

Politics of Social Policy-Making in South Korea and Japan*

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Abstract: Until recently, welfare politics in Korea and Japan tended to be dominated by conservative forces “from above.” This paper investigates the formation and domination of such forces from above, with a focus on the interaction between institutional arrangements and strategic maneuvering by political actors which, I argue, constitutes the politics of (social) policy-making. The notion of the politics of social policy-making aims to provide a more politically and institutionally sensitive framework than the pluralist analysis of policy-making. Korea and Japan share some crucial institutional legacies of the “developmental state” and “group-coordinated market economies.” At the same time, attention should also be paid to different institutional configurations, such as a strong presidential system and first-past-the-post voting in Korea and a parliamentary system and single non-transferable vote in Japan. The main research question is, what are the similarities and differences in the politics of social policy-making between these two countries?

Keywords: Japan, Korea, Policy-Making, Welfare Politics

INTRODUCTION

After various studies explaining the economic ascendance of East Asian countries, the welfare development of these countries began to attract academic interest. In particular, increasing attention has recently been paid to the characteristics of welfare systems or regimes in East Asia. With reference to Esping-Andersen’s typology (1990),

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the welfare regime of East Asia has often been viewed as representing the conservative, the liberal, or a hybrid regime of liberalism and conservatism.¹ For instance, Esping-Andersen (1997) himself claims that there is little to indicate a distinctive Pacific model, because Japan's fusion of key elements of the conservative regime (e.g., occupational segmentation and familialism) with a liberal, American-style dominance of private welfare systems exhibits a hybrid system, not a unique fourth regime. However, Takegawa (2005) argues that the uncritical application of the regime theory to non-European countries contains many theoretical problems, as the superficial similarity of the conservative welfare systems in East Asia cannot be inherently explained by the social and political structure of each country. Similarly, Goodman and his collaborators (Goodman & Peng, 1996; Goodman, White, & Kwon, 1998) emphasize the indigenous analysis of welfare development in East Asia by highlighting the notion of the East Asian welfare model/regime rather than theoretical presuppositions common to Western analysis. But they also point out that "it is misleading to think in terms of one homogeneous, over-arching 'East Asian Welfare Model' common to" East Asian societies (White & Goodman, 1998:14).

Taking these arguments into account, this research endeavors to investigate the origin and early evolution of social policy, and in particular the politics surrounding it, in Korea and Japan. Welfare politics has often been attributed to continual conflicts and struggles between forces "from above" and forces "from below."² Until recently, the welfare politics of East Asian societies was governed largely by conservative forces from above, with a lack of significant influence of pro-welfare forces from below. Attention will thus be paid to the role of such forces from above, which strongly

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1. Jones (1993) adds another category, the "Confucian welfare state." However, though Confucian values influence the evolution of specific welfare systems, they are mediated through politics (for the analytical problems of cultural explanations, see White & Goodman, 1998:15-16). On the other hand, Holliday (2000) and Gough (2004) view East Asia as the "productivist welfare regime," a fourth regime in addition to the three worlds of welfare capitalism. One of the main characteristics of the productivist regime is the subordination of welfare to economic priorities, which will be interpreted as part of "developmental welfarism" in this research.
 2. For example, the arguments about forces from below, especially those orchestrated by the organized working class and social democratic movements, are well illustrated in the power resources/democratic class struggle perspective (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Korpi, 1983). In contrast, the social control model is more concerned with forces from above in terms of either an agency-oriented analysis (social control by the ruling capitalist class) or a structure-oriented one (functional necessities of the capital economy) (Ginsburg 1979; Piven & Cloward, 1971).

affected the initial choice and subsequent development of East Asian welfare systems.

This paper argues that welfare politics is best explained in an account that views the politics of policy-making as the interaction between institutional configurations and strategic maneuvering by political actors. In so doing, it raises the following questions: What kind of social policies were adopted by political actors, especially forces from above, within the policy-making framework? To what extent did institutional configurations inhibit or facilitate policy choices and political strategies? What were the similarities and differences in the politics of social policy-making between Korea and Japan?

