

The regional connections of the 1728 Musin Rebellion (戊申亂)

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Abstract

Many scholars have stressed that regional dynamics led to the outbreak of the Musin Rebellion, the largest rebellion in eighteenth-century Korea. Scholars have examined the economic and political situation leading up to the violence and concluded that political marginalization caused Kyōngsang Province elites (from the Southerner faction) to launch the rebellion. This paper analyses evidence from official sources about rebel motivations, rebel geographical associations and the court view of the causes. Although post-rebellion government statements acknowledge tensions between the court and many Kyōngsang Province elites, rebel testimony showed no evidence of any anger about discrimination against elites from a single region. There is also inconsistent evidence of regional concerns in the membership of the rebel organization, which was drawn from three southern provinces and mainly concentrated around the capital. My findings challenge the conclusions of regionalist scholars and place the Musin Rebellion in a trajectory of late Chosŏn rebellion that was attempting to redress factional political discrimination and was not caused by regional concerns.

Keywords: Musin Rebellion, Regional history, Kyōngsang Province, Chosŏn, Korea

Introduction¹

The impact of local variables on the initiation and outcome of rebellion has long been the subject of academic inquiry. As Daniel Little has argued in his analysis of rebellion in China, interest in local political influence on collective violence has come about from the failure of class conflict theories to explain regional variations in levels of contention (Little 1989: 164–70). Scholars have also noted that rebellions challenging central government in different pre-modern East Asian contexts often began as regional attempts to correct local problems (Little 1989: 171).² Scholars such as Hugh Borton (1968) have argued that in pre-modern Japan and China certain areas were characterized by more

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2 George Dutton (2006: 7) also argues that the dynasty-changing eighteenth-century Vietnamese Tây Sơn rebellion had parochial origins.

contention than others, and these areas remained rebellious despite countrywide political and structural changes. James White (1995: 285) identifies certain areas that were particularly contentious under the Tokugawa (1600–1868) and observes that these areas often remained so throughout the Meiji Restoration (1868) and up to the First World War. Elizabeth Perry (1980: 246–9) also notes that the mass violence that continued throughout the Qing period (1644–1912) and into the People’s Republic of China only ceased when ecological problems were addressed. While Perry believes the interaction of ecological and social variables in rural Huáiběi (淮北, Northern Anhui 安徽 Province) helped instigate rebellion, White argues that both metropolitan areas, and less tightly administered far-flung regions, over time developed a “culture of contention” that was apparently impervious to both socio-political change and government repression (White 1995: 13 and 285). Within White’s framework, people from specific areas drew on previous historical memories of local contention as an impetus.³

There has been great interest in the outbreaks of collective violence that occurred in areas of the Korean peninsula during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). The focus has been on two areas in particular: P’yŏngan Province (平安道) in the north west (site of the 1811 Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion), and Kyŏngsang Province (慶尙道) in the south east (site of the 1862 Chinju Rising [晋州民亂 Chinju millan]).⁴ Among the explanations that have been given for the outbreaks of violence, scholars such as Chŏng Sŏkchong (1972) have interpreted the Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion (洪景來의 亂) in terms of class struggle, while others like Anders Karlsson (2000) have argued that local violence was a response to a power struggle between central government and local elites. Sun Joo Kim (2007) argues that the Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion should be primarily understood as a response to the cultural and political marginalization of P’yŏngan Province elites and the historical memory of previous violent outbreaks in the region. For Kim, “P’yŏngan residents were socially insulted and politically demeaned” and this helped produce a culture of contention that cut across class differences, as frustration was “transmitted to the general population . . . who eventually internalized it as their own resentment toward the central government” (Kim 2007: 57).⁵ In other words, it was neither class nor shared economic interests that unified a regional community, but rather the vicarious anger non-elites felt about elite disenfranchisement.

- 3 The impact of historical memory on rebellion is also advocated by other researchers of pre-modern rebellion such as George Rudé (1981: 3–7), who argued for the cumulative impact of rebel slogans on collective violence: in other words, the demands of one set of rebels often influenced later rebellion.
- 4 Anders Karlsson (2006: 233) argues that the 1862 Chinju Rising that spread over the southern half of the peninsula was caused by a stronger central government presence in local society and more intense competition over scarce resources.
- 5 In the context of the strongly regionalist voting tendencies in 1990s South Korean politics, explained by local economic and political marginalization, cultural studies researcher Sallie Yea (1997: 1) has also asserted that both Kyŏngsang and Chŏlla Provinces in the southern tip of the Korean peninsula in particular are marked by rebellious tendencies because of historical political and cultural marginalization.

Thus, Sun Joo Kim's explanations argue against class-based solidarity and instead stress local solidarity.

The 1728 Musin Rebellion broke out in three provinces, and many scholars have used regional as well as class conflict arguments to insist that political marginalization of elites from a single region led to the initiation of the violence.⁶ This paper explores the arguments of regionalist scholars and analyses previously unexamined evidence from official sources about rebel motivation, the regional make-up of the rebel organization, and official views of the causes of the rebellion. Official records provide a wealth of detailed information that can be used to determine whether rebel grievances centred on regional issues. This paper focuses on evidence found in post-rebellion court statements in the *Yǒngjo sillok* (英祖實錄, "Veritable records of Yǒngjo's reign", hereafter cited as *sillok*)⁷ and also assesses rebel motivation for participation based on an analysis of evidence from rebel testimony, actions and propaganda contained in the *sillok* and *Musin Yǒgok ch'uan* (戊申逆獄推案, "Trial record of the Musin year rebels" hereafter cited as *Yǒgok ch'uan*).

