

**Rainer Dormels (2014)**

**Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Kanggye**

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### IV.2.1. Kanggye

#### Capital of the mountainous province of Jagang, which was founded in 1949

The occupation of Korea by Japan promoted especially in the North of Korea the formation and growth of coastal cities. The DPR Korea tried to compensate this development by encouraging the inland regions in particular. One measure in this direction was the formation of the northern mountainous provinces of Jagang and Ryanggang. Kanggye was granted the status of a city (*si*) in 1949, when the province of Jagang was founded and in addition was proclaimed as its provincial capital. It is a medium-sized city according to its population and the only city in DPR Korea that has no rural *ri*. The built-up, urbanized area lies in a narrow, densely populated valley. In regards to its area size, Kanggye is significantly smaller than the other two cities of the Jagang Province (Huichon and Manpho).

**Table Kanggye-I.** Basic data

Population	251,971 (Rank 14)
Area	263.667 km <sup>2</sup> (Rank 22)
Population density	954 l./km <sup>2</sup> (Rank 8)
Administrative units	36 <i>dong</i> (100%) (Rank 1)
“Urban” population/“rural” population	100%/0% (Rank 1)

### Already in the past: a city of great military importance

Kanggye is located in the northern border area of Korea, which was inhabited for a long time by the Jurchen tribe. The name of “Tokro-gang,”<sup>2</sup> the former name of Jangja-gang, which flows through Kanggye, was dedicated to these earlier times. Therefore, Kanggye became soon a location of great military strategic importance. In 1413, Kanggye gained the status of *tohubu*, an administrative regional center with military functions. In 1436, the city wall of Kanggye was built.<sup>3</sup>

In Korea, Kanggye is known as the home of wild ginseng, bold hunters and beautiful women. The first two statements are due to the fact that Kanggye is located in a forest region—according to North Korean sources, 75.9% of today’s urban area is declared as a forest—which is not surprising. The latter statement has its roots in historical narratives. The poet and statesman Jōng Chōl (1536-1593) was rumored to have had a romance with the Kisaeng Jin Ok during the period of his exile in Kanggye. A woman named Purang from Kanggye, who lived at the time of King Injo (r. 1623-1649), also gained a legendary status (Ko Thae-u 1992, 208-209). Born into a livestock-breeding family, she rode well and as a child she played war games with boys, where she always was the leader. Disguised as a man, she substituted her ailing father in the military (Yes24.com 2007).

During the time of Japanese rule over Korea, Kanggye became a military base of the occupying power. The North Korean historiography praises the anti-Japanese struggle in Kanggye, which was led by Kim Hyong-jik (1884-1926), the father of Kim Il-sung (PSC-8 2009, 463). Lautensach (1945, 254) talks about a strongly Japanized city that has numerous buildings of the civil administration and the military. He characterizes Kanggye as a main base of Japanese power in North Korea. After 1939, Kanggye became a traffic junction for the transport of goods and tourism due to the opening of the railway line between Sunchon and Manpho (the Manpho-line).

In the Korean War, Kanggye was temporarily the seat of the North Korean government. When they had to leave Pyongyang in October 1950, Sinuiju was temporarily established as the new capital. When enemy troops marched towards Sinuiju, the government relocated to Kanggye (Mossman 1990), where it spent the winter of 1950/51. In an attempt to eliminate the political leadership of the DPR Korea, B-29 bombers of the U.S. Air Force dropped newly developed 12,000 pound bombs (so-called “Tarzan bombs”) (Cumings 2004). According to Cumings (2004) stronger bombs were not used until the Iraq War in 2003.

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2 Tokro is considered as a word from the language of the Jurchen, which is translated as “South” or “Outside.” In 1976, the river was renamed.

3 This city wall uses natural boundaries such as the Nam-san in the South, the cliffs of the Puk-chōn in the North and the cliffs of the Jangja-gang in the West. It was renewed in 1555 and 1739. Its shape is rectangular, and the circumference measures 4,500 m, of which 209 m are still preserved. Their height had amounted to about 4-5 m, although the height of the preserved ruins is 3 m (IPA-7 2003, 59).

