

Exchange 19: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	ee chee-aagul chal amneekaa?
Local:	Yes, I know it well.	ney, chaal amneetaa

Before enforcement subsided over the last decade, mobile police units (*kyuchaldae*) made unannounced home visits to ensure residents were not misusing electricity for cooking purposes.²³⁹ After circulation of smuggled foreign film cassettes became commonplace, the police would shut off the power to entire buildings to undertake a unit by unit search. They would ask to inspect video players to see if any foreign entertainment was lodged inside.²⁴⁰ Discovery of contraband could dispatch the entire household to a labor camp from which they would be unlikely to emerge alive. Despite their newfound access to both contraband goods as well as the possibility of buying one’s way out of trouble, most people continue to go to great lengths to keep contraband hidden. One defector in Seoul keeps in touch with family back in North Korea via a cell phone smuggled in from China that her relatives keep buried in a hill.²⁴¹



© Cift / flickr.com
Urban housing complex

²³⁵ Ralph C. Hassig and Kong Dan Oh, “Chapter 4: The Economy of Everyday Life,” in *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 128.

²³⁶ Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, “Pyongyang’s Survival Strategy: Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea,” *International Security* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 57.

²³⁷ International Crisis Group, “North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability,” Asia Report Number 230 (25 July 2012): 13, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/230-north-korean-succession-and-the-risks-of-instability.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/230-north-korean-succession-and-the-risks-of-instability.pdf)

²³⁸ Benjamin Katzeff Silberstein, “North Korea: Fading Totalitarianism in the ‘Hermit Kingdom,’” (IFN working paper no. 836, Research Institute of Industrial Economics, 2010), 8, <http://www.ifn.se/wfiles/wp/wp836.pdf>

²³⁹ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 3: The True Believer,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 53.

²⁴⁰ Nicholas D. Kristof, “A New Kim. A New Chance?” *The New York Times*, 21 December 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/22/opinion/kristof-a-new-kim-a-new-chance.html>

²⁴¹ Christian Oliver and Kang Buseong, “Mobile Phones Help Weaken N Korean Isolation,” *Financial Times*, 1 May 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9605fb7a-893b-11e1-bed0-00144feab49a.html#axzz215nVJAPF>

Healthcare

Medical Care

North Korea has one of the world’s highest physician-to-patient ratios, with approximately one doctor for every 700 people.²⁴² One doctor reported that when she began her career in the 1960s, she was required to treat at least 32 patients a day.²⁴³

Exchange 20: Is Dr. Kim in, sir?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Kim in, sir?	kim baaksaagaa aney kaashimneeka?
Local:	No.	aan key shimneetaa

In theory, medical care is free for everyone; however, the level of care varies by a sick person’s *songbun*. Authorities reserve the highest quality care for military and government elites and officials of the KWP who live in or can travel to Pyongyang, where the best hospitals are located.²⁴⁴

Exchange 21: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	kachaa-on gosey pyangwaanee isumneekaa?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	ney, shiney kaawundey isumneetaa

Acute shortages of drugs, vaccines, sterilizers, and essential medical equipment, compromise delivery of medical services.^{245, 246} Nowadays, surgery is routinely performed without anesthesia. Shortly before she defected in 1998, a doctor reported that patients had to bring their own bottles if they required intravenous fluid. Most brought beer bottles. “If they would bring in one beer bottle, they’d get one IV. If they’d bring two bottles, they would get two,” she explained.²⁴⁷



© (stephan) / flickr.com
Pyongyang Maternity Hospital

²⁴² Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment; Population,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 127-128, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

²⁴³ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 7: Two Bottles of Beer for Your IV,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 106.

²⁴⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Profile: North Korea,” July 2007, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/North_Korea.pdf

²⁴⁵ Sarah Dye, “Public Health and Conflict in North Korea” (brief, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, March 2007), <http://www.usip.org/publications/public-health-and-conflict-north-korea>

²⁴⁶ Jasmine Barrett, “The North Korean Healthcare System: On the Fine Line Between Resilience and Vulnerability,” *Resilience: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Science and Humanitarianism*, 2 (March 2011): 55-57, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Resilience/~media/3FB4B90DFD794DF7BCF7B9BAC9E3925E.pdf>

²⁴⁷ Barbara Demick, “North Korea’s Healthcare is a Horror, Report Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jul/16/world/la-fg-north-korea-health-20100716>

Health Issues

Malnutrition imposes long-term negative health effects on the entire population, including urbanites.²⁴⁸ Life expectancy in the country dropped from nearly 73 years in 1995 to about 66 years in 2010. Infant mortality and maternal death rates increased during the same period.^{249, 250} Malnutrition has stunted nearly half of all children under the age of five; 9% suffer from wasting; and 25% are underweight.²⁵¹ Regional variations are significant, however. In one province where the food distribution system failed back in the 1990s, a study found 82% of the children were malnourished. By contrast, in Pyongyang, the percentage was approximately half that number.²⁵²



© Feed My Starving Children / flickr.com
Malnourished children

Education

Primary and Secondary Schooling

Primary and secondary enrollment is compulsory in North Korea, where all pupils complete a year of kindergarten, four years of primary school, and six years of middle school.²⁵³ The principal oversees day-to-day organizational matters for a school while the vice-principal, who also serves as the school's KWP party secretary, is responsible for maintaining adherence to party-set ideological standards.²⁵⁴ Teachers are provided with detailed instructions on how to cover their assigned subject, even if it is math.



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Primary school

The educational pedagogy relies heavily on students regurgitating what they have been taught. On his first visit to the DPRK, a well-seasoned reporter was taken aback when two young girls he was informally interviewing began to repeat their responses in perfect unison. “They could

²⁴⁸ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment; Health Care,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 130, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

²⁴⁹ Tania Branigan, “North Korea Life Expectancy Falls, Census Reveals,” *The Guardian* (UK), 22 February 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/22/north-korea-life-expectancy-falls>

²⁵⁰ Jasmine Barrett, “The North Korean Healthcare System: On the Fine Line Between Resilience and Vulnerability,” *Resilience: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Science and Humanitarianism 2* (March 2011): 55, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Resilience/~media/3FB4B90DFD794DF7BCF7B9BAC9E3925E.pdf>

²⁵¹ Justin McCurry, “North Korea Facing Health and Food Crisis, Says Amnesty International,” *The Guardian* (UK), 14 July 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/15/north-korea-health-crisis-amnesty>

²⁵² “Most N. Korean Children Undernourished,” *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), 26 March 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/03/26/2012032600950.html

²⁵³ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment; Population,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 120-121, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

²⁵⁴ Jung Hang Lee, “Adjacent Schools with Infinite Distance – Narratives From North Korean Mathematics Classrooms,” (paper presented at the 12th International Congress on Mathematical Education, Seoul Korea, 8 – 15 July 2012): 8, http://www.icme12.org/upload/submission/1918_F.pdf

have been robots,” he explained.²⁵⁵ After completing middle school at age 15-16, students are either assigned a job, begin their military service if they are male, or continue their education.

Higher Education

North Korean universities and technical colleges offer a specialized curriculum such as engineering, agriculture, industry, medicine, foreign language study, music, fine arts, and so on. In addition to studying, students are required to participate in productive labor. For urbanites, this can include stints in the countryside. In 2011, university classes were cancelled for ten months, ostensibly to enable college students to help build “a great, prosperous and powerful nation.”²⁵⁶



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Students at university

Admission is highly sought after and extremely competitive. Applicants must pass both a national college entrance exam as well as a department specific exam. Since it is the nation’s most prestigious school, Kim Il Sung University has a special entrance examination.²⁵⁷ While students from cadre families can offset low scores through informal “backdoor” admissions opportunities, the regime recognizes the necessity of placing more weight on merit for technical and engineering school applicants. For that reason, promising students from ordinary families are more likely to gain admittance to schools with science programs. One defector, who recalled how he became the pride of his family after he was accepted into Kim Chaek University of Technology, the North Korean equivalent of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), noted, “it was the only way for a boy without good *songbun* to get to Pyongyang.”²⁵⁸

Restaurants

While dining options are limited in North Korea, restaurant fare includes local favorites, such as cold buckwheat noodles, along with more expensive dishes made from duck or ostrich.

Exchange 22: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	kopināa charal maasko shipsimneedaa
Local:	Sure.	ney

²⁵⁵ Nicholas D. Kristof, “A New Kim. A New Chance?” *The New York Times*, 21 December 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/22/opinion/kristof-a-new-kim-a-new-chance.html>

²⁵⁶ Julian Rydall, “North Korea Shuts Down Universities For Ten Months,” *The Telegraph*, 28 June 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/8602525/North-Korea-shuts-down-universities-for-10-months.html>

²⁵⁷ Kim Min Se, “Entrance Exam for Kim Il Song University Was Once Leaked,” *Daily NK* (Seoul), 14 November 2007, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00300&num=2907>

²⁵⁸ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 5: Victorian Romance,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 76-77.

