COALITION THEORIES AND THE DYNAMICS OF COALITION PARTY POLITICS IN JAPAN AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

YOUNG-MI KIM
UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Introduction

Debates on the causes of coalition (in)stability date back to more than a century ago; coalition governments have at times been referred to as "structurally weak and unstable" (Lowell, 1896), whereas others (Lijphart, 1994; Rokkan, 1970; Sartori, 1976) have repeatedly emphasised that "multi-party coalition systems are not necessarily unstable and ineffective". Coalition-building has been seen as coming out of bargaining and compromise between political parties, often as a strategy to achieve electoral success. Research on the relationship between political parties and coalition-building has mainly privileged coalition-building *among* parties and government formation, rather than exploring how the parties' internal dynamics influence the stability of the coalition itself, and how this affects policy performance.

Searching for causes of instability, scholars have traditionally focused on issues of coalition size, or government duration and termination, and typically in parliamentary systems. This, however, does not tell us much of the cases of minority governments or even oversized governments. Italy and Japan, for instance, well illustrate the case where a party's longevity in office (Christian Democracy Party and Liberal Democratic Party) has been also characterised by the continuous 'making and breaking' of governments. In sum, a size-centred approach (such as minimal winning coalition theories) seems to neglect important dimensions of coalition governments, in particular intra-party dynamics, namely the negotiations that take place between political factions and power groups *within*, rather than outside, the political party.

Examples of coalition governments that are stable in terms of duration and size, but unstable through internal factionalism (i.e. Korea, Japan), would hardly fit into the theoretical frameworks designed to explain Western/Western European cases. One of

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the main problems with coalition studies lies in the uncontrolled comparisons of large samples of cabinets. Most data used for existing cross-country studies are actually overused and outdated. Single or small-N comparison case studies (N signifying the number of cases under investigation) should occupy a more central place. In fact, De Winter *et al*. (2002) argue that the weakest part of coalition research lies in the lack of 'thick' descriptions (in-depth qualitative studies) and that explanations using mathematical expression predominate.

This paper discusses coalition politics in Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). First the 'fission and fusion' of political parties and factions in Japan are reviewed through the lens of minimal winning coalition theories. Second, the Korean case is introduced as it raises a series of questions about (1) the applicability of coalition theories to minority coalition governments, (2) presidential systems and (3) non-Western settings. The paper will then argue that research should go beyond the size of government, government type or party system as explanatory factors of government stability or instability. When parties build coalitions to win office, government stability may be dependent on intra-party mechanisms, the cultural and historical legacy of Confucianism, regionalism, personal networks and the degree of party institutionalisation.

With reference to the situation in Europe, coalition-building is defined by Laver and Schofield (1990:2) as "the interaction between legislative and executive power when no one party wins a majority of seats and the interaction is the essence of the politics of coalition in Europe." In a recent work on West European political systems, moreover, Müller and Strøm (2000) have pointed out that 13 of the 16 major parliamentary governments have built coalitions to win office. In other words, more than 90 per cent of majority governments built coalitions in the postwar era.[1] Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the spread of democracy to Latin America, the politics of coalition-building have extended well beyond Western political systems. The politics of coalition have recently 'spread' to East Asia—Korea, Taiwan and Japan—as well.

Japan

Japan has been an exception for scholars because of its long history of coalition-building in contrast to other countries in East Asia. Along with Italy, Japan has often provided an exceptional case of coalition-building with a high flux of fission and fusion; but within the context of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), its longevity has allowed it to survive in the longest terms of office, and the building of coalitions between factions within the governing party has been more common than between the party and other parties. Since democratisation, the ROK has added another case of coalition-building with high rates of defections. As coalition theories are mainly elaborated on data taken from Western settings, cases like Japan and the ROK do not

easily fit into existing coalition theories. As a consequence, looking at the two cases of Japan and the ROK will help to identify what the existing coalition theories can explain and what possible variables are to be added to explain and understand the dynamics of coalition-building.

The fission and fusion of political parties and factions have been the main feature of party politics in Japan. Except for the period from 1993 to 1994, the LDP has regularly been the ruling party. Despite constantly dealing with a high level of factionalism it has managed to remain in power since 1955, although in the period since 1994 this has often involved the building of a coalition with one or more other political parties. To explain the puzzle of 'high instability out of stability', scholars have applied rational choice theory, relaxing the assumption of the party as a unitary actor, and have looked at a party or faction with office- or policy-motivated behaviour and at the level of institutionalisation.

On the basis of office-seeking theory with non-unitary actors in the dynamics of party politics, Laver and Kato (2001) focus on the making and breaking of governments in Japan. Through the lens of minimal winning coalition theories, these two authors first relax the assumption of the party as a unitary actor and try to explain the splits and comings together of party members or factions. In the case of minimal winning coalition theory, if one party defects, the winning coalition will lose; on the other hand, if a party receives defectors either from other parties or from former members of coalitions, a winning status will be assured. It is also important to be reminded that minimal winning status mainly implies either a bare majority, or majority status. If we consider a party as a non-unitary actor, there are many potential defectors or factions acting within a party. Therefore, the independent party members or factions will ultimately seek to win office or to implement a specific policy or set of policies, as their own rational choice leads to and moves around the party system. As they join or split with parties, the political actors will try to maximise their bargaining position with each one's own rational choice. If actors defect from a coalition party, the winning coalition will lose, but if a coalition party attracts more defectors from other parties or factions the winning coalition will maintain its winning status. Therefore actors' behaviour will be dependent on the cost and benefit of making or breaking the government. The same situation based on benefit and cost concerned will apply to the coalition parties that attract defectors and lose actors.

