

Rainer Dormels (2014)

Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Kimchaek

This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies (KSPS) Grant funded by the Korean Government (MOE) (AKS-2011-BAA-2105)

Find an introduction to the project at
<https://koreanologie.univie.ac.at/200413/introduction/>

This work has been published as a chapter in:
Rainer Dormels (2014): North Korea's Cities. Jimoondang. Seoul.

IV.2.22. Kimchaek

One of the opened ports and base of Christian Mission

Kimchaek is located on the southern border of the Hambuk Province. In the North Kilju-kun and Hwadae-kun are located and in the West and the South Tanchon-si (Hamnam Province). In the East the city borders on the Korean East Sea. The municipal area has a North-South extent of 40 km and an east-west extent of 35 km. Kimchaek is famous for its

steel industry and its shipyards. Kimchaek was called Sōngjin until 1951, which had been appointed in 1939 as a city (*pu*), and thus was renamed after a military man and politician, Kim Chaek (1903-1951). Also in 1951, the adjacent Haksōng-kun has been renamed Kimchaek-kun.

Table Kimchaek-I. Basic data

Population	207,299 (Rank 17)
Area	854 km ² (Rank 7)
Population density	243 l./km ² (Rank 23)
Administrative units	23 <i>dong</i> /19 <i>ri</i> (55%) (Rank 19)
"Urban" population/"rural" population	74.9%/25.1% (Rank 19)

For a long time only an abandoned fishing village existed in the neighborhood of current Kimchaek. Since it is a half-way station between Vladivostok and Wonsan, this region became an important strategic point at the end of the 19th century.

Thus in 1899, Sōngjin, as Kimchaek was known before 1951, was one of eleven ports that were opened for trade with foreign countries.⁸⁸ Not only Japanese but other foreigners as well came to Sōngjin and thus Christianity spread quickly. In 1901 the Canadian missionary Grierson arrived and the city became a base for Christianity on the northeast coast of Korea for the entire region. Not only churches but also Christian hospitals and schools were built, so that Sōngjin was soon known as a city of religion.

At first, agricultural products, cowhide and fish products were exported through the port of Sōngjin and slowly the city started to develop. Still, in 1910 less than 3,000 people lived there. A stronger development in Sōngjin began only after 1915, when the Hamgyong railway line was built from Tanchon over Sōngjin to Kilju. The railway and the abundance of sardines offshore led to a rapid growth of the urban area. Also, Sōngjin was famous for its graphite, which was in great need during the First World War as it is a perfect material for molds of cannonballs. Then in May 1931, when the railway line was built from Hyesan to Kilju, Sōngjin also developed into a port for export for products of the highland regions, especially for wood (Yun Jōng-sōp, 1987, 124-125).

Sōngjin became the largest port between Hamhung and Chongjin. Since the construction of a steel plant in the 1930s, plants of all types developed and Sōngjin became an industrial city.

⁸⁸ From 1876 to 1910 eleven ports have been opened in Korea: Pusan (1876), Wonsan (1880), Inchon (1883), Nampho (1897), Mokpho (1897), Masan (1898), Kunsan (1899), Sōngjin (1899), Ryongampho (1906), Chongjin (1908), Sinuiju (1910).

Change of name to honor General Kim Chaek

In 1951, during the Korean War, Sŏngjin was renamed Kimchaek, in order to honor General Kim Chaek (1903-1951), who was born in Sŏngjin. Not only the city of Kimchaek was named after Kim Chaek, but also the Kim Chaek Iron and Steel Complex in Chongjin and the Kim Chaek University of Technology in Pyongyang. On the other hand, the old name of the city was not completely erased and has been preserved for example in the Sŏngjin Steel Complex and the Sŏngjin Refractory Factory.

The Kimchaek Bay

There are numerous medium-sized and low mountains in the city. More than half of the urban area lie less than 300 m above sea level, 20% lie more than 800 m above sea level. From the Northwest the terrain flattens out towards the Southeast. In the West the Machŏnryŏng-mountain range forms a border to Tanchon. Here the highest mountains of the city are found, the Sobandŏk (1,664 m), the Tŏkman-san (1,506 m) and the Ryongyŏn-san (1,598 m). In the North, on the border to Kilju-kun, there are also some relatively high mountains such as Hangŏ-bong (1,278 m). In the East an important agricultural land is located: the Rimmyŏng plateau with its 60 km² is situated at the lower reaches of the Rimmyŏng-chŏn (57.2 km) and its tributaries Kalpha-chŏn and Ssangpho-chŏn. At the lower reaches of Kiljunamdae-chŏn, the Hakdong plane of 17 km² has developed.

The coast shows sections with a rocky coast, as well as sections with a sandy coast. East of Kimchaek a bay has formed through tectonic movements in the period between the end of the tertiary and the beginning of the quaternary, which is used as a base for fishing companies, which are primarily active in the field of deep-sea fishery. The bay favored the establishment of the Kimchaek port.

