

Rainer Dormels (2014)

Profiles of the cities of DPR Korea – Suncheon

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Find an introduction to the project at

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IV.2.11. Suncheon

A new industrial city

Suncheon is located south of city of Kaechon and north of the city of Pyongsong. Before the Korean War Suncheon was still dominated by agriculture. The city is one of the areas that have been newly established as an industrial area after the war when the transformation of Suncheon started. Based on the rich limestone and coal reserves, the emergence of small and large mines and factories began. In particular, the production of cement has a great significance for the city. Suncheon is a traffic junction and with the establishment of the Suncheon Vinalon Complex in the 1980s many citizens from all areas moved here and thus Suncheon became the face of a large city (Chosun Ilbo September 25, 1995). However, Vinalon hasn't been produced in Suncheon for a long time.

Table Suncheon-I. Basic Data

| | |
|---|--|
| Population | 297,317 (Rank 11) |
| Area | 368 km ² (Rank 18) |
| Population density | 808 l./km ² (Rank 9) |
| Administrative units | 21 <i>dong</i> /11 <i>ri</i> (66%) (Rank 15) |
| "Urban" population / "rural" population | 84.3%/15.7% (Rank 12) |

Basin of the Taedong-gang in the central hilly terrain of Phyongnam

Sunchon is located within the central hilly terrain of Phyongnam in the basin of the Taedong-gang, whose middle reaches flows through the city. The center of the city area is occupied from North to South by the Sunchon Basin. Starting from there, the area to the East and West is gradually getting higher. The greatest heights are in the urban area in the Northeast due to the Chönsöng mountain range (Sakkat-bong 878 m; Kama-bong 414 m). In the West, the city has a share in the eastern decrease of the Chöngryong mountain range with the Kuksa-bong (344 m), the Toun-san (441 m) and the Sindök-san (358 m) (IPA-3 2003, 234).

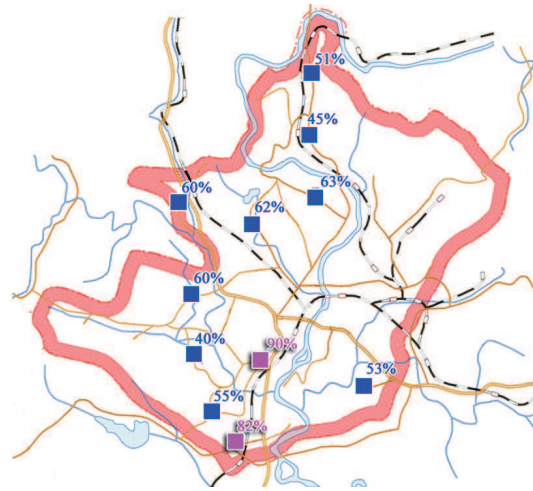


Figure Sunchon-I. Agricultural land in the ri

Table Sunchon-II. Climate values

| Annual average | January temperature | August temperature | Precipitation |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 9.7°C (12) | -6.7°C (16) | 24.0°C (8) | 1,011.8 mm (12) |

The cultivable area accounts for approximately one third of the municipal area. It is located near Taedong-gang and Kümchön-gang.

Significant cement production and a former Vinalon factory

The region has developed into a modern industrial area since the end of the Second World War. The most important industrial sector is the building material industry. The chemical industry is a sector with a relatively long history and it primarily deals with the processing of natural resources such as limestone. In the 1980s, the construction of the Sunchon Vinalon Complex brought attention to the city. Furthermore, the pharmaceutical industry, the machine construction, the shoe industry and the food industry play a major role. Additionally, there are important mines located in Sunchon. There, coal and limestone are produced.

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

| Sunchon | KOFC | MOU | IPA | KCNA | KIET | Summary |
|-----------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| Companies-total | 7 (18) | 10 (27) | 16 (11) | 11 (11) | 6 (60) | 8 |
| Companies-important | 3 (9) | 6 (5) | 8 (9) | | 5 (25) | 7 (10) |
| Cultural Institutions | | | 17 (5) | | | |

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

| Sunchon | KOFC | MOU | IPA | KCNA | KIET | Summary |
|-----------------|------|-----|---------|------|------|---------|
| Companies-total | 10 | 6 | 15-8-20 | 12 | 2-1 | 7-4 |

Sunchon's rank is usually higher in terms of numbers of companies than in the ranking of population. Table Sunchon-III especially shows that the city is home to many important industrial companies.