Laver and Kato provide a solid explanation with regard to the rational choices of defectors in Japan. One of the main features of Japanese politics is the presence of a predominant one-party system over the long term. In terms of coalition building, Japanese politics can be divided in two periods: from 1955 to 1993 and from 1994 to the present. The previous coalitions were often built among five factions within the LDP, and in the later period the LDP built a coalition with the socialist party to win back government after being defeated by the non-LDP coalitions in 1993. The LDP managed

to handle the political crisis by forming a coalition with two other parties in 1994 and won back governing power. Focusing on internal party splits and fusion, Laver and Kato examine gains in synergy from party fusion and fission. In contrast to other coalition parties, the LDP has remained a predominantly one-party system since 1955 except for a few years of retreat in 1993 and 1994. Therefore, coalitions were mainly built within the party among five or six factions until 1993 and with other parties since 1994.

Although the LDP has remained in power as a ruling party for almost half of last century, "15 different prime ministers presided over 48 Japanese cabinets formed between 1955 and 1993, whose average duration was 9.4 months" (Bouissou 2001: 581). The constant cabinet reshuffles and re-allotment of cabinet portfolios weakened the executive power of the party and provided fundamental instability. It is obvious that high rates of reshuffling and re-allocation of cabinet portfolios will result in an unstable policy performance and this will also affect government stability. In a previous study, Laver and Underhill (1982, cited Laver and Kato 2001) argue that generic incentives for party fusion may attract more defectors when it is not a major party. For the authors, two kinds of decisive structure would bring stability when there is no possibility of party fusion and fission in terms of synergy gains. One is having two parties relatively equal in terms of size—the two share nearly half of the seats. This means that the two parties do not ensure synergy gains for defectors through splitting and joining other parties. The other structure is a single majority party controlling all the bargaining and small parties with no bargaining power. As neither case would yield many synergy gains for defectors, the two types are more stable than other structures in a legislature. However, considering that a single majority party with absolute bargaining power has not often been found in recent democratic political arenas, these cases for stability sound fairly unrealistic.

In the case of intra-party politics in Japan, Laver and Kato (2001) develop further research including a minority government case. They discuss the generic incentives for party splits that are derived from both majority and non-majority parties. Taking the case of Japan in terms of office-seeking theory with non-unitary actors, they argue that a near majority or a bare majority attracts more defectors and that the synergies from the fission or fusion produce mutual gains for both defectors and the party receiving the defectors. For Laver and Kato, when the party does not reach near majority or bare majority status, the small party cannot yield enough incentives for fission and fusion. In other words, the incentives from fission and fusion can only be productive and fulfilling when the party can reach a near majority or a bare majority so that the party can win a threshold position in the legislature or ally with other small parties. However, if small parties are to build a coalition, this has to be big enough to challenge the majority party, otherwise the incentives for defectors who join the small party will not be enough to satisfy those defectors and they would then be attracted again to go back to their old party or defect from the small party to find

bigger incentives. It is fairly rational for them to seek bigger incentives to meet their ultimate aim, either office, policy, or votes in the future.

This high flux of legislators in party politics may bring generic instability. To secure ruling power the LDP extended its willingness to compromise, relinquishing a considerable portion of its own executive power to its coalition partners or to members of the partner factions. Presenting 12 different party systems from July 1993 to October 1999, Laver and Kato (2001) explain the dynamic flux of bargaining power among parties as defectors join and split parties. The authors applied the Shapley-Shubik index to measure each party's bargaining power. According to the table, the LDP faced a dramatic decline in its bargaining power from 0.69 in July 1993 to 0.37 in January 1995. Considering its number of seats decreased from 223 in 1993 to 208 in 1996, the decrease in bargaining power needed some other explanation than mere size in seats. Laver and Kato argue that decreased bargaining power was due to the emergence of the New Frontier Party (NFP) as the second largest party with 176 seats. The NFP had gradually grown from non-LDP coalition parties since 1993 when the Sakigake faction defected from the LDP and formed a coalition with the Japan Renewal Party (JRP). In dealing with this big opposition party, the LDP had less bargaining power; meanwhile, the third biggest party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), gained increased bargaining power from 0.058 in 1993 to 0.283 in 1995. The remarkable point is that the SDP did not extend its size in terms of numbers of seats, as it had 70 in 1993 and exactly the same number in 1995, but gained increased power to negotiate with coalition partners. The emerging threat of the opposition party meant that the SDP could enjoy increased bargaining power within the coalition. However, the NFP's position as the second biggest party did not last more than three years as it suffered defections. In 1998, the NFP was scattered among the LDP, the Democratic Party (DP), the Peace Party and the Liberal Party 2 (LP2). With this dramatic flux the LDP was able to secure a threshold majority and enjoyed solid bargaining power, as the Shapley-Shubik power index indicates, from 1998 to 1999.

Laver and Kato explain how, after the elections in 1996, the LDP with 239 seats—which represents a near majority out of a total of 500 seats—became very attractive to defectors from other parties. As the LDP has more possibility, by gaining defectors from other parties, to become a threshold majority party, it is in a position to yield synergy gains for both defectors joining the party and also the rest of the LDP members as the party enjoys the benefit from the defectors. The more defectors the LDP receives from other parties the higher possibility it has to win a majority. Therefore, when the party achieves the status of a near majority party, it becomes more attractive to other legislators, encouraging them to defect from their parties and join the LDP.

As a consequence, this still means more shares to offer to the new defectors. The shares can be office seats in executive positions, a potential premiership or policy allocations that will secure their future votes from satisfied voters. Considering the high

frequency of fission and fusion among the number of defectors, this means a high flux of executive seats, reshuffled cabinets and widened policy portfolio. Such activity actually makes it impossible for the government to implement every single portfolio in their agreement and this failure will again lead to potential disagreement and dissatisfaction among legislators or coalition partners. That irritation will continue to lead to future defections. The problem is that this flux in the party system is endemic. To stem this continuous flux, Laver and Kato advance the possibility of blocking defectors by law from coming back to the old party once they have left institutionally. If the parties were to refuse to accept back those who had previously defected from them, this would allegedly bring more stability. If there were a rule preventing defectors from rejoining the party they previously left, this would reduce the high level of flux by limiting defectors' opportunities. It is a very different case from European countries where, once party members leave, their parties are not willing to forgive them or accept them back.

