

《論 文》

韓国政治における地域主義の展開

—政府エリートの構成と地域差別を中心に—

尹 敬 勳

History of Regionalism in South Korean Politics

—Focusing on an analysis of the composition of the government elites by Region—

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キーワード

Korean politics (韓国政治), Regionalism (地域主義), the regional discrimination in recruitment of government elites (官僚登用と地域差別)

I. Introduction

Former President Kim Dae-jung, a towering figure in South Korea's struggle for democracy and the 2000 Nobel Peace Prize winner for seeking rapprochement with the communist North, died on "August 18, 2009, at the age of 85."¹⁾ Kim was a symbolic politician who campaigned for regionalism in the politics of the Republic of Korea, because his main political base was Honam district (Jeolla-do and the southwestern part of Korea). Therefore, the issue of regionalism governed his political life. Regionalism is also the most significant issue in the political history of South Korea.²⁾

In fact, the issue of regionalism has existed at every age and in every country. However, it has been a particularly serious social and political problem in South Korea. This is because it created conflicts between Honam and the other districts, and the government's policies for national development could not be promoted efficiently. Therefore, the problem of regionalism should be solved as soon as possible.³⁾

This paper aims to understand the causes of regionalism in Korea by considering the social context surrounding it. However, because the concept of regionalism study is broad, this paper focuses on explaining why people originating from Honam district were not included in the government elite. The problem of discrimination in recruiting the government's elite has been chosen because it creates a socio-economic divide between districts. However, the paper will first explain the history or origin of regionalism.

II. The origin of regional conflict

Previous studies have generally discussed the origin of regionalism from the "Korea period."⁴⁾ Therefore, this chapter will state the history of regionalism from the Goryeo Dynasty (Koryō: 918-1392) a sovereign state established by King Taejo (Wang Geon).

As soon as the regency of King Taejo was established, he ordered the government guideline to be called "Hunyosipjo." In it, he stated the following:

If the people from Honam district participate in the government, they might provoke a state overturn and threaten national integration. In the past, they often rioted against the government. Therefore, although they are commoners who may not have been at default, they should no longer be appointed as officers of government.⁵⁾

In the study of regionalism, King Taejo's statements like the one above are considered the origin of regionalism. During the Goryeo dynasty, regionalism was mainly discussed as the regional discrimination problem surrounding bureaucrat appointment.⁶⁾ Regionalism in the Goryeo dynasty reinforced the royal authority in excluding the appointment of the Honam district people. However, the Goryeo dynasty was overthrown because political factionalism became a serious concern. Thereafter, Taejo Yi Seong-gye founded Chosun (July 1392–August 1910), a Korean sovereign state that lasted for approximately five centuries.⁷⁾

In the Chosun dynasty, regionalism emerged from the common people's revolt. The people had revolted because in bureaucrat appointment, special districts like Yeongnam district were concentrated on.⁸⁾ The people of Honam district were discriminated against in regional economy and development opportunities, as the bureaucrats from Yeongnam and other districts gained power by excluding them. Regional discrimination against Honam district's people served to strengthen their prejudice toward the government. Thus, regionalism in the latter period of the Chosun dynasty manifested itself in frequent revolts by the people, which was the result of national power. In this situation, an imperialistic wave spread internationally and the Korean Peninsula was swallowed by it. In

short, the Chosun dynasty became a Japanese colony in 1905.

The movement of population increased during the Japanese colonization, as the Government-General of Chosun developed infrastructure like railways and electronics. People then recognized the prejudice between districts, and the spirit of regionalism began to spread throughout the Korean Peninsula.

However, the Chosun people promoted independence from Japanese colonization in order to escape the pressure of the Chosun Government-General. As the people's resistance was strong, the Chosun Government-General used the strategy of promoting regionalism to cause dissension between Yeongnam and Honam and divide the Chosun people. For instance, wealthy men from Honam district left a group that was working toward the independence movement. On the other hand, wealthy men in Yeongnam district were detained by the police of the Government-General of Chosun. Thus, regionalism at that time was stronger than during the Chosun dynasty.⁹⁾

Since the Korean peninsula was liberated from Japanese colonization, on August 15, 1945, the Korean peninsula has unfortunately been divided into two nations: North Korea and South Korea. South Korea was supported by US General headquarters (GHQ), who realized that the Honam area had many left-wing supporters and therefore mainly chose the people of Yeongnam for important government posts. Thus, regionalism in South Korea was prevalent from that time onwards, as the Yeongnam people managed to obtain important government posts.

The next chapter will consider the development of regionalism in South Korea post-1945, on the basis of the percentage of the Yeongnam district

elite occupying important government posts.

III. The consistence of the government elite and regionalism

The previous chapter presented the history of regionalism in South Korea. This chapter will address the composition of the government elite formulated by regional discrimination post-1945.

