



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

China

China – CHN38452 – Yanji – North Korea
– Border Crossing – Staying in North
Korea – Jilin North Korean Population –
Defectors – Status – Christian Missionary
Activity

28 March 2011

1. Is there a border crossing between Yanji and North Korea?

Yes. The closest official border crossing point from Yanji, China into North Korea is at Tumen.¹ Tumen is located on the Chinese side of the border approximately 35km by road from Yanji.² Tumen is considered to be one of the major border crossing points between China and North Korea. Information was located indicating that at this crossing point there is a bridge over the Tumen River and the road leads to the North Korean city of Namyang.³ Sources indicate that there are a total of 14 official border crossing points between the two nations.⁴

The travel distance from Yanji to a close border crossing point in Tumen and then to Rajin is approximately 111 km.⁵ Sources indicate that Rajin is located 50 km from the border with China and is reachable via an unpaved road.⁶

See Figure 1 for a map showing the locations discussed.

¹ Smith, H. undated, *North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions*, University of Warwick http://www.seoultrain.com/content/resources/nks_in_china-200207smith.pdf - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 1 & Freeman, K. and Thomson, D. 2009, *The Real Bridge to Nowhere*, US Institute of Peace, April 22, p. 5 [http://www.usip.org/files/resources/1\(2\).PDF](http://www.usip.org/files/resources/1(2).PDF) - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

² 'Distance from Rajin and Hunchun' 2000, Microsoft Encarta Interactive World Atlas 2000 – Attachment 3.

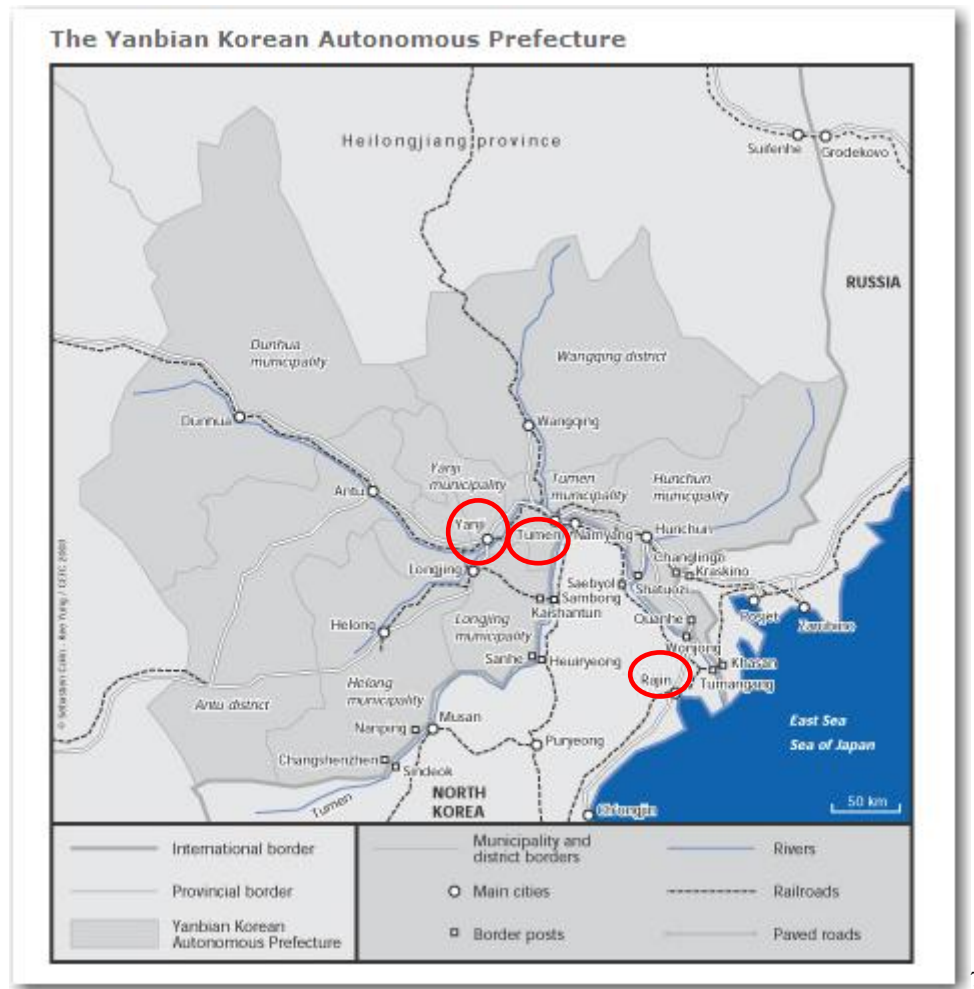
³ Somaiya, R. 2010, 'American Prisoner Attempts Suicide in North Korean Gulag' *Newsweek*, 9 July <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/09/american-prisoner-attempts-suicide-in-north-korean-gulag.print.html> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 4.