If the party is small and far behind a near majority in size, it cannot produce sufficient incentives capable of satisfying both defectors to it and its own party members. The result is less shares for every legislator in the party, as a small party cannot create synergy gains. As the Shapley-Shubik power index shows with the case of the LDP in 1996, when a party has a near majority or a bare majority, the synergy gains it creates are greater than the actual increase in numbers. Therefore, according to Laver and Kato, the small party could not produce enough benefits to satisfy as it showed increased numbers of defectors joining the LDP after the election result in 1996. The LDP won 239 out of a total of 500 total seats, which is a near majority; the second largest party, the NFP, got 156, the third largest party, the DP, had 52 and the fourth largest party, the SDP, gained 15 seats. As a result, defectors were more attracted again to the near majority party and the small parties were constrained by losing defectors to other parties. As the LDP, in near majority status, had the greatest attraction for defectors, it actually gained the most defectors and won 265 in 1999, reaching more than the threshold majority.

This research tends to overlook the case of small minority ruling parties as attractors of potential defectors. In fact, the near-majority or bare-majority lure cannot explain why minority ruling governments still attract many defectors and minority governments are not always unstable. Defectors might move around for the sake of actual power rather than possible size with potential bargaining power. In other words, defectors will be attracted even to a minority government if it offers greater benefit than the party they belong to. In July 1998 election the LDP fell far short of a threshold majority but swiftly allied with Komeito the third largest party, and with the LP, the fourth largest party, to secure its ruling position. Komeito gained much more bargaining power with a crucial leverage role and on the other hand the DP, the second largest party, remained alienated. With this coalition agreement in 1999 the LP and Komeito managed to attain one ministerial position each; however, this coalition

lasted only six months. The LP defected, and then the LDP swiftly allied with Komeito and a newly formed conservative party which was a splinter party of the LP. The LDP gained a majority through the coalition. However, on its own the LDP remained far below the majority threshold. The very recent phenomenon of the LDP as a minority party could not be sufficiently explained. The main work of Laver and Kato focused on a near-majority or a bare-majority party, assuming that such parties are more attractive to defectors as they can create synergy incentives for both defectors and the parties accepting the defectors and that therefore, the whole body of party members can enjoy greater benefit from the fusion. Laver and Kato have opened the possibility for future work on the subject, looking at the dynamics of the minority ruling party.

To sum up, if Laver and Kato's research into the politics of coalition in Japan is extremely important and insightful, it still appears to neglect two aspects of coalition-building. First, the incentives created by fission and fusion do not seem to provide a clear explanation. To what extent can the incentives be explained in exact numbers? Is it actually possible to explain the cost of changing policy or executive seats in numbers? Though the precise numbers of incentives were calculated in the highly scientific methods that the Shapley-Shubik index devised in 1954, it might miss some parts that cannot actually be calculated in numbers. This does not explain why some actors do not 'move around' for their own individual rational ends but simply out of loyalty to factions or leaders. In coalition theories what is needed is a thick description with a fundamental understanding of cultural, historical and social perspectives. Second, incentives are assumed to be bigger when fission and fusion operate for at least a near- or a bare-majority party. This does not explain the recent LDP case that resulted in a minority party remaining far behind the majority threshold without building coalitions. Therefore, research within a rational choice framework still limits itself with minimal winning coalition theories as it still clings to the idea of a majority threshold. Minority government seems inevitable in modern democratic countries (as it represents various groups of people with different ideologies, values and cultures). This needs to be considered in a multi-dimensional space rather than clinging to size itself.

Considering inter-party politics and interaction between coalition party members, Bouissou (2001) provides a thick description of party factions and coalitions under the 1955 system in Japan in terms of internal party competition. Japan as well as Italy has often been characterised by a long-lived government, frequent cabinet reshuffles and a high flux of fission and fusion. It has long been puzzling how both states retain such record-breaking long terms in power out of such high cabinet instability. On average, an Italian government lasted ten months and the Christian Democracy party governed between 1944 and 1994 (Bouissou 2001:556). As mentioned earlier, the case of Japan is analogous; there the average duration of cabinets was 9.4 months between 1955 and 1993 (ibid:581). The question arises here of how both governments were able to sustain the high cost of reshuffling cabinets and re-allotting cabinet portfolios.

Bouissou explores internal party politics and observes that "the consequent weakening of the executive power cannot have been seen as having imposed a heavy cost … And the cost was successfully managed" (2001:581). Looking at the historical and cultural factors, the LDP dates back to 1955 and started by having many different *habatsu*, or factions. In the early period of faction studies, Michael Leiserson started off by exploring factions in Japan in 1968 and provided remarkable data on the inter-relationship among factions and leaders, explaining the situation in terms of bargaining propositions with minimal winning coalitions. He argued that if the smallest numbers of actors join a coalition it can more efficiently reach agreement (Leiserson 1968). The LDP has in the main five factions, besides the early period of the system of 1955. Generally, two dominant factions participating in coalition control relatively more bargaining power than the rest. The habatsu do not execute policy, but play their main role in recruitment and the allotment of incentives. In other words they recruit potential candidates for forthcoming elections or help to get existing legislators re-elected, raise funding through negotiations with business organisations and support the campaign during election time. The habatsu are less interested in government policies but represent a solely office-motivated, uni-dimensional actor. In comparison with party coalitions in West European countries, the share of incentives is quite disproportional and the dominant party in a coalition might have a large share of benefits and, as the dominant party in a uni-dimensional space, stay at the core.

However, Bouissou (2001) points out there is no domination of the core group in terms of proportional shares. The coalition does not share out equally in proportion to the numbers within a faction, but each faction's share is very proportional. In other words, the system is highly institutionalised in terms of proportions of incentives. The dominant faction will have more chances to provide the prime minister from its own ranks and in doing so the habatsu can raise more funds from business organisations or from other funding sources such as Buddhist groups, the Komei party or the Farmers organisation. If a habatsu has a small portion of shares it can still benefit from policy allotment. However, with the very proportional division of shares, the cabinet executive seats including the premiership have to be shared in turn.

