

NORTH KOREA *The Land of the Morning Calm*

This paper concentrates on those aspects of modern North Korea of interest to the toponymist: modern history, language, romanisation and geographical names. It is not otherwise a specialist text. The paper is drawn together from an assortment of material, from a wide variety of sources, all contained in the PCGN *North Korea* country file.

Geographical names are presented as romanised by the McCune-Reischauer system. The conventional forms Seoul and Pyongyang have been used in text and cross-referred by means of footnotes to their romanised forms. The personal names included in this document are presented in the text as they are most often seen and not necessarily according to any official romanisation system; these too are cross-referred to the McCune-Reischauer romanisation.

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SECTION A:

Background History of Korea

1. The Koryŏ dynasty, from where the country name Korea is drawn, was the first dynasty to unify the Korean peninsula in 918. This dynastic ruling family was overthrown in 1392 and replaced by the Yi¹ family who were to rule until 1910; this dynasty adopted the name of *Chosŏn*, the name by which North Koreans refer to their country today².
2. Towards the end of the 19th Century, due to its strategic location and its recently forged commercial links to the west, Korea was becoming a focus of much interest for its neighbouring nations; China, Russia and Japan. Japan was especially keen to minimise Chinese influence within Korea and to increase its own power in the area. A Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) ensued from which the Japanese emerged victorious. Subsequently, Japan sensed that the Russians were also interested in the Korean peninsula and this second tussle resulted in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. This war, too, saw a comprehensive Japanese victory. Western powers, themselves colonial masters, did not discourage these Japanese ambitions for the domination of Korea, particularly as they felt united by the common goal of preventing Russian expansion into the Far East.
3. In 1905 Japan signed a protectorate treaty withdrawing Korea's diplomatic rights and in 1910 eventually succeeded in annexing Korea. On August 29th 1910 Emperor Sunjong of Korea³ issued a proclamation relinquishing both his throne and his country. The Japanese colonial administration that followed (1910-1945) was characterised by efforts to supplant Korean culture and language. The Japanese felt that in order to benefit fully from Korean manpower Koreans needed to be assimilated and during the years of colonisation there was a systematic repression of Korean political and cultural life. Japanese was taught as the national language in basic school education and was enforced as the sole language of business. Perhaps the harshest edict of the assimilation policy was the 'Names Order' which forced Koreans to drop their Korean personal names and adopt Japanese names; many place names too were replaced by Japanese names. Throughout the period this Japanization eroded Korean identity and confidence as Japanese settlers took hold of the country's best lands and most important administrative and economic roles. Permits had to be gained to produce any publication and thus the Korean press was effectively non-existent. The Japanese were also very strict monitors of insurgency and in 1912 alone there were 50,000 arrests for suspected 'nationalism'.
4. The Japanese remained in control until the end of the Second World War despite a number of attempts at resistance by Koreans both within the country and from beyond its borders. The most widely supported of these was the Independence Movement of

¹ usually seen as Yi but romanisation of Korean script gives I; see Section E; paragraph 24

² *Chosŏn* means 'Morning Calm'. The Korean peninsula has often been referred to as the *Land of the Morning Calm*. However, application of this term is now relevant only to North Korea as South Koreans refer to their country as *Han'guk* (meaning the country of the *Han*).

³ His father, King Kojong, had proclaimed himself Emperor of the *Taehan* (Great Han) *Empire* in 1897 in an attempt to reinforce the power and independence of Korea at a time when the neighbouring nations were encroaching.

1st March 1919 which saw peaceful demonstrations from Korean nationalists in almost every district. Japan responded by shooting or arresting thousands of demonstrators and bystanders.