The Revolutionary Memorial Jangjasan in Kanggye, which is closely associated with Kim Jong-il, symbolizes the stay of Kim Jong-il in Kanggye. In October 1950, as the KCNA reported on 10.11.2011, he stayed there more than 20 days for the purposes of study and self-training. A special site are the two pine trees, which is said to have been planted by him personally. From the seeds of these two trees, over 27,000 pine trees throughout the country have been planted since 1995.

### “World of rivers”

Kanggye is the center of the highlands of the province of Jagang. The city is located west of the Rangnim mountain range and south of the Kangnam mountain range, of which some small chains of mountains branch off in the direction of the city. The built-up urban area became crowded together on a 20 m high rock terrace at the northeastern arc of the Jangja-gang (Lautensach 1945, 254). It lies in a large valley or basin, which is surrounded in the North by the Jabuk-san (835 m), and to the East by a 400 m high hill country, at the western foot of Nam-san (539 m), it is embraced by the Puk-chön (in the North) and by Nam-chön (in the South), which flow into the Jangja-gang (Kang Sök-o 1984, 304). On the shores of the rivers, especially at the Jajang-gang and the Nam-chön, small alluvial plains have formed, which are used for growing rice. Apart from that, the agriculture of the suburban vegetable cultivation is emphasized. It is stated that 11.24% of the city area is agricultural acreage (PSC-8 2009, 463).

The Jangja-gang rises in Ryongrim-kun (Jagang-do) on the western edge of the Kwangsöng-ryöng and flows in Wiwon-kun Kobo-ri into the Yalu. It is a tributary river of first category of the Yalu, and with 232 km length the largest river of the province.

In addition, there are about ten other rivers in the city area. The city’s name is derived from its multitude of rivers (江 *kang* means “river,” 界 and *kye* means “world”). Apart from mountains that lie on the city boundary of Kanggye, the Taeung-san (1,123 m), which lies in the western part of the urban area, is the highest mountain of the city. The average sea level of the city area is about 300 m, and a continental climate prevails. There is only one city in North Korea, Hyesan, where the winter is much colder than in Kanggye.

**Table Kanggye-II.** Climate values

Annual average	January temperature	August temperature	Precipitation
7.0°C (24)	-12.4°C (26)	22.5°C (19)	882.7mm (17)

### A center of textile and defense industries

Following North Korean depiction, before 1945 this region was a slash-and-burn cultivation area, in which mainly potatoes and millet sprays were grown. After 1945 Kanggye developed into a city of light and heavy industry, where especially the textile industry, engine building and energy industries were developed.<sup>4</sup> Already Saitschikow (1958, 306) describes the favorable location of Kanggye for industrial development and refers to “the existence of copper, zinc, nickel and coal deposits nearby the city.” Of great importance is the favorable energy supply situation due to the proximity to several hydroelectric power plants. In numerous media reports outside of DPR Korea, Kanggye is regarded as an important basis for the North Korean defense industry, which is suspected to be located in underground facilities in this inland city.

The results of the quantitative studies on the number of companies show that the ranking of Kanggye here correlated broadly with the ranking regarding the proportion of population (Population: Rank 14, KOFC 13<sup>th</sup> rank, MOU 13<sup>th</sup> Rank, KIET 16<sup>th</sup> Rank, in summary 12<sup>th</sup> rank.).<sup>5</sup>

**Table Kanggye–III.** Ranking (in parenthesis: Number of industrial companies or cultural institutions)

Kanggye	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies-total	13 (14)	13 (23)	25 (4)	4 (22)	16 (29)	12
Companies-important	24 (1)	20 (1)	24 (3)		21 (7)	15 (6)
Cultural institutions			6 (16)			

**Table Kanggye–IV.** Ranking (Total number of companies in relation to population)

Kanggye	KOFC	MOU	IPA	KCNA	KIET	Summary
Companies-total	14	4	25–24–2	2	16–25	10–16

The fact that the news agency of the DPRK, the KCNA, mentions particularly many

4 According to KJY-24 (1990, 520), the share of textile industry, in relation to the total production sum of the industries of Kanggye, was 63% in 1980. Therefore, the share of light industry was 84.7%, the share of heavy industry was 7.3%, the share of energy production 6.1% and lastly the share of mining was 0.5%.

