

Rainer Dormels (2014)

Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Wonsan

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IV.2.26. Wonsan

Capital of Kangwon Province (North)

Wonsan is the capital of the Kangwon Province of the DPR Korea. A province with the same name exists in South Korea as well. Wonsan, Munchon and their surroundings were originally parts of the Hamnam Province. Since 1946 though they belong to Kangwon.

Table Wonsan-I. Basic data

Population	363,127 (Rank 5)
Area	314 km ² (Rank 19)
Population density	1156 I./km ² (Rank 7)
Administrative units	45 <i>dong</i> /14 <i>ri</i> (76%) (Rank 9)
“Urban” population/“rural” population	90.5%/9.5% (Rank 5)

The built-up urban area of Wonsan borders on the hills of Jangdök-san and the Tongmyöng-san¹⁰⁵ and has developed from South to North along the elongated coast. Originally Wonsan consisted of two parts.

Before the opening of the port by the Japanese, Wonsan consisted only of a poor fishing and farming village. In 1898 this village already counted 15,000 residents in 3,000 homes. It was a big village with a very large square in the center, on which every five days a market was held.

The concession area of the Japanese is about 6 km to the North. It was located in a reed field, which was drained after the opening of the port. In this part of the city the port Wonsan was built and it remained the center of the city until today. The port was



Figure Wonsan-I. Wonsan (according to an official plan); (Source: Lautensach 1945, 298)

105 The mountain was originally named Pukmang-san and was renamed in January 1987 to Tongmyöng-san. Tongmyöng means “the East is bright.” Written with Chinese characters, Pukmang is written with the character 平, which has a harmless meaning and is used for mountain names. However, the character 平 has the same pronunciation. And the meaning of this character is “spoil, go broke,” so that Pukmang, without considering the correct Chinese character is not used since they are not in common use in North Korea, can be misinterpreted as “the North is broke.”

opened on May 1st 1880 for trade with Japan, and on November 3rd 1883 for the entire international trade. Since the terrain was low and moist, many Japanese settlers suffered from malaria. In 1897 the number of Japanese residents amounted to 235. On January 1st 1900 there were already 1,560 Japanese living there. Next to the Japanese settlement, some Chinese traders lived in a small valley. In 1890 the quay was built, in 1910 the 27 m long Chan-bridge, in 1912 the long stone mole that protects against waves and drift ice from the North, in 1921 the harbor construction was completed after several additional buildings and until 1945 ships up to 20,000 tons could dock there.

Economically, the Japanese have not benefited much from the port and the concession area in Wonsan, but from the beginning Wonsan played a major role as military strategic points. The construction of the Japanese concession area blocked the advancement of Russia and during the Sino-Japanese War, Wonsan was, together with Pusan and Inchon, a base for the landing of Japanese troops (Yun Jōng-söp 1987, 114).

In 1914 a railway line (223 km) was built through by Chugaryōng tectonic valley; it connects Wonsan with Seoul. Before the Wōlla railway line (Wonsan-Rajin) was opened in 1933, the port of Wonsan was the number 1 port of favor in Northeast Korea. After opening the Wōlla line, it stagnated due to the reduction of the hinterland because of the rapid development of the port Chongjin. The establishment of industrial enterprises increased the population influx. In 1923 Wonsan counted 31,000 inhabitants, in 1936 it were 61,000, in 1940 it were 79,000 and in 1942, 122,000 (Saitschikow 1958, 277).

Wonsan Bay

Wonsan is situated in Wonsan Bay (also called Yōnghūng Bay), which is surrounded by the foothills and mountains of the Masikryōng chain in the West. The bay is embraced in the North by the emerging 16 km long Hodo Peninsula and the protruding Kalma Peninsula in the South. About 20 large and small islands such as Modo, Thaedo, Sindo and Ryōdo are located at the bay entrance. The bay is therefore protected by a natural breakwater against wind and waves.