The paper begins by providing a theoretical framework for this research on social policy-making in Korea and Japan. Second, it will draw a general picture of the politics of policy-making, with a focus on both similarities and differences of institutional configurations in these two countries. Third, attention will be given to the common characteristics of welfare systems, which can be encapsulated in the notion of "developmental welfarism." The final section will further analyze welfare politics in Japan and Korea respectively. As the formation and domination of conservative forces from above in welfare politics are the main object of analysis here, this research does not deal with contemporary welfare reform in the two countries, for instance, Korean welfare reform after the economic crisis of 1997 or Japan's major reform in social security (i.e., the Long-Term Care Insurance scheme) during the 1990s.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL POLICY-MAKING IN KOREA AND JAPAN

The analytical framework for this research focuses on the notion of the politics of policy-making which aims to provide a more politically, institutionally, and historically sensitive framework than comprehensive theoretical approaches in studies of policy-making, such as the policy streams model or the advocacy coalition model. For instance, although Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) offer the useful conception of an advocacy coalition, their approach seems most compatible with the pluralist (American) political system but may be less appropriate for the analysis of policy-making within a more interventionist, consensual, or centralized tradition (Hemerijck and van Kersbergen, 1999; Parsons, 1995). In addition, the advocacy coalition approach pays little heed to institutional constraints (see John, 1998:170-3) and institutional differences between different political systems (unitary versus federalist), party systems (two versus multi-party), state-society relations (pluralist versus corporatist), and executive-legislative relations (parliamentary versus presidential) (Hemerijck & van Kers-

bergen, 1999:177). Therefore, the advocacy coalition approach is less likely to apply to welfare politics in Korea and Japan in the light of the centralized, high degree of administrative power and autonomy available to East Asian governments on the one hand, and the significance of institutional differences between the two countries on the other.

Thus the politics of policy-making implies that the analysis of social policy-making must be placed within a historically specific set of political and institutional dimensions (e.g., partisan dominance, government structures, and policy legacies). The politics of policy-making also needs to draw considerable attention to the dense interaction of state and societal actors in the context of the institutional capacity of policy-making frameworks and the institutional structuring of state-society relations. In this sense, our focus on the politics of policy-making might serve as an analytical bridge between the society-centered power resources theories and neo-Weberian state-centered approaches—just as the historical institutionalist explanations try to go beyond a simplistic dichotomy between state- and society-centered models (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992).

Moreover, the politics of policy-making should be understood in terms of complex interactions between institutional configurations and political strategies, mirroring crucial debates on the relationship between agency and structure (see Hay, 1995). In fact, historical institutionalism is an important theoretical niche at the middle range that can help us integrate an understanding of institutional configurations with an explanation of the role of political agency (e.g., Hall & Taylor, 1996; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). Nonetheless, as Ross (2000) and Wood (2001) point out, the recent welfare-reform debates associated with the new institutionalist explanations tend to present an overly institutionalized portrait of the welfare state and to underestimate the role of political actors and the possibility for change in politics. In other words, such debates risk overstating path-dependency in the analysis of welfare reform at the expense of political agency, despite the fact that historical institutionalism aims to represent the appropriate relationship between actors and institutions. Furthermore, the literature on new institutionalism is giving increasing attention to ongoing contestation and renegotiation by strategic actors, which result in institutional change (e.g., Cortell & Peterson, 2001; Streeck & Thelen, 2005).

What is important is thus to explain welfare politics by considering the important role of both political actors and institutions in a particular socio-economic context. As historical institutionalists clearly argue, institutions as intermediate-level variables establish the rules of the game for political struggles and strategies by shaping identities, policy preferences, and coalitional choices, and by affecting the relative bargaining power of different actors. But institutions are also forged through strategic actions

of political actors who are institutionally-embedded agents but, at the same time, have the power to (at least partially) change institutions.³ In short, this research focuses on the interaction between political strategies and institutional configurations, which, I argue, constitutes the politics of policy-making.

Given that relatively little research based on a systematic understanding of such interaction has been done in the study of social policy in East Asia, this analytical framework is guiding my analysis of the case study of Korea and Japan. Here I adopt a historically oriented interpretive research strategy that “attempts to account for specific historical outcomes or sets of comparable outcomes or processes chosen for study because of their significance for current institutional arrangements or for social life in general” (Ragin, 1987:3). As Ragin, Berg-Schlosser, and de Meur (1996) argue, “outcomes often follow from combinations of causes, not from single causes,” and “it is often the case that a given outcome may follow from several different combinations of causes” (754-5).