⁴ International Crisis Group 2006, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/erilous_journeys_the_plight_of_north_koreans_in_china_and_beyond.ashx - Accessed 5 November 2010 Attachment 5.

⁵ 'Distance from Rajin and Hunchun' 2000, Microsoft Encarta Interactive World Atlas 2000 – Attachment 3.

⁶ Rank, M. 2010, 'North Korea: beyond the capital lies a different world' *The Guardian*, 26 September <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/26/north-korea-rason-beyond-capital/print> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 6.

Figure 1: Locations of Yanji and Tumen in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, in Jilin Province, China, and the city of Rajin in North Korea



2. Are Chinese nationals who are also ethnic Korean able to freely come and go across the border?

Yes. There is a sizeable Chinese community of Korean heritage (850,000 members⁸) located in Yanji and the surrounding areas of the border with North Korea. Cross-border travel for tourist purposes and business has been conducted for years with some ease, including years 1991 to 2001.⁹ While border inspections are conducted by Chinese and North Korean officials at crossing points, several sources indicate that North Korea generally allowed Chinese tourists and traders to enter into North Korea for short stays using only a Chinese identity document prior to 2004.

⁷ Colin, S. 2003, *A border opening onto numerous geopolitical issues*, French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, Revues.org website <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/385?&id=385> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 20 .

⁸ Colin, S. 2003, *A border opening onto numerous geopolitical issues*, French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, Revues.org website <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/385?&id=385> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 20.

⁹ Mong, A. 2009, 'A glimpse across the North Korean border' World Blog NBC News MSNBC.com website, 4 June <http://worldblog.msnbc.msn.com/news/2009/06/04/4376423-a-glimpse-across-the-north-korean-border> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

The February 2010 article *Chinese Businesses Pour into N.Korea's Rajin-Songbong* refers to improved border transiting conditions in recent years and notes that Chinese citizens have been visiting the area since the 1990s. While the article does not refer to specific documentation requirements, it says many past controls have recently been eliminated, including long waiting times at borders and restrictions on activities for Chinese going to the Rajin area.¹⁰

Tim Johnson is a journalist who has travelled in North Korea and who is a knowledgeable source. He reported in 2006 on completing a journey to Rajin that: 'For decades, North Korea has been the easiest foreign destination for the Chinese. Until last year, they didn't even need passports.'¹¹ This statement indicates that it is likely that a Chinese identity card, such as a Hukou, was sufficient documentation for Chinese tourist to enter North Korea for short visits to Rajin.

A common border crossing point in these areas is the Quanhe-Wonjong border crossing. A 2005 article by the East Asia Forum on economic development in Rajin stated that negotiations were under way between Hunchun (China) local government officials and North Korean to upgrade the dirt road to Rajin. Subsequent reports state the road was still not paved by 2010.¹² The article also stated that the North Koreans built a large customs facility at Wonjong to handle Chinese goods coming over the border going to port facilities in Rajin.¹³ Several reports indicate that the North Koreans are currently working to encourage Chinese and other foreign investment in Rajin to improve infrastructure and generate income.¹⁴

3. Would a Chinese national who is ethnic Korean have to register his presence in North Korea with local authorities if staying a few nights with a North Korean family?