When the Sato-Tanaka-Obuchi *ha* (lineage) built a coalition, they shared the premiership in turn for twenty years, even though each ha provided different prime ministers from their own factions. This resulted in an extremely high level of reshuffling. While the habatsu exercised post-sharing, the cabinet, the leadership and executive power were undermined. Policies were another victim of the proportioned sharing exercise. For instance, Sato was prime minister for nearly eight years, from 1964 to 1972, with notable longevity; however, a series of fierce fights among factions resulted in a yearly re-allocation of cabinet and party posts. Sato therefore paid a high cost in cabinet instability and took a long-term ruling position in return.

In terms of cost, Bouissou raises the question of why ruling governments tolerate

such high-cost coalitions. The author offers an answer in terms of historically and culturally embedded clientelism focusing on sub-space factional relationships. Japan has deep roots of clientelism in what may be called the sub-space. The sub-space binds labour unions with the Socialist Party, the Buddhist sect Sokagakkai with Komeito, and the agricultural cooperatives and over 500,000 building and public works companies with the conservative sub-space (Woodall 1996, cited in Bouissou 2001). As the LDP comprises factions, support from the sub-space through the habatsu and the pay-off with position and policy allotment are inevitable. Bouissou explains how the power triangle of the political and economic decision-making process is engaged between the LDP, the *zaikai* (the big business establishment) and the bureaucracy. The incorporation of these three allows them to enjoy a huge amount of resources. 'Sacrifices' by the ruling party (required by coalition-building among factions) may seem puzzling, as it appears that the LDP is paying an extremely high price in terms of cabinet instability. However, with an understanding of embedded clientelism, to the eyes of the LDP, at least, it is not costly. As Bouissou points out, "LDP politicians did not feel that they were 'giving away' their power to a 'foreigner'. Rather, they shared it with the co-managers of a strongly institutionalised and sympathetic community, whose smooth and efficient functioning was vital for the very survival of the politicians themselves" (2001:599).

The cost for the LDP was therefore not considered as high as it has appeared to outsiders. Bouissou, however, argues that this kind of cost leads to large-scale political damage. First, the subjugation of the decision-making role to the sub-space brings government instability, and politics becomes merely an arena of battle among office-seekers. The fearful internal fighting over stakes among factions damages the legitimacy of the ruling party. In the elections of 2000, many non-party legislators were elected and this shows that people are already very tired of watching the fights in the legislature. Finally, the LDP runs the ultimate risk of the break-up of the party as an ideological melting pot as some are close to other parties outside the coalition. If, for the sake of office, the party sacrifices policy by allocating as many portfolios as possible to the factions, this means a lack of possibility of implementing policies in the long term as the executive leaders are frequently changed with more unrealistic policy allotments. This makes it difficult for the party to satisfy voters in the future. If factions fight for office, this means the need to win elections by carrying out policies in favour of the majority of people. However, in reality, with the LDP sacrificing its executive power in the long term and its leadership, it secured a coalition for the party to remain in the ruling position. In doing so, the sub-space has been able to share out amounts of resources among the factions it supports. The LDP has been in power for more than a half a century. This means that only some privileged groups belonging to the sub-space have enjoyed the benefit of the state and the rest, with no connection to the sub-space, have been either ignored or isolated by the incentives the coalition government creates.

Overall the LDP factions share offices in turn. This means that if the party were to succeed in bringing about the end of coalition members fairly with institutionalised rules or by-laws, the cost of coalition could decrease remarkably in return for the dominant party remaining in ruling position. Coalition members would receive a fair benefit of the interest and the ruling party would remain in office. This might bring generic instability in terms of accomplishing policies or leadership. However, with the focus on office-driven theory, the ultimate end of politicians was achieved as they all remained in office for record-breaking terms.

The Republic of Korea

The puzzles over Japanese coalition politics have been explained with various approaches in the postwar era. However, making sense of government instability through existing theories has proved difficult in the case of the ROK. Since the start of democratisation,[2] coalition-building has been a constant phenomenon in every presidential election and a fundamental part of political and party life in Korea. Although it was widely unpopular for its continuous party merges and splits, coalition-building gradually moved the military regime to a process of bargaining and compromises. The then ruling party (Democratic Justice Party, hereafter DJP) merged in 1990 with two opposition parties: the Reunification Democratic Party (hereafter RDP) led by Kim Young-sam and the New Democratic Republican Party (hereafter NDRP) led by Kim Jong-pil. The three merged parties later renamed themselves as the Democratic Liberal Party and agreed to nominate Kim Young-sam as presidential candidate for the then approaching elections. The politics of coalition-building turned out to be successful and led to the electoral success of Kim Young-sam, who became the first non-military president after a long period of authoritarian military rule.

A second moment where coalition-building seemed to be decisive in Korea's political life was before the 1997 presidential elections, when the ruling party faced internal factions and the political environment was under mounting pressure from the outburst of the Asian financial crisis and the simultaneous condemnation by public opinion of the party's perceived inefficient governance. Kim Dae-jung, the leader of the opposition party, National Congress for New Politics (NCNP) entered an alliance with the United Liberal Democrats (ULD) led by Kim Jong-pil. After a life-long history as opposition leader in the 1960s, Kim Dae-jung finally became president. Since 1987, coalition-building has played a main role in determining electoral success in presidential election in the ROK. This might well become a permanent characteristic of the South Korean political system. A serious drawback, however, as will be shown later, is the fact that electoral success is no guarantee of effective governance or of stability either. As a matter of fact, stability has been constantly undermined by permanent factionalism internal to the coalition and to the parties themselves.