The Rhee Syngman government was established when he was elected to the seat of president at the First Assembly of South Korea on May 10, 1948 by a parliamentary vote after left-wing parties boycotted the election. As president, Rhee assumed dictatorial powers. In 1960, he assured his fourth term as president with a resounding 90% of the votes. However, he was determined to see his protégé Lee Gibung elected as the independent vice president—a separate office under Korean law at that time. When Rhee (who was running against Chang Myon, the ambassador to the United States during the Korean War) won the vote with an abnormally wide margin, the opposition claimed that the election was rigged. This triggered anger among segments of the Korean populace and the student-led “April 19 Movement” forced Rhee to resign on April 26. President Rhee fled South Korea and the government collapsed.

While the government had regency, the government’s elite were mainly appointed according to President Rhee’s personal choice. As Rhee was a strong conservative and continued practicing the bureaucratic system of Japanese colonization, he espoused the political ideology of conservatism and reappointed the elite from the Japanese colonization. As a result, his appointment of the elite was not influenced by regionalism but by the political ideology of

conservatism.¹⁰⁾

However, the issue of regionalism appeared again during Park Chung-hee’s presidency. President Park promoted an economic development policy with strong political power. However, his technique of politics involved acquiring political support by pressuring people and creating political conflicts between Yeongnam and Honam. To obtain political power, he appointed people born in Yeongnam as the government elite.¹¹⁾ Specifically, 2 out of 6 executive secretaries and 14 out of 31 secretaries of the Blue House were born in the Yeongnam area.¹²⁾ This shows that President Park intended to reinforce his political power by strengthening his staff’s loyalty.

In fact, the government consisting of Yeongnam elite promoted economic development policy by regional discrimination. For example, the “heavy chemical industry” was promoted in the Yeongnam area, and the “agricultural industry” was promoted in the Honam area. With the promotion of economic development policy by regionalism, people started to recognize that regionalism directly influenced their lives. The Honam people expressed their opposition against the Park government’s dictatorship and discriminatory policy by extending their support to Kim Dae-jung during the elections. The Park government, which was nervous about the outcome of the elections strengthened its dictatorial rule and appointed more bureaucrats from the Yeongnam area. The practice of appointing the government elite and adopting an economic development policy on the basis of regionalism continued in the next government as well.

President Chun Doo-hwan succeeded the Park government. He was also a military officer who had graduated from the eleventh

class of the Korea Military Academy in 1955. Additionally, he was a member of Hanahoe—a powerful private group of military officers that supported his actions. The members of Hanahoe mainly consisted of military officers who were born in Yeongnam, and General Chun Doo-hwan was supported as president because the group’s members planned for a political reform after President Park’s death.

Chun was elected as Park’s successor by the National Conference for Unification. In February 1981, he was elected president under a revised constitution as a candidate of the Democratic Justice Party, since he had resigned from the army. After the establishment of President Chun’s government, the secretaries of the Blue House were appointed by the elite of the Yeongnam area. The reason for this is related to the Gwangju massacre. The Gwangju massacre was a mass uprising from May 18 to May 27, 1980, in the city of Gwangju, South Korea. During this period, the citizens rose up against Chun Doo-hwan’s military dictatorship and took control of the city. In the course of the uprising, they took up arms to defend themselves but were crushed by the South Korean army. The event is sometimes called “518,” in reference to the date on which the uprising began.

At the time of the uprising, many politicians were arrested, including the opposition’s left-wing liberal politician Kim Dae-jung. As Kim Dae-jung was a popular politician in the Honam area, the Honam people’s hostility

toward the Chun government increased. Thus, regionalism in the case of Chun’s government could be analyzed in two respects.

The first is that the government elite consisted of the Yeongnam elite.¹⁴⁾

The second is that the Chun government excluded the Honam people in the appointment of elites and adoption of economic development policy, and they pressured or arrested the politicians from the Honam area. For both these reasons, regionalism became a serious political issue during Chun’s presidency.

Roh Tae-woo, a member of Hanahoe, achieved political power when he obtained the seat of president after the fall of the governments of Park and Chun. His government still faced the political problem of regionalism. The reason was that the government continued to exclude the Honam area in terms of economic development, and the secretaries of the government were mainly from the Yeongnam area.¹⁵⁾ Therefore, regionalism remained a serious problem, as the Roh Tae-woo government continued implementing the policies of the Chun government.

As shown in the table below, the main reason for regionalism was the discriminative appointment of the government elite based on regionalism. Further, the composition of the government elite by regionalism led to regional inequalities in economic development.