No information was located regarding regulations for Chinese to register their presence and intention to reside with a North Korean family during a stay in North Korea.

4. Would it be even possible for a Chinese national to stay with a family in North Korea without applying for permission beforehand? Would that person be closely watched by security officials while there?

No information was located indicating whether or not it is possible or permissible for a Chinese citizen to stay with North Korean family during a visit to North Korea. Any foreigner visiting North Korea is likely to be monitored to some extent by authorities. Most sources indicate that North Koreans are instilled by authorities with a strong aversion to foreigners.

¹⁰ 'Chinese Businesses Pour into N.Korea's Rajin-Songbong' 2011, *The Chosunilbo*, 26 February http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/02/26/2011022600387.html - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 8.

¹¹ Johnson, T. 2006, 'River journey shows stark differences between China, North Korea' World News website http://article.wn.com/view/2006/08/07/River_journey_shows_stark_differences_between_China_North_Ko/ - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 9.

¹² Snyder, S. 2010, 'Rajin-Songbong: A Strategic Choice for China in Its Relations with Pyongyang' The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project, 25 April <http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/2009-2010/10025Snyder.html> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 10.

¹³ Snyder, S. 2010, 'North Korea's renewed push for foreign investment at Rajin-Songbong' East Asia Forum website <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/03/12/north-koreas-renewed-push-for-foreign-investment-at-rajin-songbong/print/> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 11.

¹⁴ See for example: Sung-ki, J. 2010, 'China to Use N. Korea's Rajin Port for 10 Years' *The Korea Times*, 3 August http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/12/120_62002.html - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 12.

Western foreigners find it almost impossible to even engage a North Korean person in conversation.¹⁵ No information could be located indicating whether Chinese of North Korean ethnicity are able to interact with North Korean families more easily than others. The US DOS reports that North Korean society is rigidly monitored and controlled by multi-level system of informants and security checks on homes villages and entire communities.¹⁶ Under this system it is likely that a North Korean family would be required to report foreign guests staying overnight or risk inquiries from authorities.

5. How would North Korean officials react to a Chinese national being found with the Bible and suspected of trying to evangelise North Koreans? Would that result in a detention of only 3 days or deportation or something more serious?

Information on the treatment of Chinese visitors apprehended by authorities for distributing bibles in North Korea was not located. Numerous sources indicate that North Koreans engaging in unauthorised religious activity, including possessing bibles, are treated very harshly. Therefore, it is likely that, at a minimum, a Chinese person caught distributing bibles would be arrested, questioned, and deported.

The 2010 US Department of State reports that North Koreans engaging in proselytising activities or having contact with foreign missionaries who are proselytising, may be arrested and subjected to harsh treatment in prison. Ownership of bibles is illegal and may be punished by imprisonment or even execution.¹⁷

While many sources warn that evangelising activities may result in death sentences, there is a large underground Christian community in North Korea, estimated by various sources to number greater than 100,000.¹⁸ It is possible that authorities draw a distinction in the punishment meted out for merely possessing a bible verses engaging in evangelical activities. Therefore, it is also conceivable that Chinese person could be questioned and deported and not be subjected to further penalties or harsher treatment.

Christian Today reported in August 2010 that North Korean authorities have executed leaders of Christian underground churches leading prayers in private homes. Participants in bible studies have been arrested and sent to prison labour camps. It also reports that a woman (presumably of North Korean nationality) was executed in 2009 for distributing bibles and 'spying'. The article estimates that 400,000 North Koreans practice Christianity in hiding and risk arrest, torture and imprisonment if found. It also claims that 40,000 to 60,000 North Koreans are currently in prison due to their faith.¹⁹

One dated report from 1997 was located that detailed the severe treatment of a North Korean woman found possessing a bible. When a bible dropped from her laundry basket she was arrested and interrogated for three months. She and her father were put on a public trial and

¹⁵ Blondy, B. 2011, 'The North Korea travel guide: A country that time forgot' *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 March <http://www.jpost.com/Travel/TravelNews/Article.aspx?id=174430> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 13.