The paper also investigates the regional structure and make-up of the rebel organization to determine what this tells us about rebel intention. In her comparative study of rebellion, Diana Russell (1974: 10) writes that: "If it is not the poor who rebel, then the cause cannot be poverty". Underlying this statement is the assumption that the membership of rebel organizations reflects the interests, demands and grievances of its individual members. If a rebel is motivated by issues relating to his/her locality then that person is likely to be culturally, politically or physically linked to that area. It is important to analyse the membership of the rebel organization to confirm the existence of such regional connections. Based on this analysis of government information, rebel motivations and rebel geographical associations, the paper concludes by challenging assumptions of regionalist scholars which are ultimately misleading about the overall shape of the Musin Rebellion and its place in Korean history.

The Musin Rebellion

The Musin Rebellion broke out in 1728 when armed men led by Yi Injwa (李麟佐, ?–1728) seized control of Ch'ǒngju (淸州) in Ch'ungch'ǒng Province (忠淸道).⁸ The majority of rebels were members of the Southerner faction (Namin 南人) or were extremists of the Disciples faction (Chunso Soron 峻少 少論): this is significant because the Musin Rebellion itself was preceded by several other attempts on power by factional members or disgruntled office holders including the Injo Restoration (仁祖反正, Injo Panjǒng, 1623), the Yi Kwal Rebellion (李适, 1624), the Yi In'gǒ Rebellion (李仁居, 1627) the Kim Ik plot (金鉞, 1651),

6 The rebellion is more commonly named after Yi Injwa (Yi Injwa's Rebellion 李麟佐의亂), one of the rebel leaders. Musin indicates the year 1728 in the sexagenary cycle that was used in both China and Korea.

7 I refer to Chosǒn-period royalty using their posthumous names, so Kyǒngjong (景宗, 1688–1724; reigned 1720–24), Yǒngjo (1694–1776; reigned 1724–76) and Chǒngjo (正祖, 1752–1800; reigned 1776–1800).

8 The lunar calendar was used.

and the Sambok Plot (三復, 1680).⁹ The Musin rebels claimed loyalty to Kyōngjong, a sickly king who died young, and many Disciple's faction extremists claimed that his half-brother Yōngjo had deliberately poisoned him to usurp the throne (Haboush 1988: 32). Over a period of three years, these rebels built up an underground organization committed to overthrowing Yōngjo and destroying the pro-Yōngjo Patriarch's faction (老論 Noron) and placing a distant relative of Yōngjo on the throne.¹⁰

The Musin Rebellion erupted a few months after the 1727 removal of the Patriarch's faction and the restoration of the Disciple's faction to office (Chōngmi hwanguk 丁未換局), a restoration that represented Yōngjo's attempt to mollify factionalism (Jackson 2011a). The 1727 Disciple's faction restoration meant that many Musin rebels were, in fact, rebelling to seize power from their *own* faction. Although many of the restored men were moderates within the Disciple's faction (Wanso Soron 緩少), some rebels were also in office after 1727 and I have argued elsewhere that these rebel fifth-columnists played a central role in both the creation of a military plan and the initiation of the rebellion (Jackson 2013). The rebellion raged for three weeks and the government lost control of four county seats to the rebels in Ch'ungch'ōng, four in Kyōnggi and five in southern Kyōngsang Provinces. Rebels installed their own officials in power and for a brief period there were effectively two competing political authorities on the peninsula – an event that would not occur on such a scale until the Hong Kyōngnae rebellion, and one that provides evidence of the significance of the Musin Rebellion in eighteenth-century Chosŏn history.

The seizures in southern Kyōngsang Province were led by Kyōngsang Province elites and followed an unsuccessful attempt to mobilize and seize Andong (安東, northern Kyōngsang Province) when local elites turned against rebels (Yi Usōng 1959: 725). The seizures of provincial towns were meant to be a prelude to the main event – the capture of the capital itself (Jackson 2011b). The rebels seized regional seats to arm themselves before proceeding north to launch a co-ordinated attack on the capital along with fifth-columnist forces. But this did not go to plan. Rebel fifth-columnists led by P'yōngan military commander Yi Sasōng (李思晟, ?–1728) were supposed to mobilize government troops under their command and to use the crisis provided by the rebellion to take the capital (YS 04/04/22 (imin)17:26b–28a, pp. 47–48/42).¹¹ However, these fifth-columnists were betrayed by captured rebels and their military plan was neutralized by the court, which also raised a force to suppress rebels in the provinces. Rebels in Ch'ōngju marched towards the capital but were defeated in battles in Kyōnggi Province (YS 04/03/20 (kyōngo) 16:19b, p. 23/42). Unaware of the defeat of their comrades, the Kyōngsang Province rebels

9 For more on: the Injo Restoration, see Palais (1996: 93); the Yi Kwal Rebellion (Lee Ki-baik 1984: 215); the Yi In'gō Rebellion (Han'guk inmyōng taesajōn p'yōnch'ansil 1967: 706 and 1097); the Kim Ik Plot (Palais 1996: 394–5); the Sambok Plot (Palais 1996: 456–61, 504).

10 They had chosen Lord Milp'ung (密豐君, Yi T'an 李坦: ?–1729), who was a distant relative of King Injo who had himself seized power in a coup d'état.

11 Which refers to *Yōngjo sillok*, the date, day in the sexagenary cycle, original volume, folio number, edited edition page and volume number.

made further attempts to head north to link with rebel forces, but were hemmed in by inhospitable terrain and government troops, and were eventually crushed (Yi Wŏngyun 1971: 75).

