



**Myongchon** is a county seat in North Hamgyong Province that is situated between Kilju County and Hwasong County (the site of [Kwan-li-so No. 16 prison](#)). Its 2008 census population was 65,797. The 2020 population estimate is 73,265 (estimated growth rate is less than the national average). However, a series of new apartment blocks were constructed in 2021.

The Myongchon area was previously inhabited by Jurchen tribes as far back as the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The region was later incorporated into the Korean kingdom of Goryeo in 1107. There is an unidentified hillfort 20 km to the west (41.147590° 129.214970°) that likely dates to this period. The much larger Jaedoksan mountain fortress is just 4 km north (41.122221° 129.421737°).

It is likely that soldiers passed through Myongchon during the [Battle of Bukgwan](#) from 20 September 1592 – 28 February 1593, as the battle involved the retaking of Kilju and because the Korean (Joseon) forces left from Kyongsong which is to the north. During the Korean War, the area was under UN occupation by Nov. 1950 but within three months, with Chinese backing, the North Koreans had retaken nearly all of their original territory. Only air battles and naval bombardments occurred from then on in this region.

The modern county was created in 1952 as the historic counties were reorganized and new ones, like Hwadae, were established. The county's final boundaries were set in 1961.

The town is connected to the Pyongra Rail Line via their train station called Sin'myongchon. The line is part of the larger Pyongyang-Rason railway. The original line opened in 1916 and was built by the Japanese. Myongchon is also located adjacent to the main highway from Hamhung to Chongjin.

Myongchon is bounded on both sides by low-lying mountains and is predominately an agricultural and mining town. Small hot springs exist as well, but none have been fully developed for use.

A general food processing factory exists in the town as does a small clothing factory. There are a number of small coal mines in the county. Cellular phone service was established sometime between 2008 and

2010. The system was expanded in 2014-2015. The town's marketplace covers ~3,600 sq. meters and hasn't grown in size since at least 2012.

Myongchon is one of the localities where a probable COVID-19 [quarantine facility](#) was constructed in 2021 at 41.065216° 129.428536°.



Example of anti-tank blocks. Located along the DMZ.

**Militarily**, Myongchon is unimpressive. There are only two verified small bases within the county and no direct air defense (although it is within the coverage range of surface-to-air missile batteries in Kimchaek and Hoemun-ri).

What is important is that the town lies downwind of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site (less than 40 km away), and it is probable that the population has been affected by low doses of radiation and would have experienced pronounced shaking during North Korea's six nuclear tests. [Reports](#) from people living in the general area have spoken about radiation symptoms after at least two tests, so there's no reason to think the people in Myongchon specifically were somehow immune.

One interesting note is that anti-tank blocks were [installed](#) along the Hamhung-Chongjin highway at Myongchon in 2015 (41.117353° 129.375333°) and 2018 (41.075476° 129.378076°). These low-tech devices were developed during World War II and consist of strategically positioned concrete blocks that can be knocked onto a road to prevent tanks and other enemy vehicles from progressing forward. North Korea built hundreds of them in the aftermath of the Korean War, and it is interesting that they are still being constructed so many years later.

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--Jacob Bogle, December 22, 2020 (edited January 2023)

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