

Rainer Dormels (2014)

Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Kaechon

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IV.2.9. Kaechon

City with a tradition of craftsmanship and trade

Coal is the main energy source of the DPR Korea. The decline in coal production was an important cause of the economic crisis in the 1990s. The slight improvement of its economic situation in the 2000s is also due to the improvement of the DPRK's coal production.

One of the most important issues to the North Korean leadership in the field of economic policy is their “coal policy,” in explanation: the question of how much coal should be exported and in which inland sectors coal should be used. This context has a great influence on typical mining cities such as Kaechon. Kaechon belongs to a group of five cities north to the capital Pyongyang in the Phyongnam Province. All of these cities have been appointed a city status between 1969 and 1990. Located in the West from Kaechon is Anju, whilst on the East there is Tokchon and in the South Sunchon.

Table Kaechon–I. Basic data⁴²

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Population | 319,554 (Rank 8) |
| Area | 664.76 km ² (Rank 12) |
| Population density | 481 l./ km ² (Rank 15) |
| Administrative units | 26 <i>dong</i> /12 <i>ri</i> (68%) (Rank 13) |
| “Urban” population / “rural” population | 82.1%/17.9% (Rank 14) |

Among the cities that neither have a province independent status nor are a provincial capital, Kaechon is, after Taechon, the city with the second largest population in the DPRK. After the foundation of the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) by Thaejo Wang Kōn (r. 918-943), fortified military camps were established in various parts of the Northwest. One of such fortifications was set in Masan in 930 and named Ansu-jin, which was an

⁴² Number of population according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2009, 20); area size and administrative units according to PSC-8 (2009, 398). According to the IPA 3 (2003, 109) Kaechon had eleven *ri*; Jayang-ri is new.

important military installation in the North of Korea. In this region, there was fierce fighting with both the Khitan and later with the Mongols. At times, the region fell into the rule of the Mongol Yuan dynasty.

There were a number of changes to Kaechon's name, in 1080 to Ryŏngju, in 1217 to Ikju and in the 14th Century to Kaeju. When the region became part of the Phyongan Province in 1413, Kaeju was appointed to a county and therefore named Kaechon (Yi Wŏn-sun 1991, 599-600). Based on the rich mineral resources, iron crafts developed in Kaechon after the 17th century, which boosted trade activities. Kaechon thus developed into a city of craftsmanship and trade (Chae Thae-hyŏng-2010, 233-235). Prior to 1945, the region around Kaechon was mainly economically characterized by mining, craftsmanship and agriculture.

During the Japanese occupation, coal (especially from the mines of Joyang, Kaechon and Pongchŏn in the East and North of the city) and iron ore was extracted and brought to Japan. After 1945, Kaechon became a major industrial city on the basis of its resources and the construction of broad industrial sectors. The most important industrial sectors were coal mining, metal mining, metal and engineering industry.

City between the rivers

The downtown of Kaechon has formed on the foot of a mountain north to Kaechon-chŏn. The urban area is situated between the major rivers of Chŏngchŏn-gang in the North and Taedong-gang in the South. The location probably is also the reason for the name of the city. Kae (介) means "in between." Later, the Chinese character for the first syllable 介 was replaced with the homonymous syllable 价, meaning: good or virtuous (IPA-3 2003, 108).

The present name, Kaechon, originated from 1413, when names of cities with lower administrative status, were changed in terms of their final syllable, from "ju" to "chon" (川 river, stream) or to "san" (山 mountain). Consequentially, the name Kaeju was changed to Kaechon (Chae Thae-hyŏng 2010, 188-194).

The highest regions of the municipal area are located in the east, south and at the western border, where the foothills of the Myohyang mountain range extend. The region flattens gradually into the Kaechon-plain in the northwestern area. The highest elevations of the city are located on the eastern border of the city, the Paekthap-san (1,199 m) and the Jeil-bong (1,190 m). In the east, south and northwest, plains and caves have formed due to limestone. In the West, hilly plains extend, and this is also the area, where the main agricultural crops are grown. 53% of the city is below 200 m above sea level, 17% over 500 m above sea level.

