

Rainer Dormels (2014)

Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Hyesan

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Statistics

IV.2.18. Hyesan

Border town to China and gate to Paektusan

Hyesan is the capital of the Ryanggang Province which has been founded in 1954. It is located on the Chinese border and is connected with China since 1986 with a bridge over the border river of Yalu. Hyesan therefore is known for trade with China. Hyesan is also known for the “Youth” Copper Mine, which is operated by a joint venture company consisting of partners from the DPR Korea and China. Additionally, the construction of the Power Plant Samsu between 2004 and 2007 was the occasion for numerous comments in the media. The memorial of the victory of the Battle of Pochonbo is a landmark of the city,

which is located centrally in Hyemyŏng-dong and was built in 1967.

City of forestry

Already since the time of the Japanese occupation the most important industry of the area was forestry. Hyesan was a gathering place for logs, which came from the surrounding region. From there the logs were transferred to the paper mills of Kilju, Sinuiju and Songjin (today: Kimchaek). For this reason Hyesan is, compared to other cities in its periphery, well connected with roads. In 1937 the railway to Kilju was completed, in order to transport logs to Japan. In 1936 a bridge was built over the Yalu. Lautensach (1945, 229) referred to Hyesan as the most important settlement of the Kaema highlands. In 1982 Hyesan was portrayed by Campbell as a tiny hamlet, however already in 1936 Hyesan developed to a settlement with 11,795 inhabitants. Lautensach (1945, 229) expedites that there are wooden buildings of the gendarmerie and police, of the post office, as well as some Japanese department stores in the purely Japanese built center. Not far from the road to Kapsan the higher modern brick buildings of the barracks, hospital and the forest authority are towering. The bordering parts of the city consist of Korean village houses.

With the other cities and counties on the border to China, Hyesan is connected by roads (Ko Thae-u 1991, 297-298). In the 1970s the forest inventories were depleted. Herbs, mountain vegetables, hops and skins are now the typical products from the forests around Hyesan.

Table Hyesan-I. Basic data

Population	192,680 (Rank 20)
Area	277 km ² (Rank 21)
Population density	696 l./km ² (Rank 13)
Administrative units	25 <i>dong</i> /4 <i>ri</i> (86%) (Rank 3)
"Urban" population/"rural" population	90.3%/9.7% (Rank 6)

Hyesan is one of the smallest cities of North Korea, in terms of population as well as-area size. The *dong*, in which over 90% of the population live, are concentrated in the Northern border of the city. This suggests a very high population density in the urbanised areas of Hyesan.

Situated in a basin on the upper Yalu

Hyesan is located in a cup-shaped widening of the upper valley of the Yalu, which has been dispelled in thin-plate gray shale and gray-white tuffs, dense just above the mouth of the Hōchōn-gang (Lautensach 1945, 229). Hyesan is 715 m above sea level, therefore Hyesan is the highest located city of North Korea (Jong Song Il 2011, 99). In the northeast of the municipal area, there is a high plateau, which was formed by lava flows from Paektusan, on the east and southern boundary of the municipal area high mountains protrude and in the West the Hōchōn-gang flows. Approximately three-quarters of the municipal area (74%) consists of forest area (Yi Ok-hūi 2011, 160/IPA-16 2003, 88).



Figure Hyesan-I. Forest area in the four ri of the city of Hyesan

The agricultural land is 18% of the total city area. Mostly vegetables are cultivated (radish, Chinese cabbage, spinach, peppers, etc.). Regarding cereals, mostly corn, beans, rice plants, wheat and others are planted. In the intra-mountain basin, agriculture is operated as well, partly even in small scale on a private basis. In the animal husbandry, there are dairy and chicken farms.

Table: Hyesan-II. Climate values

Annual average	January temperature	August temperature	Precipitation
3.6°C (27)	-16.6°C (27)	19.8°C (27)	583 mm (26)

The continental character of the climate is clearly ascertained. Due to the altitude, the summer is not very hot. Freezing weather, however, starts already in late September and continues through until May.

City with a high number of factories

Major industrial sectors in Hyesan are the copper mining industry, the wood processing

industry in the region of Wiyŏn, the machine construction, the clothing and footwear industry, ironware industry and the production of Humer ears (concrete tubes from spiral spun concrete). As a cultivating product, next to their blueberries, the hops from Hyesan is famous, with which beer is brewed with all over North Korea, including in Hyesan itself.