Regional understandings of the Musin Rebellion

Academics have disagreed over the causes and character of the Musin Rebellion, but Yi Usŏng (1959), Yi Wŏngyun (1971), Yi Chaech'ŏl (1986), the Kŏch'ang kunsa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe (the history of Kŏch'ang county editorial committee, hereafter cited as *Kŏch'ang kunsa*, 1997),¹² Yi Chongbŏm (1997) and Cho Ch'anyong (2003) have stressed that regional dynamics were behind the initiation of violence. The aforementioned scholars argue that discontent resulting from marginalization motivated Kyŏngsang Province elites to dominate the rebel organization. These elites had previously played an important role in Chosŏn elite society, but had been prevented from taking highly sought-after court positions, so by 1728, the “accumulated complaints” exploded into rebellion (*Kŏch'ang kunsa* 1997: 558; Yi Wŏngyun 1971: 86). There were geographical and political reasons for this change of fortune. Although they occupied other areas, including Kyŏnggi Province, Kyŏngsang Province was the traditional home of the Southerner faction that fell from power in the late Chosŏn period.

Since factional allegiances traditionally ran along family lines, there was a high concentration of single-lineage villages in Kyŏngsang Province with strong Southerners ties (Yi Wŏngyun 1971: 84). The political disenfranchisement of the Southerner faction was engineered by the Westerners (Sŏin 西人).¹³ Subsequently the Westerners, and their offshoot the Patriarch's faction, virtually monopolized power at the centre until Chŏngjo restored some Southerners to power (Setton 1992: 60). Scholars argue this “discrimination” (*ch'abyŏl*, 差別) prevented Kyŏngsang Province elites from holding high office (Cho Ch'anyong 2003: 21),¹⁴ that they led “unproductive” lives as increasingly impoverished landlords, and were full of “bitterness” (directed primarily towards political opponents in court). Thus Kyŏngsang Province rebels were attempting to overcome their worsening disenfranchisement (Cho Ch'anyong 2003: 7 and 23).

12 This work analyses the impact of the Musin Rebellion on Kŏch'ang in southern Kyŏngsang Province.

13 For further details on the decline of the Southerners in 1623, see Yi Wŏngyun 1971: 64; and Palais 1994: 401–2. In 1694, the Southerner faction were permanently removed from power in favour of the Westerners, after giving support to Chang Hŭibin (張禧嬪, 1659–1701), a wife of Sukchong (肅宗 1661–1720; r. 1674–1720) who had fallen from favour. Some scholars also argue there were philosophical differences between the Westerner and Southerner factions; for more on the philosophical differences, see Edward Chung (1995) and Mark Setton (1992). Regionalists disagree over the employment prospects of the Southerner faction elites of southern and northern Kyŏngsang Provinces. Some claim there was discrimination against elites from all parts of the provinces (*Kŏch'ang kunsa* 1997: 558; Cho Ch'anyong 2003: 22), while others argue there were philosophical differences within the Southerner faction in northern and southern Kyŏngsang that affected employment (Yi Usŏng 1959: 724). Although they lost political power in this period, the Southerners were never driven out of the court completely.

14 Yŏng-Ho Ch'oe says “alienation” (1999: 38); *Kŏch'ang kunsa* 1997: 558.

Cho Ch'anyong and the authors of the *Köch'ang kunsu* are local historians interested in highlighting the role of Kyöngsang Province elites in what they see as a righteous rebellion to overthrow a corrupt dynasty, but some are influenced by class struggle theories and argue that discontent among the Kyöngsang Province elite coincided with countrywide economic and social disintegration (Cho Ch'anyong 2003: 13, 16). One scholar, Yi Chongböm, focuses on the connections of Chölla Province (全羅道) to the rebellion, arguing that economic competition between Chölla elites and the court manifested itself in growing government interference in the agricultural, lumber and manufacturing sectors, leading to resentment that cut across class boundaries and resulted in great local support for the rebellion (Yi Chongböm 1997: 188).

Most regionalist scholars base their arguments on an analysis of political and economic data from the period leading up to the rebellion, and the role of elite Kyöngsang Province rebels like Chöng Hüiryang (鄭希亮) and Cho Söngjwa (曹聖佐 both ?–1728) in the violence. Regionalist arguments stress that the rebellion was not a response to local ecological problems (as Elizabeth Perry argues) but was caused by anger about the repressive policy of central government: regionalists imply a local Kyöngsang Province solidarity because of the disenfranchisement of Kyöngsang Province elites (*Köch'ang kunsu* 1997: 558). Regionalist scholars have created an influential interpretation of the causes of the Musin Rebellion to the extent that others, such as Anders Karlsson, have followed regionalist analyses of the initiation of the Musin Rebellion to strengthen their own arguments stressing the regional dynamics of the Hong Kyöngnae Rebellion (Karlsson 2000: 274). All of the above arguments tend to situate the Musin Rebellion within a trend of late Chosön regional rebellion that included the Hong Kyöngnae Rebellion and Chinju Rising.

Post-suppression court debates over Yöngnam (嶺南), Andong and the Yöngnam men

On the twenty-second of the fourth month, some three weeks after the last rebel leaders had been executed, Yöngjo delivered an edict to his officials. This edict was part of the court's post-Rebellion analysis, in which Yöngjo and his officials attempted to determine its causes as well as the rebels' motivations to ensure there would be no repetition. Notable on this list is a short complaint Yöngjo made about a single region – Yöngnam or northern and southern Kyöngsang Province – and its connections to the rebellion:

In the middle of the night when I'm lying down in the palace and I start thinking about Yöngnam, my heart grows so heavy that I can't get back to sleep (YS 04/04/22 (imin) 17:28a–30b, pp. 48–9 /42).

