

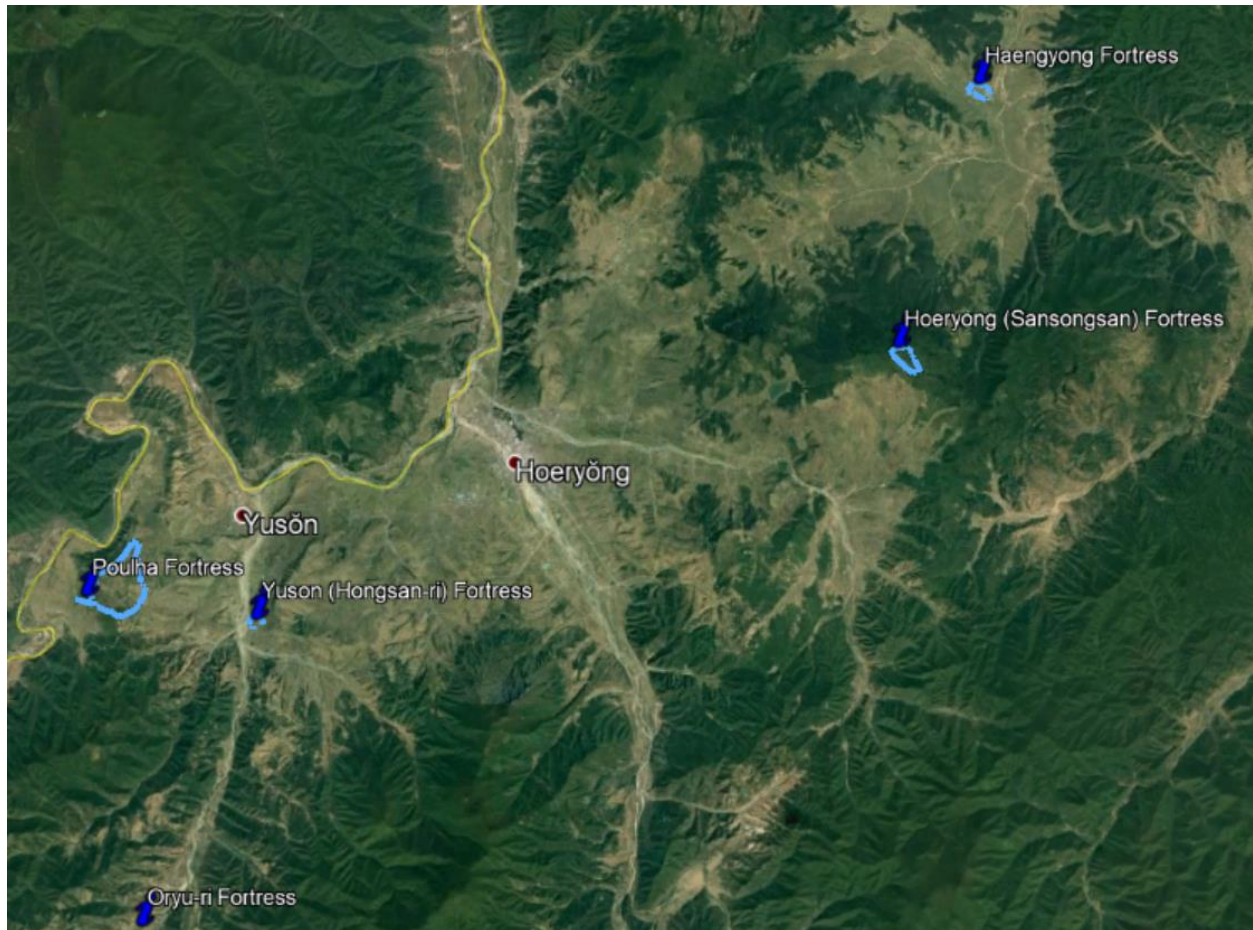
AccessDPRK analysis provided exclusively* for a [Patreon](#) supporter by Jacob Bogle, April 2021.



Hoeryong is a border town in North Hamgyong Province. It is one of the northernmost towns in the country and lies on the Tumen River, across from China. It has a 2021 estimated population of 174,528.

Hoeryong is situated in a small plain that is surrounded by hills and low mountains of the Hamgyong Range. The bulk of the town itself is squeezed between the Hoeryong River and Osan Hill. Kim Jong Un's mother, Kim Jong Suk, is said to have been born near Osan Hill. As such, her birthplace and the surrounding area, including the whole hill, have been turned into a national park and a [place of pilgrimage](#).

Like the rest of the province, it was once under the control of the Jurchen (and related) peoples for centuries and was then incorporated into the Korean Kingdom in the late 14th century. It was also one of the six fortified regions that were established by King Sejong who reigned from 1418 to 1450. While little to nothing remains, Osan Hill was once fortified. Five additional forts from various ages still have visible remains within 19 km of the town.



Hoeryong Fortresses

Hoeryong was never taken by UN-allied forces during the Korean War, but it was subjected to occasional aerial bombing and the effects of dogfights overhead.