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

Hyesan	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies-total	16 (12)	14 (22)	18 (9)	6 (17)	14 (29)	14
Companies-important	18 (2)	7 (3)	7 (9)		14 (11)	13 (7)
Cultural institutions			11 (11)			

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

Hyesan	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies – total	5	1	12-1-3	1	6-7	3-1

In terms of population Hyesan occupies rank 20. However, in regards to Hyesan's equipment the city is better placed in all categories. In view of the quotient between the shares on the total number of companies and the share on the population, Hyesan is usually in the foremost places. Hyesan shows itself in regards to this quantitative evaluation of the statistics as a strongly developed industrial city.

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

Huichon	Light Industry	Heavy Industry	Mining	Energy
KOFC	4 (5)	23 (5)	8 (1)	6 (1)
MOU	20 (10)	10 (7)	7 (5)	–
IPA	9 (5)	18 (3)	9 (1)	–
KCNA	15 (7)	16 (5)	5 (3)	11 (2)
KIET	14 (12)	13 (15)	9 (2)	–

When considering the specification, it is striking that Hyesan specializes more in light industry, than in heavy industry. Also, the mining industry in Hyesan is listed in all five sources.

To check the above quantitative results, the most important companies of the city are now looked upon at. In chapter III.7.3. seven important companies were identified

for Hyesan: the Hyesan Footwear Factory, the Wiwon Sawmill, the May 8th Forestry Machinery Factory, the Hyesan Paper Factory, the Hyesan Textile Factory, the Hyesan Blueberries Processing Factory and the Hyesan Youth Mine.

A copper mine, a company of mechanical engineering, and five companies of light industry are also included.

The May 8th Forestry Machinery Factory is a base for the production of forestry equipment (chain saws, wood processing plants etc...), which, as IPA-16 (2003, 90) explains, was built on the instructions of Kim Il-sung on 8th May 1958. The products of this factory are delivered to forestry bases in the whole country.

Two of the five light industry associated companies of Hyesan are wood-processing factories, the Wiwon Sawmill and the Hyesan Paper Factory. The Wiwon Sawmill has been operating since 1954. Here a wide range of products are made of wood (for example wardrobes), but also vegetable material (tannins). The area of the factory land is 200,000 m² (IPA-16 2003, 90).

A speciality of the region is products made from blueberries, which are picked from the mountains in and around Hyesan. The products of the Hyesan Blueberries Processing Factory (including alcoholic drinks, juices) satisfy not only the needs of the entire province of Ryanggang, but are also sold nationwide and additionally exported abroad.

In the Hyesan Textile Factory threads and fabrics are made from chemical fibers (Vinalon and staple fibers). It was built in 1963. In the beginning, between 1979 and 1980, the factory was redesigned, so that it began to produce fabrics from the chemical fibres.

The Hyesan Footwear Factory is specialised in the manufacture of shoes made from injecting moulding plastic.

Hyesan Youth Copper Mine as an example for cooperation with China

The proximity to China is significant *inter alia* due to joint economic activities between the two countries. An example of such cooperation is the Hyesan Youth Mine. It is the copper mine with the largest copper inventories in Asia with its existing stocks of 160 million tons (SNKECSA 2011, 73). It initially only had regional importance, until it was expanded to a copper mine in the late 1960s (IPA-16 2003, 91). On 19th September 2011 the implementation of the operation of the mine through the Hyesan-China Joint Venture Mineral Company was formally started. This company was established already on 1st November 2007 by the Wanxiang Resources Limited Company (China) and the Ministry of Mining Industries (DPRK) with the goal to produce and sell copper (North Korea Leadership Watch 2011).

In recent times, it is tried to attract investors from Changbai for joint ventures in Hyesan (Kim, Kwang Jin, 2012).

