



Hochon is a county seat in northern South Hamgyong Province. Its 2008 population was 104,731. Its 2022 estimated population is 112,305. The town of Hochon is on a spur of land created by the Namdae River (west-to-east) and a smaller river that runs up from the south.

During dynastic Korea this area was under central Korean authority as far back as Goryeo, and before that it belonged to the ethnic Korean kingdom of Balhae (698-926 AD). Prior to 1914, parts of the county belonged to Kapsan in Ryanggang Province. Hochon as it is currently constituted was created in 1952. The urban core of the town of Hochon has remained roughly the same since the Japanese occupation period.

During the Korean War, UN forces would have moved up the coast of South Hamgyong on their way to Chongjin, but no major battles happened within the area of Hochon.

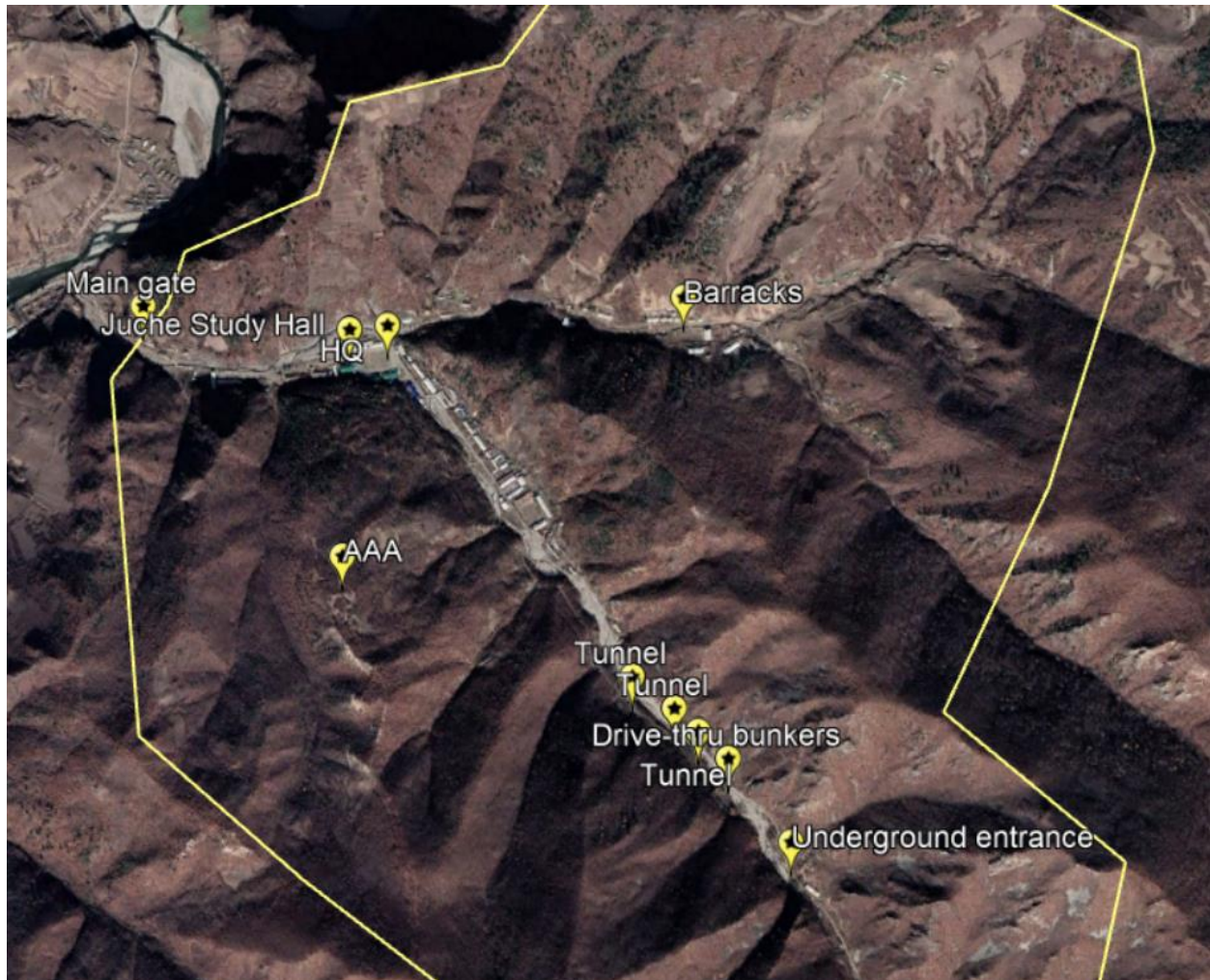
Hochon's location in a mountainous part of the country has given it a fairly robust industrial economy centered around mining and hydroelectric power generation.

Gold, iron, tungsten, and lead are among the main products mined in the area. The Mandeok Iron & Tungsten Mine (40°36'57.38"N 128°33'43.72"E) and Sangnong Gold Mine (40°36'1.74"N 128°43'32.34"E) are two of the largest mines in the county. Unfortunately, pollution from the Mandeok Mine has been spilling into a tributary of the Namdae River (discoloring it reddish brown) for many years and will have damaged the river's ecology as well as tainted the drinking water for the larger town of Tanchon which is situated down river.

The Hochongang hydroelectric network also runs through the county with three operational hydroelectric generating sites. There are several smaller micro-generating stations as well. The [Tanchon Hydroelectric Project](#), which remains unfinished as of 2023, is being constructed near the border with Ryanggang Province at 40°47'17.64"N 128°26'42.41"E. Tanchon is the largest hydroelectric project currently underway and will be one of the largest in North Korea's history.

There has been very little general construction in the county and the limited number of new housing units built over the last decade suggests a slow growth in population.

Military



Details of the Sangnam-ni Missile Base. Taken from the AccessDPRK 2021 Pro Map.

Hochon is otherwise unremarkable from a military perspective, but its remote location gives it the distinction of being home to one of North Korea's twenty or so ballistic missile bases. Sangnam-ni Missile Base (40°50'19.11"N 128°32'35.43"E) is operated by the Korean People's Army Strategic Force and is equipped with Hwasong-10 (Musudan) intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

The base has been [detailed](#) by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and according to their reporting the existence of the base first came to public light in 1999, although construction began ca. 1994. Primary construction of barracks, underground facilities, bunkers, and other support structures was completed by the mid-2000s. Sangnam-ri is a battalion- or regiment-sized unit that encompasses approximately 3.85 sq. km of mountainous territory.

***Originally created for an AccessDPRK [Patreon](#) supporter. 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, originally published July 2022 (edited April 2024)

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