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

| Sunchon | Light Industry | Heavy Industry | Mining | Energy |
|---------|----------------|----------------|--------|--------|
| KOFC | 15 (4) | 18 (10) | 6 (3) | 13 (1) |
| MOU | 25 (7) | 6 (11) | 5 (8) | 7 (1) |
| IPA | 18 (4) | 10 (5) | 5 (2) | - |
| KCNA | 22 (2) | 18 (3) | 3 (4) | 8 (2) |
| KIET | 18 (21) | 14 (30) | 6 (8) | 13 (1) |

A specialization on heavy industries is obvious as well as the fact that a variety of industries are located in the city.

In chapter III.7.3. ten companies were identified as important for Sunchon. Among them there are companies of heavy industry, light industry, mining and the energy production: Sunchon Cement Complex Sunchon Vinalon Complex, Sunchon Calcium Cyanamide Fertilizer Factory, Sunchon Pharmaceutical Factory, September 25 Machine Factory (Sunchon Tractor Factory), Textile Factory Sunchon, Sunchon Shoe Factory, Sunchon Area Coal Mining Complex, 2.8. Jik-dong Youth Coal Mine, Sunchon Thermal Power Station.

The Sunchon Cement Complex is one of the largest modern companies of the DPR Korea regarding the area size and the production capacity. The total area of the factory is 880,000 m². The factory is located in a hilly area about seven km east of the city center

of Suncheon, near limestone and coal mines. In 1973 North Korea signed a contract for the furnishing of a cement factory was imported by the Japanese company Mitsui (80%) and the Danish company FLSmith (20%). The production started in 1977, when the first part of the factory was completed. Other parts of the factory were completed in 1978 and 1979. The company receives limestone through a conveyer belt from the Söngsang Mine that is located 12 km away. The coal for firing the lime kilns is provided by the Jikdong Youth Coal Mine. Between 1995 and 1997 a 6.3 km long conveyer belt between the two companies was built. Gypsum *inter alia* was imported from China. The Ponghwa Chemical Factory (Paekma-rodongjagu, Pihyon-kun, Phyongbuk) provides heavy oil. The Pyongyang Thermal Power Station supplies electric power. Kraft paper, though, has to be imported. The produced cement is also exported abroad, and the transport is carried out across Nampho harbor (KOFC 2010, 417-420).

The Suncheon Vinalon Complex, which is situated east of the Taedonggang, was built in the 1980s on the Ryönpho plain (Kangan-dong) and became a symbol of the city. This industrial park was built on a site of 14 km² (Chosun Ilbo September 25, 1995) and began its operation in 1989 and produced various chemicals such as vinalon, methanol and fertilizers (IPA-3 2003, 237). However, since a long time vinalon hasn't been produced anymore in this factory. The KCNA had reported about the Suncheon Vinalon Complex until 1999, but has stopped since then. Since 2012, the KCNA has reported about a Suncheon Chemical Complex, which is possibly a successor company of the Vinalon Complex.

The Suncheon Calcium Cyanamide Fertilizer Factory was founded in 1940 by a predecessor of Mitsubishi Chemical Industries Limited. During the Korean War it was destroyed and after the reconstruction of the factory in 1954 it has resumed production. On a total area of 300,000 m² approximately 1,200 workers are employed. Calcium cyanamide fertilizer and carbide are mainly produced. The limestone is provided by the 14 km distant Söngsang Mine, the coal is provided by the 17.5 km distant Pongchang Coal Mine (Pukchang-kun). Energy is drawn from the Pukchang Thermal Power Complex (KOFC 2010, 384-385).

The Suncheon Pharmaceutical Factory has been in operation since 1958. Various antibiotics and injection solutions and synthetic medicines are manufactured here (IPA-3 2003, 238). In the September 25 Machine Factory (Suncheon Tractor Factory) smaller tractors are manufactured. This factory has been in operation since 1969 (IPA-3 2003, 236-237). In the sector of light industry in particular, the Suncheon Textile Factory that was built in the 1970s specializes in boots, and the Suncheon Shoe Factory, which was built in the early 1980s, and the Suncheon Children Footwear Factory (IPA-3 2003, 237-239) are to be named.