5 The deviation in the IPA source can be explained that in the description of the *ri* in IPA usually the most important companies of the *ri* were named as well. Therefore it is to be expected that in total that the cities with few *ri* will show fewer companies in the statistics. At the time of the compilation of the data for the IPA, there were only two *ri* in Kanggye. Now, however, only *dong* and no *ri* exist in Kanggye.

large companies of Kanggye, can be explained due to the propagandistic importance of the city and the numerous visits of Kanggye by Kim Jong-il.

The companies, which are located in Kanggye and listed in the researched sources, are usually not the most important ones. Therefore Kanggye has a lower ranking in regards to the important companies, when the ranking is in relation to what should be expected due to the population share. However, six of the seven companies which are regarded as important companies in at least one source are also mentioned by at least two other sources, so that the number of the as “important” defined companies according to chapter III.7.3., is large enough to allow Kanggye a similar ranking as it holds for the ranking of population share.

**Table Kanggye-V.** Specification (in parenthesis: Number of industrial companies)

Kanggye	Light Industry	Heavy Industry	Mining	Energy
KOFC	9 (4)	14 (9)	–	9 (1)
MOU	4 (18)	21 (4)	–	6 (1)
IPA	3 (3)	–	–	1 (1)
KCNA	8 (12)	18 (6)	–	7 (4)
KIET	4 (15)	21 (13)	–	9 (1)

Following the results of the statistical analyses, all five sources indicate that Kanggye specializes more on light industry than on heavy industry. However, armaments factories were not considered in these calculations, since they are not listed in the examined sources. In recent years the KCNA reported more frequently of power plants in Kanggye, since after the crisis in the 1990s, DPR Korea relies more on the construction of especially small and medium hydroelectric power plants.

In chapter III.7.3. six important companies (Kanggye General Tractor Plant, Kanggye Precision Machinery Complex, Kanggye Wine Factory, Textile Factory “September,” Kanggye Shoe Factory, Kanggye Pencil Factory) were determined for Kanggye.

In 1956, the Kanggye General Tractor Plant began operation. It provides 15HP-strong tractors for the use in mountainous areas. However, in the North Korean media this factory is merely referred to as a tractor factory (KCNA January 23, 1998; April 7, 2011), although in KOFC (2010, 263) it is pointed out that this factory is also called “Factory No. 26” and it is suggested that this factory specializes in munitions as an armaments facility.<sup>6</sup> Various sources mentioned a “No. 26 Factory” that is operated as an arms factory, where apparently 10,000 to 20,000 persons are employed and which is suspected to be located

<sup>6</sup> For further information s. kdb (2005b, 147), KIET (1996, 275).

in the southern part of the city.<sup>7</sup> A predecessor of this facility was a factory, which was initially located in Pyongyang and produced firearms. During the Korean War this factory was relocated to Kanggye. By now, it is considered as the headquarter for the North Korean defense industry, whose product range reaches from bullets to chemical weapons (Ju Yung-jung/Yi Yong-su 2010).

Additionally, the production of military goods is assumed in factories such as the Kanggye Precision Machinery Complex and the Textile Factory “September.”

In general, the Kanggye Precision Machinery Complex is described as an operation, which produces table clocks and knife tools of all kinds (KIET 1996, 296). In particular, though, Kanggye has a number of important companies of light industry. The Kanggye Pencil Factory provides a wide range of pens, such as crayons, colored pencils, pencils including the pencil brand Samcholli. This company was founded in 1946 (IPA-7 2003, 53).

