



The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia

By Andrei Lankov



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Andrei Lankov has gone where few outsiders have ever been. A native of the former Soviet Union, he lived as an exchange student in North Korea in the 1980s. He has studied it for his entire career, using his fluency in Korean and personal contacts to build a rich, nuanced understanding.

In *The Real North Korea*, Lankov substitutes cold, clear analysis for the overheated rhetoric surrounding this opaque police state. After providing an accessible history of the nation, he turns his focus to what North Korea is, what its leadership thinks, and how its people cope with living in such an oppressive and poor place. He argues that North Korea is not irrational, and nothing shows this better than its continuing survival against all odds. A living political fossil, it clings to existence in the face of limited resources and a zombie economy, manipulating great powers despite its weakness. Its leaders are not ideological zealots or madmen, but perhaps the best practitioners of Machiavellian politics that can be found in the modern world. Even though they preside over a failed state, they have successfully used diplomacy-including nuclear threats-to extract support from other nations. But while the people in charge have been ruthless and successful in holding on to power, Lankov goes on to argue that this cannot continue forever, since the old system is slowly falling apart. In the long run, with or without reform, the regime is unsustainable. Lankov contends that reforms, if attempted, will trigger a dramatic implosion of the regime. They will not prolong its existence.

Based on vast expertise, this book reveals how average North Koreans live, how their leaders rule, and how both survive.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[A] probing, clear-eyed study of the world's most irascible dictatorship. Lankov's is one of the best and most accessible recent accounts of this seemingly outlandish nation, and the book eschews North Korea's lurid stereotypes to reveal a stunted normalcy."

-*Publishers Weekly* (Starred Review)

"*The Real North Korea* is one of the best books about this isolated republic to appear in years. Andrei Lankov draws on three decades of experience to write a deeply informed, thoughtful, fair-minded and highly readable account of 'life and politics' in North Korea, from day one to the present. His policy recommendations for dealing with the nuclear problem, for a South Korea waiting impatiently to inherit the North, and for the eventual end of this regime as we know it, are cogent and full of something rare in discussions about this irascible country: common sense."

-Bruce Cumings, Chair of the History Department at the University of Chicago, and author of *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*

"Lankov explains how North Korea's survival imperative combined with South Korea's success compels the regime to persist in internally rational but self-isolating behavior that only further deepens its quandary. North Korea is the Galapagos Island of nation states, and Lankov provides clear analysis of how the regime has survived despite steep odds, why the leadership cannot change, and why it must."

-Scott Snyder, Senior Fellow for Korea Studies and Director of the Program on U.S.-Korea Policy, The Council on Foreign Relations

"*The Real North Korea* presents a detailed and careful analysis of a country that has been difficult for many to understand. Andrei Lankov, one of the world's top North Korea scholars, provides a fascinating look at the internal dynamics and motivations that drive North Korea. Few scholars of North Korea have the experience and insight of Andrei Lankov, and this book will be required reading for all who wish to better understand the actions of the DPRK."

-Terence Roehrig, Professor in National Security Affairs and Director of the Asia-Pacific Studies Group at the U.S. Naval War College and author of *Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella*

"Lankov offers a highly readable book and a unique perspective that yields a knowledgeable, sardonic, acerbic and not entirely dispassionate view of North Korea. The author also dishes up a rare treat, mostly unbound in books of this genre: common sense and humility about the North's future, a theme from beginning to end."

--*National Interest*

"Andrei Lankov has written a wonderful introduction to North Korean history and North Korean studies in *The Real North Korea*. Historians and researchers in other specialties -- particularly involving the history of the Communist world -- will find it a good introduction to the peculiarities of North Korea. Policymakers and staffers in Washington will find a sober-minded, realistic, and -- given the author's personal background as a Soviet academic -- very different take on North Korea than the standard media line. Highly recommended."

--History News Network

"The book, an engaging blend of scholarship, reportage and memoir, offers striking details about daily life in a country reminiscent of George Orwell's *1984*." -- *The New York Times Book Review* (Editor's Choice)

"The book has the feel of a particularly fascinating college class taught by an elbow-patched luminary. The syllabus ranges from labor camps to nuclear diplomacy...offering both the academic consensus and Lankov's take...Readers will come away with a solid understanding of what's happening in North Korea and why. Lankov illuminates large patches of that North Korea-shaped black hole." --*The Washington Post*

About the Author

Andrei Lankov is Professor of History at Kookmin University in Seoul, South Korea. A native of Leningrad, he studied in North Korea as an exchange student. His books include *North of the DMZ: Essays on Daily Life in North Korea*, and *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945-1960*.

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