Coalition governments have often proved relatively stable. Among the few exceptions, Italy and Japan have traditionally featured as examples of unstable coalition politics. The ROK is now a 'new entry' in the list. Making sense of government instability in South Korea through existing coalition theories has been by and large insufficiently studied. When the three parties merged in 1990, Choi Jang-jip (1996) saw the merger as an application of 'transformism'. The concept of transformism or *trasformismo* derives from the behaviour of political elites in late 19th-century Italy. The legislature was dominated by elites and the minority party members strove to gain power by reaching a stable majority. In so doing the minority party actors are engaged in an informal patron-client system and were not ideologically stratified, lacking, as they did, strong social support. Competition between highly organised parties was absent.[3]

For Choi, Korean party politics are characterised as follows: on the ideological dimension, most parties tend to converge towards the right; regional cleavages dominate political life, and social movements tend to bypass political parties in relation to the executive. In fact, Choi points out that social movements triggered the breakdown of the old system of authoritarian government. However, political reform was accomplished from the top, by the political elites, not from the bottom by social movements, despite the latter playing a major role in the democratisation process.

As the opposition party leaders have strong regional support in their own home town, regionalism represents a fundamental social cleavage. When the parties did not have clear divisions in policy terms, the conservative elite factors came into conflict with progressive groups from the Honam region—the southwest part of Korea and an economically and politically marginalised rural area. Choi argues that the conservative hegemony permits the elites' 'fission and fusion' through *trasformismo* as they are corrupted by seeking their own political and personal advantage.

Another factor hindering Korea's democratisation is arguably its Confucian background. Strong leadership within the party, parochial ties and cronyism are characteristics of Confucianism. As a result of democratisation, the ROK faces divided government or a small ruling party. On the other hand, the elite groups, not yet democratised and less institutionalised, manipulate the size of the ruling party to avoid big opposition parties. Choi's research provides an insightful explanation of the dynamics of party politics in terms of social, cultural and historical perspectives. As a consequence, he sees intra-party politics through the lens of Korean culture and the context of the country's democratisation.

Kim Hee-min (1997) explains the three-party merger of 1990 through the rational choice of each party and discusses the coalition size in terms of a minimal winning coalition. Following democratisation in 1987, President Roh Tae-woo, the successor of the old authoritarian government, won power with only 125 seats out of 299. The ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) gained only 34 per cent of the votes, far below

the majority threshold. To secure the party's political power and leadership, President Roh explored the possibilities for a merger with the remaining three opposition parties. In consideration of regional homogeneity and similar ideological positions, the DJP merged with the New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP) with 35 seats and the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP) with 59 seats. The NDRP incorporated the former conservative party that had provided authoritarian government during Park Chung-hee's presidency, and the RDP is from the same region—Yongnam, the southeast part of Korea—as the DJP. The main coalition agreement among the three parties was to change the party system from a presidential to a parliamentary system. To pass constitutional amendments, a two-thirds majority of votes is required in the National Assembly. The party merger increased the ruling party's share, as it gained 222 seats out of a total of 299 seats.

Kim Hee-min explains this merger as a minimal winning coalition. If one of the coalition parties defects, the coalition party will lose its winning status that requires two-thirds of the total legislative seats to amend the constitutional law. In terms of size only, applying the concept of minimal winning coalition seems appropriate in explaining the coalition. The winning threshold to amend the law was achieved by party merger, but the coalition member Kim Young-sam, the next president in 1992, did not seem to be interested in changing the party system. The primary agreement of the coalition had been to change the party set-up from a presidential system to a parliamentary bi-cameral system; but after the coalition was formed, attempts to change the system faded away. If a parliamentary system had been the ultimate goal of the coalition, then one would have expected Kim Young-sam to have pushed for change in the political structure after achieving the more immediate goal of attracting party defectors. If the coalition was not aiming at legislative amendments, it did not have to reach two-thirds of the total seats. In terms of size, 222 out of 299 can be excessively large to consolidate party members and reach agreement efficiently. The 222 seats generated a surplus majority party. As a result, internal conflicts caused endless problems to be solved in the coalition government.

Existing research has suggested that a surplus party is less stable than a bare-majority party.[4] To secure internal cohesiveness and consolidation the coalition size should have been reduced to a bare majority or to one or two seats above the threshold. In other words, Riker's minimum winning coalition (Riker 1962) or Leiserson's bargain proposition theory (Leiserson 1968) might suggest that a more stable coalition government appears more likely to solve internal conflicts. In fact, the Korean coalition was built without influence from minimum winning coalition or bargaining proposition theories. In terms of minimum coalition theory, the size of the coalition should be 50 per cent plus one or two, and the bargaining proposition theory suggests that the smaller the number of parties joining the coalition the less potential conflict it contains. In such a scenario, the DJP should have built a coalition

with the NDRP. Both parties were heirs to presidents in the authoritarian period—the NDRP was linked to President Park Chung-hee after his military coup and the DJP to President Chun Doo-hwan—and the NDRP also leant ideologically to the conservative sector. If the DJP had built a coalition with the NDRP, their total seats would have been the 125 of the DJP plus the 35 of the DJP: in other words, 160 seats out of 299. This figure would appear closest to the predicted number for a minimal or minimum winning coalition. Minimum coalition theory requires 50 per cent plus one or two seats. This means that the coalition parties' number of seats should be 150 or 151. If the DJP had joined with further parties, the size of the coalition would have reached a surplus majority. Considering that cabinet instability has been a main feature, a surplus majority coalition appears unfeasible. Given this, for the DJP to join the NDRP might have been the best option as they both converged on the right end of the political spectrum, shared a similar history and views and displayed anti-democratic sentiments among their members, heirs of the authoritarian regime legacy.