The Suncheon Area Coal Mining Complex has been developed since 1972 and founded

in 1977. Several mines in Sunchon and in the county of Unsan are assigned to this complex. Among the most important ones is the 2.8. Jik-dong Youth Coal Mine (KOFC 2010, 472-474). The Sunchon Thermal Power Station was built with Chinese assistance. It serves as a power supply for industrial companies as well as for the private consumption in the city of Sunchon. It was built in 1984, on the site of the Sunchon Vinalon Complex. In 1987 the first generator was connected to the grid, which was followed by the generators 2 to 4 in 1988. Between 1989 and 1994 there were explosions that destroyed parts of the facilities. In 1998, the repair work was probably completed. Coal from the Northern Phyongnam coal field (KOFC 2010, 156-157) is being burned in this power plant.

To support the industry, there are universities and colleges in Sunchon that educate in the fields of chemistry, fertilizers, cement and silicates. In addition, the city is home to a research institute for antibiotics.

Sunchon is an important traffic junction. The Pyongra railway line between Pyongyang and Rajin runs through this city. Sunchon is about 58 km away from Pyongyang and about 22 km from the provincial capital Phyongsong. In the direction of northeast this line also connects Sunchon with the cities of Hamhung, Tanchon, Kimchaek and Chongjin. From Sunchon the Manpho-line bifurcates and reaches the 300 km distant border town of Manpho at the Yalu across Huichon and Kanggye.

Also, the river transport has been improved. While in October 1980 in Tongam-ri (since 1983 Tongam-dong), a sluice was built at the Taedong-gang, the cement, coal, chemical fertilizer producing Sunchon was connected by a canal with the areas on the lower reaches of the Taedonggang, where corn is produced (Chosun Ilbo September 25, 1995).

Urban development at the Taedong-gang as well as mining and a cement factory in the east of the city

In 1943 Sunchon had become an *up*, although it was downgraded back to a *myon* by the end of the Japanese colonial periode. As a result of a local government reform of 1952, Sunchon became an *up* again. In 1974, the neighboring Unsan-kun was dissolved and almost the whole county became part of Sunchon-kun. In 1965, 1967 and 1974 large parts from Sunchon-kun were assigned to the newly established Phyongsong-kun. Then, in 1983 Sunchon-si was founded.

Figure Sunchon-II shows that the urbanized area of Sunchon can be divided into four major regions:

1. Old city center: west of the Taedong-gang

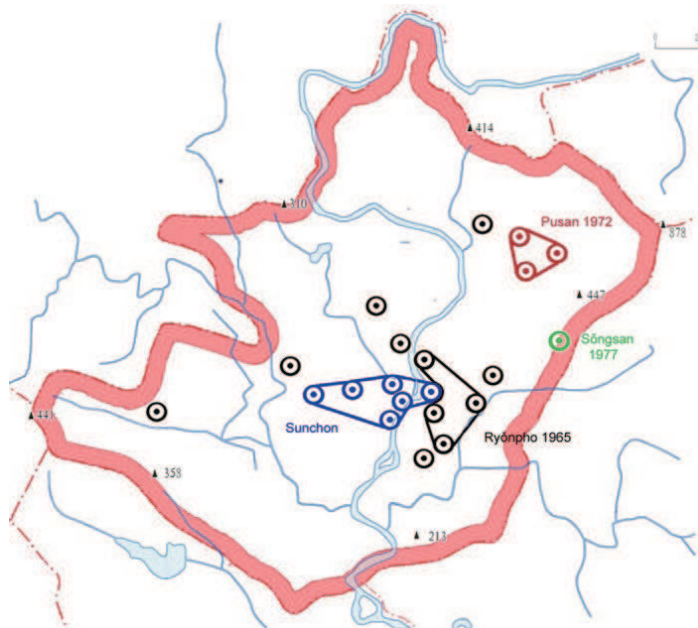


Figure Sunchon-II. *Dong* and former *rodongjagu* at the time of the city founding

2. New Ryönpho: *inter alia* Sunchon Vinalon Complex (built in the 1980s)
3. Mining region of Jik-dong (former Pusan-rodongjagu)
4. Osa-dong (former Söngsan-rodongjagu)

West of the Taedong-gang, the Sunchon station as well as educational institutions are located as well as the Ri Su-bok Sunchon-Chemical College. In Ryönpho, on the eastern side of the river, the Sunchon Vinalon Complex was built in the 1980s. Within the mining region of the former Pusan-rodongjagu especially the coal mining industry in Jik-dong, which also promotes coal for export, (KCNA June 30, 2003) is worth a mention. Also there is a ceramics factory in Jik-dong. The Sunchon Cement Complex (construction 1973-1979) is located in the area of the former Songsan-rodongjagu.