The two case studies guided by the interpretive historical research strategy can better address this casual complexity. It is not my purpose to use these case studies to produce new theory, but as Lijphart (1971) indicates, case studies can make a significant contribution to the establishment of general propositions and thus to theory-building in political science. In analyzing the case studies, emphasis is given to drawing a clear picture of the politics of social policy-making in Korea and Japan that would furnish the solid foundations upon which future research on contemporary welfare reform could be based—rather than systematic comparison of the two countries in terms of a methodologically sophisticated research design.

INSTITUTIONAL CONFIGURATIONS AND FORCES FROM ABOVE

Institutional Similarities between Korea and Japan

For the institutionally and historically sensitive analysis of social policy-making, we pay due attention to both institutional similarities and differences by utilizing the

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3. Such actors' political strategies can be motivated by ideological concerns and/or partisan interests. Here the distinction of interests and ideas is in practice difficult to make clear-cut, and the ideas versus interest dichotomy—simply opposing ideas to vested and material interests, or the reverse—is likely to be unhelpful in understanding the policy-making process. Instead of regarding the two as juxtaposed or incompatible, ideas and interests seem to be better understood as situated in institutional contexts. Institutions are “not a substitute for interests and ideas as the ultimate motors of political action, but they have a powerful effect on which interests and ideas will prevail” (Hall, 1992:109).

concepts and arguments espoused by state-centered (later institutionalist) approaches. According to a series of case studies (e.g., Amsden, 1989; Evans, 1995; Wade, 1990), the interventionist role played by the developmental state is the root cause of the dramatic economic success of East Asian countries. The developmental state formulated the developmental strategy that set economic growth as the fundamental goal. The developmental state then coordinated socio-economic resources toward long-term national economic enhancement and used control of the financial sector as the main policy tool for state-led, export-oriented industrialization.

There was thus an ideology and practice that subordinated social welfare, “particularly in the form of progressive redistribution and a universal and generous benefit system, to the over-riding priorities of economic efficiency and growth” (White & Goodman, 1998:17). Similarly, Holliday and Wilding (2003) argue that welfare in East Asia “is utilized as an aid to further economic development so that welfare seen as supportive to the economy develops, whereas welfare held to make no contribution to economic development languishes. . . . When the chips are down, Western states have always given the economy priority over social policy, but that priority has generally been less explicit and more reluctant. It has been a stance in need of justification, rather than a policy given. There has also been much less emphasis on economic growth as the high road to welfare” (13-14).

The developmental strategy was closely linked to two distinctive features of the organizational arrangements of the developmental state: bureaucratic autonomy insulated from various pressures and interests of social groups, and powerful economic bureaucracy as a pilot agency. The significant role of competent and autonomous state bureaucracy in policy-making is not only emphasized by the developmental state approach, but also postulated by the state-centered framework in comparative studies (e.g., Evans, Reuschemeyer, & Skocpol, 1985).

The “economy-first” developmental strategy and its marginalization of social policy were initiated and advocated by conservative forces from above, that is, bipartite coalitions between the developmental state and major business groups, combined with the political subordination of labor and civil society. The crucial interventionist role of the developmental state was amplified through “organisational and institutional links between politically insulated state developmental agencies and major private-sector firms” (Deyo, 1987:19).

The “varieties of capitalism” approach (e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001; Soskice, 1999; Ebbinghaus & Manow, 2001) also describes this kind of state-business alliance as a variant of “coordinated market economies” in which there is considerable direct and indirect non-market coordination among companies, with the state playing a framework-setting role. While “industry-coordinated” market economies in many northern

European nations are grounded on sector- or industry-specific corporate collaboration, wage coordination, and vocational training, “group-coordinated” market economies in Japan and Korea are characterized by “company-based unions, technology diffusion and development within the group of companies, technical standard setting within the group, and vocational training as a company-based and not an industry-based phenomenon” (Soskice, 1999:106).

The political underpinnings of group-coordinated market economies have long been conservative parties with organized labor playing a limited role, in contrast to industry-coordinated counterparts that have either (a) strong unions and social democratic hegemony or (b) moderately strong unions and Christian democratic dominance but significant social democratic influence. Product market, innovation, and work-organization strategies in the group-coordinated market economies do not rely upon collaboration with labor as much as they do in industry-coordination counterparts. In a context of group-based coordination within large companies, enterprise unionism in Korea and Japan contributed not only to the fragmented structure of trade unions but also to decentralized collective bargaining practices. The enterprise unions tend to pay more attention to firm-level issues, such as wages, working conditions, and rights at work, than to social and economic issues at the national level (Chung, 2001; Yi, 2002). Because of enterprise unionism and the fragmented bargaining structure, both Korean and Japanese trade unions had clear limitations in exercising their power over the making of social policy at the central level.

