

Rainer Dormels (2014)

Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Tokchon

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

<http://www.univie.ac.at/koreanologie/index.php?id=digital-north-korea0>

This work has been published as a chapter in:

Rainer Dormels (2014): North Korea's Cities. Jimoondang. Seoul.

IV.2.10. Tokchon

City of automobile industry and mining situated at a reservoir

Tokchon is a mountainous mining town. It is situated east of the city of Kaechon on the northern border of the Phyongnam Province. The city became known due to the Sŭngri (“victory”) Motor Plant, one of the few vehicle factories in the DPRK. There are further numerous coal pits within the city, from which coal is used *inter alia* in the Pukchang Thermal Power Complex (in the Pukchang-rodongjagu, Pukchang-kun). Starting with the coal mines of Tokchon, Chenam and Hyŏngbong, there are six big coal pits in the city (IPA-3 2003, 189). In 1939 the Pyongdok-railway line was built, in order to dispatch the coal of the northern Phyongnam-coal field. This connects the coal-mining areas of Kujang-kun (Phyongbuk) and Tokchon with Pyongyang. In connection with the mining, the mechanical engineering was developed. The most important factory in this sector is the Mining Machine Complex in Osan-dong, in Tokchon. Furthermore, there are factories for the textile production and the food production. In 1982 the Kŭmsŏng lake originated from the damming of the upper reaches of the Taedong-gang, whereby wide parts of the area of Tokchon were flooded.

Table Tokchon-I. Basic data

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Population | 237,133 (Rank 16) |
| Area | 692 km ² (Rank 10) |
| Population density | 343 l./km ² (Rank 20) |
| Administrative units | 23 <i>dong</i> /9 <i>ri</i> (72%) (Rank 12) |
| “Urban” population/“rural” population | 88.8%/11.2% (Rank 8) |

Among the cities that neither are province independent nor are a provincial capital, Tokchon is the city with the highest share of urban population among the cities of the DPRK.

Tokchon is situated in a region, which had an important military strategic role when Koryo was moving forward towards the North. In the year of 947 the Tŏksŏng-Camp was founded in today’s municipal area. In 1001 the town was named Tŏkju. Then in 1413 the Tŏkchŏn-kun was founded. The construction of the car factory in the 1950s provided stimulation for the growth of Tokchon.

Only 9% of agricultural land

The municipal area is situated in the internal mountainous countryside and exists mainly of low to medium-height mountains. From the edge to the center of the city, the height of the terrain reduces gradually.

The Myohyang mountain range extends in the North and the West, which also marks the border to the Kujang-kun and to Kaechon. Here, medium-sized mountains are elevated, such as the Ryongmun-san (1,180 m) and the Paektap-san (1,199 m). In the South on the border to Pukchang-kun, the Jangan-mountain range is located with the highest elevation of the city, the Jangan-san (1,250 m). In the east of the city, erosion activities in the limestone area of the Taedong-gang and of its tributary, Siryang-gang, as well as the tectonic movements have built the Tokchon basin and the Chöngsong basin. In this area, there are many limestone caves to be found (IPA-3 2003, 186). The Kūmsöng lake was developed due to the damming of the upper reaches of the Taedong-gang in 1982.

Table Tokchon-II. Climate values

| Annual average | January temperature | August temperatures | Precipitation |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 8.8°C (20) | -8.4°C (22) | 23.2°C (15) | 1,202.3 mm (5) |

In comparison to other towns of the Phyongnam Province, relatively a lot of rain falls in Tokchon, and the temperatures are a little lower as well.



Figure Tokchon-I. Agricultural land in the ri

The cultivable area accounts for merely 9% of the municipal area, from which 54.9% is used for the growing of grain (primarily maize) and 34.2% for the growing of vegetables. Also the animal husbandry is an important component of the economy of Tokchon. Mulberry trees are an important special crop for the production of cocoons (IPA-3 2003, 189).

Mining and the Sŭngri Motor Plant

Kaechon is famous for its automotive industry. The city has numerous factories in the industrial sectors of mechanical engineering, in which machines are produced for mining, machine accessories, transformers and other machines, as well. Mining plays an important role in Tokchon. There are dozens of mines and the coal, which is mined from it, is mostly used in the Pukchang Thermal Power Complex, which is in the neighboring county. Silk weaving and textile industry also has tradition here. Moreover, food, kitchen utensils, daily goods, paper, furniture and clothes are produced.