Considering that the rebels seized territory and mobilized in four different provinces, it is curious that Yöngjo lost sleep about Kyöngsang but not Ch'ungch'öng, Chölla or Kyönggi Provinces. Other sections of this edict provide clues to his thinking:

Yōngnam from time immemorial has been our kingdom's Ungju [雄州];¹⁵ many men of great virtue and scholarship have been produced there, so the province became the model for the loyalty between subject and ruler. Unfortunately, through their evil utterances, a gang of wild beasts have seduced the southern region [Namdo 南道— Ch'ungch'ōng, Kyōngsang and Chōlla Provinces] and this led to the emergence of the rebel Chōng Hūiryang. This is not only unfortunate for morals in general but also for Yōngnam. The foundation of the kingdom is the Samnam area [same as Namdo], but when compared to Honam [湖南 Chōlla Province], Yōngnam is the greater place. How did it reach the point that good and evil cannot be distinguished? How did this loss of loyalty reach such extremes? A person like Chōng Hūiryang coming from Yōngnam happens but once in a generation . . . (YS 04/04/22 (imin) 17:28a–30b, pp. 48–9/42).¹⁶

Later in the same edict Yōngjo discusses the case of the Andong¹⁷ men and their connections to the rebellion:

... it was my intention to release the Andong men when I did ... it is because I already knew of the customs of this area, that with the exception of those facing charges of treason, I couldn't bear to arrest people. Even though this is my intention, many feel ill at ease about this, and if they are suspicious (of me and my intentions) then this is not me rejecting them, for sure this is the Yōngnam men themselves breaking off relations with me (YS 04/04/22 (imin) 17:28a–30b, pp. 48–9/42).

Comments in the above edict signalled the start of a lengthy and sometimes heated debate in court, during the fourth to sixth months, concerning the connections between Kyōngsang Province and the rebellion, and several points are significant. In his discourse, Yōngjo is precise in his use of terms, and refers to Kyōngsang Province as Yōngnam, but also refers to Andong and at other times to the “Yōngnam men”. In his study of early factionalism, Yim Dongjae argues that “Yōngnam men” is in fact a euphemism for Southerner faction supporters, since many (but not all) of them resided in Yōngnam (hereafter, Kyōngsang Province; Yim 1976: 168), for Yōngjo, Kyōngsang Province, Yōngnam men, Andong, as well as the three southern provinces, were distinct entities. Yōngjo distinguished between Kyōngsang Province with its historical and cultural legacy, and people like the Yōngnam men and Andong elites who resided there.

- 15 A place in the Koryō Dynasty (918–1392) in the northern part of the peninsula. Yōngjo appears to be using Ungju as an example from Korea's past of a region that produced many great men.
- 16 Rebel leader Cho Sōngjwa and his brothers were from the area. Other rebels like Yi Ungbo, Yi Injwa and Pak P'irhyōn were born and brought up elsewhere but moved to the area. But it is unclear why Yōngjo only mentions Chōng Hūiryang.
- 17 The town had strong connections to the Southerner faction. For more on factional conflict in Andong see Ch'oe (1999: 38).

In the above edict and subsequent statements, Yǒngjo reveals a degree of ambivalence towards the Andong men and the Yǒngnam men, and this requires some explanation. It was revealed in the royal court that three influential Andong elites had held meetings with senior rebel leaders just prior to the seizure of Ch'ǒngju, and during one meeting these elites had rejected calls by rebel leaders to mobilize troops for the rebels (YS 04/04/29 (kiyu) 17:34a–b, p. 51/42). Despite the refusal to fight for the rebels, it was also reported to the court that there had been wider Andong support for the rebellion once it had started. On the twenty-seventh day of the third month:

when the Kyōngsang Province pacificator Pak Sasu [朴師洙, 1686–1739] arrived in Andong, in Kyōngsang Province popular feelings [*insim* 人心] had degenerated from the time of the rebel seizure of Ch'ǒngju to the extent that they were out of control. It was only when they saw Pak Sasu come over the ridge that they realized there was still a court [ruling the kingdom], and it was thanks to this that the will of the people [*paeksǒng* 百姓] was gradually pacified (YS 04/03/27 (chǒngch'uk) 16:36a, p. 31/42).

Having shown disloyalty, the people of Andong were reported to have redeemed themselves because Pak Sasu went on to form a 500-strong loyalist squad to take military action against the Kyōngsang Province rebels (YS 04/03/27 (chǒngch'uk) 16:36a, p. 31/42). However, Andong was involved in more controversy because Yǒngjo's claims to have forgiven the Andong men were also reportedly met with suspicion from Andong elites. The king's ambivalence should be seen as a response to the behaviour of Yǒngnam men and Andong elites in the context of the cultural history of the province. Yǒngjo's comments about the central place of Kyōngsang Province in the historical development of pre-modern Korea echoes rebel testimony in official records that Kyōngsang Province was not traditionally thought of as a particularly rebellious area. On the contrary, it was considered to be a centre of Korean civilization.¹⁸ With this tradition in mind, Yǒngjo was offended by the fluctuating loyalty and ambiguous actions of a significant number of influential Andong elites who had refused to commit themselves to active participation on the rebel side, but subsequently supported the collapse of court rule in Ch'ǒngju and other areas. Later, when it became clearer that the rebels themselves would be defeated, Andong men fought for the crown yet maintained frosty relations with the king.

The king was advised to make a public declaration that the people of Andong had been officially pardoned. He made the chief state councillor Yi Kwangjwa (李光佐, 1674–1740) compose a document to be announced to the area and the country, and Pak Munsu (朴文秀, 1691–1756) took it to Andong and gathered the local dignitaries in the county Confucian shrine school to proclaim the king had forgiven them. The dignitaries gathered were reportedly moved to tears (YS 04/04/29 (kiyu) 17:34a–b, p. 51/42). After this, Yi Kwangjwa also

18 In the interrogation of rebel Kwǒn Hu (權熙) it is stated that Kyōngsang was traditionally a province where there were no rebels and loyalty to the crown reigned, *Yōgok ch'uan* 75, p. 380.

recommended that because rebel testimony indicated that not “all” the Yǒngnam men had agreed with the rebels, this rebel testimony should be published and proclaimed to the country (*YS* 04/05/05 (ǔlmyo) 18:5a–6b, pp. 54–5/42). Gradually the clamour for the punishment of the Yǒngnam men abated within court, although occasionally officials urged wider punishment because of those Yǒngnam men who had been mixed up in “murky plotting” (*YS* 04/06/29 (musin) f30b–31a, p. 67/4).