Considering that in terms of size the Party for Peace and Democracy (PDP) led by Kim Dae-jung and the RDP are also similar, they would be expected to form a coalition according to minimum winning coalition or bargaining proposition theory. Both parties fought against authoritarian regimes for more than three decades. Yet the actual coalition was formed by the RDP, the NDRP and the DJP. On the basis of rational choice, the merger in reality was puzzling. The merger of the three parties in 1990 can be explained by minimal winning coalition on a theoretical level. However, this does not explain why the coalition parties could not achieve their main goal of agreement in practice. Was it only to win office? Was it really to change to a cabinet system? Minimal winning coalition theory does not explain intra-party politics. Although Kim Hee-min (1997) looks at the preferences of political actors, the party merger can be studied in terms of many different aspects such as divided government, the leader's individual rational choice or lack of institutionalisation in party politics right after democratisation. The aesthetics of numbers does not explain the socially and culturally embedded or historical factors and why three parties merged and not two, as discussed above. Kim explains ideological and regional closeness among the three parties; however, he overlooks two important factors: time and the political system. The merger came right after democratisation, which itself followed a long experience of authoritarian regimes.

According to Park Chan-pyo (1999), rational choice theory based on size does not explain why the number of defectors from political parties dramatically increased after democratisation. From the sixth to the twelfth National Assembly elections the flux rate of defectors who joined the major party was under 6.5 per cent during the authoritarian regimes; however, between the thirteenth and fourteenth National Assembly elections the rate of increase in the major party's number of seats was 30.9

per cent (from 41.8 per cent in 1988 to 71.8 per cent in 1991) (Park 1999:14). The rate of seats held by the major party increased by 9.4 per cent between the fourteenth and the early fifteenth National Assembly elections, and during President Kim Dae-jung's administration, seat numbers of the major party increased from 41.1 per cent to 53.3 per cent from 1998 to 1999. The flux rate of defectors toward the major parties was 12.4 per cent (ibid:12).

Park argues that this high flux rate of defectors can be explained by institutional factors when electoral democracy started. He suggests that electoral democracy under the presidential system brought a 'divided government' facing a big opposition party and that parties are strongly supported on a regional basis. Another factor to explain the puzzle, as Park points out, is the different electoral period for parliamentary members and the president. Parliamentary members are elected every four years and the president every five years. The different electoral terms systematically bring a negative effect for the ruling party to govern as the party can receive either more or less support from the public. This means that the ruling party's seat numbers will affect the government's ability to implement its policies. Where the ruling party becomes smaller in terms of legislative seat numbers, the government has to struggle with big oppositions. Then the ruling party either has to build a coalition to remain in power or secure future electoral votes, or has to attract more defectors from other parties by offering greater benefits in order to gain more seats in the legislature. This will also bring instability for the government. To remain in a ruling position the government may offer more positions or benefits to defectors from other parties, who may have different policy or ideology orientations. This means the share of the power or benefit for the ruling party gets smaller and also brings the possibility for more conflicts of interest among the ruling party members, as Axelrod (1970) contends. Therefore institutional factors and intra-party politics need to be taken into account in order to provide a more insightful explanation of the high flux of defectors and coalition-building.

As democratisation became consolidated, voters' preferences split along regional lines. Even though the two parties won office after building a coalition, the government reached far less than a majority threshold and faced a large opposition party. When Kim Dae-jung became president in 1998, NCNP, the president's party, had 77 seats (26.3 per cent) out of a total of 293 seats, his coalition partner, the ULD, had 43 seats (14.7 per cent), and the opposition Grand National Party with (GNP) had 161 (54 per cent). Combining the two ruling coalition parties, the coalition government had 120 seats (41 per cent) out of 293, which is still far below a majority.

As already seen, Laver and Kato (2001), working on the case of Japan in terms of office-seeking theory with non-unitary actors, argue that a near majority or a bare majority attracts more defectors, and the synergies from fission or fusion produces mutual gains for both defectors and the party receiving defectors. When the party

does not obtain a near majority or a bare majority, the small party cannot yield enough incentives for fission and fusion. In light of Laver and Kato's argument in term of size, the opposition party—the GNP—should be more attractive than smaller parties. In fact, fission and fusion did materialise in the ROK, and within six months after President Kim took office, the ruling parties (NCNP and ULD) gained 105 seats and 55 seats respectively and achieved a majority government with 160 seats (Son 1999:5). However, this research overlooks the case of a small minority ruling party as attractive to potential defectors. In fact, the attraction of a near majority or a bare majority cannot explain why minority ruling governments still attract many defectors and why minority governments are not always unstable. Defectors might move around for reasons of actual power rather than for possible size with potential bargaining power. They are myopic office-seekers. In other words, defectors will be attracted to the minority government, if there is any better benefit in the ruling party than in the party they belong to.

In the case of the ROK, many defectors from the largest opposition party joined the small minority party for more power as the ruling party could still offer better benefits such as executive positions or the promise of future appointment as a candidate for a parliamentary seat. As of 1999, 73 parliamentary members (24 per cent) out of a total number of 299 had defected from their original parties since April 1996 when the legislature started (*Chosun Ilbo*, 18 October 1999:4). For Laver and Kato defection is derived from individual rational choice, which is dependent on self-interest; when defection can bring more incentives than remaining in the same party, the defector will take an action towards fission and fusion. The party benefiting from the defection will also accept the defector as a member when they see more incentives than before in receiving this defection. However, regardless of size, if a party is in a ruling position, then it can offer not only policy allocations but also potential executive positions.

The small ruling minority party had to secure its political stability but also to accomplish political reform. The president introduced the term 'Jeongkye gaepyun' ('reorganisation of the political system') as a way of legitimising his efforts to ensure the ruling party maintained a majority of seats and to smooth the legislative process without disruption from the large opposition party. What the NCNP did was to attract as many defectors as possible from the opposition GNP. Within six months of the president taking office the NCNP had achieved 105 seats and the ULD had 54 seats. The high flux of party members changed the small minority ruling party into two majority coalition parties, with 159 seats versus the 134 seats of the opposition party. Fighting off the opposition in the legislature was getting worse. Park Chan-pyo (1999) argues that Jeongkye gaepyun was a costly form of fusion.