¹⁶ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November– Attachment 14.

¹⁷ US Department of State 2010, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009 – DPRK* 11 March – Attachment 15 & US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November– Attachment 14 & Lankov, A. 2005, 'North Korea's missionary position' Asia Times online, 16 March <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/GC16Dg03.html> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 16.

¹⁸ US Department of State 2010, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009 – DPRK* 11 March – Attachment 15 & Cain, G. 2009, 'How Christmas Is (Not) Celebrated in North Korea', Time, 24 December <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1949984,00.html> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 17.

¹⁹ Cole, E. 2009, 'North Korea executes underground church leaders' Christian Today, 19 August <http://www.christiantoday.com/articledir/print.htm?id=26540> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 18.

sentenced for treason. They were both executed publicly.²⁰ No recent examples of punishment for possessing a bible were located.

6. Are there many North Korean defectors living in this part of Jilin province?

Yes. Accurate figures are not available and the total number is a matter of debate. A number of reliable sources reported in 2000-2002 that the number of North Koreans living illegally in northeast China is estimated to number between 50,000 and 300,000.²¹ The most recent report located was an article published by Radio Free Asia, which reported on 3 March 2011, that 20,000 North Korean defectors live in border towns in Yangbian and a further 80,000 are estimated to live in other areas of China.²² The largest concentration of ethnic-Korean Chinese nationals live in the border areas of China's Yanbian Autonomous Korean Prefecture.²³ See Figure 1.

Several factors make it impossible to determine the exact number of North Korean defectors or migrants living in China. North Koreans crossing the border do not report to Chinese authorities and avoid contact, they often they do not officially claim asylum fearing return, NGOs and churches refrain from reporting their estimates to protect migrants, and some North Koreans stay for short periods time and then return and repeat this cycle if they have family in both countries.²⁴

A University of Warwick study estimates that 2.2 million ethnic Koreans with Chinese nationality live legally in China. Of these, approximately 854,000 lived in the Korean Autonomous Region of Yanbian. Yanji City has the highest concentration of ethnic Korean Chinese with an estimated 210,000 ethnic Koreans comprising a total population of 350,000.²⁵

7. What is their status – are they considered as illegal immigrants or are they tolerated by Chinese authorities?

North Koreans crossing into China and staying are considered to be illegal 'economic migrants'.²⁶ By labelling North Koreans residing illegally in China 'economic migrants'

²⁰ 'North Korea crushing churches' 2005, Canada.com website 18 November <http://www.canada.com/national/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=5af3e8a1-30ed-4726-9643-e04eec4e3879> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 19.

²¹ Smith, H. undated, *North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions*, University of Warwick, p. 117 http://www.seoultrain.com/content/resources/nks_in_china-200207smith.pdf - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 1 & International Crisis Group 2006, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October, p.1, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/erilous_journeys_the_plight_of_north_koreans_in_china_and_beyond.ashx - Accessed 5 November 2010 Attachment 5

²² 'North Korean Defectors Would Return' 2011, *AFP*, 3 March <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/defectors-03032011153812.html> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 20

²³ Colin, S. 2003, *A border opening onto numerous geopolitical issues*, French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, Revues.org website <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/385?&id=385> - Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 21

²⁴ Smith, H. undated, *North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions*, University of Warwick pp. 116-118 http://www.seoultrain.com/content/resources/nks_in_china-200207smith.pdf - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 1

²⁵ Smith, H. undated, *North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions*, University of Warwick, pp. 115-116 http://www.seoultrain.com/content/resources/nks_in_china-200207smith.pdf - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 1.

²⁶ Smith, H. undated, *North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions*, University of Warwick, p. 119 http://www.seoultrain.com/content/resources/nks_in_china-200207smith.pdf - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 1.