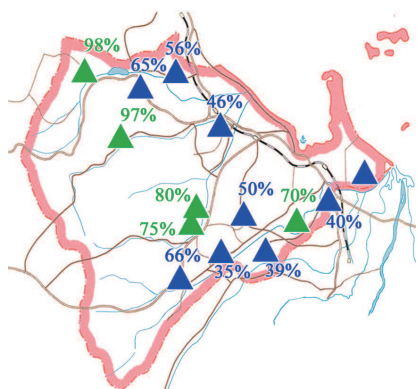


Figure Wonsan-II. Forest area in the *ri*

A characteristic feature of the climate of Wonsan's landscape are the frequent foehn winds, which fall mainly in spring and late autumn from the warm and dry passes of the main watershed into the Japanese Sea coast. They are of great importance for the growth and ripening of the crops. The winter of the Wonsan landscape is milder, summers are a bit cooler than at

the coasts of Taedong-basin that are located the same latitude (Lautensach 1945, 300).

Table Wonsan-II. Climate values

Annual average	January temperature	August temperature	Precipitation
11°C (2)	-2.3°C (1)	23.2°C (16)	1,426.1 mm (2)

Walnuts – a special product of the city of Wonsan

Cultivation fields account for 18% of the total city area, on which rice, corn, vegetables, fruit and as important specialized crop, walnuts are grown. Figure Wonsan-III shows the rice development areas (dark blue) in the lowest lying areas. In the lowlands in the north of the municipal area both rice and corn are grown in greater quantities (light blue). In the southwest of the municipal area a region specialized in vegetable growing is located (red). Specialties of Wonsan are walnuts that are grown in the central areas of the city area (brown). In areas, in which rice cultivation is no longer possible without restriction, corn is the main crop (yellow).

The confluence of warm and cold ocean currents in front of Wonsan bay ensured favorable conditions for fishing. Until the early 1980s, the fishing companies of Wonsan boomed. They mainly caught flounder, sardines, Alaskan Pollack, herring and anchovies. Since the mid-1980s the situation for the fisheries has gotten worse. Accumulations of rivers opening into the East Sea, such as the Anbyon-Namdae-chŏn, affected the sea in the Wonsan bay to become flat, which had negative effects on the coastal fisheries particularly since the mid-1980s (Chosun Ilbo January 29, 1996).



Figure Wonsan-III. Agriculture in the *ri* of Wonsan city

Industrial zone of the second degree

Wonsan with its specialization on engineering and shipbuilding, Munchon with its non-ferrous metal smelting facilities and Chonnae-kun with its production of cement, form one of the industrial zones of North Korea. Important location factors for these industries are the mineral resources such as the coal field of Kowŏn, south of the Chonnae-kun, and limestone in Chonnae-ri; of great importance for the electric power supply are the

hydropower plants of Kūmgangsan and Jangjingang and for industrial water supply the Yōnghūng-gang. Relatively good transport connection provides the highway between Pyongyang-Wonsan, the Kangwon railway line and the port of Wonsan. (KOTRA 1995, 30) Since Wonsan also occupies the function of a city of tourism, culture and recreation, the industrial zone of Wonsan is classified by importance and extent as a second degree industrial zone. (KOTRA 1995, 28)

In Wonsan important companies in the field of railway carriages, shipbuilding, tractor production and chemistry are located. Important industrial sectors of the light industry are mainly the textile industry, the production of televisions, the food industry and the wood processing industry.

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

Wonsan	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies-total	5 (27)	7 (31)	10 (19)	7 (15)	7 (46)	5
Companies-important	8 (5)	12 (3)	3 (13)		7 (20)	5 (12)
Cultural institutions			5 (19)			

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

Wonsan	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies – total	3	11	11–5–7	8	13–10	8–3

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

Wonsan	Light Industry	Heavy Industry	Mining	Energy
KOFC	11 (7)	19 (14)	11 (1)	3 (5)
MOU	6 (22)	13 (9)	–	–
IPA	17 (7)	4 (12)	–	–
KCNA	9 (8)	14 (5)	–	10 (2)
KIET	9 (21)	8 (25)	–	–

Although Wonsan is the city with the fifth-highest population of the DPR Korea, it ranks in the industrial companies ranking usually on the further lower ranked places. The focus of the city is on tourism so this will play a role here. In the city, both light and heavy industry companies are represented, so that Table-V Wonsan shows no clear specialization in one of the two industrial sectors.

