

**Ongjin** is located in South Hwanghae Province and has a population of 152,878 according to the 2008 census. The 2022 population estimate is 175,729. The city is the capital of Ongjin County which occupies the Ongjin Peninsula and was previously connected to the Yellow Sea via Kangryŏng Bay; however, a dam was built across the bay from 1984-87, cutting it off and creating a freshwater lake in its place.

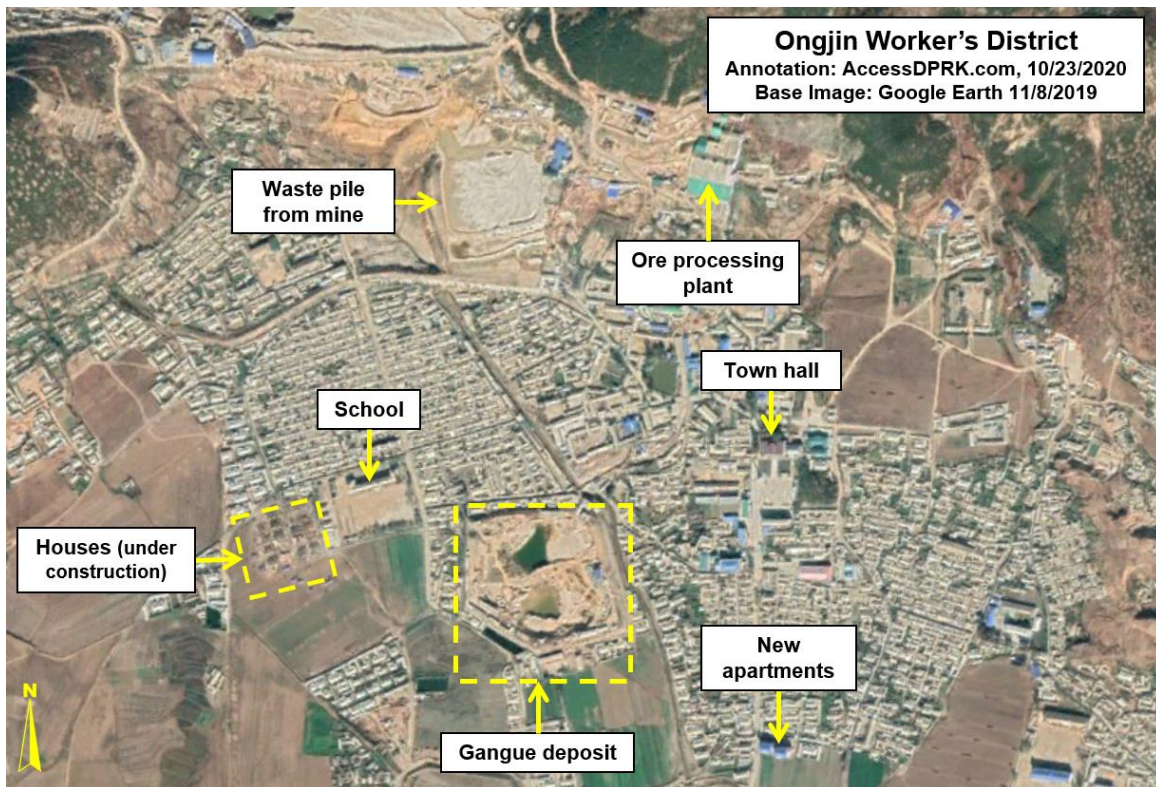
Prior to the dam's construction, the center of town was 3.65 km from the water's edge. Due to siltation and the buildup of new soils, Ongjin is now 6.3 km away from the edge of the new lake. While this caused major changes to the ecosystem (and destroyed a source of protein from crustaceans and other sea life in the area), the additional land that has built up has added approximately 1,576 hectares of arable land.

Ongjin is divided into two main urban areas, Ongjin proper and the Ongjin Worker's District less than 2 km to the north. The main city is the primary administrative and historic area while the worker's district has been built up over the course of the last century as home to the workforce for the Ongjin Mine and other nearby mines.

After the division of Korea, the city lay south of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel (by about 7 km), placing it under South Korean control. The area was lost to the North during the Korean War and a [battle](#) was fought here during the opening assault by North Korea.

The **economy** relies on mining and agriculture. The mines produce gold, silver and other less valuable quartz-bearing minerals. In terms of nationwide reserves, North Korea is estimated to hold 1,500 tons of gold and 4,000 tons of silver. At recent prices, these reserves are worth over \$90 billion. However, annual national production of gold is only estimated to be 2-3 tons and around 20 tons of silver, for an

annual income of \$137,000,000-\$198,000,000. Upwards of half of all gold mined in North Korea comes from the Woon-san gold mine, and the rest comes from a collection of 4-5 smaller mines including Ongjin.



The combination of added sanctions and rising metal prices has resulted in the 5.3-hectare former gangue depository (worthless material intertwined with the wanted mineral) being reopened and the materials reprocessed to extract every recoverable ounce possible. The gangue depository predates the Korean War suggesting that the mining area has been active since at least the Japanese occupation period, if not even earlier as a small source of gold for the Korean Empire and Joseon dynasty. This reprocessing activity can be seen at other mines throughout the country as well.