The construction of the Samsu Hydroelectric Power Station

A great change within the municipal area of Hyesan was brought by the construction of the Samsu-Hydroelectric Power Station. The beginning of construction was celebrated in May 2004 (KCNA 7.5.2004), and in May 2007 the completion arrived. The dam was built at the confluence of the Unchon-gang and the Hochon-gang, on the border between the city of Hyesan and the county of Samsu. As capacity, 50,000 kW were provided by the North Koreans. 30,000 workers were mobilised. KCNA (May 7, 2004) specified as a goal the solution to the electricity sustenance problem around the area of Paektusan, especially in Samjiyon-kun (KCNA August 3, 2006), in which there are numerous national memorials. Additionally, the new artificial lake should contribute to the enhancement of the landscape of the city of Hyesan and the county of Samsu. Thus, the lake could also be a touristic destination especially for visitors from China (Mok Yong-jae 2012). On the other hand, the construction of the hydroelectric power station is blamed for a flood of the copper mine “Youth” Hyesan (Jōng Thae-wōn 2007).

Provincial capital with appropriate cultural facilities

As the capital of Ryonggang Province, there are numerous cultural institutions in Hyesan, starting from universities and research institutions, which specialise in medicine, education, agriculture, mining, forestry and wood chemistry. Also, press organs such as the daily newspaper “Ryonggang” and the radio station Hyesan are represented in the city.

Border trade with China and its effects

The economic standstill of North Korea, which has been increasingly evident since the 1980s, increased the importance of exports from China. Chinese Goods arrived through the neighbouring region of Changbai through Hyesan into the country. Hyesan, after Sinuiju, is the second largest border city to China of North Korea. Thus it became a goods turnover location, from which the goods would be transported to Sinuiju, Hamhung, Pyongyang and even to Sariwon. Therefore, the standard of living in Hyesan was comparatively considered as high, which was the reason that the term “Libya Hyesan”⁷⁴ was born (Yi Ok-Hŭi 2011, 159-162).

Opposite of Hyesan on the Chinese side the large community of Changbai, part of the

74 In North Korea workers were sent to Libya in the 1980s. They lived better than people, who worked in the USSR. Libya was considered as a symbol of richness (Yi Ok-hŭi 2011, 185).

Autonomous County of Changbai of the Koreans (Jilin Province), is located. Hyesan and Changbai are connected by the Changbai-Hyesan International Bridge. The bridge was built in 1936, however it was destroyed several times and also rebuilt. The existing bridge dates back to the renovation in 1985. The bridge is 148 m long and 9 m wide (Baidu n.d.).

When it does not rain, there are many locations in Hyesan, in which the Yalu has a width of less than 30 m. In the winter, a thick ice layer emerges, which enables the easy transition to the Chinese riverside. Therefore, in the early times Hyesan was a city, which was used for smuggling and escaping from North Korea.

Also, Hyesan as a border town is known for its residents, who are confronted with information from abroad comparatively often. In response, the North Korean state apparatus employed strengthened controls and military missions. Especially the famine in the 1990s worsened the situation. Escape, smuggling and discontent with the regime was boldly registered in Hyesan. Therefore, the North Korean government responded with far-reaching purges that began in 1997 and peaked in 1999. South Korean Media speak of arrests, deportations, executions and other killings of citizens of the city of Hyesan (Kang Chöl-hwan, 2011).⁷⁵

Hyesan – the basis for the Paektusan tourism

Hyesan is also a starting point for tourism to Paektusan, especially for Chinese tourists. On the program is the Monument of the Victorious Battle of Pochonbo, the College of Education Kim Jong-suk, as well as a performance at the University of the Arts (Mok Yong-chaе 2012). The 38.7 m high Pochonbo Monument plays a major role for North Korean propaganda as a reminder of the battle led by Kim Il-sung on 4th June 1937 in the anti-Japanese struggle. The most important historic landmark of the city is the Kwaegung Pavilion. It served as the south gate of the fortification of Hyesan-jin, which was built as a defence for the protection against invaders from the North, at the beginning of the Joseon time in the year of 1421 as a replacement and restoration of an older fortress. From this pavilion a beautiful view of the Yalu exists (VNC Asia Travel n.d./Jong Song Il 2011, 100). An important place of remembrance for the population is the in 1959 built and in 1965 expanded cemetery of heroes in Hyesan (KCNA 6.12.2002).

1954: city foundation – capital of Ryanggang Province

In 1934 Hyesan became an *up* within the Kapsan-kun. In 1942 Hyesan-kun was newly

⁷⁵ As well: Yi Jöng-hun (2001).

established. After the liberation, Hyesan was again a *myon* and in the course of a large-scale administrative transformation it became an *up* again in 1952.

