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Made in North Korea

Graphics From Everyday Life in The DPRK

PHAIĐON
Introduction 6

Our Country is Best 36

American’s are Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing 60

The People’s Paradise 84

The Shoes my Brother Bought me Fit me Tight 108

Single Hearted Unity 132

Gymnasts Must Not Dance 156

Let’s Wear Our Hair in the Socialist Style 180

Learning a Foreign Language is a Weapon 206

Index 234
Made in North Korea
Previous page: wrapping paper featuring some of Pyongyang's architectural highlights: the Koryo Hotel, Railway Station, Ice Rink, Military Circus, Mansudae Art Theatre and the Grand People's Study House. This page: tinned food labels - apples, flatfish and beef. Koreans tend to prefer their national dishes but, nevertheless, Pyongyang has a handful of restaurants serving foreign food: Japanese, Italian dishes, North Korean-style burgers - however, still it is axiomatic in the country that Korean food is best for Korean people.
Top left: Ryongsong Beer. Top right: Ragwon (Paradise) Beer. Bottom left: Pyongyang Beer. Bottom right: Kangso Sparkling Mineral Water – a natural digestive decorated with a dragon painting reproduced from one of the UNESCO-registered Koguryo Dynasty royal tombs found in the vicinity of the Kangso spring. Koreans claim that their beer is the best in the world because of the quality and purity of their water.

Top left: Myohyangsan Spring Water. Top right: Pakyon Spring Water. Bottom left: Paekdusan blueberry (tuljuk) a natural-flavoured carbonated drink for both children and adults. The berries are picked wild in the area of the sacred Mt. Paekdu. Bottom right: pear carbonated drink which is called cider, but actually it’s non-alcoholic.
Above: Stamp sheet depicting various aircraft of the world (most likely issued to mark the 75th anniversary of powered flight) including two examples from Air Koryo, North Korea’s national airline. If the mood takes you, it is possible to design your own stamps and have them be validated for use. Stamps are a common souvenir for visitors to the DPRK. Any that were printed before 2009 (when a currency reform took place) are now not valid for postage and can be used only as souvenirs.

Above: Two sets of sports badges which are generally produced as souvenirs for tourists. These sets are not official presentation badges, such as those that were popularly exchanged as friendship gifts between socialist countries. The only badges worn by local people (other than those portraying the leaders Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il, which are worn by all adults in the country) are Schoolchildren’s Union badges or University badges.
Above: A locally made toy gun (top) which fires plastic bullets and its box (above). The gun features the characters for the Korean Army slogan ‘Il Tang Paek’ meaning ‘one is the match for one hundred (enemies)’. The hedgehog is a popular cartoon character (representing the Korean hero) fighting the wolf and the weasel (representing the enemy – Americans). Opposite: A comic book published in 2001 entitled The Snowstorm in the Tropics.
Comics are produced on topics ranging from historical drama, fighting against the Japanese occupation (1900-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), or spies – normally from South Korea, Japan, or the USA. Comics are popular with children and young adults and can be bought in shops and kiosks across the country.
Opposite page. Top left: Kunsol Filter Cigarettes (Construction). Top right: Pyongyang Koryo Hotel Cigarettes. Bottom left: Pyongyang Filter Cigarettes. Bottom right: Chollima Cigarettes. This page. Top left: Hana Cigarettes (a brand based on the theme of reunification, and like reunification talks, no long in production). Top right: Ragwon Cigarettes (featuring the iconic structures of Pyongyang city. Bottom left: Matchbox with Pyongyang Railway Station graphic. Bottom right: The logo for Daeson Factory on the back of the matchbox, which produces most of the country’s cigarettes and matches.
Above and opposite: From a souvenir set of Pyongyang Metro postcards designed for East German tourists, and published in 1977. The ‘dowa’ line shown here opened in 1973. Mosaic murals, produced at the Mansudae Art Studio, decorate all seventeen subway stations on the system. Station names are generally revolutionary or symbolic, so it is possible to travel the length of line 2 from Restoration to Paradise.
Above: A New Year postcard for use by members of the DPRK military. The emblem (top left) is that of the ‘Supreme Commander’ (at that time Kim Jong Il), in the background the sculpture is of anti-Japanese guerrilla with bugle, then in the mid-ground are three representations of the different eras of the military since the liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945. In the foreground (bottom right) we see a contemporary soldier with members of the public (from left to right, a farmer, an intellectual and a worker in unity). The slogan reads: ‘Happy New Year’.

Above: A postcard showing the military helping the workers construct a dam. The soldiers (left) are carrying the flag ‘Help the People’ and the people (right) are carrying the flag ‘Help the Army’. This card reflects the ‘Songun’ (Army First) policy under which it is seen as necessary to focus on development of the military as the prime section of society. This kind of social contract demands that the army also supports the people. The slogan at the bottom reads ‘Let’s Make the People and Army Unity as Hard as Steel’.
Above: Blueberry Jelly. Blueberries grow wild in the far north of the country. The fruit is used to make candy, drinks, and alcohol products and is prized for its association with good health and the fact that it is native to Mt. Paekdu.

Above: A box of Liquor Candies that emulates Western-style packaging associated in North Korea with luxury. The candies are filled with red ginseng-infused alcohol.
Top: Invitation issued in 1996 to the indoor mass gymnastics performance organised for the birthday of Kim Jong Il. Above: Ticket for the 1996 Mass Games entitled ‘Down with Imperialism Union’ – an organisation established by Kim Il Sung in 1926 and considered to be the precursor of the Workers Party; the ruling party since 1945.

Top: Ticket to the Military Parade followed by the People’s Parade to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War (Korean War, 1953–1953). Above: A 2003 Invitation to mark the celebrations for the 55th year of the founding of the DPRK.
Above and opposite: Korean sweet and biscuit wrappers. These wrappers show high-quality products which are sold in presentation boxes. Striped colour schemes are commonly found in Korea, often on textiles, and on opening a box of biscuits or sweets it common to find the contents presented in stripes of colours.
Above: A commemorative stamp sheet issued in 1996 to mark the '5th Anniversary of the Acclamation of the Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il as the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army'.

Above: A stamp sheet issued in 1997 entitled 'Let's Model the Whole Society on the Idea of the Red Flag of our Party'. These stamps are produced in limited edition but are used for internal postage.
Above and opposite: The popularity of 3D postcards is enormous, from traditional countryside scenes (top), to Christmas greeting cards (above), to revolutionary tales such as the story of nurse Cho Soo Ok in the Korean War who, in order to save her comrades, threw herself under an enemy tank as a ‘human bomb’ (opposite top) and traditional artisans at work (opposite below).
The first and most comprehensive collection of North Korean graphic ephemera in the world, Made in North Korea reveals the compelling and surprisingly beautiful graphic culture of this most enigmatic nation. Over several decades, Nicholas Bonner has been collecting stamps, candy packaging, postcards, tickets, luggage labels, wrapping paper, toys, food labels, lapel pins, bottle tops, phrase books – and more. As a collection, and published for the first time here, Made in North Korea provides an extraordinary and rare glimpse into the creative culture of North Korea, as well as the daily lives of ordinary North Koreans.