Further evidence of problems between the government and the Andong men and Southerner faction can be found in discrepancies between government records like the *sillok* and the *Yǒgok ch’uan*. Information from one confession included in the *Yǒgok ch’uan* is subsequently omitted in the *sillok*, suggesting deliberate manipulation of information. In the *Yǒgok ch’uan*, one rebel confesses that leader Pak P’irhyōn (朴弼顯, 1680–1728) had told other rebels that Andong Southerner faction members were mobilizing, and in addition Pak announced that members of the Southerner faction were leading the plot. The *sillok* version of the confession omits any mention of Andong Southerner faction involvement for unclear reasons (*Musin Yǒgok ch’uan* 75, pp. 534–5). There are further apparently deliberate omissions about Southerner faction involvement in the mobilization in the same record. In contrast to the king’s use of the “Yǒngnam men” in his edict, it is notable that Pak P’ilhyōn does not refer to the Southerners euphemistically but as “Namin”.¹⁹

Andong, and the case of the Yǒngnam men and their involvement in the rebellion, was evidently a difficult area for Yǒngjo and his court. The Yǒngnam men case provided evidence of a systematic problem: this was not just a few immoral individuals, but an entire influential provincial community that was potentially hostile to Yǒngjo’s government. The rebel organization had also failed to unify the Kyōngsang Province Southerner faction against the crown, so blanket repression may have unified them, which would have reflected badly on a king committed to not showing favouritism to factions (Haboush 1988: 129). There is no explanation for either the deliberate manipulation of records or the use of euphemism, but it appears to indicate court sensitivity to the involvement of Southerners from Andong and Kyōngsang Province in the rebellion. It may also indicate a king who did not want relations to degenerate further or at least did not want it recorded in perpetuity that his rule had helped alienate an entire political community. Overall, the post-rebellion debates and manipulation of records provide clear evidence of tensions between the court and the Southerner faction in Kyōngsang Province.

Rebel motivations

The most public statement of the Musin rebel aims can be seen in their open letters (or manifestos), which were sent to magistrates in Ch’ungch’ōng, Kyōnggi and Kyōngsang Provinces, of which only two Kyōngsang Province open letters

19 In other examples, in confessions found in the *sillok*, individual rebels are reported to have been supporters of the Southerner faction; *YS* 04/03/25 (ǔlhae) 16:27b–29a, p. 27–8/42.

survive.²⁰ Kyöngsang Province rebel leaders Chöng Hüiryang and Yi Ungbo (李熊輔?–1728; Yi Injwa’s brother) sent one such letter to the Köch’ang (居昌) magistrate Shin Chöngmo (申正模 1691–1742), and it stated that the rebels aimed to save the royal tombs and temples (a euphemism for the kingdom). The text claimed that Chöng came from a long line of loyal officials and was a descendant of a famous official Tonggye (桐溪, Chöng On [鄭蘊 1569–1641]). The rebels had mobilized an army of “righteous warriors” who would protect the kingdom and its people from chaos. The letter ended by stressing that since this was a matter for the whole country (*kukka* 國家), magistrates of the region could not remain neutral but should support the rebels and provide horses, troops and supplies. Chöng Hüiryang also gave an ominous warning in his letter: if the magistrates refused to help, then “I tremble with fear for what will happen” (YS 04/03/27 (chöngch’uk) 16:35a–36a, p. 31/42).

The letters clearly show that rebels wanted to intimidate the magistrates either into fleeing or into joining the rebels and surrendering their government arms and supplies.²¹ The rebels couched their threats in Confucian terms, talking about protecting the people and their devotion to the country. They referred to Chöng Hüiryang and his famous scholar-official forebear, stressing they were equally worthy and loyal Confucians as the magistrate and his subordinate officials.

Most significantly, the open letters reveal evidence of rebel grievances. Sun Joo Kim, in her analysis of the Hong Kyöngnae Rebellion, argues that rebel open letters produced in 1812 show clear evidence of resentment about regional discrimination as a catalyst for the rebellion.²² However, if the Kyöngsang Province rebels of 1728 had regional grievances they certainly did not show it in their open letters. We can find no complaints about discrimination against Kyöngsang Province elites, and neither are there any references to other local problems (the restoration of local rights that had been removed, or complaints about local corruption, mismanagement or high taxes, or for the righting of perceived wrongs by centrally appointed officials). The Musin Rebellion open letters refer to the country on several different occasions as well as the rebel intention to seize the capital. Overall this indicates that the rebels believed they were (or claimed to be) on a mission of national salvation, and the rectification of a Confucian political system from a king they accused of usurpation, regicide and fratricide. They saw themselves as saviours of the Yi Dynasty.

Other evidence of rebel motivation is found in testimony set down in the official records. Several rebels confessed that they had joined the rebel organization because they were prevented from holding office, while others were lured into the rebel organization with promises of office if Yöngjo were successfully

20 The rest, like Yi Injwa’s open letter, were destroyed for reasons which are unclear, but perhaps because they contained allegations of regicide (see O Kapgyun 1977: 67–8).

21 Kim and Haboush translate *kyöngmun* (檄文) and *kyöksö* (檄書) as open letters or manifestos with different functions, one of which was to seize the area, government resources, and to intimidate government magistrates (Kim 2009: 141; Haboush 2009: 121).

