

AccessDPRK analysis provided exclusively\* for a [Patreon](#) supporter by Jacob Bogle, June 2, 2020.

**Onsong** has a 2020 population estimate of 139,000 and it is the northernmost county seat in the country.



Onsong lies on a floodplain of the Tumen River and there are four main rivers that run south-to-north, originating in the mountains south of the city. These rivers create a wide and fertile plain for agriculture.

The city has all of the expected monuments as any other city, as well as a statue dedicated to Choe Chun-kuk (1914-1950) who was an anti-Japanese fighter and took part in a local battle against Japanese police in 1935.

Within the city, there is at least one hotel, three schools, a college of machine work, and a gymnasium that was built in 2019 next to the city's stadium. Onsong's market added over 1,000 sq. m. of overflow space in 2020. There has been very limited residential construction in the county since 2010.

Located in the northwest corner of the city is a large compound that houses both the Ministry of State Security and the Social Security Office (formerly *People's Security*).

There are no obvious ancient sites within the city. The closest are two segments of border wall that likely date between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first segment is at 42°59'23.39"N 129°53'51.90"E and the second segment is at 42°58'57.77"N 129°54'45.13"E. Both are heavily eroded.

The county used to be the site of the Onsong Concentration Camp (Kwan-li-so No. 12) before its closure in 1989 (location 42.785820° 129.929748°). Its ~15,000 prisoners were transferred to the Hoeryong Concentration Camp (Kwan-li-so No. 22) roughly 40 km south of Onsong city. Camp 22 was subsequently closed in 2012.

Onsong's economy currently relies on agriculture and limited trade thanks to its proximity to two DPRK-China border crossings at Namyang and Kyongwon. This part of North Korea had been a large coal mining region but there has been steep decline since 2000 and many coal mines have closed down. This has even led to the removal of two rail lines: the Ontag-Sanghwa line (which had split near the Onsong station) and the Kangan-Changphyhong line that used to be roughly in the center of the county.

A limited amount of coal is still mined and transported from Onsong, but it's a fraction of what it used to be.

## **Military**

The only substantial military site is a single anti-aircraft artillery battery across from the large Wangjaesan Grand Monument (4.5 km east of downtown). The monument also supplements the area's economy as guided tours are occasionally given by some tour groups and through domestic tourism. The monument is said to dedicate a moment in 1933 when Kim Il Sung and his guerillas agreed, at that spot, to expand their anti-Japanese activities out of northern China and into Korean territory.

There is also an underground site with an unidentified purpose located at 42.913259° 129.944060°. It was constructed between 2017-19.

**\*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, June 11, 2020 (edited March 4, 2022)

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