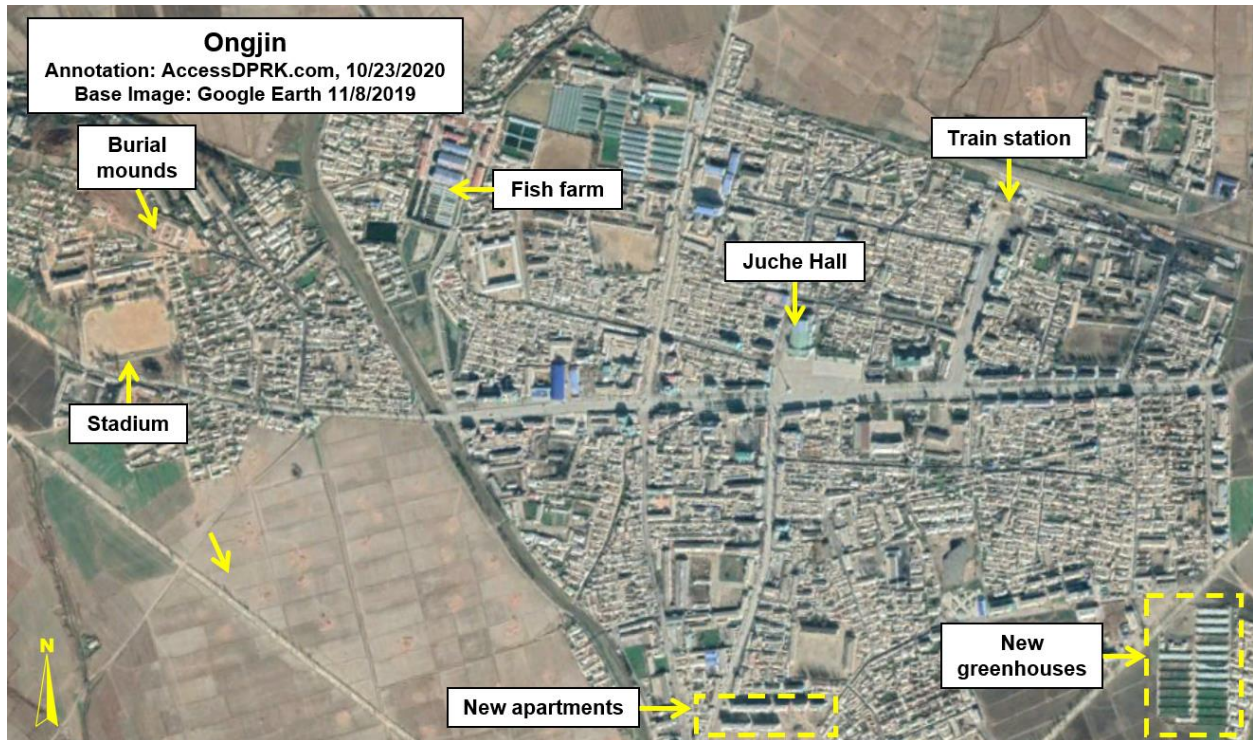
As mentioned earlier, the addition of new arable lands has increased the importance of agriculture to the region's economy. The region's mild climate and access to freshwater makes Ongjin a great area to grow rice, wheat, barely, and corn.

The current marketplace has existed in its location since at least 2005. The available market space has grown by 2,000 sq. meters since then, but the added space has only been partially taken up by new stalls.

A 10,000 sq. meter pond in town is in the process of being filled in and 18 new homes have been constructed on the site. Other recent changes include the addition of 2.1 hectares of new greenhouses, a children's traffic park (built ca. 2017), seven new apartment blocks in Ongjin and two new ones in the worker's district, and a series of small buildings were also constructed in the administrative center of the district in 2011, 2015, and 2017. Over a dozen district homes were also under construction in late 2019.



Lastly, Ongjin is the site of one of North Korea's first wind farms. Consisting of four turbines, the facility is controlled by the Army and was built in the early 2000s.



**Militarily**, Ongjin itself isn't very important but it lies in an important area as it is so close to South Korea.

Ongjin has an airfield (37.932° 125.419°) but it is just a grass landing strip, suitable only for small transport planes. There are also three small bases to the east, but the area's real military importance comes from naval assets to the south and southwest.

The Sagot Naval Base is at (37.824° 125.349°) and the nearby Ryongho Island base includes an [underground facility](#). To the west lies the [Yonbong-ni Hovercraft Base](#) (37.906° 125.224°) which has been under construction since 2014 and when completed, could house at least 54 high-speed hovercraft.

On the Kumdong-ri peninsula and adjacent areas, in 2011/12, the regime constructed dozens of artillery emplacements (examples at 37.806184° 125.467390°) in the wake of their [shelling](#) of Yeongpyeong Island in 2010 to further fortify the area against any counter attack (and to give them more places from which to fire into ROK territory).

**\*Originally created for An AccessDPRK Patreon supporter. Free online access has been granted by the patron. This city brief has been edited for tone, context, and added references when needed.**

[AccessDPRK.com](http://AccessDPRK.com)  
[JacobBogle.com](http://JacobBogle.com)