From the east and the south of the city 17 rivers that have a length of more than 5 km flow into the Chŏngchŏn-gang. Correlatively to the numerous water resources, there are also numerous reservoirs. The water is primarily used for agricultural irrigation and as industrial water.

Kaechon is one of the cities that is counted as one of the coldest in January, although it is one the warmest in August.

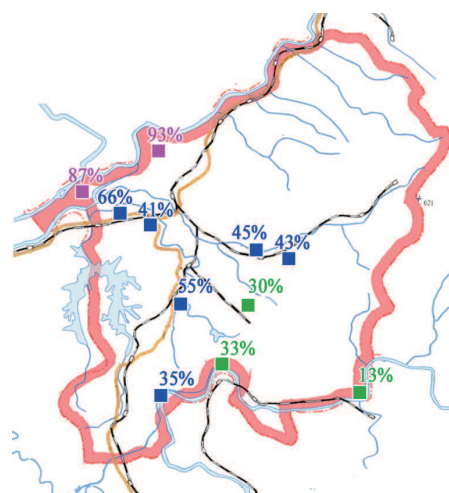


Figure Kaechon-I. Agricultural land in the ri

Table Kaechon-II. Climate values

| Annual average | January temperature | August temperature | Precipitation |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 9,4°C (16) | -7,4°C (20) | 23,9°C (10) | 1.066,7 mm (10) |

Mountains and forests amount to 61% of the total area of the city. Mainly oaks, larches and pines can be found. Approximately 21% of the total area is usable for agriculture, of which 19.6% is used for wet rice agriculture, 66.9% for dry land farming and 5.3% for mulberry cultivation that is used for silkworm rearing. The most important crop is corn. Though, an important special product of this region is tobacco, of which half is exported. In terms of fruits, apples, pears and peaches, are counted to the main products.

Besides agriculture, animal husbandry is also important in Kaechon. Important farms are the Chicken Farm Kaechon and the Duck Farm Kaechon. The first was put into operation in 1968 and specializes in the production of eggs for the city population. The latter is one of the largest duck farms for the production of duck meat in North Korea and is located in Kuŭp-ri in the middle of the urban area (IPA-3 2003, 116-117). The Compound Feed Factory Kaechon, which was founded in 1965, has supra-regional significance. Animal feeding stuff and veterinary medicine from Kaechon is also supplied to other parts of the province Phyongan-namdo.

A town specialized in mining

During the Japanese occupation, mainly coal and iron ore was extracted and manual work was conducted in Kaechon and its vicinity. Agriculture accounted for the major part of the economy. After the establishment of the government of the DPRK, the mining industry continued to operate whereas the production of coal accounts for a large proportion. In Kaechon, there are also many factories which produce food, pharmaceuticals, textiles and garments. Additionally cement, bricks or slaked lime are produced in Kaechon.

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

| Kaechon | KOFC | MOU | IPA | KCNA | KIET | Summary |
|---------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total number of companies | 8 (18) | 12 (24) | 8 (25) | 14 (10) | 9 (41) | 9 |
| Important companies | 20 (2) | 22 (1) | 12 (7) | | 13 (12) | 8 (10) |
| Cultural institutions | | | 27 (0) | | | |

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

| Kaechon | KOFC | MOU | IPA | KCNA | KIET | Summary |
|---------------------------|------|-----|---------|------|-------|---------|
| Total number of companies | 12 | 17 | 6–13–27 | 15 | 11–18 | 13–10 |

In the ranking concerning the number of companies, Kaechon ranks lower than in the ranking in view of population number (rank 8). There are few important companies. Six of the ten important companies in chapter III.7—overall view are mines. In the IPA no important cultural institution were accounted for Kaechon.