In chapter III.7.3. twelve companies were identified as important: Wonsan Rolling Stock Complex, Wonsan Shipyard, Wonsan Ship Repair Factory, Wonsan Chungsoᅅng

Tractor Factory, Kūmgang Motor Joint Venture Company, Wonsan Electro Cables Factory, Wonsan Chemical Factory, Wonsan Disabled Soldiers' Essential Plastic Goods Factory, Wonsan Shoes Factory, Wonsan Knitting Mill, Wonsan Export Garment Factory, Wonsan Disabled Soldiers' Bags Factory.

In the Wonsan Rolling Stock Complex (June 4th Rolling Stock Complex), situated in the city center in Kalmi-dong, mainly railway carriages and freight wagons are manufactured or repaired. The annual capacity of this complex is said to be about 200 railway carriages and 2,000 freight wagons. On a total area of 600,000 m² approximately 15,000 people are employed (Yun Ung 1995, 223). In the Korean War the company was evacuated to Hyesan and rebuilt after the war (IPA 11 2003, 113-114).

The Wonsan Shipyard in Haeon-dong was built in 1939 and rebuilt in 1955 after the destruction of the Korean War. It is dedicated to both the construction and the repair of, inter alia, cargo ships, ships for net fishing, and all kinds of ships for the navy, and has a total area of 45,000 m² with 4,000 employees (KOFC 2010, 324-325).

In the Wonsan Chungsoŋg Tractor Factory on a total area of 34,000 m² with approximately 1,000 employees tractors with 8PS are produced (KOFC 2010, 262-263). The Kūmgang Motor Joint Venture Company is a company that is specialized on producing engines for agricultural equipment. It started its operations in 1959. Since 1993 it is operating as a joint venture enterprise with the Japanese company DIA-STAR CO., LTD., which a company that is run by Koreans living in Japan (IPA-11 2003, 113). The Wonsan Electro Cables Factory specializes in the production of cables for lamps (IPA-11 2003, 116).

The Wonsan Chemical Factory is located in Jangchon-dong and has a total area of 58,000 m². The Jangjingang Power Station supplies the plant with electricity. Industrial water is provided by the Namdae-chōn. The plant was already built before 1945 and was dedicated to the production of crude oil. In 1958 the production was changed to manufacturing chromium salt products and photographic paper (KOFC 2010, 372). The Wonsan cement factory is in operation since 1990 and has a total area of 20,000m² (IPA-11 2003, 115). The Wonsan Glass Bottle Factory is frequently mentioned in the KCNA.

The Wonsan Disabled Soldiers' Essential Plastic Goods Factory was founded in 1952 and initially set up as a cooperative company for clothes manufacturing. Later it became a company that mainly produces kitchen appliances and toothbrushes in Namsan-dong (IPA 11 2003, 115-116). Further light industry enterprises are the Wonsan Shoes Factory that employs 720 persons (KOFC 2010, 610), the Wonsan Knitting Mill, that manufactures different yarns and supplies the textile factories in the Kangwon Province (IPA-11 2003, 115) and the Wonsan Export Garment Factory, which was built in 1974 and modernized in 1992 (IPA 2003-11, 115). Even televisions are assembled in Wonsan. The wood-processing industry is of importance too, which produces newsprint, cardboard and wrapping paper in Wonsan. The Wonsan Brewery was completed in 1986. Here, beer, soda and wine are

produced (KOTRA 1995, 195). The Wonsan Cornstarch Factory has been in operation since 1978 (KOFC 2010, 567).

The Wonsan Youth Power Plant, which is located in Chilbong-ri, contributes significantly to the energy supply in Wonsan. Construction started in 2002. The inauguration ceremony took place in 2009 (KOFC 2010, 151).