Important mineral resources in the urban area are graphite, limestone and marble. The forest accounts for 76% of the city area (IPA-14 2003, 157; PSC-8 2009, 626-627).

Kimchaek is the southernmost and warmest city of the province. The location near the East Sea brings mild winters. In summer, temperatures do not rise much and precipitation is less than in most other cities.

Table Kimchaek-II. Climate values

Annual average	January temperature	August temperature	Precipitation
8.9°C (19)	-4.0°C (6)	21.8°C (23)	714,6 mm (23)

In Kimchaek the fishing industry is of great importance. The Kimchaek Taehung Fishery Enterprise concentrates on deep-sea fishing and the processing of sea products.

City of steel and Magnesia Clinker

Important industrial sectors that are represented in Kimchaek are the metal industry, the construction material industry, the machine construction and mining. Among them the metal industry has a nationwide significance. Steel and steel products that are important for engineering in the DPRK are manufactured in the Sŏngjin Steel Complex.

Significant construction material products of the city are magnesia clinker, firebrick and marble. The marble slabs produced in Janghyŏn-dong are a specialty of the city and can widely be used for monuments or housing construction.

Table Kimchaek-III. Ranking (in parenthesis: number of industrial companies and cultural institutions)

Kimchaek	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies-total	18 (11)	22 (10)	19 (8)	23 (4)	17 (25)	21
Companies-important	10 (4)	8 (3)	20 (4)		20 (8)	21 (4)
Cultural institutions			16 (5)			

Table Kimchaek-IV. Ranking (Total number of companies in relation to population)

Kimchaek	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies – total	13	21	20–15–15	23	14–17	22–21

The analysis shows that Kimchaek is in none of the five sources, concerning the number of industrial companies, better ranked than in terms of population, where the city came in 17th place.

Table Kimchaek-V. Specification (in parenthesis: number of industrial companies)

Kimchaek	Light Industry	Heavy Industry	Mining	Energy
KOFC	18 (2)	8 (8)	7 (1)	–
MOU	23 (4)	2 (5)	11 (1)	–
IPA	26 (1)	5 (5)	7 (1)	5 (1)
KCNA	–	1 (4)	–	–
KIET	27 (6)	5 (14)	3 (5)	–

A significant specialization of Kimchaek on heavy and chemical industry can be observed.

In chapter III.7.3. four companies were identified as important for Kimchaek: the Sŏngjin Steel Complex, the Sŏngjin Refractory Factory, the Kimchaek Ship Factory and the Ssangryong Phosphate Fertilizer Factory.

The Sŏngjin Steel Complex is directly located at the port of Kimchaek, is furthermore connected to the road network as well as to the Wŏlla railway line (Wonsan-Rason) and shows therefore favorable conditions for the transport of raw materials and goods. It employs about 25,000 workers. In 1934 the construction started, and from 1938 steel production began on the basis of iron ores of the Musan Mine and hydropower energy of Hŏchŏn-gang with the aim of steel production for the Japanese defense industry (KOF 2010, 205-208; IPA-14 2003, 161-162).

The Sŏngjin Refractory Factory is, after the Tanchon Magnesite Factory, the second most important Refractory Factory of the DPR Korea. It manufactures mainly Magnesite Clinker and other firebricks and mainly supplies the Sŏngjin Steel Complex, but also other factories in the steel industry, the building material industry or machine construction. The Sŏngjin Magnesite Factory was a precursor of that factory which was built in 1936 (KOF 2010, 445; IPA 14 2003, 161). In the Kimchaek Ship Factory cargo ships and fishing ships are built and repaired. It is located in Chonghak-dong and employs approximately 1,000 workers. This factory was already built in the period of the Japanese colonization, was destroyed during the Korean War and rebuilt between 1953-1954 (KOF 2010, 327; IPA 14 2003, 160).

The Ssangryong Phosphate Fertilizer Factory is located in Unho-ri. In this factory lime fertilizer is produced. The construction started in 1981 (KOF 2010, 385; IPA 14 2003, 162).

In Kimchaek there are a number of technical colleges and in Sechon-ri and Songhung-ri well known health resorts with hot springs are located.

Incorporations in 1952 and 1961, five *ri* outside the center became *dong*

As part of the regional rearrangement in 1952, six *ri* of Kimchaek-kun went to Kimchaek-si. Then Kimchaek-kun was incorporated into Kimchaek-si in February 1961. With the incorporation of Kimchaek-kun to Kimchaek-si, the administrative center of the *up*, Kimchaek-up, became Haksŏng-dong. Of the *ri*, which were incorporated to the city in 1952 and 1961, five were appointed to *dong*. These are the following (in parenthesis the year in which the *ri* became *dong*):

- Thanso-dong (1961), just north of Old Kimchaek
- Öböck-dong (1961), north of the urban area
- Kümchön-dong (1961), east of the northern part of Old Kimchaek
- Janghyöng-dong (1961), southeast of Old Kimchaek
- Ssangryong-dong (1988), south of Old Kimchaek



Figure Kimchaek-I. New *dong* of Kimchaek (in the area of the former Kimchaek-kun)

Within Old-Kimchaek six new *dong* formed by separation

Another six new *dong* emerged by separating it from existing *dong*. Of these, only *dong* within Old-Kimchaek were affected.