China sidesteps obligations to them as refugees as a signatory to the *1951 Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol*. Chinese authorities occasionally conduct sweeps for illegal North Korean migrants who are arrested and repatriated to North Korea.²⁷ There have been periodic crackdowns on Chinese harbouring North Koreans and reward programs offered for turning in illegal North Koreans. Chinese employers are fined for employing North Koreans. These conditions place North Koreans in vulnerable positions and most take deliberate measures to hide from authorities.²⁸

8. Is there a lot of missionary activity by South Korean Christians or church ministers in that area? Is their presence in that area tolerated by Chinese authorities?

Yes. An August 2010 article in *Foreign Policy* reports that missionaries are very active in the Chinese border regions with North Korea. The article reports that environment is permissive enough on both sides of the border that even U.S. citizens are engaged in missionary activities specifically directed at North Korean communities over the border. It reports that while evangelising activities are forbidden, North Korean authorities knowingly permit missionaries to enter as ‘investors’ in orphanages and small business enterprises. The article reports that North Korea is aware that religious outreach is occurring, but permits this activity because of dire economic conditions in the area.²⁹ In light of this report, it is possible that low key South Korean supported missionary activities are also tolerated on both sides of the border.

A 2007 *New York Times* article on South Korean missionary activities in North Korea reports that South Korean Christians have operated in Jilin province of China for decades. South Korean missionaries first became active during North Korean famines in the 1990s when refugees streamed across the border to China in search of food. The missionaries successfully converted many North Koreans and operated underground networks to move North Koreans over the border. While Chinese authorities did make arrests for proselytising, it is reported that these activities continue.³⁰ A 2007 *Time* article reports that South Korean missionaries enter China under the guise of being researchers, or businessmen, so they won’t be imprisoned for proselytizing under Chinese laws.³¹

A 2006 report by Crisis Group Asia stated that Chinese house churches have been actively supporting cross border relations with North Koreans for many years. A network of churches periodically moves North Koreans across the border either for temporary stays or

²⁷ International Crisis Group 2006, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October, p. I., http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/erilous_journeys_the_plight_of_north_koreans_in_china_and_beyond.ashx - Accessed 5 November 2010 Attachment 5.

²⁸ International Crisis Group 2006, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October, pp.6-7, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/erilous_journeys_the_plight_of_north_koreans_in_china_and_beyond.ashx - Accessed 5 November 2010 Attachment 5 & ‘North Korean Defectors Would Return’ 2011, *AFP*, 3 March <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/defectors-03032011153812.html> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 20.

²⁹ Larson, C. 2010 ‘What’s It Like to Be a Tourist in North Korea?’, *Foreign Policy*, 16 August http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/16/a_tourist_in_pyongyang?page=full - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 21.

³⁰ Sang-Hun, C. 2007, ‘South Korean missionaries spread political message in the North’, *New York Times*, 1 November http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/01/world/asia/01iht-korea.1.8142590.html?_r=2&pagewanted=2 - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 23.

³¹ Veale, J. 2007, ‘Korean Missionaries Under Fire’, *Time*, 27 July <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1647646,00.html> - Accessed 28 March 2011 – Attachment 24.

permanently, and provides provisions to North Koreans during famine years. The report stated these activities were conducted with relative ease in a permissive environment.³²