5. Resistance also came in the form of guerrilla fighters mainly based in Manchuria, north-east China, bordering the Korean peninsula. Among these bands was a young guerrilla leader, Kim Il-sung⁴. A native Korean, born in 1912 in the village of Man'gyŏngdae near Pyongyang⁵, he had emigrated with his family at the age of 7 to live in southern Manchuria. There he had enrolled in a Chinese school and joined the Chinese Communist Youth League before becoming the leader of a group of Korean partisans within the Chinese guerrilla army. He also forged strong relations with the Soviets, receiving training with the Soviet Army in the Khabarovsk area during the Second World War.
6. Towards the end of the Second World War the four Allied powers (US, UK, USSR and China) held a number of conferences to establish procedure towards those countries who had aided Germany's aggression. This included making decisions regarding the liberation of the Korean peninsula. At the Yalta Conference early in 1945, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin decided that when Japan surrendered (it was to be 6 months later, in August 1945) the Korean peninsula would be divided into two occupation zones. The United States was to administer the south and the USSR the north; the dividing line to be 38°N (the 38th parallel). This division was intended to be a military expedient merely to administer the surrender of the Japanese forces.
7. Subsequent to the Japanese surrender, in September 1945 Kim Il-sung returned to Korea, as a Major in the Soviet army, and was installed as leader in the northern part of the newly divided country. As a result of the meeting of Allied Foreign Ministers in Moscow, December 1945, a US-USSR joint commission was established to work towards Korean re-unification. The commission met intermittently in Seoul⁶ but due to both growing mistrust between the members, themselves engaged in the politics of the Cold War, and to opposition from the Koreans, such joint activity was hard to maintain. In 1947 a United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea was formed and sent to the peninsula the following year to prepare and observe reunifying elections. However, the USSR boycotted the Commission's entry into the north and the interim committee decided, pivotally, that the election should go ahead in the south. On 15th August 1948 Syngman Rhee⁷ was installed as the first president of the Republic of Korea. Weeks later, on 9th September, the north too held elections and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)⁸ was born, with Kim Il-sung as its leader and Pyongyang as its capital. With these elections the separation of the two countries was affirmed and thus two nations with diametrically opposed economic, political and ideological systems were established.

⁴ Or Kim Il-sŏng, according to the McCune-Reischauer romanisation system (see Section E). He adopted this name, the name of a celebrated resistance fighter, whilst fighting with the Chinese communist guerrillas. He was born Kim Sŏng-ju.

⁵ This is the conventional spelling; the native name, romanised according to the McCune-Reischauer system, is P'yŏngyang (see Section E)

⁶ Seoul is the conventional spelling for this city. The romanised form according to the McCune-Reischauer system is Sŏul (see Section E).

⁷ see Section E; paragraph 24

⁸ see also Section F; paragraph 26

SECTION B:

The History of North Korea

8. The division of Korea set the stage for war. Both North and South sensed that this was inevitable and each leader in turn announced his belief in the necessity for military force if Korea were to be reunited. Skirmishes along the 38th parallel increased and both countries prepared their forces. The North had clear advantages in terms of experience and resources, having been trained and armed by the Soviet army. This advantage was increased as China sent many ethnic Koreans who had fought in the Chinese Civil War to return to Korea and also strengthened defence forces on the Korean border.
9. On 25th June 1950 North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel to invade the Republic of Korea thus marking the beginning of the Korean War. They captured Seoul, just 50 km from the line of division, in three days and then pushed south as far as the environs of Pusan. The invasion was reported to the United Nations, and the Security Council met in emergency session the same day and passed a resolution calling for a cessation to the hostilities. This resolution was ignored by the invading troops and so the UN passed a second resolution, on 27th June, calling upon member nations to send troops to be available under the unified command of the United States. These United Nations forces landed at Inch'ŏn, near Seoul, and succeeded in pushing the North Korean troops back. The North Korean retreat continued and the United Nations and South Korean forces pushed on northwards capturing the North Korean eastern port of Wŏnsan. The tide was again turned as the Chinese communist forces joined the effort enabling the North Koreans to retake Pyongyang and, by the end of 1950, Seoul. The UN forces struck back and again drove out the combined communist forces in March 1951. Further 'see-saw' fighting around the 38th parallel followed until, in June 1951, truce negotiations were commenced. These were to drag on for two years, stalling and reopening on a number of points, resulting finally in an armistice agreement on 27th July 1953. At the time of this truce a demilitarised zone of 238 km became the *de facto* boundary between the countries.
10. After the war Kim Il-sung consolidated his power in North Korea by unifying all the branches of Communist thinking; that of Chinese communists who had fought with the Red Army, Soviet Koreans who had lived or studied in the Soviet Union and his partisans from Manchuria. After this consolidation the DPRK regime developed a campaign to establish a cult around its leader, achieved by creating myths about him and his family. His leadership was exemplified by his people's extraordinary adoration, which was based entirely on the cult of personality. The extravagance of this cult was, arguably, far greater than that of Stalin or Mao.