In North Korea the Kanggye Wine Factory is known for their Inphung liquor and their wine. Mainly raw materials from the region are used. Products of this factory are also exported abroad. In 1956, a certain section from the Kanggye Foodstuff Factory was separated, whereby this liquor factory was launched (IPA-7 2003, 53).<sup>8</sup>

The Textile Factory “September,” which is located in Sinmun-dong and Namchŏn-dong, is the basic operation for the textile industry in Kanggye. The name is derived from the fact that Kim Il-sung had given the order to build modern textile factories in the province of Jagang in September 1966. A factory, which was built in the early 1960s, completely burned down in 1967. Afterwards the factory was rebuilt with equipment from the GDR until October 1972. In this factory mainly yarns are produced, which are further processed in other textile factories of the country. The total area size of this building is 65,000 m<sup>2</sup>. About 5,000 people are employed by this factory (IPA 2003-7, 53; KOFC 2010, 595).<sup>9</sup> There are numerous other textile industry companies in various parts of the city.

Furthermore, the Kanggye Shoe Factory is mentioned in three of the examined sources (see KIET 1996, 107). Also, frequent mentions in the North Korean media are awarded to the Kanggye Koryo Medicine Factory.<sup>10</sup>

Already in 1937 the construction of the power plant, which is now called Kanggye Youth Power Plant, was started. Initially it was not completed. However, starting from 1958 the construction was then continued and finished in 1964. Subsequently, several extensions and improvements have taken place. The power plant consists of three parts, one of

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7 According to Future Korea (2004) the “No. 26 Factory” is located in Namchŏn-dong, and according to Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) (n.d. a) in Konggui-dong. See also Bermudez Jr. (2001, 284).

8 See also KIET (1996, 71).

9 For further information see also KIET (1996, 75)

10 E.g. KCNA 18<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

them is located in the city of Kanggye (No. 3) (Yŏnphung-dong) and two in the Janggang-kun (No. 1 in the Oil-rodongjagu; No. 2 in Sŭngbang-rodongjagu) (KOFC 2010, 147).

Kanggye is a traffic junction in the North of the country. Through Kanggye the Manpho line runs between Sunchon and Manpho, which was opened in 1939. It is about 300 km long. Kanggye is located about 250 km from Sunchon and 50 km from Manpho. From Kanggye the Kanggye-line branches off towards Ryangrim (57 km distance). Commuter trains operate between Kanggye and Ssangbang. Roads leading from Kanggye to the principal up of the province.

### **Cultural center of the province**

Particularly developed in Kanggye is the centrality in terms of cultural institutions. In addition to numerous universities and other educational institutions, there are also museums as well as press and radio facilities and other cultural facilities located in the capital of the province of Jagang.

The landmark of the city is the Inphung Pavilion at the estuary of the Puk-chŏn into the Jangja-gang. To the East and North from there, there are additional historical sites, memorials and public spaces. The Inphung Pavilion was built in 1472 as part of the fortification around Kanggye, which burned down in 1663 and was rebuilt in 1680. The Korea Inphung Trading Company as well as the famous spirituous beverage Inphung-sul from Kanggye bear the name of the Pavilion (IPA 2003-7, 60).

Another important historic building in Kanggye is a government office that was built in 1663 and rebuilt in 1888. During the Korean War this Kanggye government office was destroyed again and rebuilt (KCNA August 8, 2000).

Near the Inphung Pavilion bronze statues of the former leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il have been erected.<sup>11</sup>

The Yŏnphung Revolutionary Site is located at the place where Kim Il-sung stayed during the Korean War in December 1950 and where he led a cabinet meeting.

### **The “Spirit of Kanggye (Kanggye Spirit)”**

In January 1998, Kim Jong-il evoked the so-called “Spirit of Kanggye (Kanggye Spirit),” the spirit of defending socialism, since particularly the people of Jagang had to suffer from

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<sup>11</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011, the two statues were unveiled. Previously, only the statue of Kim Il-sung was there.



the difficulties of the "Arduous March. "Today, the "Bright Lights on the Jangja River" belong to the "Eight Scenic Spots in the Songun Era."

