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# Life On The North Korea Borderlands: A Collection Of Essays By NK News Contributors



## Synopsis

If there is one thing that everyone knows about North Korea, it is that it is a closed country. Trade is blocked by sanctions. Possession of foreign media is punishable by death. One does not leave North Korea, one escapes. However, while it is undeniable that the DPRK is a more reclusive nation than most, its borders are far from impermeable. As the centrally-planned economy broke down in the 1990s, border guards grew easier to bribe, and the razor-wire fences fell into disrepair. With the collapse of the food distribution systems, an increasing number of North Koreans found their way across the icy Tumen river. While some were defectors searching for a better life in China, Laos or even South Korea, many more were traders and smugglers supplying a North Korean market hungry for foreign goods, or illicit migrant workers looking for jobs that would allow them to send money back to their families in the DPRK, or even people-traffickers paid to facilitate the border crossing. While its agents may have been paid to look the other way, the state was far from ignorant of the growing flows of people and goods across the Northern border. Party officials regularly make the same trip, on a quest for hard currency or luxury goods to fuel Pyongyang's palace economy. Moreover, the authorities soon discovered a sector in which North Korea had a comparative advantage: the provision of cheap labour. Incredible though it may seem, over 50,000 North Koreans are working abroad – perfectly legally – largely in Russia and China. While the pay and conditions that they endure are often bad enough as to constitute abuse by any reasonable standards, these jobs are nevertheless coveted and competition for them within the DPRK is extremely high. Nor is the flow all one way. China's ethnic Koreans and North Korea's ethnic Chinese have always had a foot in both camps, and many families have seen the porous border as a way of hedging their bets in times of political turmoil. With the growth of North Korea's special economic zones, the country has also seen a minor Chinese tourism boom, with regular tour buses crossing the Yalu bridge full of middle class Chinese travelers, whether nostalgic for their own recent past or eager to stock up on cheap alcohol and cigarettes. Nevertheless, such is the unpredictability of the DPRK authorities and the weight of international sanctions that most of this activity takes place in a perpetual legal limbo. The North Korean borderlands are a liminal space, populated by inhabitants of a twilight world, clinging to survival in the face of a political environment that mirrors the harsh steppes themselves. Wanting to bring this fascinating and largely unknown corner of the world to a wider audience, in 2015 NK News launched a Kickstarter campaign to send an undercover investigative reporter to the region. The response was better than we could have hoped for, and we exceeded our funding goals. This collection presents a selection of articles by our NK Borderlands reporter, as well as essays by Dr. Andrei Lankov and Peter Ward.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is no secret to the North Korean government that in the far northern area of the country where the DPRK borders China it is fairly easy to cross the Tumen River in order to defect to China and other countries. Winter is the best time because the Tumen is frozen over and it is not deep if crossing in other seasons. Border guards are stationed at the places that are used as crossings, but sometimes they can be bribed to look the other way. However, the North Koreans built a bridge in hopes of carrying out trade with China, and at a cost of \$320 million, the bridge has never been used. Friction between the two countries erupted and the bridge stands empty of traffic. The Chinese and North Koreans have since agreed on an economic zone in Sinuiju, which would be for matters of trade. China has higher hopes of trade with North Korea, but it is a wish not yet fulfilled as the Chinese would like. This is a book of essays written by a North Korean investigative reporter on the borderlands. It is interesting to read with a deeper understanding of the closed society of North Korea and the activity surrounding the borderlands of the DPRK. Dr. Andrei Lankov and Peter Ward also contributed articles in this book.

Life on the North Korea Borderlands: A Collection of Essays by NK News Contributors Kindle Edition by John Driscoll (Author), Andrei Lankov (Author), Je Son Lee (Author), Laurence Steele (Author), Jennifer Dodgson (Foreword) This piece on DPRK is a dark and chilling first hand look into the privatized country of North Korea, and how a Government will go at any lengths to keep it this way. The collection of reviews and articles, though very dark and chilling, were very eye opening. This is a richly piece of literature that is very important for any society wanting to know more about this country. Al-Khemet Book Club Feb 2017

North Korea is being more important every day. This nonfiction compendium of reviews and articles will give you an unerring feel for why the current trajectory of North Korea is so disturbing to many news commentators and defense professionals. A friend let me read his copy, and I'm glad I did. Unpredictable DPRK authorities, plus the limitations imposed on North Korea by international sanctions, exacerbates the problems that the outside world perceives in the secretive and then threatening actions of North Korea. Its borderlands are the focus of this book, whose inhabitants struggle to survive in an ever-harsher environment. The 2015 NK News Kickstarter campaign funded this book, which is composed of articles by their NK Borderlands reporter and essays by Dr. Andrei Lankov and Peter Ward. A must-read if you have an interest in this region.

I found this book intriguing, with wonderful informational essays of the perils for North Korea's defectors. It gave me a broader look at what is going on around the borderlands of DPRK. Quite interesting for sure.

Life on the North Korea Borderlands: A Collection of Essays by NK News Contributors A fascinating and eye-opening look at life in North Korea's borderlands - a view normally unseen by the rest of the world.

Great series of articles and essays and one of the critical areas of activity for North Korea's defectors, black market traders and as a result government security units.

fascinating read. I'd love to see more done by this author

Great collection of essays. Timely and essential reading.

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