Center of Transport and Culture

Wonsan has great potential in terms of traffic. The Chugaryŏng tectonic valley theoretically allows an easy access to Seoul, which is of course now interrupted by the DMZ. But a highway connects Wonsan with Pyongyang. There are connections from Wonsan railway station to Pyongyang and Rajin. After changing the routing, the Wonsan station was moved as well in 1945. Before 1945 the railway line grazed the southern edge of the former Japanese settlement, and a railway station was here as well: the railway line meandered between the Tongmyŏng-san in the South and the Chŏkdŏk-san in the North. This was straightened after 1945 by building a route through an approximately 2 km long tunnel at the foot of Tongmyŏng-san. The station is now about 1km northwest of the tunnel (Chosun Ilbo January 23, 1996).



Figure Wonsan-IV. Wonsan station (2012)



Figure Wonsan-V. Trolleybus Terminal (2012)

After the Korean War the port of Wonsan lost almost completely the function as a trading port, but survived as a fishing and military port.

Wonsan has four colleges of national importance with a total of 11,500 students, i.e. students from all over North Korea study here and the graduates can be employed nationwide. There are also five colleges of provincial importance with a total of 8,000 students, i.e. the students are all from Kangwon-do and the graduates are also appointed

here (Chosun Ilbo January 23, 1996). The universities of the city are specialized in the areas of education, politics, agriculture, medicine, finance and engineering. There is also a research institute with the focus on marine technology. Wonsan has also a daily newspaper, a radio station, a zoo and museums.

Tourism Center Wonsan

When Koreans think of Wonsan, the seaside resorts of Myōngsa-sibri and Songdowōn come to mind. Myōngsa-sibri is located about 10km from the city center at the end of Kalma Peninsula and is famous for its white sand beach and red wild roses. The pine trees in the background offer a cool-down in summer. The Kalma Peninsula extends in the east of Wonsan about 5 km into the southern part of the Wonsan Bay. Towards the end of the period of Japanese occupation this area became restricted due to an airport, which was built nearby. Even today, the area is not accessible for the population due to the military airport. But a recreation center for senior officers is located there. The airport is considered an important base for the North Korean Air Force. It is said that airplanes of the latest type are stationed here. The runway has a length of 10 km. It is about 5 km away from the center of Wonsan. Seoul would be able to be reached within 30 minutes.

The seaside resort of Songdowōn (Song = pine; do = waves) is about 2-3 km far from the city center in northwestern direction. Songdowōn is known for its many kilometers of white sandy beach and the pine grove, which was planted by the people here 700 years ago to hinder the sea winds and sand drifts. The width of the sandy beach is 40-100 m, not more than 1.5-2 m far from the sea coast the water depth is up to 100 m. There are several additional facilities including a Zoological Garden, an East Asian garden with an artificial lake that is a few acres large and walking trails at the neighboring mountain Jangdok-san. There are also games and sports courts in the area of the Songdowōn seaside resort, a children's holiday home and recreation homes for the population. For the tourists, the eleven-storey hotel Songdowōn (Category C-Hotel with 164 rooms) was built in Wonsan Phyōngchōn-dong on the northern city border right at the beach in 1963 (Chosun Ilbo January 23, 1996). Next to it the Tongmyōng Hotel is located, which is opened for tourists too.

Above all Wonsan is an important starting point for trips to the Kūmgang-san.

Compared with the dimensions of the city there are not many residents in Wonsan. The reason for this relatively small population is known to be the fact that Kim Il-sung, who visited this region in 1967, instructed to establish Wonsan as an international port city and a city of culture and recreation, and therefore to regulate the population to about 150,000. Because of this objective there are hardly any new larger industrial plants in Wonsan (Chosun Ilbo January 23, 1996). The plans were carried out on the occasion of

Kim Il-sung's visit in Wonsan in October 1978. He set the direction in which Wonsan should develop:

- to promote Wonsan as a starting point for the developing tourism in the Kūmgangsan region,
- to establish Wonsan as the largest seaside resort city of the DPR Korea and
- to promote Wonsan as an international port city of culture.

Therefore, the following measures should be promoted

- reshaping of Yōkjōn Street, Haebang street and Haeon Street,
- focus on developing an East Coast General Tourism Development Zone, which include the Songdowon, Songchondong Valley, eight landmarks of Kwandong and the Kūmgangsan as well as
- the construction of a resort village, the upgrading of facilities of the beach resorts and the expansion of various utilities (Kim Wōn 1998, 248-249).