With the establishment of Kim Young-sam’s government, there was the possibility of solving the regionalism problem. The trend of governments led by military personnel had

Table 1: Composition of the government elite since 1948, by region

| District Government | Metro-politan Areas | Yeong-nam | Ho-nam | Chung-Cheong | Gang-won/Jeju | Others |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------|--------------|---------------|--------|
| Rhee Syngman | 33.2% | 18.8% | 6.2% | 16% | 6.5% | 25.8% |
| Yun Boseon | 16.3% | 25.5% | 16.3% | 16.3% | 1.0% | 24.6% |
| Park Chung-hee | 14.1% | 30.1% | 13.2% | 13.9% | 7.7% | 21% |
| Chun Doo-hwan | 18% | 43.6% | 9.6% | 13.5% | 5.1% | 10.2% |
| Roh Tae-woo | 19.7% | 40.9% | 12.7% | 13.4% | 5.8% | 7.5% |

ended, and a government led by civilians was established in 1992. Kim Young-sam's government planned to solve the regionalism problem. His government enthusiastically appointed talent from the Honam area to clearly indicate the difference from the previous military government's policies.¹⁶⁾ The table below presents the composition of the government elite in Kim Young-sam's government.

From the tables above, we see that in the previous military governments, the average percentage of government elites from the Honam area was 11.4%. This figure increased to 22% in Kim Young-sam's government. This is proof of the Kim Young-sam government's plan to solve the regionalism problem. The next government was headed by Kim Dae-jung. As it was supported by the Honam area residents who were earlier excluded from social and economic development, the character of regionalism changed. The change in the composition of the government elite is the perfect illustration for this. In the Kim Dae-jung government, the percentage of secretaries from the Yeongnam area and Honam area was 24.1% and 27.6%, respectively.¹⁸⁾ Therefore, the percentage of government elite from the Honam area exceeded that from the Yeongnam area. This is very significant. Although, the Kim Young-sam government served to ease the regionalism problem, it emerged as a significant problem again in the Kim Dae-jung government.

The Roh Moo-hyun government that succeeded the Kim Dae-jung government insisted on a solution for the regionalism problem. However, the percentage of government elites from the Yeongnam area increased in the Roh Moo-hyun government, as seen in the table below. The main reason is that President Roh Moo-hyun and his secretaries were born in Yeongnam. Thus, the trend of regionalism in appointing the elite from Yeongnam to important government positions continued.

IV. The reconsideration of regionalism in South Korea

When discussing regionalism in Korean society, it is important to consider the regional background of the government elites, because this influences the distribution of social and economic benefits. In other words, regional background differences influence differences in the social and economic profits of regions. Thus, owing to the regional background differences in the government elite, regionalism can be said to considerably influence socio-economic profit.²⁰⁾ The role of the government elite in regionalism can be analyzed from the following three points.

First, policy making by the government elite follows the traditional structure of the paterfamilias rule, and therefore, the people are forced to follow the president's policy decisions.

Table 2: Composition of the government elite in Kim Young-sam's government¹⁷⁾

| District Government | Metro-politan Areas | Yeong-nam | Honam | Chung-Cheong | Gangwon/Jeju | Others |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| Kim Young-sam | 23.6% | 34.4% | 22.0% | 13.5% | 4.1% | 4.4% |

Table 3: Comparison of the hometown areas of the present and former government elites¹⁹⁾

| District Government | Metro-politan Areas | Yeong-nam | Ho-nam | Chung-Cheong | Gang-won/Jeju | Persons |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Roh Moo-hyun | 32 (18.4%) | 70 (40.2%) | 38 (21.8%) | 20 (11.5%) | 14 (8.0%) | 174 |
| Lee Myung-bak | 33 (21.0%) | 55 (35.1%) | 29 (18.5%) | 25 (15.9%) | 15 (9.5%) | 157 |

As a result, a policy decision by the government elite is regarded as the president's policy decision, which is similar to the traditional importance of the father of the household. This played an important role in the social distribution in Korean society.

Second, the appointment of the government elite based on their regional backgrounds is not the problem. The problem is that regionalism based on the structure of the paterfamilias rule in Korean society influenced the appointment of the government elite.

Therefore, third, the problem of regionalism has a double structure. In other words, there is a reason for which people who had the same regional background were selected as the government elite. However, from the above analysis, it can be said that there is an essential reason for the structure of the paterfamilias rule in Korean society.

In summary, it can be understood that the regionalism problem is double-structured because of the paterfamilias rule in Korean society and the composition of the government elite.

V. Conclusion

This paper showed that regionalism is a serious problem in Korean politics and that the main cause is the appointment of government elites who have the same regional background as the president. For example, Willson mentioned that it strengthens the union and political power of a group so that it cannot be excluded from a social mainstream group.²¹⁾

However, this paper presents another point of view, that regionalism originated from the traditional structure of the paterfamilias rule, which is why people are forced to follow the president's policy decision. Therefore, regional-

ism is caused by the traditional social structure of the Korean society government and not by the appointment of government elites according to their regional background. Regionalism in Korean politics can be considered a double-structured problem because of the paterfamilias rule in Korean society and the composition of the government elite.

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