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

| Kaechon | Light Industry | Heavy Industry | Mining | Energy |
|---------|----------------|----------------|--------|--------|
| KOFC | 23 (1) | 27 (3) | 1 (14) | – |
| MOU | 19 (11) | 22 (4) | 3 (9) | – |
| IPA | 23 (6) | 21 (7) | 1 (12) | – |
| KCNA | 21 (2) | 20 (2) | 4 (3) | 3 (3) |
| KIET | 24 (13) | 24 (11) | 1 (17) | – |

In chapter III.7.3. ten companies were identified as important for Kaechon, of which six are mines: Kaechon Area Coal Mining Complex, Pongchŏn Coal Mine, Joyang Coal

Mine, Kaecheon Coal Mine, Chöndong Mine, Ryongwön Mine. The remaining four important companies are the Kaecheon Export Clothing Factory, Kaecheon Pig Iron Factory, Kaecheon Disabled Soldiers Music Instruments Factory and Kaecheon Paper Factory.

The most important industrial sector in Kaecheon is coal mining. More than 30% of the coal reserves of Northern Phyongnam are located in Kaecheon, primarily in the North (Jajak-dong, Jönjin-dong, Ramjön-dong, Sambong-dong, Pukwön-dong) and the East (Aril-dong, Joyang-dong) of the city. 81.3% of the coal mines are under the control of the central administration and 18.7% of them are small and medium-sized mines that are subject to the regional administration. In Kaecheon, seven coal mines are subjected to the central administration (IPA-3 2003, 115): in the North the coal mines Ramjön, Kaecheon and Pongchön, in the East the coal mines Joyang and Sinrip (Aril-dong), in the Southeast the coal mine Mujindae (Mokbang-dong) and in the Northwest, the coal mine Sinsöng. Furthermore, there are also more than 100 small and medium-sized mines that are subject to the regional administration.

There are also other natural resources in Kaecheon: iron ore, lead, kyanite, graphite, limestone. Regarding the iron, two mines are of importance: Chöndong (Ryongjin-dong, South of the city center) and Ryongdam (North of the city). It is about brown iron ore (limenit) that has a good quality with a fe content of 50-60%. In addition, the Kaecheon area is nationwide the region with the highest concentration of graphite. In particular the Wönri Mine (Pukwön-dong) has to be mentioned at this point. Lead and zinc are extracted in the Sünghang Mine. Limestone deposits are in Ryongjin-dong south of the city center, and kyanite deposits are available in the two mines of Ramjön and Sambong in the North of the city.

Other important industrial companies of the city are either metal processing factories, such as the Kaecheon Pig Iron Factory or the Kaecheon Silumin Factory that manufactures aluminum products or machinery for mining usage, such as the Workshop for Exploration Machinery Kaecheon and the machine factory Kaecheon.

Among the companies of light industry, which warrant a mention, are the Kaecheon Export Clothing Factory, which has been founded in 1958, and the Kaecheon Food Factory, which was established for the processing of meat, seafood and vegetable products in the early 1980s and which also produces soft drinks and beer since the 1990s. Furthermore, the Kaecheon Disabled Soldiers Music Instruments Factory with a specialization in brass and woodwind instruments, as well as the Kaecheon Paper Factory (IPA-3 2003, 116-117).

In addition, there are reports that Syria ordered rocket engines that were made at “January 8th Factory” in Kaecheon (Futurekorea 2004).

Transportation hub in northwestern Korea

Kaechon is a transportation hub in the western part of North Korea and an important seat of the railway administration of North Korea (Kaechon Railway Administration). The Manpho railway line runs through Kaechon from north to south connecting Kaechon with Manpho and Huichon in the north as well as with Sunchon in the south. Splitting from this line at the Kaechon station are the Kaechon line which leads to Anju as well as the Joyang Coal line. From Chŏndong station, which is situated south of the Kaechon station at the Manpho Line, another branch line leads to the limestone quarries in Ryongdaedong. The Taegŏn-line between Unsan (Unsan-kun) and Pongchang (Pukchang-kun) crosses the southern part of Kaechon. The distance from Kaechon to the provincial capital Phyongsong is 66km.