#### Expansion of the urban area in the years 1952, 1963, 1967 and 1995 in a northern direction

Kanggye is the capital of the Jagang Province, which was founded in January 1949 from six *kun* of the Phyongbuk Province and from one part of a *kun* of the Hamnam Province. In December 1949, the provincial capital of Kanggye-si was formed from the Kanggye-myon of Kanggye-kun, whilst from the rest of the Kanggye-kun (6 *myon*) the Janggang-kun was formed.

In the years of 1952, 1963, 1967 and 1995, the area of Kanggye-si was extended with parts of Janggang-kun (in the Northeast) and Sijung-kun (in the Northwest). In 1952, parts of the Kongbuk-myon (Janggang-kun) came to Kanggye-si and formed Hyangro-ri, Tuhŭng-ri, Konggui-ri and Kongin-ri. In March 1961, Hŭngju-ri (Sijung-kun) was added to Kanggye-si and became a *dong*. In October 1967, a part of Changphyŏng-ri (Janggang-kun) came to the city of Kanggye and formed with a part of Koyŏn-dong the Kogye-dong, which was renamed in February 1976 to Jangja-dong. In December 1995, two of the *ri* of Sijung-kun came to Kanggye-si (Uijin-ri; Ssangsin-ri-ri, in 1998 renamed to Sinhŭng-ri).

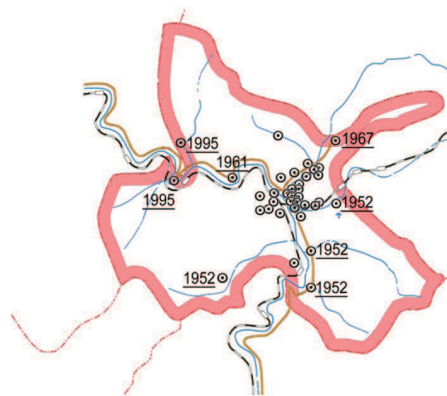


Figure Kanggye-I. Incorporations

#### Active development of the inner city until the 1960s and early 1980s, afterwards urbanization of the peripheral

In 1955, Kanggye had 21 *dong*, from 1957 to 1961 though nine new *dong* were established, whilst five others were dissolved due to the consolidation with other *dong*. Thus, Kanggye possessed 25 *dong* in 1961.

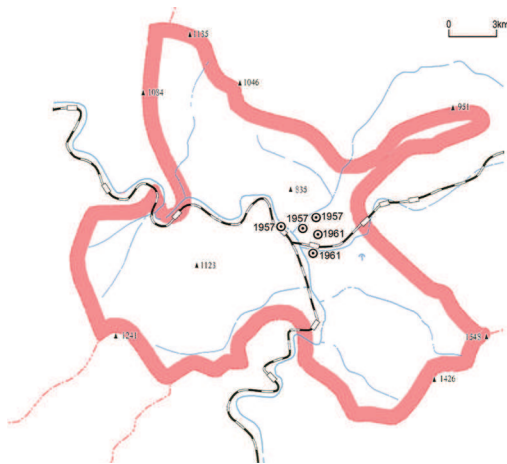


Figure Kanggye-II. Dissolved *dong*

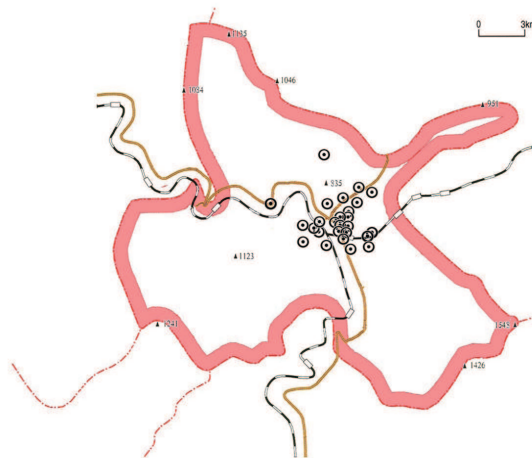


Figure Kanggye-III. *Dong* in 1961

Furthermore, between 1967 and 1999, nine new *dong* were created. Thereby, in a total of five cases, a new *dong* was created by splitting from existing *dong* in 1967 and 1981. This suggests an increase in population and respectively an increase of construction of new housing units in the town center on these two points in time.