To sum up, the common characteristics of institutional configurations in Korea and Japan include the interventionist state, powerful economic bureaucracy, institutional linkages of a bipartite alliance, group-based coordination, and company-based unions.

Differences in Institutional Arrangements between Korea and Japan

As we have seen, Korea and Japan share similarities, but they are also marked by distinctive variations in institutional arrangements, such as the relationship between executive and legislature and the rules of electoral politics. The policy-making framework of Korea is rooted in the concentration of power, especially strong presidential influence in Korean politics and society. The pivotal role of the President as a chief policy-maker derives from the office’s constitutional authority. The President is authorized to appoint the Prime Minister and the heads of administrative ministries and to direct advisory organizations and executive agencies. In addition to having constitutional power, the President used to be the leader of the ruling party and could exclusively supervise the party’s nomination of parliamentary candidates. The President also used the intelligence service, which was not accountable to the parliament for its

activities, to control both his own party and the opposition (H.J. Kwon, 1999:38). Furthermore, the presidential secretariat in the Office of the President (in Korea, referred to as the “Blue House”) enjoyed unchallenged status in central decision-making. In the Korean case, the developmental state approach tends to undervalue “the dominance that the presidency has historically had over bureaucratic actors and how personal preferences have often overruled bureaucratic policy recommendations” (Hahm & Plein, 1997:13).

Whereas the President typically selects a cabinet independent of the legislative assembly, the Prime Minister in a parliamentary system, as described in the Japanese Constitution, is a member of parliament, selected by and responsible to that parliament. A Japanese Prime Minister has extensive power as s/he decides on all the key appointments and dismissals of cabinet ministers, other political designation in the government, and senior posts in the ruling party (Neary, 2002). Within the overall high degree of state capacity and autonomy possessed by these two developmental states, however, Korea’s President has enjoyed more power and authority than the Prime Minister in Japan.

In Korea, the President is a key lawmaker who can propose bills to the legislature and issue presidential decrees for the enforcement of laws. But, until 2001, a Japanese Prime Minister had no legal power to make a policy or to insist that his or her ministers initiate a policy (Neary, 2002). Throughout the policy-making process, the Korean President is in a position to get much more effective assistance from a relatively larger number of advisory and administrative agencies, compared with his counterpart in Japan (Jung, 2002:325).

There are also differences in power between the President’s Office and the Prime Minister’s Office. Unlike the powerful presidential secretariat of Korea, the Prime Minister’s Office in Japan was “small compared to most ministries and composed mainly of individuals seconded from elsewhere and whose loyalty remained with their ministry of origin” (Neary, 2002:111). In addition, there are limitations to Japanese Prime Ministers’ authority, which derive from the nature of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that has monopolized the position of ruling party. Even under a single majority government led by the LDP, “the control of the Prime Minister over the cabinet is limited, as a majority of members belonged to different factions within the ruling party over which the prime minister had little control” (Kim, 2005:44). The shifting sands of inter-factional relationships within the party have been “an unreliable basis for the exercise of prime ministerial power particularly since the enforcement of the rule on two-year terms for the party leader” (Neary, 2002:111). Moreover, the decision-making apparatus of the LDP had a bottom-up structure, which rendered backbenchers more powerful than their equivalents in Korea. In other words, the party’s

policy committees and deliberative bodies exerted a great deal of control over the decision-making of the party without the intervention of the Prime Minister.

Legislative power in Korea is vested in the National Assembly, a unicameral legislature. The decades of military authoritarian rule had hindered the development of political parties and the Assembly. After the 1987 democratization, the Assembly regained all of the powers it had lost under the previous authoritarian regimes. However, partisan politics and party structure have rapidly become regionally based since 1987, because regionalism was an effective way for politicians to mobilize votes in regular elections (Chung, 2001). Regionalism originated from the authoritarian regimes' discrimination in resource allocation and hence uneven regional development. In the presidential elections of 1987, 1992, and 1997, the decisive factor was the candidates' regional origins. In the case of the general election, regionalism was reinforced by an electoral system, that is, a first-past-the-post and small constituency (or single-member district) system. In other words, this system combined with regionalism favored the existing parties, whose supporters were geographically concentrated (H.J. Kwon, 1999:63). Party nomination in a major party's regional bases guaranteed re-election. Regionalism thus became an institutional barrier to "the deepening of democracy, not only by reducing political accountability and policy-based competition between parties within national politics, but also by dividing the various groups and social classes of civil society against their own common interest" (Chung, 2001:18). Consequently, the regionally-based party system that lacked policy- or ideology-based competition functioned to inhibit the formation of viable pro-welfare reform coalitions.