Attachments

1. Smith, H. undated, *North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions*, University of Warwick
http://www.seoultrain.com/content/resources/nks_in_china-200207smith.pdf – Accessed 28 March 2011
2. Freeman, K. and Thomson, D. 2009, *The Real Bridge to Nowhere*, US Institute of Peace, April 22, p. 5 [http://www.usip.org/files/resources/1\(2\).PDF](http://www.usip.org/files/resources/1(2).PDF) – Accessed 28 March 2011.
3. ‘Distance from Rajin and Hunchun’ 2000, Microsoft Encarta Interactive World Atlas 2000.
4. Somaiya, R. 2010, ‘American Prisoner Attempts Suicide in North Korean Gulag’ *Newsweek*, 9 July <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/09/american-prisoner-attempts-suicide-in-north-korean-gulag.print.html> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
5. International Crisis Group 2006, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/erilous_journeys_the_plight_of_north_koreans_in_china_and_beyond.ashx – Accessed 5 November 2010.
6. Rank, M. 2010, ‘North Korea: beyond the capital lies a different world’ *The Guardian*, 26 September <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/26/north-korea-rason-beyond-capital/print> – Accessed 11 March 2011.
7. Mong, A. 2009, ‘A glimpse across the North Korean border’ *World Blog NBC News MSNBC.com website*, 4 June <http://worldblog.msnbc.msn.com/news/2009/06/04/4376423-a-glimpse-across-the-north-korean-border> – Accessed 11 March 2011.
8. ‘Chinese Businesses Pour into N.Korea’s Rajin-Songbong’ 2011, *The Chosunilbo*, 26 February http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/02/26/2011022600387.html – Accessed 11 March 2011.
9. Johnson, T. 2006, ‘River journey shows stark differences between China, North Korea’ *World News website*
http://article.wn.com/view/2006/08/07/River_journey_shows_stark_differences_between_China_North_Ko/ – Accessed 11 March 2011.
10. Snyder, S. 2010, ‘Rajin-Sonbong: A Strategic Choice for China in Its Relations with Pyongyang’ *The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project*, 25 April
<http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/forum/2009-2010/10025Snyder.html> – Accessed 11 March 2011.

³² International Crisis Group 2006, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October, p.5, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/erilous_journeys_the_plight_of_north_koreans_in_china_and_beyond.ashx - Accessed 5 November 2010 Attachment 5.

11. Snyder, S. 2010, 'North Korea's renewed push for foreign investment at Rajin-Sonbong' East Asia Forum website <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/03/12/north-koreas-renewed-push-for-foreign-investment-at-rajin-sonbong/print/> – Accessed 11 March 2011.
12. Sung-ki, J. 2010, 'China to Use N. Korea's Rajin Port for 10 Years' *The Korea Times*, 3 August http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/12/120_62002.html – Accessed 11 March 2011.
13. Blondy, B. 2011, 'The North Korea travel guide: A country that time forgot' *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 March <http://www.jpost.com/Travel/TravelNews/Article.aspx?id=174430> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
14. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November.
15. US Department of State 2010, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009 – DPRK* 11 March.
16. Lankov, A. 2005, 'North Korea's missionary position' Asia Times online, 16 March <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/GC16Dg03.html> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
17. Cain, G. 2009, 'How Christmas Is (Not) Celebrated in North Korea', *Time*, 24 December <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1949984,00.html> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
18. Cole, E. 2009, 'North Korea executes underground church leaders' Christian Today, 19 August <http://www.christiantoday.com/articledir/print.htm?id=26540> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
19. 'North Korea crushing churches' 2005, Canada.com website 18 November <http://www.canada.com/national/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=5af3e8a1-30ed-4726-9643-e04eec4e3879> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
20. 'North Korean Defectors Would Return' 2011, *AFP*, 3 March <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/defectors-03032011153812.html> – Accessed 28 March 2011.
21. Colin, S. 2003, *A border opening onto numerous geopolitical issues*, French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, Revues.org website <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/385?&id=385> – Accessed 11 March 2011.
22. Larson, C. 2010 'What's It Like to Be a Tourist in North Korea?', *Foreign Policy*, 16 August http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/16/a_tourist_in_pyongyang?page=full – Accessed 28 March 2011.
23. Sang-Hun, C. 2007, 'South Korean missionaries spread political message in the North', *New York Times*, 1 November http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/01/world/asia/01iht-korea.1.8142590.html?_r=2&pagewanted=2 – Accessed 28 March 2011.
24. Veale, J. 2007, 'Korean Missionaries Under Fire', *Time*, 27 July <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1647646,00.html> – Accessed 28 March 2011.