A restaurant outside Pyongyang, known as Pyongyang Ostrich Farm, supplies meat to high-end restaurants in Pyongyang and is a destination for visitors.²⁵⁹ Pyongyang now also boasts a pizzeria.²⁶⁰

Exchange 23: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	hoosuegee isaayo?
Local:	Yes, we have Shikhey and fruit	ney, ooreenin shikyewa kwaayree isimneeda

Credit cards denominated in USD cannot be used in North Korea due to sanctions. In 2011 the DPRK issued an electronic payment card, called the Narae, which stores balances in hard currency that international visitors can use to settle their accounts.²⁶¹

Exchange 24: Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	kasansorool taa kataa choosil shoo isaayo?
Local:	Yes, of course.	ney bulbonee cheeyo

Environmental Issues

Pyongyang has significant amounts of air pollution due to reliance on coal. Primary contributors include coal-fired industrial boilers and kilns operating in factories in and around the city. Even residential households, which rely on coal to meet their needs, contribute significantly to the problem. Concerns about the nation's water quality increase as water pollution from industrial waste and sewage plants flows into streams. The government uses most of the nation's surface-water supply (80%) to produce hydroelectric power.²⁶² Regardless of whether ordinary residents have to make do without, the authorities never cut power to monuments like the Juche Tower that are important to the regime's legitimacy. Nonetheless, as a scholar observed, "Pyongyang residents can console themselves with the fact that the situation outside the capital is invariably much worse."²⁶³ This is true for pollution as well. Most of the country's natural



²⁵⁹ Stephan Haggard, "Not Satire: North Korea's Ostrich Farm," *North Korea: Witness to Transformation* (blog), 28 July 2011, <http://www.piie.com/blogs/nk/?p=2219>

²⁶⁰ Oliver Burkeman, "After 10 Years of Leader's Heroic Struggle, Pizza Comes to North Korea," *The Guardian* (UK), 15 March 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/16/north-korea-pizza>

²⁶¹ Choi Sung, "Narae – Electronic Payment Card for Foreign Travellers in North Korea," *Korea Industry and Technology Times* (Seoul), 8 April 2011, <http://www.koreaitimes.com/story/14070/narae-electronic-payment-card-foreign-travellers-north-korea>

²⁶² Ken Piddington, ed., "State of the Environment: DPR Korea" (report, United Nations Development Program, 2003), 37-38, 41, http://www.rrcap.unep.org/reports/soe/dprk_air.pdf

²⁶³ Paul French, "Chapter 1: A Normal Day in Pyongyang," in *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula—A Modern History* (New York: Zed Books, revised edition, 2007), 14.

resources are located in the northern two-fifths of the country, adjacent to China. Consequently, the North Korea's industrial base is located there, too.²⁶⁴

Urban Transportation

Rail

Most North Korean cities have tram and bus service and Pyongyang has a subway. Visitors are typically chauffeured around during their stay. A ride on the Pyongyang metro is popular with tour groups, however. Chandelier-lit stations have been built deep into the ground. One station is 150 m (492 ft) underground, versus 10-30 m (33 to 99 ft) for its counterpart in Seoul. Presumably it was constructed at such a depth to prepare for emergencies like war. The upshot is that it requires a great deal of electricity to operate.²⁶⁵ A foreign resident in the 1980s noted it took two to three minutes to go up or down and walking the escalator steps was absolutely prohibited.²⁶⁶ Much more recently, a diplomat routinely observed locals sitting on the escalators steps, though that too is prohibited.²⁶⁷ The stations are decorated as socialist-themed “underground palaces.” The names of the stops do not refer to geographical locations but rather to revolutionary goals like Triumph or Paradise. The two-line train, built in the 1970s, traverses approximately 30 km (18 mi) of track with cars bought second-hand from Germany where they formerly carried passengers in East Berlin.²⁶⁸



© Joseph A Ferris III
Pyongyang Metro

Road

The capital city's broad boulevards were long legendary for their emptiness. Many people appeared to walk to their destinations. Due to the chronic electricity shortage, the government relied on sharply dressed “traffic ladies” to direct the few vehicle drivers.²⁶⁹ A Beijing-based tour operator has observed the recent installation of traffic lights and the redeployment of traffic ladies as enforcers over successive recent visits to North Korea.²⁷⁰



© (stephan) / flickr.com
Traffic policewoman

²⁶⁴ Robert D. Kaplan and Abraham M. Denmark, “The Long Goodbye: The Future of North Korea,” *World Affairs* (May/June 2011), <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/long-goodbye-future-north-korea>

²⁶⁵ “Pyongyang,” Global Security.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/dprk/pyongyang.htm>

²⁶⁶ Andrew Holloway, “Chapter 8,” in *A Year in Pyongyang* (Enfield, England: The Nihilist Amateur Press, 2011), http://www.aidanfc.net/a_year_in_pyongyang_8.html

²⁶⁷ John Everard, “The Markets of Pyongyang,” *Korea Economic Institute* 6, no. 1 (January 2011): 2, <http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/everard.pdf>

²⁶⁸ Robert Schwandl, “Pyongyang,” *Urbanrail.net*, 2007, <http://www.urbanrail.net/as/pyon/pyongyang.htm>

²⁶⁹ Robert Mackey, “The Umbrellas of Pyongyang,” *The New York Times*, 18 August 2009, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/18/the-umbrellas-of-pyongyang/>

²⁷⁰ “Changes in Pyongyang,” *Young Pioneers Blog*, 11 May 2012, <http://blog.youngpioneertours.com/2012/05/11/changes-in-pyongyang/>

Exchange 25: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	pawsugaa kumbang omneekaa
Local:	Yes.	ney

There are now significantly more motor vehicles on the streets of Pyongyang than there were just a few years ago when cars, often with smoky windows, were exclusively associated with officialdom.²⁷¹ The one exception was Japanese cars imported as gifts to North Koreans with relatives in Japan.²⁷² Though Japanese models were reportedly banned in 2006, it took many years to implement due to the lack of alternative vehicles.²⁷³ Privately owned cars are typically registered through a state agency, which sell their license plate allotments to raise cash. This arrangement enables owners to maintain a lower profile and have greater leverage in dealing with law enforcement.²⁷⁴ While only men are allowed to drive cars, the 1996 prohibition against women riding bicycles was lifted in 2012.²⁷⁵ Bicycle transportation has become a lifeline for peddlers transporting their wares to market.

Street Crimes and Solicitation

Although no official statistics are available, crime against foreign nationals is presumed rare in North Korea where visitors are escorted everywhere.²⁷⁶ One seven-year British resident felt safe everywhere he went. Shortly prior to his departure, however, he took a swing at a local after the man, who appeared inebriated, began insulting him. Male drunkenness is so common in North Korea it figured into how the matter was judged.²⁷⁷ A member of a foreign journalists' tour reported finding a man passed out in front of the restaurant where his group was scheduled to eat. Their guide immediately summoned passersby to surround the man to prevent anyone from taking pictures.²⁷⁸ After slipping away from his Chinese tour group, an Asian American college student walked the streets of Pyongyang without interference despite the fact he was 1.9 meters (6 ft 4



© adaptorplug / flickr.com
North Korean tourist guide

²⁷¹ Charles K. Armstrong, "The View From Pyongyang," *The New York Times*, 15 August 2012,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/opinion/the-view-from-pyongyang-north-korea.html>

²⁷² Bradley K. Martin, "In Kim's North Korea, Cars Are Scarce Symbols of Power, Wealth," *Bloomberg News*, 9

July 2007, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a31VJVRxcJ1Y>

²⁷³ Choi Song Min, "Japanese Cars Crashing Out," *Daily NK* (Seoul), 31 May 2012,

<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=9302>

²⁷⁴ Andrei Lankov, "Chapter 8: Low-Profile Capitalism: The Emergence of the New Merchant/Entrepreneurial Class in Post-Famine North Korea," in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 190.

²⁷⁵ Angus Walker, "The Wheels of Change Appear to Be Turning in North Korea," *Itv*, 17 August 2012,

<http://www.itv.com/news/2012-08-17/the-wheels-of-change-in-north-korea-appear-to-turning/>

²⁷⁶ Max Fisher, "Welcome to Lenin Disney: North Korea's Otherworldly Tourism Experience," *The Washington Post*, 16 October 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/10/16/welcome-to-lenin-disney-north-koreas-otherworldly-tourism-experience/>

²⁷⁷ Michael Harrold, "Chapter 10: Inside Out," in *Comrades and Strangers: Behind the Closed Doors of North Korea* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 368-371.

²⁷⁸ Peter Hitchens, "Pyongyang Revisited – Or, Still No Chance of a Flat White in North Korea," *Mail Online* (blog) 29 December 2011, <http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2011/12/pyongyang-revisited-or-still-no-chance-of-a-flat-white-in-north-korea.html>

in) tall and therefore unlikely to be a native.²⁷⁹ When he pulled out a camera to photograph merchants in a *jangmadang*, though, he quickly found himself surrounded by stocky matrons who alerted law enforcement to his unauthorized presence. He was released six hours later after producing a satisfactory self-criticism. Exercise caution in interacting with the local population. Informal efforts to engage North Koreans in any conversation, however innocuous, could land them in serious trouble.

