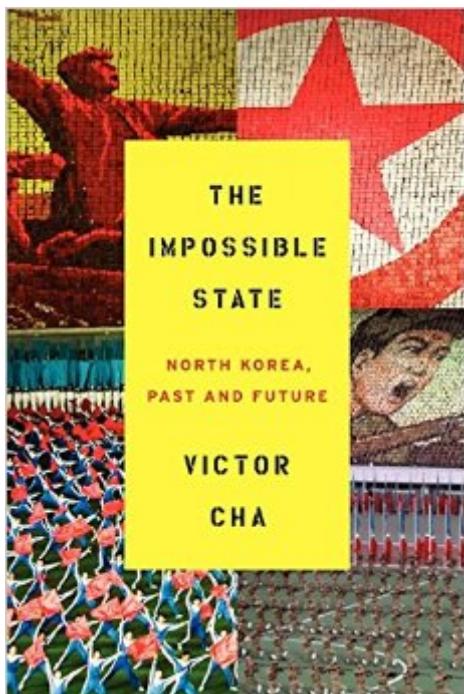


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The Impossible State: North Korea, Past And Future



Synopsis

Former White House official Victor Cha has written the definitive volume on North Korea, arguably the world's most menacing and mysterious nation. In *The Impossible State*, Cha, a singular expert on the region, exposes North Korea's veiled past; sheds light on its culture, economy, and foreign policy; and explores the possibilities of its uncertain future in the post-Kim Jong-il era. A timely and engaging insider's look at a volatile, and isolationist Asian juggernaut, *The Impossible State* will carry readers far deeper into this frighteningly adversarial country than they've ever traveled before.

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Customer Reviews

Author Cha begins by describing his 2009 landing at Pyongyang International, an airport about one-tenth the size of typical international airports. When he arrived, there was only one departing flight listed on its schedule board - to Beijing. Schoolchildren there learn conjugations by reciting 'We killed Americans,' 'We are killing Americans,' 'We will kill Americans.' Math is similarly learned via word problems that involve calculating the number of dead American soldiers. Per capita gross national income has fallen from \$1,160 in 1990 to \$960 in 2009. Three in 90,000 own their own car, 10% have refrigerators. Most all are vegetarians, and not by choice - beef is eaten once/year by the average N.K. citizen. The average 7-year-old boy is 8" shorter and 22 lbs lighter than his S.K. counterpart. Most defectors (now 21,000) do so for economic reasons, and 75% say they retain affection for their 'Great Leader' I, II, and III. Forget about an Arab Spring in N.K., says Cha. And

there won't be a Chinese-style modernization either - it has no credible, competent, charismatic leader such as Deng Xiaoping waiting in the wings. N.K. originally had a considerable economic advantage over S.K., thanks to the Japanese occupiers; most of that, however, was leveled by U.S. bombing during the Korean War. Moscow and Beijing then helped it rebuild (primarily to win N.K. allegiance when Moscow and Beijing were competing), but Moscow backed out after the first three year plan when it saw N.K. focusing on heavy industry and refusing to engage in foreign trade to fill in other areas. (S.K. helped make the divorce permanent by later granting Moscow a \$3 billion loan as part of reconciliation; Moscow had been providing oil at one-fourth of market price).

Having had my curiosity over North Korea piqued by the recent "The Interview" and Sony hacking controversies, I picked up this book on a recommendation. After finishing it, I can say that it definitely has given me a much better understanding of not just North Korea, but also how all of the countries involved in the six-nation talks (including the U.S.) have a stake in what happens to the DPRK in the future. "The Impossible State" breaks down every aspect of North Korea, from its founding by Kim Il-Sung (with a massive assist from the Soviet Union) through the death of Kim Jong-Il and the ascension of Kim Jong-Un (note: this book was published in 2012, so more recent events are not covered). Cha takes a very academic look at the DPRK's history, including how an economy that once dwarfed South Korea's got to a state in which its people are now starving. It also looks at the relationships between the North and the other six-party nations, provides an in-depth overview of their nuclear programming and details the horrifying conditions most North Koreans face in the service of the "Dear Leader". Cha ends the book by looking at the future of the DPRK and what would need to happen if/when the regime collapses. Cha's level of detail and critical analysis are quite impressive. You really feel like he provides a comprehensive overview of the North Korean situation from a very academic perspective, which allows you to better understand one of the most despotic regimes in the world.

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