Furthermore, when the South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun suggested at the inter-Korean summit in October 2007 to build an industrial park, such as the one in Kaesong, in Wonsan, his proposal was dismissed from the North Korean side with the remark that Wonsan is a “holiday destination” (Jeong, Yong-Soo 2013).

In 2013 a “General blueprint for the Wonsan District” emerged, which should further promote the development of Wonsan into a tourist destination.

For this purpose, aging factories, especially heavy industry factories such as automobile plants and shipyards, shall be closed and also the relocation of the military airport of the Kalma Peninsula to regions that are closer to the DMZ is planned. Concretely, three special districts in Wonsan are planned:



Figure Wonsan-VI. Development Plan; modified version of a figure in Jōng Yong-su (2013)



Figure Wonsan-VII. Songdowon Hotel (2012)

- a financial district,
- an entertainment and sports area and
- a tourist destination.

Kim Jong-un is quoted that he plans to develop Songdowon Beach into a holiday destination for summers and a ski resort on Mount Masik for winter (Jeong Yong-Soo, 2013). He is talking about the 20 km far from the city center, just outside the city borders on a highway to Pyongyang situated ski resort, which is currently under construction and the first phase has already been completed. Since this is supposed to have happened with breathtaking speed, the North Korean propaganda talk about the “Masikryŏng Speed,” which enabled this achievement.

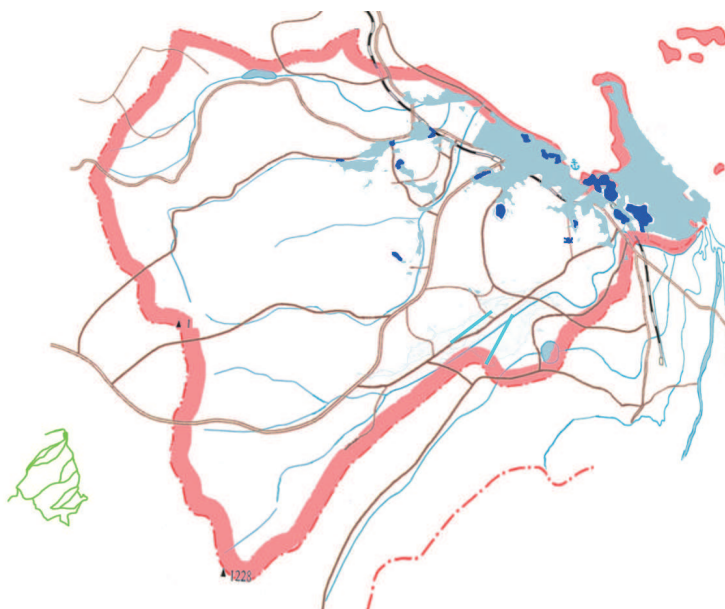


Figure Wonsan–VIII. Urbanized areas (light blue) and industrial areas (dark blue)

(In light green: Ski Resort Masikryong, blue green stripes: the underground “Thunderbirds runway” of the Air Force Base on the East Coast) (Source: Yi Sang-jun et. al. 2012, 99; modified)

The silhouette of Wonsan is characterized by approximately 20-storey skyscrapers that were built at the foot of Tongmyŏng-san. These shall also contribute to give Wonsan an atmosphere of an international port city a la Hong Kong. Construction work of the residential high-rise apartments started in 1984, in 1987 a part was finished, but due to lack of glass and other materials for the interior, however, the final completion was delayed (Chosun Ilbo January 23, 1996).



Figure Wonsan–IX. Skyline (2012)



Figure Wonsan–X. Mural in the International Youth Camp Songdowŏn (2012)

Changes in terms of the urban area

Wonsan was removed from the Tŏkwŏn-kun and appointed to a city (*pu*) in 1912.

Before the Korean War the city area was extended three times:

- In 1939 the urban area of Wonsan is increased by incorporations from the Tŏkwŏn-kun.
- In 1943 Tŏkwŏn-kun was dissolved, parts of the *kun* go to Wonsan-pu, other parts to Munchon-kun.
- In 1946 Wonsan is merged to Kangwon Province and becomes its capital. Parts of the newly formed Munchon-kun are included into the municipal area.