²⁷⁹ Jerry Guo, "A Writer Journeys Into North Korea With Chinese Tourists," *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 September 2008, <http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/2008/0916/a-writer-journeys-into-north-korea-with-chinese-tourists>

Chapter 4 Assessment

1. During the three decades after Korean War combat ended, the urban population of North Korea tripled.

True

About 18% of the population lived in cities at the end of the Korean War. By 1987, that figure had risen to almost 60% where it remains today.

2. The quality of North Korean medical care suffers from a lack of trained doctors.

False

The country has adequate doctors but quality of care suffers from a lack of medicines and equipment.

3. Pyongyang's subway stop names do not refer to geographical locations.

True

The city's subway stop names are revolutionary goals like reunification or paradise.

4. The city limits of Pyongyang expanded in 2011 when the city annexed part of a neighboring province to ease a labor shortage in the capital.

False

In 2011, the southern part of Pyongyang was re-designated part of a neighboring province. This reduced the capital city's population by half a million people.

5. Frog markets are where shoppers go to buy frogs, considered a North Korean delicacy, for special occasions.

False

"Frog markets" is the colloquial name for free markets where peddlers jump and flee like frogs when the police appear.

CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE

Introduction

Approximately 40% of the North Korean population lives in rural areas.²⁸⁰ Few people live in the inland areas of Chagang and Yanggang provinces because these areas are unsuitable for agriculture and the climate is brutally cold. Instead, most rural communities are found in the coastal lowlands and the Yalu and Tumen river-valleys, where towns and villages dot hill slope bases. Farmers live in small low-rise apartments or simple thatched-roofed houses often without running water, heating systems, bathrooms, or kitchens.²⁸¹ They confront a short growing season, due to the country's northern latitude, along with a high ratio of population to arable land, estimated to be 14% of total territory.²⁸² For this reason, the government's emphasis on agricultural self-sufficiency, part of Kim Il Sung's *juche* ideology, is fundamentally misguided.²⁸³ When one factors in economic mismanagement, lack of inputs and machinery, weather alternating between heavy monsoonal rains and drought during critical points in the crop cycle, the results have proved tragic. While few expect a return to the conditions which prevailed in the 1990s that led to widespread famine, food shortages remain a recurring possibility for rural North Koreans who have virtually no other means to earn a living than farming.²⁸⁴



© Joseph A Ferris III
Farm village

Agriculture

Perhaps taking the Korean saying “10 years is enough to change the landscape” literally, Pyongyang sought ways to increase grain production after the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1948. Toward this end, the amount of land under irrigation was expanded by building a system of pumps and reservoirs reliant on electricity to run.²⁸⁵ The government also adopted a Chinese model of dense seed



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Cooperative farming

²⁸⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “North Korea: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 22 May 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html>

²⁸¹ “In Pictures: Unseen North Korea,” *BBC News*, n.d.,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/asia_pac_unseen_north_korea/html/1.stm

²⁸² John Feffer, “Mother Earth’s Triple Whammy: North Korea as a Global Crisis Canary,” *The Asian Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (22 June 2008), <http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-Feffer/2785>

²⁸³ Stephan Haggard, Marcus Noland, and Erik Weeks, “North Korea on the Precipice of Famine” (working paper, Peterson Institute for International Economics, May 2008), 4,

<http://www.iie.com/publications/papers/noland0508.pdf>

²⁸⁴ Brain Palmer, “Why Is North Korea Always Short on Food?” *Slate*, 1 March 2012,

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2012/03/north_korea_nuclear_deal_why_does_the_hermit_kingdom_suffer_so_many_famines_.html

²⁸⁵ Randall Ireson, “Food Security in North Korea: Designing Realistic Possibilities,” (Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, February 2006), 8, http://relooney.fatcow.com/SI_FAO-Asia-N-Korea_155.pdf

planting to increase yields.²⁸⁶ It could claim some success; agricultural output doubled between 1961 and 1988.²⁸⁷ This was aided through intensive application of petroleum-based chemical fertilizers, which benefitted from Soviet energy subsidies, coupled with initiatives like terraced farming, where hillsides are stripped of natural vegetation and cut into horizontal steps that can be planted with crops. Terracing also created the conditions for catastrophic flooding since there were no trees to absorb water. A reporter described the 1995 floods as a “deluge of biblical proportions.” Some communities received as much as 46 cm (18 in) of rainfall in a single day.²⁸⁸

Cooperative Farms

Such sweeping reorganization would not have been possible if land ownership had remained in private hands. In 1943, approximately 75% of rural households were either landless or close to landless.²⁸⁹ After Japanese colonial rule ended, however, the traditional landlord class fled south.²⁹⁰ Their property was distributed to those who worked the land, a highly popular move.²⁹¹ Collectivization of individual plots into cooperative farms did not commence until the mid-1950s, when several thousand cooperative farms, each encompassing multiple housing clusters, were created. Contact between residents of neighboring hamlets was traditionally minimal unless they relied on shared resources.²⁹² Now some 300 families were jointly responsible for cultivating an area of approximately 500 hectares (1,236 ac).²⁹³ Cooperatives were provided with tractors, a symbol of socialist agriculture. In 1977, the regime boasted there were six tractors in use for every 100 hectares (247 ac).²⁹⁴



© Cilt / flickr.com
Cooperative farm worker

²⁸⁶ Christine Ahn, “Famine and the Future of Food Security in North Korea” (brief, Institute for Food and Development Policy/Food First, Oakland, CA, May 2005), 8-9,

<http://www.kpolicy.org/documents/policy/050531christineahnkfoodsecurity.pdf>

²⁸⁷ Meredith Woo-Cumings, “The Political Ecology of Famine: The North Korean Catastrophe and Its Lessons,” (Asian Development Bank Institute Research Paper 31, January 2002) 25,

<http://202.4.7.101/files/2002.01.rp31.ecology.famine.northkorea.pdf>

²⁸⁸ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, Revised and Updated (New York: Basic Books 2001), 370.

²⁸⁹ Chon-Ae Yu, “The Rise and Demise of Industrial Agriculture in North Korea,” (The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University, Paper no. 08-05, October 2005) 8,

<http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/node/7918>

²⁹⁰ Sung Chull Kim, “Introduction,” in *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to Systematic Dissonance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 5.

²⁹¹ Tom Dixon, “Assessing the Success of Self-Reliance: North Korea’s Juche Ideology,” e-International Relations, 7 August 2011, <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/07/assessing-the-success-of-self-reliance-north-korea%E2%80%99s-juche-ideology/>

²⁹² “Chapter 3: Life on a Farm,” in *Rice University Studies*, 5,

http://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/63215/article_RIP621_part3.pdf?sequence=1

²⁹³ David Kang, “Chapter 3: The Economy,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 142-143, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

²⁹⁴ Hy-Sang Lee, “Chapter 5: 1970s: Mounting Arms and Myopic Push for Economic Growth,” in *North Korea: A Strange Socialist Fortress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 91.

Exchange 26: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	awdeesaw eeraasimneekaa?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	chon dongbu-eemneetaa

All cooperatives operated on the same schedule regardless of local conditions. Farmers fulfilled targets set by state planners.²⁹⁵ After the harvest was completed, farm managers delivered it to a collection site, where it entered the Public Distribution System (PDS). In contrast to urban residents who received twice monthly grain rations, the PDS allocated an annual ration to farmers, who possessed the means to store grain.²⁹⁶ In the event they ran short, farmers foraged for food.

Market Reforms

In response to declining grain production, in 1991 the government unveiled a “Let’s Eat Two Meals a Day” campaign that legitimized reduced rations.²⁹⁷ As shortages grew more acute by the mid-1990s, the PDS proved unable to deliver. While 61% of the population received rations through the PDS in 1994, the number had plummeted to 6% three years later.²⁹⁸ The social contract in which the state provided for the basic dietary needs of the populace was in tatters.²⁹⁹



© Joseph A Ferris III
Carrying goods to market

People with access to idle land began to cultivate crops illegally as a survival strategy. Others hiked into the mountains to clear land and grew food on what became known as private farms (*sotochi*). Self-reliance was psychologically reconfigured away from state ideology (*juche*) to individual initiative.³⁰⁰ Those unable to grow their own food sold their possessions, and even the accommodation rights to their housing, to buy grain. As famine spread, social order broke down in areas hardest hit.³⁰¹ Though reports of cannibalism were never confirmed, orphaned children, referred to as wandering swallows (*kochebi*), joined gangs to find food. Mainly it involved

²⁹⁵ Randall Ireson, “Why North Korea Could Feed Itself,” 38 North, US Korea Institute at SAIS, May 2010, <http://38north.org/2010/05/why-north-korea-could-feed-itself/>

²⁹⁶ Andrei Lankov, Seok Hyang Kim, and Inok Kwak, “Relying on One’s Strength: The Growth of the (sic) Private Agriculture in Borderland Areas of North Korea,” *North Korean Economy Watch* (blog), 2011, 9, <http://www.nkeconwatch.com/nk-uploads/DPRK-agricultur-Lankov-Kim-Kwak.pdf>

²⁹⁷ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Nolan, “Chapter 2: The Origins of the Great Famine,” in *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 27.