Japan's parliament, or Diet, is composed of two houses, the House of Representatives, or the lower house, and the House of Councillors, or the upper house. The Constitution gives the House of Representatives priority over the House of Councillors on issues such as deliberation on bills, annual national budgets, treaty approval, and the designation of a Prime Minister. The Japanese electoral system prior to the 1996 elections (following the reform of the electoral system in 1994) was based on single non-transferable vote (SNTV) in multi-seat constituencies. Under the SNTV system, each voter casts a single vote for one candidate in a multi-member district where there is more than one seat to be filled. Although not a system of propositional representation, this system permitted wider representation of parties than is possible in the first-past-the-post system (Neary, 2002). In order to maximize their representation in the parliament, political parties should run the optimal number of candidates in each district and find a way of ensuring that each candidate would gain the minimum number of votes necessary to be elected.⁴ As multiple candidates of the same party have to compete

4. For instance, in a four-member district, a candidate with just over 20 percent of the total

among themselves for the votes of the same constituents, the SNTV tended not only to cause internal party fragmentation and conflicts but also to make election campaigning more expensive. Moreover, it could serve to facilitate “clientelist politics,” whereby candidates deliver electoral bribes or pork to their supportive constituencies and receive votes in return.

As will be detailed below, these distinctive institutional arrangements in Korea and Japan, together with their similar institutional legacies, played a special role in framing the politics of social policy-making. Before turning to the analysis of the welfare politics of each country, the next section will examine the array of social policies.

DEVELOPMENTAL WELFARISM IN KOREA AND JAPAN

The most striking aspect of welfare development in Korea and Japan is the fact that social policy was the handmaiden of economic policy. This situation derived from the developmental state/strategy geared toward export-oriented industrialization with active state intervention in the economy. The economy-first developmental strategy, espoused by conservative forces from above, engendered essential principles and features underlying the Korean and Japanese welfare systems, which can be captured by the notion of developmental welfare (Chung, 2001, 2006; Goodman, White, & Kwon, 1998; H.J. Kwon, 2005).

Above all, an overriding concern was to impose minimum financial burden on the state by virtue of the low level of public spending in social welfare. Accordingly, in Korea and Japan the state as a low social spender was less involved in providing social provision than its Western counterparts, but it did play a significant welfare role as a regulator (e.g., Goodman, White, & Kwon, 1998; Holliday & Wilding, 2003; Jacobs, 2000; Tang, 2000). As the government continued to give first priority to economic development, the minimum financial commitment of the state to welfare within fiscal conservatism enormously influenced the subsequent development of social policy. In this context, the developmental state in these two countries shifted welfare responsibility onto companies, using its regulatory power to force the private sector to provide certain types of social provision.

votes can guarantee being elected. A party with 50 percent of the votes could thus expect to win two positions in this district. If each candidate receives 25 percent, this will happen. However, if one candidate polls 40 percent and the other 10 percent, the latter may not gain a seat. If the party puts up more than two candidates, the danger of vote-splitting makes it even less likely that the party will secure two seats.

Family welfare—encouraged by Confucian cultural ideology (e.g., individual self-help and family interdependence)—also negated much of the need for state support (Goodman & Peng, 1996; Jones, 1993). As Estevez-Abe (2002) points out, the means test for social assistance took place not on an individual basis but on a family basis, as Japanese law stipulated that the family was responsible for the welfare of its members. To be entitled to social assistance benefits in Korea, claimants had to prove an absence of private support from extended-family members, and a household was the basic unit of benefit entitlement. Moreover, the provision of social services in East Asia has long been seen as the responsibility of families. For instance, Japanese governments were able to keep to a minimum the state's responsibility for personal social service, building upon an already existing network of communal and especially family social support (C. Pierson, 2004). In this way, the state's role as a regulator in combination with its low social spending engendered a prominent welfare role for the private sector in the two countries.