In 1954 Hyesan-si was founded from the *up*, the Wiyŏnpho-rodongjagu and three *ri* of the Hyesan-kun; however from the rest of the *kun* Unhung-kun was formed. Hyesan-up was split into six *dong* and one *ri*; Wiyŏnpho-rodongjagu in one *dong* and two *ri*. The latter three *ri* were made into a *dong* in 1955.

1961 – Expansion of the city around the rural areas

After becoming a city, incorporations were made in 1954 and 1961. The incorporation of 1954 covered the west of the city, where a portion of Jungun-ri (Samsu-kun) was merged with Chungdong (Hyesan-kun). In 1961 Jungun-ri was split completely. One part, together with Chungdong-ri, formed Kanggu-dong (Hyesan-si), the other part was added to Phosŏng-ri (since 1991: Phosŏng-rodongjagu) (Samsu-kun).

Additionally in 1961, five *ri* were added to the city of Hyesan. All four *ri* of the city of Hyesan and Komsan-dong, which emerged in 1981 from Osichŏn-ri, came to the city in 1961.

Developments and structure

The old market of Hyesan was located in what is now Hyegang-dong, north of the “Youth” Hyesan railway station, where today the Market road (Jang-road) is located.

In 1957 Hyejang-dong was incorporated into Hyegang-dong. In 1961, the *dong* have been separated again. Additionally, in 1957 Yŏnphung-dong originated in the north-eastern region of the former Wiyŏnpho-rodongjagu by splitting-off from Wiyŏn-dong.

Figure Hyesan-II shows the location of the ten *dong* in 1957, four *dong* of them, which emerged from Wiyŏnpho-rodongjagu, are located in the East; however the former *up* lies in the West.



Figure Hyesan-II. The ten *dong* in 1957

In the 1960es, ten new *dong* emerged (figure Hyesan-III).



Figure Hyesan-III. The *dong*, which emerged in the 1960s.



Figure Hyesan-IV. *Dong*, which emerged since 1972.

Clear city expansions are seen in the south and southwest of the center.

Since 1972, five new *dong* originated (figure Hyesan-IV).

As growth centers beyond the two centers (Hyesan, Wiyŏn) are the regions south from the city center as well as the regions on the northern border to the municipal area.

Figure Hyesan-V gives an overview of the entire municipal area as well as the current *dong* of the city. Even the former Hyesan-up as well as the former *rodongjagu* of Wiyonpho is shown.



Figure Hyesan-V. *Dong* in the city of Hyesan

Statistics

Urbanized areas before the city foundation (*up* and *rodongjagu*)

1952-1954 Hyesan-up

1952-1954 Wiyŏnpho-rodongjagu

	<i>Dong-Formation</i>	<i>Dong-Splitting</i>
1954 (7)	-	(5)
1955 (10)	(3)	-
1957 (10)	-	1/-1
1961 (16)	4	2
1965 (20)	-	4
1972 (21)	-	1
1973 (22)	-	1
1981 (23)	1	-
1993 (24)	-	1
1999 (25)	-	1

Incorporations

1954: + Part of Jungun-ri (Samsu-kun)

1961 *ri* of Unhŭng-kun; + part of Jungun-ri (Samsu-kun)

Hyesan – border city with a considerable number of middle and small factories

From the statistics about Hyesan, it is noticed that the city has especially a lot of factories, in comparison to its population, and that it occupies top positions in the relevant tables. How can this phenomenon be explained? One can notice that Hyesan has a considerable number of factories for its area size, that these factories are partially known nationwide due to their specialisations, albeit they are not the largest factories in the country. The qualitative analysis thus relativizes the quantitative result with regard to the importance of Hyesan as an industrial city.

Furthermore, the population of the city of Hyesan is mostly concentrated in the valley of the Yalu. This high population density in a limited part of the municipal area embodies the fact, that in the statistics the ratio of industrial companies is high compared to the population. From the latter statistical finding, it cannot be concluded that Hyesan is a city that is particularly strongly affected industrially. A large part of the most important industrial companies are in a relationship with the forest economy. With the objective of

stimulation and differentiation of the economic structure of the city on the Korean-Chinese border, Hyesan was appointed in 2013 as one of the 14 new locations for an economic development zone of the DPR Korea.