²⁹⁸ Meredith Woo-Cumings, “The Political Ecology of Famine: The North Korean Catastrophe and Its Lessons,” Asian Development Bank Institute Research Paper 31 (January 2002): 30, <http://202.4.7.101/files/2002.01.rp31.ecology.famine.northkorea.pdf>

²⁹⁹ Brian Gleason, “Poor Professors, State Corruption and the Entrepreneurial Spirit Within the North Korean Economy,” ASAN Institute for Policy Studies, 23 August 2012, <http://sinonk.com/2012/08/23/poor-professors-state-corruption-and-the-entrepreneurial-spirit-within-the-north-korean-economy/>

³⁰⁰ Bradley Babson, “Transformation and Modernization of North Korea: Implications for Future Engagement Policy,” (paper supporting the project “Improving Regional Security and Denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula: U.S. Policy Interests and Options,” U.S. Korea Institute at SAIS and Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University, 2009), 4, http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/Babson_Transformation_and_Modernization_of_North%20Korea.pdf

³⁰¹ Paul French, *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula – A Modern History* (New York: Zed Books, 1995), 130.

stealing. Soldiers, referred to as corn guards, were sent to guard the fields. Farmers pilfered crops in order to feed their own families. According to one relief agency, half the corn crop disappeared in 1996.³⁰²

In 2002, North Korea legalized the private sale of agricultural produce.³⁰³ Given the ideological sensitivity of sanctioning material incentives to meet the demand for food, the regime shied away from the word *gaehyeok* (개혁, reform), instead using terms like *jeonbyeon* (전변, change) or *balhyeon* (발현, development).³⁰⁴ While there appears to be no formal commitment to marketization other than as a stopgap measure, Pyongyang has found it impossible to turn back the clock. After 2005 proved to be the best harvest in ten years, private sales of grain were again banned and the PDS was reinstated.³⁰⁵ In May 2010, all restrictions on private retail trade imposed between 2005 and 2009 were lifted.³⁰⁶ The PDS has been replaced by vouchers that are only distributed to select groups.³⁰⁷ Everyone else buys their food at market-determined prices.³⁰⁸

Rural Transportation

Poor infrastructure limits travel in North Korea. National rail service, built during Japanese colonial rule, mainly serves the more populated western side of the country. Rural residents in the north, and particularly the east, have been described as an “internally isolated underclass” left to their own devices to survive.³⁰⁹

Exchange 27: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	kichayawgee kachaa-un gosey isumneedaa?
Local:	No.	naneeyo

North Koreans need permission for in-country travel. During the period of severe famine, the government turned a blind eye to the movement of people in search of food. After the situation stabilized, authorization could be procured by paying a “commission” (bribe) to personnel in charge of issuing permits. This enables traders to move their wares, though they may have to pay off every person in a position of authority whom they encounter. Train conductors and other staff

³⁰² Jordan Weissmann, “How Kim Jong Il Starved North Korea, *The Atlantic*, 20 December 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/12/how-kim-jong-il-starved-north-korea/250244/#>
³⁰³ Christopher D. Hale, “Real Reform in North Korea? The Aftermath of the July 2002 Economic Measures,” *Asian Survey* 45, Issue 6, (2005): 823-842, http://www.relooney.info/SI_FAO-Asia/N-Korea_118.pdf
³⁰⁴ Ruediger Frank, “Classical Socialism in North Korea and its Transformation: The Role and the Future of Agriculture,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly* X, no. 2 (2006): 16, http://univie.academia.edu/RuedigerFrank/Papers/474375/Classical_Socialism_in_North_Korea_and_its_Transformation_The_Role_and_the_Future_of_Agriculture
³⁰⁵ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Economy,” 4 April 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm>
³⁰⁶ Andrei Lankov, “It’s Not All Gloom and Doom in Pyongyang,” *Asia Times*, 23 September 2011, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/MI23Dg02.html>
³⁰⁷ Yoshihiro Makino, “Side Jobs, Black Markets Flourish in North Korea,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, 26 December 2011, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201112260001
³⁰⁸ Shin Hyon-hee, “N.K. Abandoning Central Planning, Rationing: Report,” *The Korean Herald*, 9 August 2012, <http://nwww.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120809001367>
³⁰⁹ “Deprive and Rule,” *The Economist*, 17 September 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21529063>

reportedly check documents multiple times. Anyone whose paperwork is questioned will likely have to pay a bribe to make the problem go away, according to defectors and Chinese traders.³¹⁰

River transportation is a less common mode of moving passengers and goods.³¹¹ Two of the main rivers used to transport freight are the Amnok (Yalu), running along part of the border with China, and the Taedong, flowing from central North Korea to the southwest.



© jonprc / flickr.com
North Korean boat Amnok River

Rural Health

The North Korean government takes great pride in providing universal healthcare for its citizens.³¹² At the same time, according to the World Health Organization, the DPRK spends less on healthcare than any other country in the world—under USD 1 per person per year.³¹³

Exchange 28: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	kachaa-on gosey pyongonee isumneekaa?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ney, chowgee-ey isumneetaa

The diagnosis may be free, but out-patient treatment is often contingent upon the patient purchasing medicine from a private source recommended by the doctor who presumably receives a kick-back. Such schemes enable medical professionals to earn enough money to survive themselves.³¹⁴ They are no longer automatically entitled to receive subsidized rice rations.

Exchange 29: My arm is broken doctor, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken doctor, can you help me?	paaree burojanindey, tu-aa jul soo isumneekaa?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	ney, tu-aa tidee kaasumneetaa

The cost of surgery must be negotiated beforehand and paid up front. Defectors in Seoul report receiving frantic calls from family members in North Korea asking for immediate transfer of funds to pay for essential treatment.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ “Official Solicit Bribes From Travelers,” *Radio Free Asia*, 28 September 2011, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/bribes-09282011171258.html>

³¹¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, “Country Profile: North Korea; Transportation and Telecommunications,” July 2007, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/North_Korea.pdf

³¹² Choi Song Min, “Celebrating 60 Years of Free Healthcare,” *Daily NK* (Seoul), 15 November 2012, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01300&num=10042>

³¹³ Stephanie Medeiros, “North Korean Health System is a Horrific Story, Reports Say,” *Digital Journal*, 15 July 2010, <http://digitaljournal.com/article/294695>

³¹⁴ “North Korea’s Crumbling Health System in Dire Need of Aid,” *Amnesty International*, 15 July 2010, 22-23, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/north-koreas-crumbling-health-system-dire-need-aid-2010-07-14>

³¹⁵ Ju-min Park, “Insight: A Secret Plea for Money From a Mountain in North Korea,” *Reuters*, 11 July 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/12/us-korea-north-money-idUSBRE86A1AR20120712>

Exchange 30: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	chanaarul sayongal soo isumneekaa?
Local:	Sure.	murlonee cheeyo

Tuberculosis is a threat to those suffering from malnutrition. According to an organization involved in relief work, “[b]etween 2006 and 2008, the number of reported cases doubled to 344 per 100,000 people.”³¹⁶ However, treatment facilities are insufficient to accommodate the demand. In addition, drugs supplied by international humanitarian groups are at risk of ending up for sale on the open market.³¹⁷



© United Nations Photo
Hospitalized child

Rural Education

Education in North Korea is free and the government claims that 99% of the nation is literate. Eleven years of education are compulsory and includes two years of kindergarten or daycare, four years of primary school, and six years of middle school.

Exchange 31: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	aayeedree hagkyowey taaneemneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

Each cooperative has at least one primary school. There is one middle school for every two or three cooperative farms. Each rural middle school has approximately 500-600 students, with an average class size of around 30 students, typically operating in two shifts. Despite the impact of food shortages on children, the system excludes those who have developmental disorders from schooling; there are no known special education programs in North Korea where disabilities are viewed as a source of shame.³¹⁸



© (stephan) / flickr.com
Cooperative primary school

Who Is In Charge?