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

| Tokchon | KOFC | MOU | IPA | KCNA | KIET | Summary |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Companies-total | 12 (15) | 18 (13) | 22 (6) | 10 (11) | 20 (21) | 18 |
| Companies-important | 15 (3) | 9 (3) | 23 (3) | | 15 (10) | 10 (8) |
| Cultural institutions | | | 21 (3) | | | |

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

| Tokchon | KOFC | MOU | IPA | KCNA | KIET | Summary |
|-------------------|------|-----|----------|------|---------|---------|
| Companies – total | 7 | 20 | 24-23-23 | 7 | 23 – 16 | 18 – 6 |

In the ranking of the number of companies, Kaechon oscillates, depending on the source, around the ranking of the number of inhabitants. However, the number of important companies (which is mentioned in chapter. III.7.3) is comparably high on account of the mining companies.

In Kaechon an unequivocal specialization on the mining industry is ascertained. Therefore, the heavy industry generally has a stronger position than the light industry in the city.

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

| Tokchon | Light Industry | Heavy Industry | Mining | Energy |
|---------|----------------|----------------|--------|--------|
| KOFC | – | 25 (4) | 2 (10) | 10 (1) |
| MOU | 27 (2) | 25 (1) | 1 (9) | 3 (1) |
| IPA | – | 7 (3) | 3 (2) | 4 (1) |
| KCNA | 23 (1) | 22 (2) | 1 (7) | 12 (1) |
| KIET | 21 (7) | 25 (5) | 2 (8) | 6 (1) |

In chapter III.7.3. eight companies were determined as important for Tokchon: one of the companies is in the sector of motor vehicle construction, one in the sector of mechanical engineering, five in the sector of mining and one in the sector of power production: Sŭngri Motor Plant, Tokchon Coal Mining Machine Complex, Tokchon Area Coal Mining Complex, Tokchon Coal Mine, Wŏlbong Coal Mine, Jangan Coal mine, Jenam Coal Mine and the Taedonggang Power Station.

The Sŭngri Motor Complex, which lies on the edge of the Sŭngri-san, is considered as the largest car producing factory in the DPRK with its 25,000 employees and a size of 600,000 m². Parts of the factory are subterranean, so that the production can continue even in the case of an evacuation. Tokchon is linked to Pyongyang with a railway line. The factory is 500m away from the railway station of Tokchon, which is a distance that is bridged by a spur runway (KOFC 2010, 271). In 1952 the construction began and in 1956 it was finished under the name of Tokchon Motor Factory⁴³ (IPA-3 2003, 189). In the beginning the factory only produced car accessories. In November 1958, a model in the style of the Soviet 2.5 Tonners GAZ-51,⁴⁴ the “Sŭngri-58”-truck, was produced. During the time of the first Seven-Year-Plan (1961-1970, including a three year extension) the range of products was extended. Now, besides trucks, passenger cars and jeeps are produced as well (KOFC 2010, 271). The factory was renamed to Sŭngri (victory) Engine Factory in 1975. In the 1980s the approximate production was between 6,000 to 7,000 vehicles and sank to 150 vehicles in 1996 (Kim, Mi-young 2002).

The Tokchon Coal Mining Machine Complex is located in Osan-dong and is connected to the railway network with a spur runway. Here coal carriages, production lines and other utensils for coal mines are produced (IPA-3 2003, 189). The complex covers a total area of 50,000 m² (KOFC 2010, 260).

In the municipal area other companies are to be found, for example in the sector of machine construction such as the Tokchon Machine Accessory Factory and the Tokchon

43 “Some of the facilities were built by the Chinese as a logistical base during the Korean War (1950-53)” (Kim, Mi-young 2002).

44 “Since the 1950s, North Korea’s auto industry has persistently relied on ‘anatomy plan drawing’-a practice of disassembling foreign-made car models and drawing their parts design one by one.” (Kim, Mi-young 2002).

Machine Repair Kongjang. Additionally, the light industry is represented in Kaechon. The most important companies of light industry are the Tokchon Textile Factory, the Tokchon Silk Factory and the Tokchon Basic Foodstuff Factory (IPA-3 2003, 188).

The Tokchon Area Coal Mining Complex has an important function for the extraction of anthracite in the northern Phyongnam coal field. Six big and 40 middle-sized to small coal mines are subordinated to the complex. The coal is, *inter alia*, delivered to the Pukchang Thermal Power Station.

The Taedonggang Power Station was established by damming the upper reaches of the Taedong-gang, through which the Kŭmsŏng Lake was created. In 1972 enquiries were made, however difficulties arose, so that a group of experts from Yugoslavia was sent. Then in 1973 the construction started and in 1983 it was concluded. In November 1986 a delegation of Siemens has visited the power station, in order to negotiate the modernization of the plant (KOFC 2010, 148).