11. According to North Korean propaganda, Kim Il-sung's greatest achievement was the development of an ideology, *Chuch'e*⁹, on which the country is run today. This philosophy is aimed at developing (lit.) *self-reliance* and was improvised in the 1950s in order to cut off Soviet influence and thus purge Kim Il-sung's rivals. It is the sole state ideology and, based on Marxist-Leninist thought, exemplifies a striving for national identity and independence. Indeed, the Constitution stipulates that "the *Chuch'e* ideology of the Workers' Party [shall be] the guiding principle for all its actions".

12. A further facet of this ideology was to make room for nepotism and it became clear that Kim Il-sung was preparing the way for his son, Kim Jong-il¹⁰, to follow him as leader. Throughout the 1970s Kim Jong-il was promoted to progressively more influential posts within the regime and at the 6th Korean Workers' Party Congress in 1980 he was installed as North Korea's second most powerful man and officially designated as his father's political successor. And so it was that on Kim Il-sung's death on July 8th 1994 Kim Jong-il took power. He took the title of General Secretary of the Communist Party in October 1997 whilst his father was posthumously given the title of Eternal President in 1998¹¹. Little is known about the leadership since this time. Kim Jong-il is seen by the west as a playboy though within North Korea he is credited with having extended his father's *Chuch'e* ideology. Very little information is available about this ideological extension, known as the '*Red Flag Ideology*', except that, in the words of Kim Jong-il himself, this "philosophy is an expression of the Revolutionary spirit based on *Chuch'e* Ideology [and is] an expression that my ideology is red". Despite not yet, by his own admission, being a structured philosophy the name comes from the Red Flag Anthem (written by Kim Il-sung); it is reported that the philosophy consists in promoting such values as struggle in the face of desperation, and defence of the Supreme Leader unto death.

13. Kim Jong-il is, as his father was and is, surrounded by an impressive personality cult. This even includes the circumstances of his birth. In fact he was born in 1941 in Siberia but according to North Korean propaganda he was born in 1942 in a log cabin on the country's highest mountain and most celebrated area of natural beauty, Paektusan. The legend records that a double rainbow and a bright star marked the event.

⁹ This is often seen as *Juche*. *Chuch'e* is the spelling according to the McCune-Reischauer romanisation system (see Section E). The *Chuch'e* calendar is used in North Korea today. This calendar records years since the year of Kim Il-sung's birth (1912= *Chuch'e 1*); thus 2003 is *Chuch'e 92*.

¹⁰ Or Kim Chŏng-il as romanised by the McCune-Reischauer system.(see Section E)

¹¹ Kim Il-sung, in light of this posthumous decree, remains the country's President. Both father and son may be correctly referred to as *Supreme Leader* (*Saryŏng*). However, the most widely seen terms are *Great Leader* (*Widaehan Yŏngdoja*) for Kim Il-sung and *Dear Leader* (*Ch'inaehanŭn Chidoja*) for Kim Jong-il. Some sources suggest though that Kim Jong-il now prefers to be referred to as *Great Leader*.