In 1952 three *ri* in the southeast of Wonsan are moved to Anbyon-kun.

Wonsan was extended from 1961 to 1976 by seven *ri* from the Munchon-kun:

- 1961 four *ri* from Munchon-kun were added to Wonsan
- 1972 Munchon-kun was dissolved, parts of the *kun* go to Wonsan. When in 1976 Munchon-kun was formed again, these areas were returned to the *kun* except three *ri*. In 1991 Munchon was declared as a city (*si*).

In 1984 four *ri* from Anbyon-kun go to Wonsan-si, which now make up the southwest part of the municipal area of Wonsan and build an important role for the vegetable supply of the city.

The in 1961 from Munchon incorporated parts are regions, which are situated in the valley of the Jangrim-chŏn and around the Tŏkwŏn station. These regions are now located,

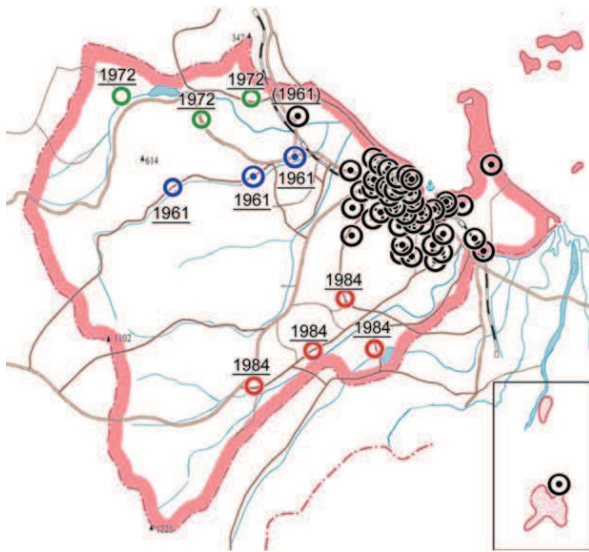


Figure Wonsan-XI. Incorporations

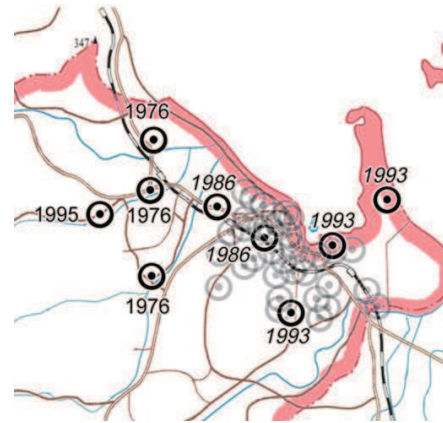


Figure Wonsan-XII. New *dong* (1976–1995)

where today Jangrim-ri, Sŏkhyŏn-dong, Segil-dong and parts of Songchŏn-dong located. The in 1972 incorporated parts from Munchon are three *ri* that are situated on the northern border of the city Wonsan.

Statistics

	<i>Dong</i> -Formation	<i>Dong</i> -Splitting
1955 (33)		
1957 (30)	-1	-3/1
1961 (35)	-	-2/7
1967 (36)	-	-1/2
1976 (39)	3	-
1986 (41)	-	2
1993 (44)	-	3
1995 (45)	1	-

Of the four newly created *dong*, which have been *ri*, two lie west of the city of Wonsan, and two in the North near the train station Tŏkwŏn.

Next to the main center of the city Wonsan in the North, separated by Jungphyŏng-ri, in which rice and vegetables for Wonsan's population are grown, lies the Tŏkwŏn region, in which German missionaries were before the Korean War, which can be seen as a smaller

second development pole.

Wonsan – Great potential for tourism

Wonsan has very good requirements for further development as a tourist area. Additionally to the favorable climatic conditions, mountains and beaches are located here or nearby. Also Wonsan is easily accessible both by land and by sea.

In case of a reunification, Wonsan would also be easily accessible via the Chugaryŏng tectonic valley from Seoul.