



Taehongdan is a county seat in northern Ryanggang Province and borders China. Its 2021 estimated population is 38,000.

Taehongdan sits on the expansive Paektu Plateau and has an average elevation of 900-950 meters. The three primary rivers are the Tumen, the Sohongdansu that runs through the middle of the county, and the Sodusu River which forms the county's border with North Hamgyong Province.

I could find very little historical information about the area other than that it was once populated by Jurchen tribes and became part of the ethnic Korean Goreyo Kingdom in the 10th and 11th centuries. No major events occurred relating to the Japanese occupation or Korean War; although, North Korean propaganda claims that Kim Il-sung won major victories here against the Japanese in 1939. In reality, the conflict involved little more than skirmishes and Kim never commanded a large army.

The large Memorial of Victory in the Battle of Musan monument (41.947103° 128.683600°) was constructed in the 1970s to commemorate these exaggerated exploits.

Taehongdan was established as an administrative district in 1978.

Economy

The area's cool climate has made it a key potato producing region, with the "Potato Research Center" being established in 1998 to improve harvests. Since the early 1990s, over 2,000 hectares of forests and grasslands have been converted into agricultural land within the county.

Logging and hydroelectric production are two other parts to the local economy. The county has a series of four generating plants along the Sohongdansu River next to the Musan Area battle monument, another one on the Sogol River at 41.896184° 128.758755°, and a larger one at 42.031707° 128.973832° on the Sodusu River.

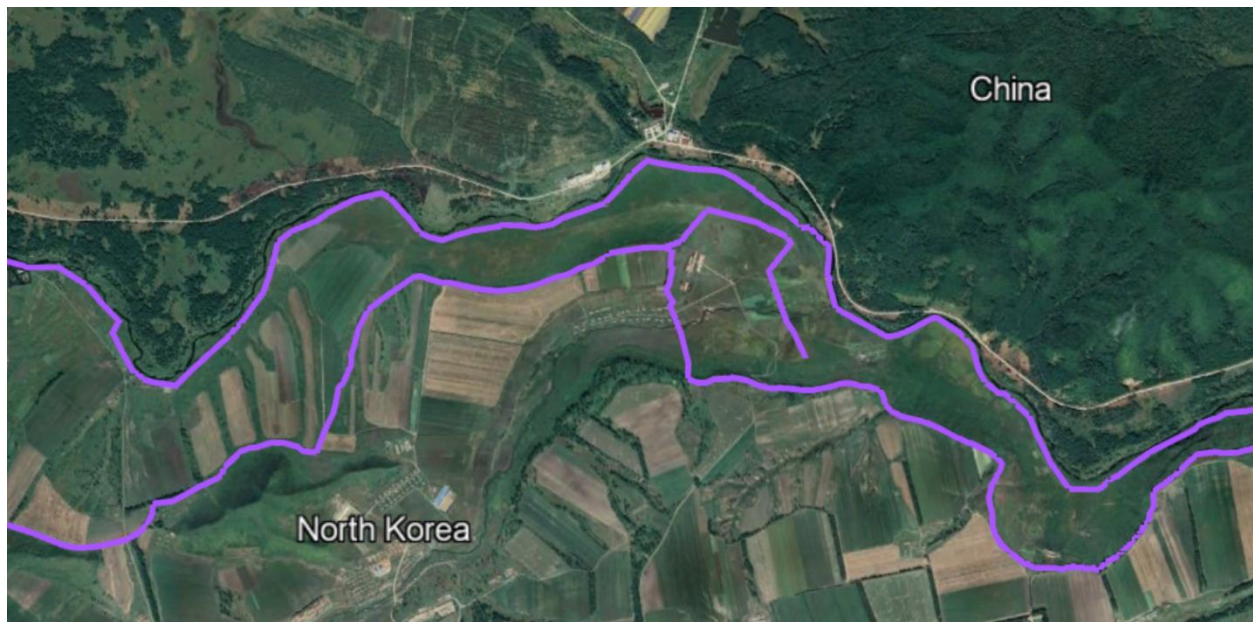
From 2007-2010, part of the town of Taehongdan was modernized with traditional style houses being replaced by two-story apartment buildings. This modernization continued in 2014-15 and again around 2017. The result is that the majority of the town has now been reconstructed.

For the outlying villages within the county, very little construction activity has been noted since 2010 with the exception of the expansion of the Taehongdan Potato Processing Plant in Sindok (41.989366° 128.880431°) that occurred in 2013 and 2018.

Taehongdan's market covers 2,900 sq. m. and hasn't grown in area since 2007.

A possible Ministry of Social Security complex (or other internal security agency) exists at 41.986075° 128.833176°. The complex has a walled administrative area with a smaller walled compound adjoining it that may be a prison.

Military



Map of new border fencing in Taehongdan County.

Taehongdan's military situation is fairly basic. There are no air defense sites and the only the airport in the county is the Paegam Airfield which is nothing more than a grass landing strip.

The county does have two underground facilities. One was established many years ago and is located at 41.971143° 128.783947° within a valley created by the Sohongdansu River. The second underground site is a tunnel that was constructed in 2018 beneath Taenoŭn-san at 41.959378° 128.693726°.

The Taenoŭn-san tunnel is rather mysterious as it is located in a very remote area and is not connected to any paved road network or to any identifiable military base, despite being a large tunnel. The facility only has one entrance and the limited amount of spoils from excavation work suggests that North Korea took steps to conceal the true size of the underground facility by removing the excavated material to other sites, preventing analysts from being able to estimate the size of the UGF by measuring the amount of spoils.

In terms of border security, however, under Kim Jong-un the regime has taken great steps to close off the Sino-DPRK border and stop defections. To that end, over 70 km of [new fencing](#) has been constructed along with scores of new guard posts in Taehongdan since the COVID-19 outbreak.

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--Jacob Bogle, originally published Sept. 2021 (edited March 2024)
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