Starting point for the Kaechon–Lake Thaesong Waterway

The 150 km long Kaechon-Lake Waterway, which was built between November 1999 and October 2002 runs from Taegak-ri (in the south of Kaechon) through Sunchon-si, Sukchon-kun, Phyonwon-kun and Chungsan-kun to Lake Thaesong (Kangso-kun). As a multi-purpose facility, it serves as agricultural irrigation, but is also used to generate electricity as well as for flood protection. The Taegak Youth Dam which was built within the framework of the project is also a sightseeing place for tourists. The project was financially supported by the OPEC (Chong Yong-su 2002).

Between 1952 and 1969 ten *rodongjagu* developed, in 1990 Kaechon became a city (*si*).

In August 1990 Kaechon became a city (*si*). Between 1952 and 1969 a total of ten *rodongjagu* developed in the area of today's Kaechon. In 1990, during the transformation of Kaechon-kun to Kaechon-si Kaechon-up and the *rodongjagu* were regrouped to *dong*.

From 1990, only four *dong* originated from *ri*

During the city's founding, three new *dong* (Namchŏn-dong, Sŭngchang-dong, Ryongdae-dong) were constructed from parts of *ri*. Another "new" *dong* is the result of the single incorporation of Kaechon-si: in 1997 a part of Songam-dong (Anju-si) was incorporated and renamed to Ryongwŏn-dong. Songam-dong, formerly a *ri*, had been designated as *dong* in 1993.

A splitting of *dong* did not take place after Kaechon became a city.

Structure of the urbanized areas of the city of Kaechon

The urbanized areas of Kaechon-si can be divided into five regions as follows:

1. Center (Northwest)

In the Northwest of the city the city center of Kaechon is located. Situated there are the former Kaechon-up, the former Kunu-rodongjagu and Ryongjin-rodongjagu and the in 1990 developed Namchŏn-dong and Sŭngchang-dong. In Sinsong-dong, north of the railway station of Kaechŏn, there is a coal mine. In Kunu-dong there is a co-op farm. The area of the former Ryongjin-rodongjagu is located near the Chŏndong station, here are the Chŏndong Mines, where iron carbonate is extracted. In Ryongjin-dong (in the South of the former *rodongjagu*) limestone is mined. There is a mine in Sŭngchang-dong which is south of the city center.

2. Northern region

In the North of the municipal area, the *rodongjagu* Ryongdam, Ramjŏn, Sambong and Pukwŏn were located. The areas in the far North, including the former *rodongjagu* Ryongdam and Ramjŏn, form the Ramjŏn mine region. When Kaechon city was founded, Ramjŏn-dong developed out of Ryongdam-rodongjagu, whilst Jajak-dong and Jŏnjin-dong were formed out of Ramjŏn-rodongjagu. In 1967 areas had been transferred from the Ramjŏn-rodongjagu into the Ryongdam-rodongjagu and vice versa. From the Ramjŏn

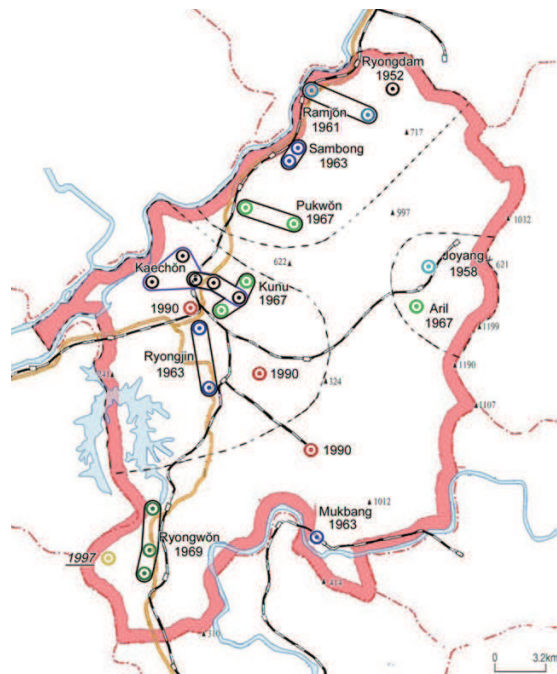


Figure Kaechon-II. Kaechon-up and the former *rodongjagu*

mine region coal and iron ore are extracted. Major production sites are the Ramjŏn Coal Mine, the Ramjŏn Mine and the Kaechon Mine.