The administrative and economic affairs at the village level are the responsibility of the chairman of the cooperative farm management committee of each village (*ri*). The Korean Workers’ Party

³¹⁶ “Tuberculosis Threat in North Korea,” *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, <http://www.nti.org/about/projects/TB-Threat/>

³¹⁷ Mok Yong Jae, “Trials of Treating TB in North Korea,” *Daily NK* (Seoul), 7 November 2012, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00400&num=10004>

³¹⁸ Greg Scarlatoiu, trans., “Disabled in North Korea Confined to Homes, Expelled From Capital,” *Radio Free Asia*, 13 June 2007, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/in_depth/nkorea_disabled-20070613.html

(KWP), local people’s assemblies, and local administrative committees elect officials at the local level. The committees are extensions of the national bodies of the KWP and the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA) as well as the cabinet.³¹⁹ There are no checks and balances on state power in North Korea.³²⁰ At the same time, the administrative hierarchy of authority is riddled with principal-agent problems that result in diversion of goods from their intended purpose.³²¹ Fertilizer allocated by the central level, for example, ended up for sale on the open market in June 2012. Despite the prospect of punishment, farmers sold the fertilizer in order to recoup what they spent on gasoline and truck rental fees to transport it from the distribution center to their fields.³²² Aware of the situation, a former ambassador, upon receiving a request for fuel aid, pointed out “others” (e.g. the military) would likely appropriate whatever assistance his government could provide the cooperative. He was informed that wouldn’t happen because the farm manager was the chair of the local KWP committee, a position that gave her the power to fend off any effort by the local military commander to appropriate the fuel.³²³ Still, farmers face the ever present threat that in the event of food shortages, the military will simply come in and seize whatever it needs to feed the troops.³²⁴



© Joseph A Ferris III
DPRK military soldiers

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

There is direct international train service from Pyongyang to Beijing and Moscow.³²⁵ There is also a heavily monitored crossing point at Panmunjom between North and South Korea, used primarily by South Koreans working at the Kaesong Industrial Complex in North Korea.

Exchange 32: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	kajhaang kachaa-un chadansogaa odiimneekaa?
Local:	It is two kilometers.	ee keeromeetaa jongdo tarojani koshimeetaa

³¹⁹ Victor D. Cha and Galbina Y. Hwang, “Chapter 4: Government and Politics; Local Government,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 202,

³²⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “2011 Human Rights Report: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186491.pdf>

³²¹ The principal-agent problem addresses the difficulties in ensuring that lower levels of decision-makers follow the wishes of higher levels rather than acting out of self-interest. Sam Vaknin, “The Agent-Principal Problem in Politics,” *Global Politician*, 30 August 2010, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/26567-politics-business-corruption-citizenry-state>

³²² “Farmers Sell Government Fertilizer,” *Radio Free Asia*, 18 June 2012, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/fertilizer-06182012171803.html>

³²³ John Everard, “Beyond Official North Korea: A British Diplomat’s Observations of Daily Life,” The Brookings Institution, 25 June 2012, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2012/6/25%20beyond%20official%20north%20korea/20120625_beyond_official_north_korea_transcript_uncorrected.pdf

³²⁴ Carol J. Williams, “North Korea Farmers to Test Regime Appetite for Reform,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 2012, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/09/north-korea-farmers-market-economy.html

³²⁵ The Man in Seat Sixty-One, “Train Travel to North Korea ...” <http://www.seat61.com/NorthKorea.htm#.UK0X5oYbiK0>

Citizens of the DPRK do not have the right to move around freely outside their home county or municipality.³²⁶ Military and police checkpoints exist on artery roads throughout the country to check papers that were originally issued only after an individual’s place of work requested permission for a business trip. As it became more important to have cash in the wake of the famine, officials would issue anyone the required travel pass for a price. Those unable to pay can expect to be seriously roughed up and have their possessions confiscated.

Exchange 33: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	chaayeso neyreeshipsheeyo
Local:	OK.	aras simneetaa

Travel within restricted areas like the Chinese border region (or Pyongyang) requires an additional endorsement from the security office at the person’s place of residence.³²⁷ This enables border guards to demand larger bribes from those without documentation travelling to or from China, especially smugglers who are presumed to have deep pockets.³²⁸ Moreover, the North Korean government has fortified the border through electric fencing and deployment of 20,000 additional guards since Kim Jong Un came to power in late 2011.³²⁹



© Chris Price
Military checkpoint

Exchange 34: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	ee kominsungee tangshinee kaajin chanbu imneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	Ney

It is possible for citizens of the DPRK to get permits to cross the border legally, though the process can take six months.³³⁰ Approval may require generous payments to all those who are in a position to deny the application. Would-be North Korean defectors repatriated from China, where those without papers are viewed as economic migrants not political refugees and therefore subject to deportation, will likely be sent to a labor camp.³³¹

³²⁶ Melanie Kirkpatrick, “Chapter 1: Crossing the River,” in *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia’s Underground Railroad* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), 32.

³²⁷ Ralph C. Hassig and Kim Dan Oh, “Chapter 8: Defectors,” in *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham, MD., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 226.

³²⁸ “Official Solicit Bribes From Travelers,” *Radio Free Asia*, 28 September 2011, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/bribes-09282011171258.html>

³²⁹ Andrew Jacobs, “North Koreans See Few Gains Below Top Tier,” *The New York Times*, 14 October 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/15/world/asia/north-koreans-say-life-has-not-improved.html?pagewanted=all>

³³⁰ Andrei Lankov, “Travel Permits in N. Korea,” *The Korea Times*, 2 January 2011, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2011/01/137_79022.html

³³¹ Mark McDonald, “Women Facing Harsh New Pressures in North Korea,” *The New York Times*, 25 June 2012, <http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/women-facing-harsh-new-pressures-in-north-korea/>

Landmines

North Korea has neither agreed to nor signed the Mine Ban Treaty. In the past, the country has produced antipersonnel mines; however, its current production cannot be determined due to lack of information. Estimates indicate the country’s mine stockpile to be large, but again, this remains unverified.³³²

Exchange 35: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	eegosee tangang choneemeekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

The number of landmine casualties in North Korea is unknown. The country admits it has laid mines in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) along its border with South Korea, and there are unconfirmed suspicions that areas along the east coast have also been mined. Following severe rains on the Korean Peninsula, boxes of mines believed to have washed down from North Korea were found near a South Korean island.³³³ Several similar incidents have occurred in recent years.^{334, 335}



© Christophe Chenevier
DMZ landmine warning

³³² International Campaign to Ban Landmines, “North Korea,” *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor*, 31 October, 2011, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/300

³³³ International Campaign to Ban Landmines, “North Korea,” *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor*, 31 October, 2011, http://www.the-monitor.org/custom/index.php/region_profiles/print_profile/300

³³⁴ “Report: North Korean Landmines Found in South Korea,” *CNN World*, 31 July 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-07-31/world/north.korea.land.mines_1_land-mines-yellow-sea-sea-border?s=PM:WORLD

³³⁵ Associated Press, “Parts of North Korean Land Mines Wash Up in South,” *USA Today*, 29 July 2011, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-07-29-south-korea-landslides_n.htm

Chapter 5 Assessment

1. All North Korean farmers work on collective farms.

True

Agriculture was collectivized in North Korea between 1945 and 1958. No meaningful privatization reforms have altered this arrangement.

2. North Korea ranked last in a World Health Organization comparison of national healthcare expenditures.

True

North Korea spends less than USD 1 per person per year on healthcare.

3. Private grain sales have been allowed in North Korea since the late 1990s to ease food shortages.

False

Private sales of grain were only allowed during the famine, but prohibited again by the mid-2000s when the government moved to reassert control over the distribution of essential foodstuffs.

4. Loyalty to the regime is the decisive factor in all college admission decisions.

False

Loyalty to the regime is the most important factor in acceptance at Kim Il Sung University. For engineering and technical schools, however, merit figures prominently to ensure the students can do the work.

5. Orphaned children were referred to as “wandering swallows” during the famine years.

True

The children typically banded together to find food, often by stealing whenever they had the opportunity.

CHAPTER 6: FAMILY LIFE

Introduction

Even by the standards of 20th century state socialist regimes, the transformation of North Korea into a totalitarian quasi-cult where citizens literally worship the Kim dynastic leadership is extraordinary.³³⁶ Nonetheless, traditional values underpin its society. The government took deeply ingrained Confucian cultural norms such as filial piety and deference to authority and used them to cast Kim Il Sung as the national father figure.³³⁷



© Christopher Schoenbohm
Kim Il Sung propaganda mural

When the regime announced his death in 1994, defectors recall old women wailing “*Abogi, Abogi*,” the honorific used to address either the family patriarch or deity.³³⁸ At the same time, the regime’s high level of surveillance reinforces the bonds of blood relations.

Exchange 36: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	ee saramduree tangshin kajok imneekaa?
Local:	No.	aanyo

A former Chongjin resident who reached Seoul with several relatives said her family started planning their escape after a friend revealed he had traveled back and forth to China numerous times and knew people who could help them get across the border. In recounting their decision to leave, she recalled not only her shock upon learning her friend’s secret but fear as well, because, “[y]ou could never trust anybody who wasn’t family. This was exactly the way the secret police entrapped people.”³³⁹

Traditional Family Lineage

Following World War II, the Soviet Red Army occupied North Korea. The Soviet government viewed the Korean family lineage, a patrilineal descent group, as an obstacle to socialism. It traditionally owned an extended family’s land in common and bound members together through the worship of male ancestors. It represented an alternative source of authority. To destroy its power, authorities burned lineage records.³⁴⁰



© John Pavelka
Proud parent

³³⁶ Bertil Lintner, “Chapter 3: The Great and Dear Leaders,” in *Great Leader, Dear Leader: Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2005), 78.