Many scholars such as Larry Diamond, Kim Byung-kuk and Choi Jang-jip point out that this manufactured majority government is working against consolidating

democracy. If a small ruling party is the result of democracy, the government should seek out democratic ways of running the government rather than clinging to the magic number of a majority to pass legislative laws without the opposition party's co-operation. How can this high flux of party members and the ruling party's struggles that even violate democratic and moral rules be explained? This new phenomenon in non-Western settings in the process of consolidating democracy is a problem not only for Korea but also for Taiwan, Singapore, Mexico and other countries. It is pervasive and endemic. Coalition party politics in non-Western contexts need to consider consolidating democracy in internal party organisation, electoral laws, at the level of institutions and with regard to historical, cultural and social factors. As has been shown, a high flux of mobilisation among party members threatens political stability, which in turn threatens the consolidation of democracy where democracy is relatively new compared to Western countries.

When the ROK faced the trauma of the 1997 Asian crisis, many among the public showed nostalgia for authoritarian government. Choi Jang-jip (2002: 5) argues that the quality of Korean society has actually deteriorated since democratisation. The gap between rich and poor has become much bigger and social pressure under competition has been severe. The opportunities to increase one's own social status through education and diligence have dramatically decreased. Democracy in South Korea does not seem to be perceived by the broader public as a tool of social and political stability. Scholars, on their side, see democracy as an institution with a long way to go before being defined as consolidated (S. S. Kim, 2003). The puzzle over unstable coalition governments may be a part of the process of consolidating democracy.

Research needs to be able to predict or explain, not necessarily making use of Western theories, as these are mainly framed and tested in different political systems with different historical, cultural and social backgrounds. A new framework is therefore required to take into consideration the cultural specificities of the newly democratised countries in non-Western settings. The extent to which it is possible to accommodate explanations building on rational choice theory with cultural specificities is discussed in the following section.

The problems with rational choice theory

Studies of coalition governments have for the most part been framed within a positivist paradigm and have arguably gone too far in drawing from quantitative methodology. In terms of case selection, coalition studies have relied on a large-N comparison of cases mostly selected from Western European countries. As Bäck (2003:15) notes, coalition studies have mainly developed in answer to questions such as: "What type of government will be formed?", "What type of systems make minority or oversized governments more likely to be formed?", or "What type of

parties will get into government?" However, questions like "how does a government run the administration after winning office?" or "why does coalition government fail in stability?" have received far less attention. Existing studies on government termination and duration do not focus much, either, on what is actually going on inside the party, privileging study of the government's stability by the length in office of governments. Despite the flourishing research on coalition theories, such theories in their traditional form have in general shown a poor empirical performance. Michael Laver ascribes this to the fact that theories are tested against a high number of cases while neglecting the specificities of each. Laver (1989 cited in Bäck, 2003:16) argues that because "the differences between the national systems are 'so significant', sensible tests of coalition theories must be conducted on a country-by-country basis." As discussed in the previous section, what coalition research seems to be lacking is in fact 'thick' descriptions, or in-depth qualitative studies (Bäck, 2003: 32). Instead of focusing on "who gets in" (the coalition), research should now extend to investigate questions like "why does it [the coalition] fail?", "what are political actors bargaining for?" and "how do coalitions work?" in different countries.

Coalition research has traditionally downplayed the importance of context, focusing instead on the motivation and behaviour of individual actors acting out of self-interest, i.e. a rational choice approach. Very briefly, rational choice theories are based on the assumption that an individual strives to maximise utility on the basis of the information available and of a cost/benefit analysis. If an individual acts to maximise his or her interests after calculating all the possible gains and losses, this is considered to be rational. However, if an individual acts the way she or he does because of the influence of cultural norms, then action cannot seemingly be explained by rational choice and behaviour. At the very least, rational choice theory seems to have no place for culture, a consequence of the universalistic premise of the view of human agency and the parsimony of the 'thin' approach.

Rationality, however, differs depending on cultural context. Can rationality indeed be separated from the culture it is embedded in? Individual belief is socially structured and the calculation of cost and benefit is based on the person's preferences, which are influenced by the society and culture that the person belongs to and has originated from. Human behaviour is not always the outcome of calculation based on individual utility maximisation in the economic market. Francis Fukuyama (1995:35) notes that "choices arise out of habit". He illustrates this through the example of the use of chopsticks for Chinese people. Chinese use chopsticks simply because all Chinese use chopsticks for their food rather than calculating the cost and benefit of using chopsticks compared to Western forks and knives. Using a fork and knife for Chinese noodles would look odd for Chinese.

Fukuyama argues that culture can have its own rationality in each different society. Culture is not irrational but "a-rational", that is, it is not derived from a

cost and benefit calculation; however, this a-rational behaviour actually shows a high degree of rationality that is embedded in society. Non-Western culture such as the behaviour of following 'seniors' from the same high school or university regardless of rational choice looks very irrational. This is because rationality has so far been highly developed with an eye on the economic market, ignoring the fact that human beings are socially structured and belief and values in each society are not universal but contingent. Fukuyama argues that "[i]t is an act of considerable intellectual hubris to believe that only economic goals in the narrow sense can be considered rational" (ibid:37).

The Korean case (as well as Japan's and Italy's), with seemingly non-rational factionalism, regionalism and continuous splitting of political parties, well illustrates the problems rational choice theorists have in coming to terms with culture. These Korean patterns of behaviour were assumed rather than explained, or even relegated to the condition of the 'structural problems' of the ROK's political system. Furthermore, Korean scholars seemed unwilling to explore the extent to which these 'non-rational' phenomena could actually be explained in a way that recognised both their specificity (out of the Confucian legacy, for example) and the rationality of such behaviour from the vantage point of individual political actors in the specificity of the Korean socio-political and cultural context: what is rational in one culture may not be rational in another. Can rational choice and culture be accommodated in an explanation of the formation, instability and collapse of Korean political coalitions?