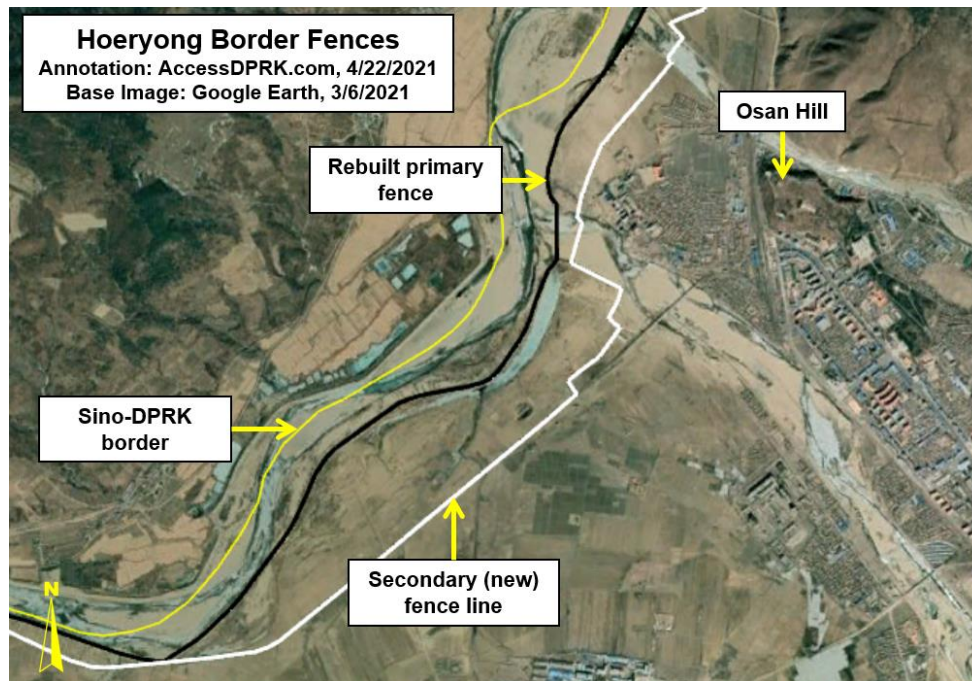
Given its position within a “bowl”, surrounded by mountains, and because the Hoeryong River runs through the town, flooding can pose major problems. Hoeryong has been flooded multiple times in recent years, with major flooding events occurring in [2016](#) (affecting over half a million people) and in 2020 when multiple typhoons impacted the area.

Rebuilding from the 2016 flood resulted in at least 92 new apartment blocks, rebuilt schools, the addition of a water treatment plant (which are rare in North Korea), and the reconstruction of the nearby border crossing (which had itself only been recently modernized). However, flood mitigation measures like dikes were either not completed by 2020 or were not greatly improved over the pre-2016 flood versions.

The floods of 2020 burst the dikes, inundated around 100 hectares of farmland in the immediate area, and collapsed a portion of the railway bridge that crosses the Hoeryong River.

As part of the government’s “border blockade” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in Hoeryong and along the [rest of the border](#), the original border fence was modernized and a second line of fencing was added behind that, in effect, sealing off the entire border. New guard posts have also been added every

50-100 meters. The new second line cuts off portions of farmland (requiring farmers to pass through checkpoints to tend the land each day) and, where possible, follows the railway. This serves to also keep people from jumping on and off trains to enforce internal travel restrictions.



Hoeryong's economy is fairly mixed.

The plain and low hills create a rough oval, 20 km x 6 km, of arable land. The extreme winter and short summers limit what can be grown, but it gives residents a baseline of food supply. Additionally, a 48,800 sq. m fish farm is located next to the town's stadium.

The rest of the region is heavily forested. In the past, this facilitated the operation of two paper mills, but current satellite imagery suggests the larger factory (42.431977° 129.742875°) is now defunct.

Hoeryong is also home to one of the country's largest tobacco manufacturers, a small medical supply factory, a shoe factory, and a machine parts factory. There are numerous shops for the local economy and the market occupies 8,800 sq. m.

Within the city is also a library (42.437689° 129.751902°), maternity hospital (42.445083° 129.745212°), and at least one identified hotel (42.424214° 129.767211°).

There are several points of interest related to the Kim family, the Juche idea, and other state-cult locations. However, Kim Jong Suk's birthplace is by far the most important site. Starting at the top of Osan Hill, down to the Hoeryong Revolutionary Site, there's an area of 31 hectares that is dedicated to the Kim family and state through a series of interconnected parks. This translates into a key pilgrimage destination and supplements the area's economy.

In terms of education, the Kim Jong Suk University of Education, Hoeryong College of Industry, and one other unidentified site that could be a university are in town. There are also at least 14 primary and secondary schools.

Defector Joseph Kim grew up in the town and was taken to the Ministry of People's Security at least once. It is located at 42.432078° 129.763203° and its walled detention center is clearly defined.

Militarily, as it is near the border with China and lacks any major industrial sites, Hoeryong plays a minimal role and defenses are also kept to a minimum to avoid any accidental incidents with China (such as an errant artillery shell hitting a Chinese village).

Hoeryong is protected by two anti-aircraft artillery batteries, and the nearest other military base is a small shooting range 8.5 km south (by the river). For the whole northern section of the province, military sites are very sparse until you get to Chongjin and the coastal region.

***Free online access has been granted by the patron. This city brief has been edited for tone, context, and added references when needed.**

--Jacob Bogle, April 2021 (edited May 2023)

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