³³⁷ Suk-Young Kim, “Introduction,” in *Illusive Utopia: Theatre, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 6-7, <http://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/9780472117086-intro.pdf>

³³⁸ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 6: Twilight of the God,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 100.

³³⁹ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 14: The River,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 204-205.

³⁴⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “North Korea: Cultural Life,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/322222/North-Korea>

Exchange 37: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	hyongjeygaa isumneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

However, a defector recalled being surprised that his father had memorized the names of their ancestors recorded in the traditional family register (*hoju*). In his final days, the ailing father repeated them to his only male heir. It represented the boy's filial obligation to commit them to memory.³⁴¹ For the son, the *hoju* was a relic of the past. He had grown up after the state assumed many functions of the lineage like education of children and provision of essential services.³⁴² What mattered to him was the *songbun*, the government's social classification system, since it determined his opportunities in life as a citizen of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Distribution of Roles and Responsibilities

While the state assigns both men and women jobs, men were traditionally considered the primary breadwinner. Surveys of defectors in South Korea reveal many North Korean women self-identify as housewives even though they were employed full-time outside the home.³⁴³

Exchange 38: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	kaajok chungyey chigaabul kaajhin boonee tangshin hojaa eemneekaa?
Local:	No.	aanyo

In fact, women are disproportionately represented in the labor force between the ages of 16 and 30. According to visitors, there appear to be more female than male medical doctors as well.³⁴⁴ This likely owes to the 10-year military enlistment men must complete.

Status of Women and Children*Women*

According to the constitution of the DPRK, "women hold equal social status and rights with men."³⁴⁵ Kim Il Sung advocated the creation of a female working class that would revolutionize the traditional family system. In reality, this imposed a double burden on North Korean women

³⁴¹ Barbara Demick, "Chapter 14: The River," *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 204.

³⁴² Donald M. Seekins, "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Andrea Matles Savada (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+kp0046%29>

³⁴³ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "Gender in Transition: The Case of North Korea" (working paper, Peterson Institute for International Economics, June 2012), 7, <http://www.iie.com/publications/wp/wp12-11.pdf>

³⁴⁴ Shannon Eddy, "Searching for Truth in North Korea," The Clayman Institute for Gender Research, 21 December 2012, <http://gender.stanford.edu/news/2012/searching-truth-north-korea>

³⁴⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2010 Human Rights Report: Democratic People's Republic of Korea," 8 April 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/eap/154388.htm>

who continued to shoulder almost all the responsibility for housework. Unsurprisingly, researchers ascertained a much higher proportion of men sat for workplace promotion exams.³⁴⁶ Moreover, women were overwhelmingly assigned jobs in light industry because heavy industry is considered a man’s profession and one that, incidentally, offered better compensation and greater social prestige.³⁴⁷ Female employees were simply taken less seriously. If a woman opted to become a full-time homemaker, she faced little official resistance.

During the mid-1990s when the economy went into a sharp downturn, entrepreneurship began to proliferate as a means of household survival. Light industries were the first to cease production and many North Korean women became active in trading and selling activities to put food on the table. Men remain employees of the state, even though most factories operate in name only. Resigning is not an option, since that would be considered an act of disloyalty. Instead they can pay, in most cases many times their monthly salary, not to show up but remain on the books. Interviews indicate it is often the wife who decides whether her husband’s skills on the open market are worth such a large payment.³⁴⁸



© Joseph A Ferris III
Female state employee

Children

Children are accorded a special place in North Korea. Government and party leaders spend a great deal of time visiting collective venues dedicated the instilling the correct values in the next generation.³⁴⁹ This includes indoctrinating them to view the United States as an evil place and the American people as monsters. Nonetheless, according to a British journalist, “the littlest North Koreans show more fascination than fear when they encounter the rare American in Pyongyang, invariably waving and calling out ‘Hello’ in English.”³⁵⁰



© Tatyana / flickr.com
Girl taking wood to school

Exchange 39: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	otokey chiney saayo?
Local:	Fine, very well.	chal chinemeedaa

³⁴⁶ Kyungja Jung and Bronwen Dalton, “Rhetoric Versus Reality for the Women of North Korea: Mothers of the Revolution,” *Asian Survey* 46, No. 5 (2006): 752,
<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/bitstream/handle/10453/6005/2006004166.pdf?sequence=1>

³⁴⁷ Yinhay Ahn, “Chapter 5: North Korea: Economy, Society, and Women,” in *The North Korean System in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 121-122.

³⁴⁸ Louisa Lim, “Out of Desperation, North Korean Women Become Breadwinners,” NPR, 28 December 2012,
<http://www.npr.org/2012/12/28/168193827/out-of-desperation-north-korean-women-become-breadwinners>

³⁴⁹ Helen-Louise Hunter, “Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment; Family Life,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 111,
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

³⁵⁰ “How North Korean Children Are Taught to Hate the ‘American B*****’ at Kindergarten,” *Daily Mail* (UK), 23 June 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2163817/How-North-Korean-children-taught-hate-American-b---kindergarten.html>

Children in Pyongyang, who come from families with good *songbun*, participate in numerous extracurricular activities like painting, gymnastics and accordion lessons. Nationally, Korean Worker’s Party (KWP) Sports Committee scouts identify children with special abilities. They are sent to train at special year-round boarding schools. Students with advanced computer skills are similarly singled out and sent to a special school in Pyongyang.³⁵¹

Exchange 40: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	yawgeesaa charas sumneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

While education is nominally free in the DPRK, local authorities organize secondary school students in rural areas to collect wood to heat the classroom buildings. If they fail to meet their quota, families must make up the difference.³⁵² Furthermore, officials may enlist students to help with farm or factory work.³⁵³

Family Life in a Typical Household

After the establishment of the DPRK, nuclear families became the norm, in part because the state regarded the extended family or lineage as a relic of the pre-socialist era.³⁵⁴ Family size shrank from 6.5 children per woman in 1966 to 2.5 children in 1988.³⁵⁵ To what extent this declining demographic trend reflects Kim Il Sung’s 1974 pronouncement that a woman should not bear more than three children is unknown.³⁵⁶ It remains slightly above 2 children per woman.³⁵⁷ Nonetheless, they may have to support their children well into adulthood. One woman noted proudly, “My [adult] son comes to me because I feed him, and he obeys me.”³⁵⁸



© Tatyana / flickr.com
Pyongyang family outing

³⁵¹ Geoffrey Cain, “Why is Google Chief Eric Schmidt Visiting North Korea?” *GlobalPost*, 4 January 2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/asia-pacific/130103/why-google-chief-eric-schmidt-visiting-north-korea>

³⁵² Young Hwan-Lee, “Child is King of the Country: Briefing Report on the Situation of the Rights of the Child in DPRK,” *Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights* (website), September 2009, 13, http://eng.nkhumanrights.or.kr/board/bbs_view.php?no=18&board_table=bbs_report&page=1&word=&searchItem=&cate_id=

³⁵³ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “2011 Human Rights Report: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” n.d., 22, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186491.pdf>

³⁵⁴ Charles K. Armstrong, “Chapter 3: Remaking the People,” in *The North Korean Revolution: 1945-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 95.

³⁵⁵ Kyungja Jung and Bronwen Dalton, “Rhetoric Versus Reality for The Women of North Korea,” *Asian Survey* 46, no. 5 (2006): 753-754, <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/bitstream/handle/10453/6005/2006004166.pdf?sequence=1>

³⁵⁶ ProQuest, “North Korea,” *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012.

