

# LOOKING PAST THE REGIME: A REVISED POLICY OF “ENGAGEMENT” WITH NORTH KOREA

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*In our shrinking world, cross-linguistic and intercultural collaborations have become increasingly important. This is especially true for North Korea, a country so often misunderstood and relatively distant in Western discourse. Nevertheless, western commentators on North Korea traditionally lack engagement with a group that has much to offer on the subject: North Koreans in exile, particularly those who not only have first-hand experience of the country, but base their studies of North Korea on this experience and/or continue to maintain ties with those inside the country. We should learn from and build on the lessons of the Orientalist and post-colonial eras by working through the clashes of frameworks that accompany one culture’s study of another.*

## Entry Points into a Closed Society Undergoing Change

The North Korean regime continues to enforce a closed society and prohibits organic information-flow on multiple fronts. There is no independent media, every kind of art must be approved before publication, and North Koreans cannot communicate freely with outsiders. Those who do pass through these informational borders are either part of a political elite that exists to enforce the regime’s communications blockade,<sup>1</sup> or are members of the business classes. While examining those who work in business may provide interesting

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Jang Jin-Sung, “The Propaganda Officers’ Latest Coup: South Koreans Mourn The Death of Kim Jong-Il,” *New Focus International*, August 2, 2012, <http://newfocusintl.com/the-propaganda-officers-latest-coup-south-koreans-mourn-the-death-of-kim-jong-il/>.