Rational choice theories in coalition studies have gone too far in their search for parsimony, and as a result many crucial variables, most notably culture, have not been included to explain *what is actually going on* in the cases under investigation. In explaining ROK political parties or coalition party politics in non-Western settings through established Western coalition theories, it is crucial to add cultural variables such as regionalism and cronyism or Confucianism as important factors influencing political actors' behaviour or voters' behaviour. Fission and fusion among parties in the last two decades has been the main feature of Korean party politics and has often been considered as a barrier to consolidating democracy and maintaining government stability. To explain the fission and fusion of the parties it is important to examine to what ends politicians or parties are gathering and separating and how they form parties and defect from previous parties. To explore the procedures within the government or parties causing them to implement party policies or to make or break government among parties, socially embedded culture is a very important factor to look at. In the case of the ROK it is not difficult to identify the rigid vertical hierarchy within party members from the top to the bottom: Confucianism is pervasively embedded in society.

The possibility of overcoming the dichotomy between rational choice theory and culture is also suggested by Daniel Little (1991:36). Little maintains that rational

choice theory can be legitimately applied to non-Western culture because "the notion of goal-directed rationality is not an ethnocentric concept". The original rational choice theory is based on individual self-interest, which neglects the influence of social norms and values in the cultural context. This is simply characterised as a 'thin' theory of human action, which provides an abstract description of goals in an economic market environment. As human beings are goal-directed, calculating the costs and benefits of each possible choice, rational choice theory could not convincingly counter claims by interpretivists that human action needs thicker descriptions than accounts of norms, values and beliefs. Little argues the dimension of rationality needs to be extended. For the concept of economic rationality and the model of maximising egoism, individuals calculate the costs and benefits of each possible choice in the most abstract way. However, when individuals need to make their optimal choice, utility does not always reflect narrow self-interest in strictly economic terms. If individuals have a list of goods that they value in accordance with their own preferences, individual choice will not always be the same as when they value the same good in many different strategies. Individuals can choose their own utility without assuming precise or quantifiable estimates of probabilities, for cost and benefit can be assessed not only by narrow economic calculation, but by social norms and values. Utility can be valued or calculated differently as a result of the "local normative commitment" of each individual, i.e. voting for regional leaders can be rational in South Korea rather than following emotional ties. Individual actors will make a choice dependent on their own strategy and the social and cultural context. Little refers to this concept as "broadened practical rationality". Through this approach, Little manages to relax restrictive egoistic assumptions based on utility maximisation while still retaining one fundamental pillar of rational choice theory—calculation of the costs and benefits of various possible actions.

Critiques and directions for future research

This paper has shown that empirical studies on coalitions have been mainly conducted in West European countries, whereas quantitative and theory-driven studies have been carried out mostly by scholars in North America. In their paper, De Winter *et al.* (2002:3) point out that "rational choice theories have always dominated the study of government formation, but … despite considerable advances these theories still lack predictive precision, and also leave many crucial variables under-explored because of its focus on only one aspect of coalition formation: the party composition." In the same paper (ibid:32), the authors succinctly display the main problems regarding what we are actually missing in coalition studies. The general problems they discuss can be briefly summarised as follows:

- Data sets are usually collected from Keesing's *Historical Archives* and the *European Journal of Political Research*. This means data are collected for empirical testing on the existing theories. Other variables such as factions or institutions are therefore missing, as previous studies were mainly concerned with size and party composition.
- Poor operationalisation of theoretical variables is leading to unreliable and unstable conclusions or lack of expert surveys.
- Basic assumptions are oversimplified. (The authors argue that good coalition theories should be multi-motivational, not only office- or policy-motivational).
- Selection is biased by an over-restricted choice of countries and limited time periods. Cases should be extended regardless of cabinet types or party systems and regardless of geographical distance.
- Some essential components of coalition formation and governance are traditionally neglected. There is, for instance, a lack of attention to formation failure, bargaining failure and personal selection or a too exclusive focus on parties. Investigation should be extended to the head of state, pressure groups, foreign powers, or informal veto power.
- Another crucial problem with coalition studies lies in uncontrolled comparisons of large samples of cabinets. Most data used for existing cross-country studies are actually overused and outdated. Single or small-N comparison case studies should occupy a more central place in coalition studies. De Winter *et al*. argue that the weakest part of coalition formation studies is a lack of 'thick' descriptions, as mathematical explanation predominates in coalition theories.

Coalition research fundamentally lacks in-depth qualitative studies. It needs to include explanatory variables other than size, extend to non-Western political systems and non-parliamentary regimes. It also needs to be extended from a study of parties as monolithic organisations to individual members or other political groups (i.e. trades unions) influencing governance.

As established coalition theories have gone too far in parsimonious explanation, it is now time to pay more attention to the conventional methods such as thick descriptive analysis or the introduction of provocative trials such as amalgams of rational choice theory and cultural variables to refine existing coalition theories. By looking at non-Western countries, the study of coalition theories can also add new data set to refine established coalition studies and in doing so it will make findings more robust and explanations more sensitive to the context.

Notes

1. Müller and Strøm 2000, cited in De Winter *et al*. 2002:3.
2. The result of rapid economic development by authoritarian governments from 1960 to 1987 (the Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan governments) was to increase demands for democracy from a civil rights movement and brought the regime to an end. This is often called 'a crisis of success' in Korean politics (Diamond and Kim 2000:69). Nationwide demonstrations from civil society movements forced the demise of the Chun presidency and of the government. The succeeding presidential candidate Roh Tae-woo announced on 29 June 1987 that he would basically accept fair presidential elections. This signalled the start of the democratisation era in Korea. Despite his unpopularity (as still essentially authoritarian), Roh Tae-woo succeeded in the presidential elections in December 1987 and practically continued a military government despite his claims of being a "man on the street".
3. Choi 2002:110.
4. Laver and Schofield 1990.

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