

Ian Jeffries, *North Korea, 2009-2012: A Guide to Economic and Political Developments* (Routledge Guides to Economic and Political Developments in Asia), Oxon: Routledge, 2013, 924 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-65644-3 (hardcover).

This is the 11th volume in a series of guides on economic and political developments published by Ian Jeffries, an honorary professor at the School of Business and Economics at Swansea University in the UK. Three of these books are devoted to North Korea, three to China; other countries covered in the series are Vietnam, Mongolia and Russia.

The present volume is an uncommented collection of original articles from online editions of Western presses such as *International Herald Tribune*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, BBC, CNN, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, and *The Independent*. It covers the period between June 2010 and August 2012, with a postscript extending to October 2012.

The articles are short, ranging from one single paragraph to one-and-a-half pages. They are assigned to three parts: introduction (82 pp.), political developments (689 pp.), and economic developments (87 pp.) plus a postscript (56 pp.).

Topics covered in the introduction are political background; labour force working abroad; labour camps; defectors; the Korean War and post-war North Korean attacks; the internet, media and the Press Freedom Index; South Korea; Japan; bird flu and foot-and-mouth disease. The 689 pages on political developments are structured chronologically. The part on economic developments is divided into sections on background; the currency reform of late 2009; markets; aid; foreign trade; direct foreign investment; and economic performance. The postscript roughly follows the structure of the first three parts and adds developments between September and October 2012.

Except for a list of acknowledgements, and despite sections called 'introduction' and 'background', the book consists entirely of the above-mentioned short articles from online sources. It clearly does not aim to contribute to the scholarly debate or to develop a certain argument; it is meant to be a collection of resources.

Such a collection is not without its benefits; no matter what the search engine of your choice, it will inevitably turn out the latest results first and tends to disregard entries older than a few months. With the necessary skills, older articles can be found, too, but this is complicated and depends on the willingness of the providers of these sources to store a massive and exponentially growing amount of data for the long term.

Providing a snap-shot of the media echo on North Korea in more durable (i.e. printed) form is thus not a bad idea.

What most readers will nevertheless miss is an introduction explaining the purpose and the limitations of the book, the methodology and criteria for selecting the entries, and at least some analysis of the major events in the covered period. Critics will further point out that only Western sources have been used, in particular from the UK. They will be unhappy about the rather short index (7 pages) that, with just a handful of exceptions, lists only names.

In some cases, the actual value of the quoted articles is not instantly obvious, like the very first entry on page 1: 'Korea's old name, *Chosun*, means "the land of the morning calm" (www.iht.com, 15 July 2010)'. Much could be said about this sentence alone. To begin with, the *International Herald Tribune's* romanization is flawed: it should be either Joseon or Chosŏn, or at least Choson. Furthermore, the reader would benefit from knowing that North Korea still uses the name Chosŏn for Korea, while South Korea prefers Han'guk. Other entries are potentially more useful, such as, 'While most of the [South Korean] military fills its ranks with conscripts, the marines accept only volunteers...' (p. 472), although it is not instantly obvious why this would count as a political development.

In any case, the author should be lauded for having meticulously collected commentaries on major and minor developments in and around North Korea that will soon disappear from our short-term memories as well as from the front pages of web search engines. The value of this book will thus grow over the years.

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