Reduction of the municipal area in favor of Unsan-kun and Ungok-jigu

In January 1992, Unsan-kun was re-formed, therefore large parts of Sunchon-si were incorporated in that *kun*. However, already in December 1992 Unsan gave back two *dong* (Puhung-dong and Jik-dong), in explanation the former Pusan-rodongjagu, and in 1995 Unsan-kun incorporates two *dong* from Sunchon-si.

The balance is that six *dong* in the east of Sunchon-si are located in areas that have

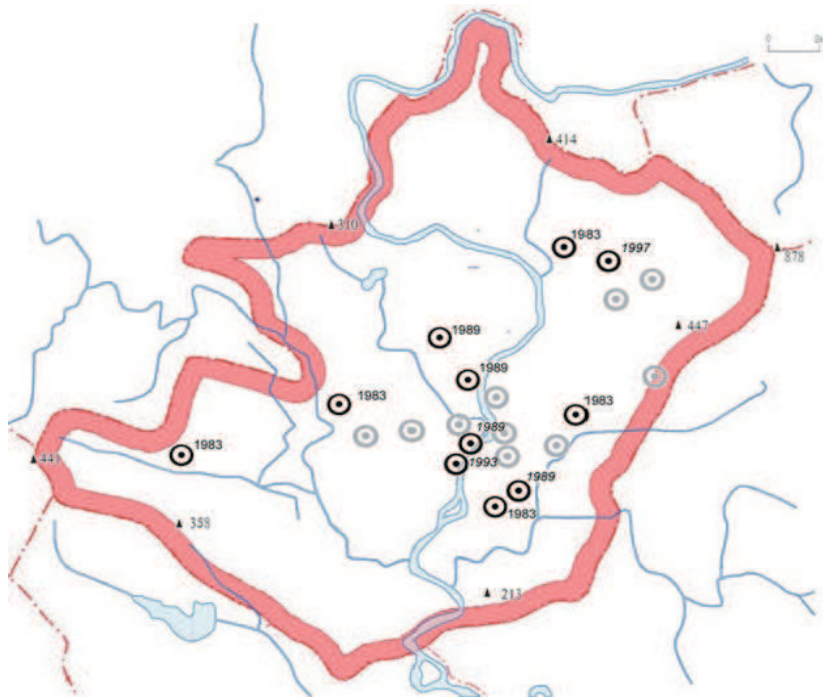


Figure Sunchon-III. *Dong*, which originated in 1983 or later

been still part of Unsan-kun before 1974. In 1997 Sinhŭng-ri has been incorporated into Ungok-jigu, which has been founded in 1997.

Figure Sunchon-III makes it clear that five of the six *dong*, which originated between 1989 and 1997, are located near the Sunchon Vinalon Complex. Therefore, in 1989 Kangpho-dong and Söksu-dong emerged from Kangpho-ri, where settlements were built (Chosun Ilbo September 25, 1995) for the employees of the Vinalon Complex. The creation of Saemaül-dong, from parts of Jik-dong and Puhŭng-dong in 1997, can probably be interpreted as a sign of the intensification of coal mining in this region, especially since the KCNA reported between 1998 and 2003 on several occasions about the coal mining in Jik-dong (KCNA January 8, 1998; October 26, 1998, July 1, 2003).

Statistics

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

1952: Sunchon-up (1)

1965: Ryöngpho-rodongjagu (2)

1972 Pusan-rodongjagu (3)
 1977: Söngsan-rodongjagu (4)

| | <i>Dong-Formation</i> | <i>Dong-Splitting</i> |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1983 (15) | 5 | (6) |
| 1989 (19) | 2 | 2 |
| 1993 (20) | - | 1 |
| 1997 (21) | - | 1 |

The numbers refer to the current municipal area.

Sunchon – Industrial city with a variety of companies from different industrial sectors

Sunchon is a new industrial city, which has a variety of important companies from various industries. Thus statistically the ranking of the number of companies in the city is above the ranking on the population. The old city center is located west of the Taedong-gang. On the east side the supposedly prestigious Sunchon Vinalon Complex was built, which operated only for a short time. The environmental impairing Sunchon Cement Complex is located a few kilometers from the city center.

The construction of the Sunchon Vinalon Complexes was crucial for the development of the city. After the 1980s there was little growth.