But the peripherally located *ri* also got an intense urban character, which was the reason to upgrade them gradually into *dong*. In 1967, 1981 and 1995, a *dong* in the south of the municipal area was affected, whilst in 1999 a *dong* in the west of the municipal area was affected by this phenomenon. The two remaining *ri* of the city lie in the west and southwest of the city. In IPA-7 (2003),<sup>12</sup> they are still presented as *ri*, although the PSC-8 (2009, 463) described Kanggye as a city consisting of 36 *dong* and no *ri*.

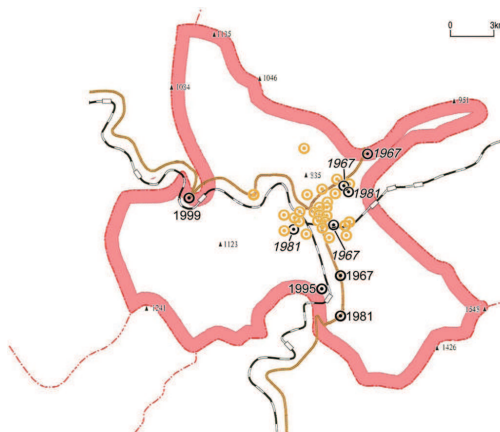


Figure Kanggye-IV. *Dong* in 1999 (displayed with the current city borders)

Functionally the downtown of Kanggye could be roughly divided as follows:

Centrally located in the North at the confluence of the Jangja-gang and the Pukchŏn is the administrative and political center with the statues of both Kims and the Inphung Park in the East and with the railway station in the West of the Jangja-gang. Within the center of the city there are companies of light industry, although most companies of the textile industry can be found in East Kanggye. Most companies of mechanical engineering focus on three

<sup>12</sup> According to IPA-7 (2003) Kanggye consisted of 34 *dong* and 2 *ri*.

regions on the edge of downtown: in the West (Sosan-dong, Naeryong-dong), in the South (Konggui-dong, Sökhjön-dong) or in the Northeast (Jangja-dong, Yöñju-dong, Koyöng1-dong) (KJY-24 1990, 520-521).

## Statistics

Up 1931-1946

	<i>Dong</i> -Formation	<i>Dong</i> -Splitting
1955 (21)	21	-
1957 (20)	-	2/-3
1961 (25)	3	4/-2
1967 (29)	1	3
1981 (32)	1	2
1995 (33)	1	-
1999 (34)	1	-

## Kanggye – a symbol for “the spirit of defending socialism” in North Korean propaganda

Kanggye is located in the center of the Jagang-plateau in the valley of the Jangja-gang. In the time of the occupation of Korea by Japan, Kanggye was a main base of Japanese power in North Korea. In 1949, Kanggye became capital of the newly founded Jagang Province. In the course of the promotion of inland cities, the industry of the city, especially the arms industry, was expanded. From 1998, the “Spirit of Kanggye” (Kanggye spirit), “the spirit of defending socialism” is propagated throughout the country.

The results of statistical surveys show that the light industry plays a more important role than heavy industry in Kanggye. In fact, the textile industry actually has in Kanggye a dominant role. Although companies of light industry of Kanggye as well as the Kanggye Wine Factory have a good reputation, it is assumed that there are numerous arms factories situated in the city, which is located in the inner country, and that due to reasons of confidentiality there are no official announcements thereof. The Kanggye General Tractor Factory is probably the largest company of the city with its numerous employees.

Kanggye is the only city in DPR Korea, which shows no rural *ri*. After the reconstruction period after the Korean War, urbanization thrusts can be identified by the emergence of new *dong* in 1967 (four new *dong*) and in 1981 (three new *dong*). Two new *dong* each were developed in the 1990s and after 2002.

A densely built-up center can be ascertained, and there are also smaller settlements in the valleys of Jangja-gang and its tributaries.