

and readers interested in the Korean literary tradition. It would also be excellent material for classes on Korean literature. Although the rivalry between good and evil characters in the story appears to be simple and repetitive, the way in which the story shows how the morality of filial piety and loyalty become instruments of power to forge alliances and shape societies is interesting. Additionally, the way in which divinity and human will are entangled together in Cho Ung's life provides the reader with an engaging reading experience. The volume also uncovers the cultural values and practices of that time and conveys a resonating message for those interested in looking at the complex relationship between fate (*karma*) and the power of free will.

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*Inside North Korea's Theocracy: The Rise and Sudden Fall of Jang Song-Thaek.* By Ra Jong-yil. Translated by Jinna Park. New York: SUNY Press, 2019, 200 pp. (ISBN: 9781438473727)  
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There is a saying in North Korea that the leader is like the sun: too close and you burn, too far and you freeze. *Inside North Korea's Theocracy: The Rise and Sudden Fall of Jang Song-Thaek* captures that delicate balance which Jang Song-Thaek (Chang Söngt'aek) struggled to maintain from the moment he met Kim Kyong-Hui (Kim Kyöngghüi)—the daughter of Kim Il Sung (Kim Ilsöng) and sister of Kim Jong Il (Kim Chöngil)—the woman he would later marry. However hard you may try to maintain this balance, the Kim family will dispose of you as soon as they see the need. Those who doubt this can look at how the North Korean government makes use of NGOs and aid agencies, or even friendly foreign travelers, and then ousts them on a whim. Such expulsions, or executions in this case, tell us more about the Kim family and the political structure of North Korea than about those it exterminates. Thus, the great value of this book – and perhaps the story of Jang Song-Thaek's life – is that it demonstrates how easily the power of the Kim family can turn against those who are close to it.

Over eight chapters author Ra Jong-yil (Ra Chongil), through the translation of Jinna Park, takes us on a chronological journey through the life of Jang, including his early education at Kim Il-Sung University and the Wonsan University of Economics. Chapter three describes the early one-sided relationship between Jang and Kim Kyung-

Hui, giving us a sense of their life in Moscow where they both studied as well as their activities and cultural interests. Ra continues with the story of their marriage, which was important to the Kim leadership, the preparation of the World Festival of Youth, the famine of the 1990s, which concerned Jang considerably, and the North Korean nuclear program. Chapter seven explores Jang's visits to South Korea in the early 2000s and their impact on his thinking about development and economics. His fatal mistake was to recognize and state the obvious; it is almost impossible for North Korea to simultaneously develop nuclear arms and the economy. This sentiment distanced Jang from the official party line and the leadership. The final chapter details the brutal public execution of Jang, and as many as 400 people associated with him, on charges of treason, counter-revolutionary activities, and factionalism. Ra concludes that Jang knew too much about how to improve the North Korean economy; he gave voice to these suggestions and fell afoul of the leadership.

Unfortunately, the book suffers from careless copy-editing as various typos exist throughout, including on the first page! Also, the author frequently waxes elliptical, diverting from the topic at hand in ways that are confounding. A strong editor would have cut these sections and kept the main story flowing; they push the reader out. While this is an important biography and teaches a substantive lesson about North Korean high leadership, it is, in the final analysis, hard to take seriously given the many errors in the text itself. For these reasons, the book is probably not ideal for classroom instruction. I would encourage readers interested in North Korean high leadership to take a look at this book for the insights but because of the unusual organization, style, and poor editing, it is unlikely that this book will appeal to a more general audience.

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