From Sambong-rodongjagu, Pongchŏn-dong and Sambong-dong were formed in 1990. In this area the Pongchŏn Coal Mine and Sambong Mine are located. The Pukwŏn-rodongjagu was divided into Inhŭng-dong and the Pokwŏn-dong. The Wŏnri Mine is located there, where graphite is extracted. Also located in this area are the Wŏnri Mineral Spring and affiliated relaxation resorts.

3. Eastern region

The *rodongjagu* of Joyang and Aril both became a *dong* in 1990. Important is the Joyang Coal Mine and the Sinrip Coal Mine, which is located in Aril-dong.

4. Southeast

In the southeast of the city the former Mokbang-rodongjagu and the in 1990 developed Ryongdae-dong (1990) are situated. Mokbang-rodongjagu became a *dong* during the city founding. In this area the Mujindae Coal Mine and the Mokbang Mineral Springs are located. Mokbang is located on the Taegŏn railway line between Unsan (Unsan-kun) and Taegŏn (Sunchon-si) to Pongchang. Until 1984 Pongchang-ri was still part of the Kaechon-kun, but afterwards it was counted to Pukchang-kun. However, Mokbang has no direct rail link to the center of Kaechon. In Ryongdae-dong limestone is conveyed for the Silicate Brick Factory Anju. A railway branch line was built to Chŏndong station, in order to transport the limestone to Anju. In the far Southeast of the urban area the internment camp of Kaechon is located.

5. Southwest

In the southwest of the city is the former Ryongwŏn-rodongjagu, which was dissolved in 1990 into Sŏnam-dong, Kagam-dong and Ryongam-dong, as well as into the in 1997 newly created Ryŏngwŏn-dong. In this area the Ryŏngwŏn Mine is located. In Ryŏngam-dong, there are two reservoirs, as well as the Songam Cave. The latter is praised in the issues 2/2006 and 4/2010 of the quarterly North Korean journal “Foreign Trade” as a tourist attraction along with 70 or respectively more than 100 attractions. According to the North Korean news agency KCNA (July 3, 2004), only a few years ago the cave has been rediscovered. Visits by Kim Jong-il were reported for March 1996 and April 2002.

Statistics

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

- 1939-1949, 1952-1990 Kaecheon-up (1)
- 1952-1990 Ryongdam-rodongjagu (2)
- 1958-1990 Joyang-rodongjagu (3)
- 1961-1990 Ramjŏn-rodongjagu (4)
- 1963-1990 Sambong-rodongjagu (5)
- 1963-1990 Ryongjin-rodongjagu (6)
- 1963-1990 Mokbang-rodongjagu (7)
- 1967-1990 Pukwŏn-rodongjagu (8)
- 1967-1990 Kunu-rodongjagu (9)
- 1967-1990 Aril-rodongjagu (10)
- 1969-1990 Ryongwŏn-rodongjagu (11)

| | <i>Dong-Formation</i> | <i>Dong-Splitting</i> |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1990 (25) | 3 | (11) |
| 1997 (26) | - | 1 |

Conclusion: three *dong* were formed due to upgrading the former *ri* during the city foundation.

Enlargement of the municipal area in 1997 by the incorporation of Ryongwŏn-dong, which was split from a *dong* in the city of Anju.

Kaechon – numerous former *rodongjagu* with its mining villages

Kaechon mainly is recognized and famous as a result of coal and iron ore mining. The mining goes back to the time of the Japanese occupation. Numerous *rodongjagu*, which had been set up until the city founding in 1990, indicate the natural resources of the urban area.

Both, the statistics and other sources, have identified Kaechon as a typical mining town. The high number of *rodongjagu*, which were located in Kaechon-kun previous to the city founding, is also a sign of numerous mines in the urban area. Culturally Kaechon does not hold any central function, although it is a major traffic junction in northwestern Korea.