SECTION C:
North Korea in 2003

14. North Korea today is racially and linguistically homogenous. There are no indigenous minorities and the few, almost exclusively Chinese, foreigners number only about 50,000. Indeed the country might well be described as the world's most reclusive. Most desperately, after years of mismanagement by the government and weather-related problems, there has in the past decade been a chronic shortage of food. It is estimated that there are thousands of deaths from starvation every year.
15. North Korea has an external debt of \$12 billion. There is a heavy reliance on international food aid yet the government continues to expend its resources on maintaining and developing the military. The focus of military spending throughout the 1990s shifted to the production of weapons of mass destruction including the development of a nuclear capability. This research and production is, in part, to generate revenue from exportation of nuclear material.
16. The country's principal nuclear plant is at *Yŏngbyŏn* (39°48'N 125°48'E) which has lain dormant throughout most of the past 10 years. International eyes in 2003 are, however, focussing on this plant as the nuclear threat from North Korea recurs.

SECTION D:
Language

17. Korean is an Ural-Altaic language related, remotely, to Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian and Mongolian. There is also a striking grammatical similarity to Japanese although a historical relationship has not been established. The language throughout the peninsula is mutually comprehensible although the North Korean accent and vocabulary have, since the peninsula's division, attempted to eschew external influence whereas the South has embraced influence from Japan and the United States.
18. Due to the cultural history and proximity to China there exists also a large vocabulary borrowed from Chinese. Indeed, approximately half the words in Korean originated from Chinese and have been adapted, in terms of having different pronunciation for the same Sino-Japanese character¹², into Korean. There are, thus, many instances where two words, a Chinese loanword and an indigenous Korean word, exist for the same object or idea. However, the North Korean regime has attempted to eliminate as many words of Chinese and Western origin as possible. North Koreans refer to their language as 'Cultured Language' [*Munhwa-ŏ*] and to that of South Korea as 'Standard Language' [*P'yojun-ŏ*] which they consider decadent in its use of loanwords.
19. The Korean language is spoken today by over 65 million people living on the peninsula and by 5.5 million diaspora residing, largely, in the United States and in Western Europe.

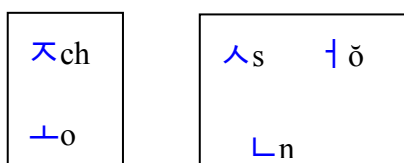
¹² These characters are known as *hanja* in Korea

SECTION E:

Korean Script and Romanisation

20. The Korean alphabet is known in South Korea as *Han'gŭl* and in North Korea as *Chosŏn-ŏ*. The script is a phonetic alphabetic system but differs from other alphabetic scripts in presentation. Whereas other scripts are presented in linear form, Korean is characterised by syllabic grouping. Each syllabic unit is written from left to right and from top to bottom and comprises a *consonant/vowel* or a *consonant/vowel/consonant* combination.

To illustrate, the word *Chosŏn* (조선) is shown below:



21. This alphabet was developed in the 15th Century at the behest of King Sejong in order to promote literacy. Before this time the only writing system used had been Sino-Japanese characters¹³ and scholars in Korea were slow to take to this new script, scorning it for its simplicity and believing it to degrade the Chinese classics. However, at the end of the 19th Century, as Korea struggled to retain its independence¹⁴, the long-held association with China began to be abandoned and Korean script became more widely used amongst the educated. Indeed, in North Korea today only Korean script is used. In South Korea one will find predominantly Korean script with occasional use of Sino-Japanese characters. Increasingly though Roman script is given as an alternative to Sino-Japanese characters in South Korea, for instance on road signs, and the knowledge of Sino-Japanese characters is declining.

22. PCGN uses the 1939 McCune-Reischauer system¹⁵ for the romanisation of Korean. Both South Korea and North Korea have their own systems but it has been PCGN policy to maintain a single and unchanging system. This also reflects the UN policy that there should be one system for one language. This ensures the consistent treatment of Korean names across the peninsula and avoids the expense and logistical difficulties of updating maps, gazetteers and databases. The McCune-Reischauer system was devised to be used for all elements of Korean language and is thus a rare instance in which the BGN/PCGN approved system lays claim to being applicable to a language beyond geographical names. Furthermore, it is unusual in that it reflects the pronunciation of the language. Indeed, because Korean pronunciation is often inconsistently represented by Korean script, the McCune-Reischauer system is rather elaborate and complex.