³⁵⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, “North Korea: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 22 May 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html>

³⁵⁸ Tania Branigan, “Women in North Korea: ‘Men Can’t Earn Enough Money So It’s Our Job Now’,” *The Guardian* (UK), 11 December 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/11/women-north-korea-men-jobs>

Exchange 41: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	ee jeebey modyoo myat myangee samneekaa?
Local:	Ten.	yowl myangimneetaa

The empowerment of women is the direct result of their economic importance to the family. It has become common for women to jokingly refer to their husbands as *meong-meong-i*, a term of endearment for a pet who, while cute and loveable, is a financial responsibility.³⁵⁹ One man explained what happens to widowers. “Men without wives become beggars. They become so hungry that they can’t go to work. Then they have to go to market to beg.”³⁶⁰ Though domestic violence is reportedly on the rise as well, for a woman to remain single is not socially acceptable in North Korea.³⁶¹

Marriage, Birth and Divorce*Finding a Partner*

Since 1971, men can marry at age 20 while women must wait until 28. Although the rationale has not been made public, it is understood that the unusual age-gap policy was promulgated to sustain the morale of soldiers during their mandatory 10-year enlistment. They do not need to worry about their girlfriends marrying someone else in their absence.³⁶²

Exchange 42: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	kaaron hashas sumneekaa?
Local:	No.	aanyo

While North Korea has regulations against pre- and extra-marital sex, such laws have long been at odds with elite behavior. It is common knowledge that Kim Jong Il’s eldest son was born to his mistress, a married woman.³⁶³ Prostitution re-emerged during the famine and access to condoms, which had been restricted, has become increasingly widespread.³⁶⁴

After the establishment of the DPRK, *songbun* status replaced the traditional concern over compatible ancestral names in finding an appropriate martial partner. However, economic factors

³⁵⁹ Andrew Lankov, “Women in North Korea,” *The Korea Times*, 29 July 2012, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2012/11/304_116192.html

³⁶⁰ Louisa Lim, “Out of Desperation, North Korean Women Become Breadwinners,” NPR, 28 December 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/28/168193827/out-of-desperation-north-korean-women-become-breadwinners>

³⁶¹ “North Korean Women: Markets and Power,” 38 North, US Korea Institute at SAIS, 18 March 2011, <http://38north.org/2011/03/north-korean-women/>

³⁶² Barbara Demick, “Chapter 5: Victorian Romance,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 81-82.

³⁶³ Jinhee Bonny, “Love and Sex in North Korea,” *Radio Free Asia*, 14 April 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/48187e26c.html>

³⁶⁴ Shirley Lee, “The 10 Things No North Korean Can Live Without,” *NK News* (Seoul), 17 January 2013, <http://www.nknews.org/2013/01/the-10-things-no-north-korea-can-live-without/>

are increasingly important. If the person has relatives in Japan (or even South Korea) who can send hard currency, it will improve his/her prospects.³⁶⁵

Exchange 43: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	eebunee aaney imneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

A woman’s moneymaking ability has become a desirable attribute in a wife as well. North Koreans speak of “golden couples,” referring to a husband in government and a wife in private commerce.³⁶⁶ Whereas in the past men would have been ridiculed for marrying a divorcee, this is no longer the case. If she is a successful entrepreneur, she may be viewed as preferable to a never wed woman with no work history. According to a news report, “The choice of a divorced partner is especially popular among discharged soldiers in rural locations. The men see it as a chance to marry a city woman and escape the poverty of the countryside.”³⁶⁷ Marriages between urbanites and farmers enable the couple to live in either location.



© Cift / flickr.com
Newlyweds splashing each other

Birth of Children

It is customary for newlyweds to begin planning a family immediately. For Koreans, parenthood confers passage to adulthood.³⁶⁸ Visibly pregnant women generally remain out of public view and rely on their mothers or mothers-in-law to care for them. Most births take place in hospitals. By custom, fathers are not present in the delivery room.³⁶⁹ After three or four days, mother and baby return home, where they remain in seclusion, visited only by family members.³⁷⁰



© Bryan Hughes
Young boy

Exchange 44: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	bodoo tangshiney kaajog imneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

³⁶⁵ Park Hyun-Sun, “Economic Crisis, Social Network, and the North Korean Family,” *East Asian Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 130, http://www.ieas.or.kr/vol15_4/15_4_6.pdf

³⁶⁶ John Feffer, “Beyond the Golden Couples of Pyongyang,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 8 March 2012, http://www.fpif.org/articles/beyond_the_golden_couples_of_pyongyang

³⁶⁷ Nam Sul-Hee, “The Good Marriage Prospects of Divorced Women for Discharged Soldiers,” *Open Radio for North Korea*, 22 June 2011, <http://english.nkradio.org/news/392>

³⁶⁸ Katherine H. Moon, “Love and Marriage in North Korea,” Project Syndicate, 3 August 2012, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/love-and-marriage-in-north-korea-by-katharine-h-moon>

³⁶⁹ Andrew Holloway, “Chapter 21,” in *A Year in Pyongyang* (Enfield, England: The Nihilist Amateur Press, 2011), http://www.aidanfc.net/a_year_in_pyongyang_21.html

³⁷⁰ ProQuest, “North Korea,” *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012,

According to demographic researchers, the traditional Korean preference for sons seems to have waned in the DPRK and has even shifted toward daughters, perhaps as a consequence of female earning power in the private sector.^{371,372}

Divorce

Divorce by mutual consent does not exist in North Korea. A decree is only granted through court trial. Unhappy couples must therefore make their case for marital dissolution in court, which requires costly filing fees.³⁷³ Moreover, the DPRK only allows the courts to issue a fixed number of decrees each year, since the regime views divorce, a practice traditionally unheard of in Korea, as a selfish bourgeois lifestyle choice harmful to children.³⁷⁴

Exchange 45: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	tangsheen eydeur imneekaa?
Local:	Yes.	ney

Those trying to advance in the ranks of the KWP would be unlikely to seek a divorce for that reason. North Koreans who are determined to end their unions may have to pay “commissions” to court personnel to obtain a decree.³⁷⁵ The courts routinely award the couple’s property and children to the husband, which forces the wife to forge a new life.³⁷⁶



© John Pavelka
Father with his children

Rites of Passage

Weddings

In North Korea, spring weddings are favored. Brides wear a traditional *choson-ot*, purchased by their future in-laws, while grooms don Western-style suits, not the Mao-suit worn on other formal occasions, unless they are in the military, in which case they are married in uniform. The couple usually exchange their vows in the bride’s home. A designated master of ceremony (*churye*), often a party cadre or workplace administrator, officiates on behalf of Kim Il Sung. As he pronounces the couple man and wife, they bow deeply in front of portraits of the Kim family leadership. Guests sing a song of praise of to Kim Il Sung followed by a round

³⁷¹ Daniel Goodkind, “Do Parents Prefer Sons in North Korea?” *Studies in Family Planning* 30, no. 3 (1999): 212-218.

³⁷² Daniel Schwekendiek, “Why Has Son-Preference Disappeared in North Korea?” *North Korean Review* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 65-73, <http://mcfarland.metapress.com/content/km116050059w2036/>

³⁷³ Kyungja Jung and Bronwen Dalton, “Rhetoric Versus Reality for The Women of North Korea: Mothers of the Revolution,” *Asian Survey* 46, no. 5 (2006): 754, <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/bitstream/handle/10453/6005/2006004166.pdf?sequence=1>

³⁷⁴ Yong-bum Shin and Heyoung Jung, “Divorce Rates Rise Even as Bribery to Win at the Court,” *Open Radio for North Korea*, n.d., http://nkradio.cafe24.com/bbs/view.php?id=public_news_eng&page=1&sn1=&divpage=1&sn=off&ss=on&sc=on&select_arrange=headnum&desc=asc&no=236

³⁷⁵ Yoon Il Geun and Jung Kwon Ho, “Divorce Rate is Skyrocketing for Economical (sic) Reasons,” *Daily NK* (Seoul), 6 December 2007, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00100&num=3002>

³⁷⁶ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 16: Bartered Bride,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 223.

of toasts.³⁷⁷ The newlyweds then emerge to place a floral tribute on the nearest Kim Il Sung statue before posing for a commemorative picture in front of it.

Exchange 46: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	hangbug aasigil paaraa imneedaa
Local:	We are honored.	yongang imneedaa

Both sets of parents host separate receptions for between 30 to 50 guests. A defector recalled this created a friendly competition to show off.³⁷⁸ The bride's family prepares a banquet including fruits of five different colors served in dishware she will use in her new home. While the state has assumed the traditional responsibility of the groom's side for providing the couple with accommodation, the bride's family remains responsible for their cooking utensils, a cupboard full of quilts, which are laid out for guests to admire, and other daily use items.³⁷⁹ A refrigerator has become a "must have" item, even if there is no electricity to run it.³⁸⁰



© adaptorplug / flickr.com
The wedding party

Later, or possibly even the next day, the party moves to the groom's home where the revelry continues into the night. The *churye* may provide the couple with a car so the bride can arrive at her in-laws' home in style. Most guests will travel by bus or farm cooperative truck.³⁸¹ Lavish wedding celebrations are regarded as wasteful and ideologically subversive by the government. Festivities are confined to private settings to shield the couple and their respective families from criticism.³⁸² Afterward, newlyweds are customarily excused from professional obligations for three or four days to allow them to settle into their new life.

Funerals

When the communists took power in North Korea, they abolished many traditional customs that were perceived to support the old social order. This included elaborate funerals and memorial services that could draw large numbers of extended family. Yet in reality, traditional practices

³⁷⁷ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment; Family Life," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 108, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

³⁷⁸ Barbara Demick, "Chapter 3: The True Believer," in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 50.

³⁷⁹ Andrei Lankov, "North Korean Weddings," *Korea Times*, 7 December 2008, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2012/05/166_35716.html

³⁸⁰ Andrei Lankov, "Chapter 8: Low-Profile Capitalism: The Emergence of the New Merchant/Entrepreneurial Class in Post-Famine North Korea," in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 190.