For the education of specialists four big technical training centers can be found in Tokchon which either are specialized in the construction of vehicles or in mining. The advanced technical college for construction of vehicles, the Tokchon Technical University (established in 1960, and is specialized in the construction of vehicles), the Toksong Technical University and the Hyŏngbong Technical University (established in 1979, Factory affiliated with of the Tokchon Coal Mine).

Tokchon is connected with the capital by the Pyongdok- Railway line (between Pyongyang and Kujang over Tokchon). The Sŏchang line leads to the west of the city from the Tokchon railway station. From the west of the city one is able to reach a country road over the Alil pass to the neighboring town Kaechon. On the Kŭmsŏng lake cargo boats and passenger ships go to the district Nŏngwon. The distance between the city centers of the cities of Tokchon and Kaechon is 42 km. The provincial capital of Pyongsong is 104 km away (IPA-3 2003, 189) from Tokchon.

Until the city founding eight *rodongjagu* existed

In 1952 Tokchon-kun was founded with one *up* and 22 *ri*. In October 1954 Samhŭng-ri (Pukchang-kun) was added. Between 1958 and 1967 five *rodongjagu* have been founded:

- Jangsang-rodongjagu (1958) (Tokchon Coal Mine),
- Hyŏngbong-rodongjagu (1963),
- Chŏngsong-rodongjagu (1963),
- Jangan-rodongjagu (1967), in October 1981 renamed to Namdŏk-rodongjagu,
- Jenam-rodongjagu (1967).

In June 1981 the following were established:

- the Sangdŏk-rodongjagu (Sŏchang Coal Mine) and
- the Sinsŏng-rodongjagu (Tŏksŏng Coal Mine).

At the same time Osan-rodongjagu (Tokchon Coal Mining Machine Complex) was split off from Chŏngsong-rodongjagu.

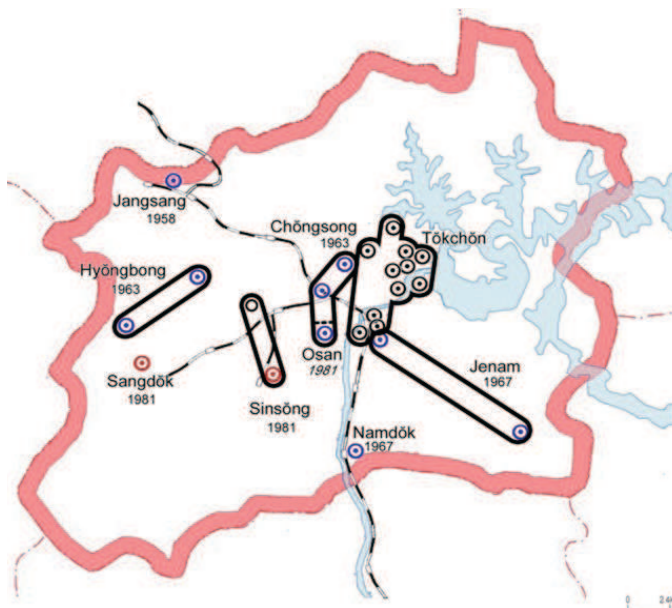


Figure Tokchon-II. *Dong* and former *rodongjagu*

In connection with the construction of the Kŭmsŏng-ho, which originated in 1982 due to the damming of the upper reaches of the Taedong-gang; Tokchon-up was increased in July 1982 and at the same time Namyang-ri received the remaining rests of three *ri*.

No changes after the designation as a city in 1986

In June 1986 Tŏkchŏn was designated as a city. The *up* was split in eleven *dong*, whilst eight *rodongjagu* are split up into *dong* and *ri*.

The IPA-3 (2003, 183) does not mention any new *dong* and no incorporations⁴⁵ after the Tokchon was designated as a city.

⁴⁵ There was probably a slight change in the 2000s. According to IPA-3 (2003, 183) Tokchon consists of 22 *dong* and ten *ri*, according to PSC-8 (2009, 389) of 23 *dong* and nine *ri*.

Statistics

1952, 1 *up*

1958, 1 *up*, 1 *rodongjagu*

1963, 1 *up*, 3 *rodongjagu*

1967, 1 *up*, 5 *rodongjagu*

1981, 1 *up*, 8 *rodongjagu* (of which one by splitting)

1986, 22 *dong*, 10 *ri*

Tokchon – Many former working-class districts, a typical mining town with a car construction facility

Tokchon is an important mining town. Similar as in the case of Kaecheon, there were numerous *rodongjagu* before Tokchon became a city. The automotive industry has a major importance for this city as well, although it had to suffer a slump in production. In the 1970s a reservoir lake was artificially built, which has flooded several former agricultural settlements.