¹³ See Section D; paragraph 18

¹⁴ see Section A; paragraph 2

¹⁵ The system first appeared in *The Romanisation of Korean Language Based on its Phonetic Structure*, G. McCune and E.O. Reischauer, 1939.

23. The romanisation system used by North Korea was presented to the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) in 1992 and again to the 8th UNCSGN in 2002. The system “was adopted in 1992 and has been compulsorily in use for transcribing Korean including the geographical names and personal names into Roman alphabet since then”¹⁶. This system is similar to the McCune-Reischauer system but distinctions include the use of *kh*, *th*, *ph* and *ch* for the aspirated consonants instead of *k*’, *t*’, *p*’ and *ch*’ respectively as given by the McCune-Reischauer system. Nevertheless, PCGN has not seen any North Korean sources applying this, or any other, system.
24. Although personal names are treated as described above in North Korea today, this has not always been the case. Furthermore, in South Korea despite a government romanisation system being used, it is not yet obligatory to romanise personal names according to any system. This category of names is therefore subject to more inconsistency. Many Koreans have their own preference as to how their name should be written in Roman script and therefore do not employ a system but “create” their own name. Those with the surname *Pak*, for example, often prefer to see this as *Park*, even though there is no letter ‘r’ in the original. The first president of the Republic of Korea, *I Sŭng-man*, was universally known as *Syngman Rhee*. Others like him with the surname *I* opt instead for *Yi*, *Ri*, *Lee* or *Li*. None of these forms is a romanisation of Korean script; rather, each is a one-off appellation applicable only to that particular individual. As a further note, Korean personal names proceed from the family to the individual name; a reflection of Korean thinking that the self is less important than the family. However, when dealing with the west Koreans often reverse the order of their names to present themselves in a form more familiar to westerners.

¹⁶ From *Working Paper INF 72* presented by the North Korean delegation at UNCSGN 2002.

SECTION F:

Administrative Divisions and Population Figures

25. North Korea at its creation in 1948 was the half of the Korean peninsula that lay to the north of the 38th parallel¹⁷. The entire peninsula is marginally smaller than the UK; North Korea being slightly smaller than England and just a few thousand square kilometres larger than its southern cousin. The terrain, however, is so mountainous that an estimated 80% of North Korea's area is uninhabitable.
26. The official state title of North Korea is *Chosŏn-Minjujuŭi-Inmin-Konghwaguk*; this translates as the *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. The country name "North Korea", or "Korea (North)", should not be used in official communications with that country. Rather the state title should always be used. Likewise in official communications, the adjectival form "North Korean" should be replaced by "DPRK" (as in "DPRK Government").
27. The capital, Pyongyang, is the largest city with a population of approximately 2,767,900. The estimated population of the country is 25,191,600. It must be noted though that all populations listed are approximate, as official figures are not made available.

10 largest cities of North Korea

	City	Province	Population(x1000)	City co-ordinates
1	P'yŏngyang	P'yŏngyang-t'ŭkpyŏlsi	2767.9	39°01'N 125°45'E
2	Hamhŭng	Hamgyŏng-namdo	834.2	39°54'N 127°32'E
3	Chŏngjin	Hamgyŏng-bukto	684.6	41°47'N 129°46'E
4	Namp'o	Namp'o-si	665.5	38°43'N 125°24'E
5	Sinŭiju	Sinŭiju [zone]	383.2	40°06'N 124°23'E
6	Wŏnsan	Kangwŏn-do	352.8	39°09'N 127°26'E
7	P'yŏngsŏng	P'yŏngan-namdo	320.8	39°14'N 125°52'E
8	Sariwŏn	Hwanghae-bukto	298.7	38°30'N 125°45'E
9	Haeju	Hwanghae-namdo	269.4	38°02'N 125°42'E
10	Kanggye	Chagang-do	262.6	40°58'N 126°35'E