22 Kim 2009: 142–3.

overthrown. An example typical of much testimony comes from the slave of a rebel leader, Min Paekhyo (閔百孝, ?–1728) who confessed:

On the thirteenth day of the third month, Min Paekhyo claimed he was going to the capital to take the civil service examination, and he slept at the house of Yi Chogyōm. When Yi Chogyōm [李祖謙] said he wanted to become an official of the third rank, Min Paekhyo said, “If the rebellion succeeds, you won’t be a mere third rank official” (YS 04/05/07 (chōngsa) 18:7b–8a, pp. 55–6/42).

Testimony such as the above is significant because it indicates that political marginalization was more widespread: Min was linked to both Kyōnggi and Ch’ungch’ōng Provinces while Yi was linked to Ch’ungch’ōng Province. Many men who joined the rebel organization descended from lines that had had an ancestor excluded from office – either removed from their posts, exiled, executed or forced to commit suicide – and this resulted in successive generations of the same family strand being marginalized from power at the centre of government. This testimony also indicates that the motivation for participation was not just an angry response to government policy; motivation was also conditioned by rational calculations of self-interest. Through official positions such as that mentioned by Min and Yi above, the elites received social status, wealth and land. To boost its membership, the rebel organization tapped into concerns about the office of marginalized elites. From the rebels who had complaints about being cut off from office, there were no complaints about employment discrimination against individual regions or any evidence to suggest a shared regional experience of discrimination. The majority of these rebels were Southerner faction members connected to various provinces.²³ If there was anger about marginalization directed towards elites from specific regions, rebels made no reference to it within their testimony or propaganda.

Geographical association

If regional grievances were foremost in rebel minds and regional solidarity was a prime motivational force for the rebellion then this should theoretically be reflected in rebel geographical associations, i.e. where people were born or raised, or where they lived or moved to, but also locations where rebels were particularly active. The collected *Yōgok ch’uan* records provide information about individual rebels and their geographical associations.²⁴ This information is revealed in several ways. Judicial decision documents (kyōlan, 結案) produced just prior to execution (Kim Uch’ōl 2010: 207) identify where each rebel was born, grew up and where the rebel’s parents lived. This detail is

23 For example, Pak Sagwan (朴師寬) was from Chōlla Province, YS 04/04/14 (kabo) 17:20b–21a, pp. 44–5/42. Cho Sang (趙鏞) was from Kyōnggi Province YS 04/05/07 (chōngsa) 18:7b, p. 55/42. Pak P’ilsang (朴弼祥) was from Kyōnggi Province, YS 04/05/16 (pyōng’in) 18:14b–15a, p. 59/42; (all ?–1728).

24 I also used other secondary and primary sources (including employment records, and civil service examinations).

most likely included for bureaucratic purposes: for officials to demonstrate that they had identified the correct person for execution. The interrogation generally centred around the organization of rebel cells; in other words, it went by families and groups associated with a particular area, where one rebel suspect who was mentioned in an interrogation was subsequently picked up and interrogated, and so on (*Yōgok ch'uan* 76 pp. 452–3). Other information about geographical association is found in the testimony of rebels who reveal where their co-conspirators lived, moved to, or areas to which they were linked (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Geographical associations can be divided into leadership groups, regional cells and total rebel numbers. Following the suppression of the rebellion, ten men were identified by the government as rebel leaders.²⁵ Although no criteria for the selection of these leaders were ever indicated by *sillok* historians, it was probably made on the basis of who was considered by the government to have played the most significant roles in military preparation and actions. The leaders identified were: Pak P'ilhyōn, Yi Yuik (李有翼), Sim Yuhyōn (沈維賢), Yi Injwa, Chōng Hūiryang, Pak P'ilmong (朴弼夢), Yi Ungbo, Nam T'aejing (南泰徵), Yi Sasōng and Min Kwanhyo (閔觀孝).²⁶ Of these ten men, two had clear geographical associations with Kyōngsang Province, while three were associated with both Kyōngsang and other provinces; three others had no connections whatsoever and the associations of two men are unknown. Four supported the Southerner faction while four supported the Disciple faction extremists. Far from being disgruntled ex-officials, four were serving officials and acting as fifth-columnist rebels around the time of the rebellion (see Table 1).²⁷ Therefore, of the ten men identified as rebel leaders by the government, five had strong links to Kyōngsang Province but only Chōng Hūiryang fits the bill as a marginalized Kyōngsang Province Southerner.

It is also possible to identify regional cells within the rebel organization laid out according to kinship, marriage, politics and geography. Of eleven identifiable rebel groups, four were active in Kyōnggi Province, two in Ch'ungch'ōng Province, three in Chōlla Province and two in Kyōngsang Province. Thus, evidence from rebel testimony suggests that the rebels were actively engaged in plotting, recruitment and the mobilization of resources in all four southern provinces, but the most active rebel plotting occurred in Kyōnggi Province (see Appendix 3).

It is possible to identify the geographical associations of around 335 elite rebels, and this provides an idea about the total regional breakdown of the rebel

25 YS 04/04/14 (kap'o) 17:17b, p. 43/42.

26 The government missed prominent and influential rebel leaders from the list, including Chōng Seyun (鄭世胤 associated with groups in Kyōnggi and Chōlla Provinces).

27 Yi Injwa and his younger brother Yi Ungbo were both Southerner faction members; Yi Injwa lived in Mun'gyōng (聞慶) in Kyōngsang Province, but both men originally came from Ch'ōngju in Ch'ungch'ōng Province (*Yōgok ch'uan* 75, p. 78); Disciples faction extremist Pak P'ilhyōn had unclear geographical origins, although he was reported to have left his hometown and moved to Sangju (尙州) in Kyōngsang Province. Yi Sasōng was said to have come from Ich'ōn (利川) in Kyōnggi Province, but his factional affiliation cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy; however, he may have had Disciple faction sympathies, since he was voted into positions by other Disciple faction supporters; *Pipyōnsa Tūngnok* YJ 03/09/10 (*kyehae*) p. 27/27 (Cho Ch'anyong 2003: 44).