³⁸¹ "The Culture of Family and Marriage in North Korea [Insight]," YouTube video, 10:52, *Arirang News*, 22 May 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFh_1ilduTg

³⁸² Yoo Gwan Hee, "No Nice Day for White Weddings in North Korea," *Daily NK* (Seoul), 25 February 2010, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01300&num=6060>

have blended with ideology. For example, a standard burial chant was reworded to include the claim, “though this body is deceased, the spirit of the revolution still lives.”³⁸³

Exchange 47: I would like to give my condolences.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	choo-eerul pyoo haamneedaa
Local:	Thank you.	kamsaa hamneedaa

In order to preserve land for other uses, the government requires the dead be cremated, an alien practice to Koreans.³⁸⁴ However, burial in the ground is permitted upon approval by “appropriate authorities,” which likely requires a bribe.³⁸⁵ During the years of famine, defectors report bodies removed from public places were dumped in anonymous mass graves.³⁸⁶ This represented disgraceful treatment of the dead in a Confucian society, where it is believed that proper burial in a carefully chosen location is critical to the good-fortune of the deceased’s descendants.

Exchange 48: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	kaangaagey puteysaayo
Local:	We will try.	koorotorok haages sumneetaa

Authorities reserve those Confucian rituals for the leadership. When Kim Il Sung died in 1994, his funeral procession was an elaborately staged spectacle. Mourners filled Pyongyang’s broad boulevards and expressed their grief in frenzied fashion; crying, wailing, and fainting as the funeral cortege passed by them. A more subdued but nonetheless publicly choreographed funeral was similarly staged for Kim Jong Il when he died in 2011. Tens of thousands lined the streets, weeping and wailing.³⁸⁷ Wailing (*kok*) is a traditional Korean response that reflects not only the family’s sadness over the loss of the deceased, but guilt over the prospect their lack of attention might be responsible for the person’s demise.³⁸⁸



© Bryan Hughes
Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery

³⁸³ Donald M. Seekins, “Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment; Family Life,” in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Andrea Matles Savada (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+kp0047%29>

³⁸⁴ Chang-Won Park, “Korea,” in *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, eds. Douglas J. Davies and Lewis H. Mates (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 291.

³⁸⁵ Young Jung, “Hard Cash for Grave Sales,” *Radio Free Asia*, 5 October 2012, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/graves-10052012185124.html>

³⁸⁶ Barbara Demick, “Chapter 11: Wandering Swallows,” in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2010), 169.

³⁸⁷ Choe Sang-Hun and Norimitsu Onishi, “North Korea’s Tears: A Blend of Cult, Culture and Coercion,” *The New York Times*, 20 December, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/21/world/asia/north-korean-mourning-blends-emotion-and-coercion.html?_r=2&ref=world

³⁸⁸ “Korean Society Celebrations – Funeral Rites,” AsianInfo, http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/celebrations_funeral_rites.htm

Hwangap (60th Birthday)

The 60th birthday is an important milestone for all Koreans, who base their traditional calendar on the 60-year Chinese zodiac cycle. Individuals who complete the entire cycle are set to begin a new one. (The person's actual chronological age can vary according to Western reckoning, since Koreans are considered one during their first calendar year and advance in age on the first of the year rather than on their birth date.)

Children generally prepare a celebration when a parent passes this milestone. If a North Korean citizen has served society exceptionally well, s/he may also receive a table filled with special foods from the Kim family leadership. In honor of Kim Jong Il's *hwangap*, mass celebrations were organized across the country.³⁸⁹ Sixty signals the normal retirement age for urban North Koreans employed in the public sector.³⁹⁰



© Stefan Krasowski
Elderly men

Naming Conventions

Parents name their children in North Korea. Generally, Korean names have three syllables. The first is the paternal family name. The second and third are given names by which others will call the child. Traditionally for males, one of the given names is unique but the second is common to all male children in the generation so that all male cousins in the same generation share a common name. For example, Kim Il Sung, the nation's first leader, named his son Kim Jong Il. The three sons of Kim Jong Il are named Kim Jong Nam, Kim Jong Chul, and Kim Jong Un (the current leader).³⁹¹

Kim is the paternal family name, Jong is the generational name, while the third is unique to each son. The next generation of males will likely have the same third name but a different second name. Circulating name parts (*dollimja*) enable each generation to know how far removed they are from their original lineage founder.³⁹² Women keep their paternal family name when they marry, and so, their names are different from those of their husbands and children.³⁹³



© Bumix2000 / flickr.com
North Korean children

³⁸⁹ "Kim Jong Il," AsianInfo, <http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/north%20korea/kimjungil.htm>

³⁹⁰ ProQuest, "North Korea," *CultureGrams World Edition*, 2012,

³⁹¹ Julian Ryall, "Kim Jong-il Dead: Family Tree," *The Telegraph* (UK), 19 December 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/8965123/Kim-Jong-il-dead-family-tree.html>

³⁹² Ask a Korean! (blog), "Still More About Korean Names," 26 October 2010, <http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2010/10/still-more-about-korean-names.html>

³⁹³ Helen-Louise Hunter, "Chapter 2: The Society and its Environment; Family Life," in *North Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Robert L. Worden (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2008), 108, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_North-Korea.pdf

Chapter 6 Assessment

1. Korean children are considered one-year old at birth. The Communist regime in North Korea profoundly altered traditional culture.

True

Koreans consider the nine-month gestation to be the first year of life. The Communists severed the traditional organization of lineages and reshaped family life.

2. The government encourages North Koreans to have large families to provide future laborers to build socialism.

False

The North Korean birth rate dropped by two-thirds between the 1960s and the 1980s. In 1974, Kim Il Sung decreed women should give birth to no more than three children.

3. North Koreans consider heavy industry to be a man's profession.

True

Women are generally assigned to farm and light industrial work because heavy industry is considered a man's profession.

4. Authorities have the right to remove children with their homes to enroll them in specialized schools.

True

Promising athletes are sent to state boarding schools to develop their talents. They only come home for several short vacations a year.

5. The deeply instilled revulsion for capitalism continues to handicap those with money-making skills in finding a spouse.

False

The ability to earn money has become an asset for those seeking a marriage partner. North Korean men may look for a woman with a proven history of entrepreneurship so they don't have to face the prospect of shouldering the burden of supporting a family alone.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. The Amnok River is also known as the Yalu River.
True / False
2. The North Korean city of Kaesong lies below the 38th parallel division of North and South Korea.
True / False
3. Any North Korean citizen is entitled to live in the capital of Pyongyang.
True / False
4. Kim Jong Il succeeded his father, Kim Il Sung, as president of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).
True / False
5. North Korea has always been poorer than South Korea.
True / False
6. North Korean people demonstrate their devotion to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il by placing their portraits along family photos inside their home.
True / False
7. Christianity never made deep inroads on the Korean peninsula.
True / False
8. Chongdogyo is a religion native to Korea.
True / False
9. Though Confucius was Chinese, Korea is routinely described as "the most Confucian land" in Asia.
True / False
10. In recent years, North Korea restored a number of historic Buddhist temples so Buddhists have a place to worship.
True / False
11. North Koreans never bow when exchanging greetings because this is a Japanese custom.
True / False
12. North Koreans avoid using their fingers to pick up food when eating.
True / False

13. North Koreans make social visits whenever their schedule allows.
True / False
14. There are three major *songbun* categories broken down into 51 separation subcategories.
True / False
15. There are three types of badges worn by North Korean citizens.
True / False
16. Under socialism, the typical workday was shortened to fewer than eight hours to demonstrate that only capitalists forced employees to spend long hours on the job.
True / False
17. Few urbanites heeded recent calls from the government to move to the countryside to help build a socialist society.
True / False
18. South Korea, which has better conditions for farming, is less urbanized than North Korea which industrialized earlier.
True / False
19. Most free market peddlers in North Korea are women.
True / False
20. According to surveys, North Korea has only a modest level of corruption.
True / False
21. Farmers set aside part of the harvest for personal consumption before turning the rest over to the government to distribute to city residents.
True / False
22. Creating terraces on hills and mountains upon which to plant rice made a lasting difference in North Korea's ability to expand grain harvests.
True / False
23. Disabled students and others who have disabilities are banished routinely from Pyongyang and sent to live in rural areas.
True / False
24. Most rural residents of North Korea live in the inland areas of Chagang and Yanggang provinces.
True / False
25. Less than half of the current population of North Korea lives in rural areas.
True / False

26. North Korean women are rising to the highest echelons of power reflecting government efforts to end traditional forms of gender discrimination.

True / False

27. Divorce is considered a private matter in North Korea where the government routinely grants decrees when both partners want to end the marriage.

True / False

28. All North Korean wedding festivities are held indoors.

True / False

29. Only members of the Kim dynastic leadership are accorded elaborate public funeral services.

True / False

30. North Korean men can legally marry at a younger age than women.

True / False

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