¹⁷ The present demarcation line differs slightly (see MAP, p.11)

28. Until 1993, North Korea was divided into 12 first order administrative divisions; 9 Provinces and 3 Special Cities as follows:

Province name	Province seat	Province population (2003 est.)	Co-ordinates of province seat
Chagang-do	Kanggye	1,505,300	40°58'N 126°35'E
Hamgyōng-bukto	Ch'ōngjin	2,608,200 ¹⁸	41°47'N 129°46'E
Hamgyōng-namdo	Hamhŭng	3,316,600	39°54'N 127°32'E
Hwanghae-bukto	Sariwŏn	1,834,800	38°30'N 125°45'E
Hwanghae-namdo	Haeju	2,492,300	38°02'N 125°42'E
Kaesōng-si ¹⁹	Kaesōng	431,000	37°58'N 126°33'E
Kangwŏn-do	Wŏnsan	1,597,800	39°09'N 127°26'E
Namp'o-si	Namp'o	931,000	38°43'N 125°24'E
P'yōngan-bukto ²⁰	Sinŭiju	3,135,600	40°06'N 124°23'E
P'yōngan-namdo	P'yōngsōng	3,454,600	39°15'N 125°51'E
P'yōngyang-t'ŭkpyŏlsi	P'yōngyang (Pyongyang)	3,066,600 ²¹	39°04'N 125°50'E
Yanggang-do	Hyesan	817,800	41°23'N 128°10'E

Notes:

1. The generic term *province* in Korean is *to*. The apparent generics *namdo* and *bukto* are not true generics although they are usually seen in this form; *nam* simply means south and *buk* north. The 'd' that occurs in *namdo* is a reflection of the McCune-Reischauer romanisation system discussed in Section E. The nature of Korean is that some consonants cause changes in the phonetic sound of, although not spelling in Korean script of, the consonants that follow them.

2. *Si* means city.

3. *T'ŭkpyŏlsi* means special city.

¹⁸ These population figures are believed to include the populations of the special zones (see paragraph 29) whose areas used to fall into these provinces.

¹⁹ Part of this administrative division is now a separate "special industrial zone", centred on this province seat (see paragraph 29). We cannot confirm whether Kaesōng remains the administrative centre of Kaesōng-si now that this zone exists.

²⁰ Part of this administrative division is now a separate "special administrative region", centred on this province seat (see paragraph 29). We cannot confirm the administrative centre of P'yōngan-bukto now that this zone exists.

²¹ The administrative area's population is slightly larger than that for the city itself.

29. Since 1993 four special zones²² have been created; each of these appears to be under direct supervision of the state. PCGN has not seen population figures for these zones.

- In 1993 a “special economic zone” comprising the cities of Najin and Sŏnbong was formed on the border with China. [The city of Sŏnbong was formerly named Unggi.]
In August 2000, this area was given the name **Nasŏn**, a contraction of the two city names. The full name with generic term is **Najin Sŏnbong-si**. The zone is often referred to in English language sources as Nasŏn City.
- **Sinŭiju**: This was declared a “special administrative region” in September 2002. Imitating Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in structure, the area is to be walled off from the rest of North Korea. It is said that foreigners, including South Koreans, will be able to visit the zone (on the border with China) without visas.
- **Kaesŏng**: This area was declared a “special industrial zone” in October 2002; it is to be an industrial complex focussing, due to its location on the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), on ties with South Korea.
- **Kŭmgang-san**: This mountainous area was, also in October 2002, designated a tax-free “special tourism zone”. Renowned as an area of outstanding natural beauty the area, comprising some 12,000 peaks, is often referred to in its English translation; Diamond Mountains.

BOUNDARIES OF NORTH KOREA

China	1416 km
Russia	19 km
South Korea	238 km

TOTAL BOUNDARY:1673km

A 33 km section of the boundary with China, around the area of Paektu-san, is disputed.

²² See MAP, p.11

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