Table 1. Geographical associations and factional affiliations of Musin rebel leaders

Rebel leader	Geographical associations	Factional affiliation
Yi Injwa	Kyōngsang and Ch'ungch'ōng Provinces	Southerner faction
Yi Ungbo	Kyōngsang and Ch'ungch'ōng Provinces	Southerner faction
Pak P'irhyōn	Kyōngsang Province	Disciples faction extremist
Yi Sasōng	Kyōnggi Province	Disciples faction ?
Chōng Hūiryang	Kyōngsang Province	Southerner faction
Pak P'ilmong	Kyōnggi Province	Disciples faction extremist
Nam T'aejing	?	Disciples faction extremist
Min Kwanhyo	Capital, Kyōnggi and Ch'ungch'ōng Provinces	Southerner faction

organization. An analysis of the 335 elite rebels roughly reflects the regional spread of the leadership and regional cells. Around thirty-three of the total number of rebels were associated with Kyōngsang Province, whereas forty-two and forty-nine were from Ch'ungch'ōng and Chōlla Provinces respectively, fourteen had geographical associations with the capital, thirty-four rebels, including Yi Injwa, were associated with more than one geographical area, and the geographical associations of fourteen other rebels are unclear because of partial information or unknown locations; however, the largest number (140) were associated with Kyōnggi Province (see Appendix 4 for full details). Overall, this evidence suggests widespread regional participation in the rebellion.

The geographical spread based on the analysis of geographical association is confirmed by rebel testimony about the development of the rebel organization. Of the other plotters mentioned in rebel testimony about the early years, the geographical spread is most noticeable. From an early stage, there were links to people connected with four southern provinces: Kyōnggi, Kyōngsang, Ch'ungch'ōng and Chōlla Provinces. By early 1727, there is evidence that connections with these areas had spread still further.²⁸ Overall, the breakdown of the elites within the rebel organization appears to show a mixed picture of geographical association. Half the leadership group had Kyōngsang Province associations but based on an analysis of rebel groups and total (identifiable) geographical associations of other elite rebels, it is difficult to conclude that rebels with links to a single province dominated the rebel organization. This is significant

28 Of those early plotters whose geographical association can be identified, Yi To (李燾), Yi Injwa and Kwōn Hu (權熙) were associated with Kyōngsang Province; Wōn Manju (元萬周), An Ch'u (安樞) and Chang Chōn (張鎭) with Kyōnggi Province; Yi Injwa was also connected with Ch'ungch'ōng Province; and Chōng Seyun was associated with Chōlla Province. Cho Tōkbo (趙德普) had connections to Ch'ungch'ōng Province and Min Kwanhyo was connected with Kyōnggi Province.

because it suggests that rebel recruiters were not attempting to build a regional rebellion, nor were they responding to local issues. They were seeking broad-based support from all over the southern part of the country to bring their military ambitions to fruition, and their concerns were countrywide rather than parochial. The evidence about early membership is also significant because it indicates that the rebellion was not an assault on the capital that had begun as a regional rebellion, but that from the very first moment of the plotting, the rebels had recruited from far and wide.

Conclusion

My analysis of the Musin Rebellion brings to light apparently contradictory data about the involvement of regional elites – especially Kyōngsang Province Southerners – in the Musin Rebellion. Official responses to the rebel challenge from the immediate post-rebellion period signify underlying tensions between the central authorities and provincial elites, especially in Kyōngsang Province (or a perception of tensions by central authorities), and a desire not to exacerbate these tensions. However, one would expect some reference to such problems if they were so central to the rebels' concerns. Rebel discourse in the *sillok* and *Yōgok ch'uan* includes no information that could lead us to conclude that discrimination against Kyōngsang Province Southerners caused the rebellion. A case could be made for official manipulation of records, but as I have shown, court manipulation of records was inconsistent and removed specific references to Andong and the Kyōngsang Province Southerners' involvement in the rebellion, yet retained evidence of tensions between Kyōngsang Province Southerners and the court. The Musin Rebellion was in part responsive: a widespread as opposed to a local response to political exclusion. But in addition to discontent, the rebel testimony above indicates that there were rational and opportunistic components of rebel motivation, based on a desire for greater power. Rebel organization membership also points away from a regionalist explanation for the rebellion. Half of the leadership group had Kyōngsang Province connections but only Chōng Hūiryang fitted the bill of marginalized Kyōngsang Province Southerner. As for the rest of the organization, elites from the four southern provinces of Kyōngsang, Chōlla, Ch'ungch'ōng and, most of all, Kyōnggi Provinces took part in the rebellion. From such a widespread membership it is difficult to infer that a regional solidarity unified a region against the court. Southern Kyōngsang Province Southerners supported the rebellion, while Andong Southerners had refused to commit themselves to active participation on the rebel side, although they had apparently celebrated what they believed to be the collapse of court rule. Such evidence reflects the ambivalence of Kyōngsang Province elite support for the rebellion.

The concentration of rebel geographical associations around Kyōnggi Province and the capital, as well as a more or less equal spread of elite rebels across three southern provinces, provides some important insights into what was a centralized rebellion. Charles Tilly (1974: 285–90) argues that an important precondition for rebellion was the emergence of coalitions of contenders, often including members of the polity, which then launched assaults on the government. This is exactly what we see in the Musin Rebellion. The rebel

organization calculated that the most efficient method of seizing power was dependent upon the formation of coalitions with elites who were already in power (fifth-columnists) and also disenfranchised elites from all over the southern part of the peninsula. Clues about the causes can also be found in the membership. Kyōnggi Province is also a location of powerful office-holding elites and those who had until more recently held power. The Musin rebel organization was made up of rebels who had recently lost power in the centre, as well as marginalized elites in three southern provinces. What linked the coalition of groups from the provinces and the centre was political rather than regional allegiance.

