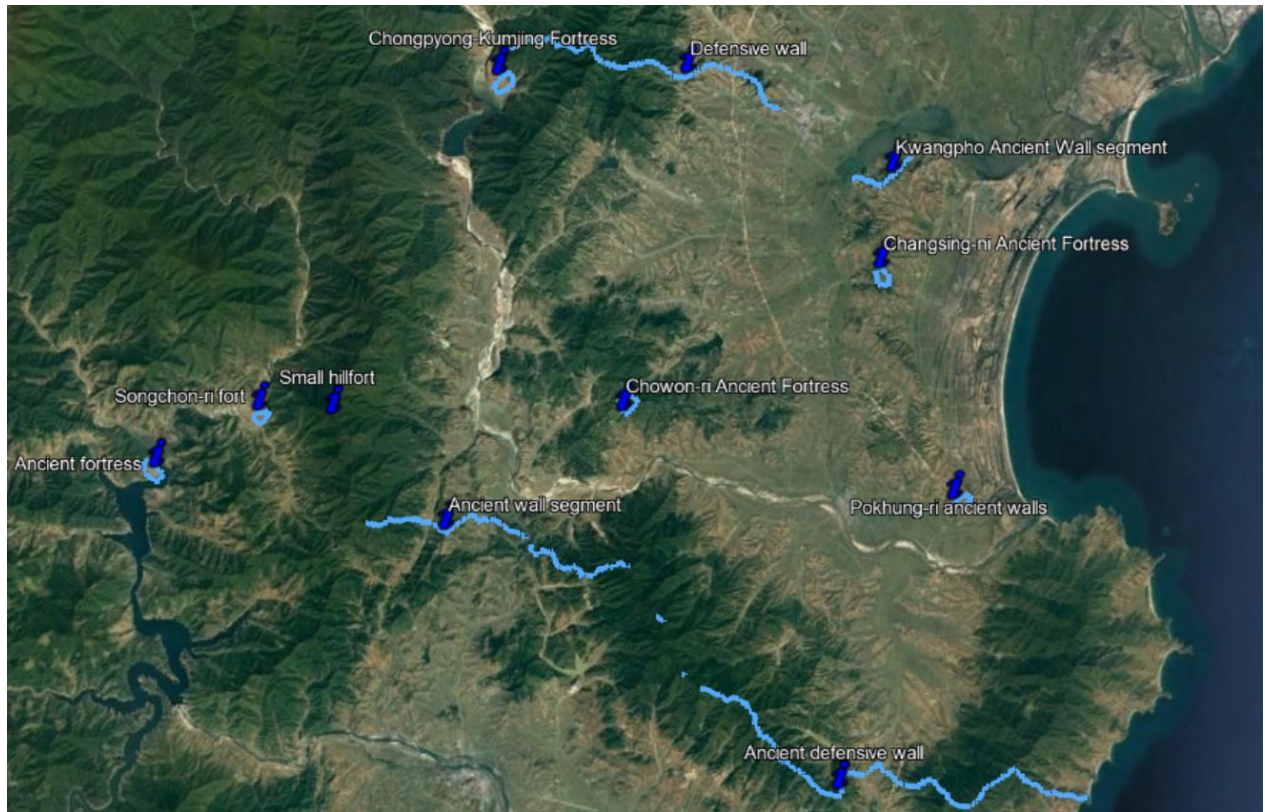




**Chongpyong** is a county seat in South Hamgyong Province. Its 2021 estimated population is 191,112.

The county extends from the East Korean Bay and coastal plains westward through the Rangrim Mountain range which forms much of the north-south spine of the province. The major rivers are the Kimjin River to the south and the Kwangpho in the north that turns into a large estuary as it empties into the sea.

Chongpyong's location in the middle of this coastal corridor of flat terrain meant that it was one of the few historic invasion paths into Korea's heartland for groups coming from Mongolia and Manchuria. As such, a series of fortified towns, forts, and long walls were constructed from the 11<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> centuries to defend the region.



Chongpyong area historic fortifications.

There are at least four primary forts in the county and two lines of defensive stone walls. The northern wall is part of the Cheonli Wall which was constructed from 1033-1044 and originally extended to Yodok and eventually all the way across the peninsula to Uiju. Today, only slight traces of the wall remain, and I have only been able to positively identify 17 km of the wall's ruins within Chongpyong.

A second wall exists to the south near the village of Kumsa-ri. It extends from the coast inland for at least 40 km, following the mountain range. I don't know if it was a secondary wall built as part of the Cheonli Wall or if it was constructed later. This "Kumsa Wall" forms part of the modern boundary between Chongpyong and Kumya counties.

I couldn't find any specific information about the town during the Korean War, but it would have certainly been captured as part of the UN assault on Hamhung in 1950. And then it would have been retaken by Chinese troops advancing south after their victory in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir (Nov. 27-Dec. 13, 1950). For the rest of the war, Chongpyong would have seen aerial bombing but no further ground actions. One of the largest air strikes carried out by US Task Force 77 was against the Sondok Airfield in July 1953.

Administratively, Chongpyong was attested to in 983 AD after a battle incorporated it into the Goryeo Kingdom (prior to this it belonged to the Goguryeo and Balhae kingdoms). It was occupied by Mongol invasions throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century and became part of a vassal state but finally became part of an independent Korea again in 1356.

It wasn't until the reorganization of the country in 1952 that Chongpyong became its own county, and it has remained in its current form since 1974.

## **Economy**

With mountains to the west and the sea in the east, Chongpyong's economy is fairly diversified, though small.

The wide coastal plain provides fertile farmland, with rice being the staple product. Several orchards can also be found.

Multiple livestock facilities exist including the large Kwangpho Duck Farm (39.786471° 127.414743°) which has a number of satellite facilities. One of these satellite facilities [opened](#) a new black swan hatchery on Oct. 27, 2021 as part of the regime's drive to diversify protein sources and "solve" the ongoing food crisis.

Limited fishing, mining, and logging activities also take place. Chongpyong has a minor industrial base, with various small factories lining the railway in town.

The path of a planned future highway connecting Wonsan to Hamhung went through Chongpyong but after some initial work in 2012, it seems the idea was abandoned. However, the county is still served by the P'yŏngra Line of the Korean State Railway and the older south-north highway that begins in Sinsang, runs through Chongpyong, and ends in Hamhung.

Chonpyong's market was moved to its current location sometime around 2010. The market's overall size has only grown slightly, and today it occupies 7,500 sq. m. The town also has several hotels, stores, and restaurants along its two main roads. However, urban growth has been very limited since 2003.

The Kimjin River is an important source of hydroelectric power and three of the four hydroelectric dams situated on the river are within the county. The first of these dams was constructed in 2001 and the final one was completed in 2019. A small tidal dam also runs across the Kwangpho Estuary.

Since 2012, approximately 300 new housing units have been constructed in the county based on mapping for AccessDPRK.

## Military



Chongpyong has a number of military installations, the most important of which is the Sondok Airfield at 39.756694° 127.472850°. Sondok is the headquarters for the 6<sup>th</sup> Air Division (Transport) and has 40 An-2 biplanes stationed there.

After the closure of the Uiju Airfield in 2020, seventeen Il-28 bombers were [redeployed](#) to Sondok.

Other sites include two large storage bases, eight coastal positions, and eight small bases scattered throughout the county. There is also the Sinphyong-ri Training Base located at 39.592110° 127.487344°.

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

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