Eight new *dong* from 1961 to 1965, afterwards only three new *dong*

In total Kimchaek consists of 22 *dong* (2002). In 1955, Kimchaek had ten *dong*. As another densely populated unit the *up* of Kimchaek-kun has to be mentioned, which became a *dong* (Haksöng-dong) after being incorporated to Kimchaek-si. Eleven other *dong* came into existence between 1961-1993 by the upgrading of a *ri* or by splitting from other *dong*.

However, eight of these eleven *dong* were already formed between 1961-1965.

In 1972 Songryŏng-dong in the north-west corner of Old-Kimchaek was divided into two *dong* and in 1993 Ssangam-dong south of the station Jangphyŏng. In 1988 Ssangryong-ri became a *dong*.

Three centers of urban development and three new *dong* in the periphery

Let's take a look at the geographical distribution of the eleven *dong* that were formed between 1961 and 1993. In doing so, eight of these *dong* can be divided into three regions (encircled are the new *dong*):

1. the center around the Kimchaek train station; here two new *dong* were formed by separation in 1965.



Figure Kimchaek-III. Centers of development in Kimchaek



Figure Kimchaek-II. New *dong* of Kimchaek city (in the down-town area)

2. the area near the Sŏngjin Steel Complex: here two *dong* emerged in 1961, one by upgrading a *ri* (Thanso-dong, where the train station Jangphyŏng is situated), and one by separation. In 1993 another *dong* was formed by separation.
3. In 1961, in the northwest corner Kŭmchŏn-ri became a *dong* and Songryŏng-dong was formed by separation from two other *dong*. In 1972, Songryŏng was then split into two *dong*.

The other three *dong*, which were formed in 1961 and 1988 respectively, are situated at some distance from Old Kimchaek:

Ŏbok-dong is famous for its graphite mine (IPA-14 2003, 159) and Janghyŏn-dong for its marble (IPA 14 2003, 159). In Ssangryong-dong (*dong* since 1988) a large fertilizer factory is situated which construction began in 1981 and which started operation in 1985 (IPA-14 2003, 162).

Statistics

According to the IPA (2003), Kimchaek consists of 22 *dong* and 22 *ri*. In PSC-8 (2009, 626) 23 *dong* and 19 *ri* are indicated, with Songhŭng-ri, Phungnyŏn-ri and Hŭngphyŏng-ri no longer being listed. These three *ri* are all situated just north of the Songryŏng region.⁸⁹

	<i>Dong-Formation</i>	<i>Dong-Splitting</i>
1955 (11)		
1961 (17)	4	2
1965 (19)	-	2
1972 (20)	-	1
1988 (21)	1	-
1993 (22)	-	1

Kimchaek–City in the shadow of Chongjin and Tanchon

Kimchaek consists of two centers which have developed at the East Sea coast and adjacent valleys. The actual city center is located in the south of the city; another center was formed in the North near the Sŏngjin Steel Complex.

The KCNA (May 13, 2008) reports a field guidance to units in Kilju county and Kimchaek City by Kim Jong-il. In Kimchaek there are two places he visited, the Kimchaek Taehung Fishery Company and the Pukkwandaechŏppi monument.⁹⁰ This is an indication that Kimchaek is not necessarily famous for its industrial plants, apart from the Sŏngjin Steel Complex, which however now has to use anthracite coal for smelting due to a shortage of coke which has to be imported, resulting in a reduction of quality of steel products.⁹¹

⁸⁹ The names of the *dong* are not mentioned in the PSC-8 (2009).

⁹⁰ KCNA (May 13, 2008) explains: „The monument in Rimmyong-ri, Kimchaek City, was erected in 1708 to commemorate the great victory Jong Mun Bu’s volunteer corps won by decisively wiping out the Japanese aggression troops in Jangphyong, Rimmyong, Tanchon, Paekthap and other areas after their intrusion into Hamgyong Province during the Imjin Patriotic War (1592-98).”

⁹¹ In 1985 the metallurgy had accounted for 53.39% of the total production volume of the city Kimchaek, 14.53% accounted for the fishing industry, 10.88% for the construction material production and 10.26% for mechanical engineering. Following the slump in metallurgy the importance of fisheries is likely to have increased

Cooperation with China and Russia could spur the development of the city on the East Sea coast, however with the newly developed port in neighboring Tanchon a new competitor has emerged.

proportionally (KJY-26 1990, 525).