At the start of this paper, I stated that scholars have long been interested in regional influences on the initiation and outcomes of rebellion. Regionalist scholars are right to shed light on the regional spread of the Musin Rebellion, but I contend that their conclusions about regional grievances are wrong. The significance of local processes lies in the rebel organization's attempt to build a widespread movement capable of seizing power in the capital. In other words, the expansion of the rebel organization into the provinces occurred for organizational reasons.

Related to this, one important point is revealed in the king's testimony about the central historical role of Kyōngsang Province in the culture of the kingdom. This is important in the light of James White's "cultures of contention" theory because it suggests that prior to 1728 there was not a culture of contention for rebels to draw on, and this perhaps indicates a more recent change in political behaviour. There is, then, a stronger case for arguing that subsequent rebels in Kyōngsang Province had a culture of contention to which they could relate, for it was the Musin Rebellion that provided it – at least in southern Kyōngsang Province. There is more evidence to argue for the existence of regional solidarities behind later rebellions like the Hong Kyōngnae Rebellion and the Chinju Uprising, but in claiming that Musin rebels were motivated by regional grievances, scholars are arguing for dynamics of rebellion that did not exist for at least seventy years. The Musin Rebellion should be judged on its own terms, and the evidence from the words of the participants themselves in the two most extensive sources on the rebellion point to more complex rebel motivations aimed at seizing power in the capital. In this way, we should think of the Musin Rebellion as the last in a series of elite-led attempts to overthrow the king that started with the rebellions of 1623, 1624, 1627, 1651 and 1680, and involved factional members or incumbent officials. After 1728, bottom-up and regional forces dominated late Chosŏn rebellions. The reason why the face of late Chosŏn rebellion was transformed after 1728 is a subject that requires further analysis.

While not pretending to be a definitive study on the subject of regional catalysts behind rebellion, I hope this article will provoke a debate on a subject which has until now been dominated by assumptions. Other related questions remain: these are beyond the scope of this article but relevant to an understanding of the regional dynamics within Kyōngsang Province both during and in the aftermath of the Musin Rebellion. As yet no major study has focused on the strong support given to the rebellion in the southern part of Kyōngsang Province and the total rejection in the Southerner faction-dominated northern part. Related to this, there has been little interest in the reasons for the continued

repression of Kyöngsang Province elites, both in the northern and southern parts, in the light of the Andong elite rejection of military mobilization. A final question concerns the significance of the notion of cultural solidarity in the light of the mixed geographical associations of rebels.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Sample data

Extract from a judgment document (kyŏlan)

Yi Yunhaeng (李允幸) “his mother and father bore him in Yech'ŏn (醴泉, Kyŏngsang Province), following this, his mother and father raised him in Yech'ŏn”. (*Yŏgok ch'uan* 75, p. 677).

Extract from confession with information about geographical association

The suspect Yun Sangdŏk (尹尙憲) was again pressed to confess, in an earlier confession he stated that he had lived in Yŏngnam for around ten years (*Yŏgok ch'uan* 77, p. 140).

Example of rebel with multiple geographical associations

Cho Myŏnggyu (趙命奎 *kyŏlan*) “His mother and father bore him in Yŏju (驪州, Kyŏnggi Province). Following this, his mother and father raised him in the same province” (*Yŏgok ch'uan* 76, p. 530).

Cho Myŏnggyu moved from Yŏju to Wŏnju (原州, Kangwŏn Province) (*Yŏgok ch'uan* 76, p. 479). Cho Myŏnggyu went to live together with Han Sehong in Wŏnju (*Yŏgok ch'uan* 76, p. 434).

Appendix 2. Methodology for determining geographical association

While analysing records of interrogations, the focus was on identifiable fully named individuals rather than those known as Cho *ka* (趙哥, Cho so and so) from Yŏju. This usage clearly derives from rebel operational security – rebels often kept their given names secret from each other, used pseudonyms (*Yŏgok ch'uan* 76 p. 307) or used titles like *sŏbang* (書房, literally “husband”, in this case “Mr”) or *saengwŏn* (生員, Classics licentiate exam passer).

The focus was also on leading rebels and their associates, those who were interrogated, and those names revealed by rebels during interrogations.

Appendix 3. Example of regional groups

Location	Number of identifiable members	Location of meeting places	Links to rest of rebel organization	Internal leaders	Links within group
Ch'ungch'ōng Province one	Twelve	Ch'ungju 忠州	Min Paekhyo	Min Paekhyo	Dominated by the Yōhūng Min clan 驪興閔氏
		Capital	Min Wōnbo 閔元普	Min Wōnbo	
Ch'ungch'ōng Province two	Seven	Chiksan 稷山 Kwoesan 槐山	Cho Munbo 趙文普	Cho Munbo	Dominated by the Hanyang Cho clan 漢陽趙氏

Appendix 4. Identifiable geographical associations of Musin rebels as revealed in interrogations

Kyōnggi Province	140
Ch'ungch'ōng Province	42
Chōlla Province	49
Kyōngsang Province	33
Capital	20
Kangwōn Province	3
Associated with more than one area	34
Identifiable but unknown locations	14
Total rebels	335

When rebels associated with one area are added to rebels associated with more than one area:

Associated with Kyōngsang Province and elsewhere = 13

Total Kyōngsang Province = 46

Associated with Chōlla Province and elsewhere = 4

Total Chōlla Province = 53

Associated with Ch'ungch'ōng Province and elsewhere = 11

Total Ch'ungch'ōng Province = 53

Associated with Kyōnggi Province and elsewhere = 19

Kyōnggi Province = 159