The Japanese and Korean developmental state also claimed that social needs would be best met by rising real income in the labor market, led by high economic growth together with low unemployment. In other words, “the high economic growth rate, rising income levels, and low unemployment mitigated the need for state expenditure on social welfare” (Ramesh, 2004:4). The developmental states in East Asia, as ardent believers in the trickle-down theory, held that increasing national income through economic growth would have trickle-down effects throughout the population, even to the poorest people (Holliday & Wilding, 2003; Shin, 2003; Tang, 2000). Policy initiatives based upon the developmental strategy and its developmental welfarism not only brought out political learning among policy-makers, but also constructed the societal beliefs of “economy-first” and “trickle-down.” In East Asian societies, there was “little sense of a general public responsibility for the needy” and “little support for state welfare as an instrument of either redistribution or social justice” (Holliday & Wilding, 2003:167).

Given the state's prominent role as a low social spender, major social programs in Japan and Korea depended on the social insurance principle under which a person should contribute first before claiming any benefit. For instance, Japan “has favoured social insurance over other means of financing such as taxation-based or pay-as-you-go schemes” (Izuhara, 2003:8). The social insurance programs were fragmented along occupational lines, because the previous authoritarian regimes used them to appease certain sectors of the public such as civil servants and industrial workers in large companies (H.J. Kwon, 1999). In a context of highly fragmented and occupationally segregated social insurance, there was “little or no commitment to use the state as an agent of vertical redistribution” (C. Pierson, 2004:11).

In addition to the prevalent role of enterprise welfare, the social insurance programs of Japan and Korea were linked to work at their inception. Work is thus “central to welfare not only in terms of the income it provides, but also in terms of the way status in the labor force affects access to state benefits” through social insurance schemes (Holliday & Wilding, 2003:164). In short, there was the link between work and welfare through the work-based, contributory insurance programs as well as through strong company welfare.

Such social protection as a combination of social insurance and company welfare was “institutionally complementary” to other spheres of production regimes, including industrial relations, vocational training, and corporate governance (for detailed discussions of institutional complementarities, see Ebbinghaus & Manow, 2001; Hall & Soskice, 2001; and Huber & Stephens, 2001). In Korea and Japan, the subsystems of production were fostered by the entrenched interests of the state-business alliance sustaining the economy-first development strategy. In particular, the systems of industrial relations and corporate governance were extremely attentive to capital’s interests. As noted earlier, company-based unions tended to confine their demands and activities to wage increases and basic labor rights. Within labor exclusion strategies, the activity of company-based unions was restricted by the government’s tightening control, with physical force if necessary. Company-based unions helped maintain the corporate welfare system, which in turn contributed to the underdevelopment of state welfare.

A lack of state income support and universal welfare provision was compensated by Korean and Japanese companies’ commitment to lifetime employment and the automatic seniority system, as well as family and company welfare. While the government suppressed the political mobilization of labor forces, it forced and encouraged firms to offer lifelong employment patterns, occupational welfare benefits, guaranteed bonuses, and other supplementary payments. Japanese management over time “came to appreciate the merit of ‘lifetime’ employment as a means to secure workers’ loyalty to the company, and tenure-based wages also turned out to be economically rational so long as workers’ skills continued to be upgraded over the course of their career in the firm” (Thelen & Kume, 2006:28). As Ebbinghaus and Manow (2001) point out, occupational benefits also provided positive incentives for workers to invest in company-specific skills. Similarly, the large-business sector of Korea was willing to provide company welfare and employment stability in order to secure a stable supply of skilled workers in heavy and chemical industrialization (Chung, 2006). In this way, the institutional complementarities (or elective affinities) between specific social protection and particular components of production regimes were embedded in the group-coordinated market economy.

In the course of export-led industrialization, the developmental state highlighted

the improvement of human capital, which would strengthen not merely the productive potential of individuals but also their self-reliance. Given the cultural heritage that assigns great value to education, such investment in human resources was promoted mainly through education policy. Hence, Korea and Japan spent a high proportion of general government expenditure on education despite an extremely small proportion on social security expenditure (Jacobs, 2000).

In sum, developmental welfarism can be encapsulated in the following interrelated components: (a) the state's role as a regulator and a low social spender (in combination with the prominent welfare role of the private sector); (b) the link between work and welfare through an enterprise- and employment-centered system; and (c) a strong emphasis on human capital investment and self-reliance. The following section will investigate how these common characteristics of welfare systems in Korea and Japan were shaped by the politics of social policy-making.⁵ It will begin with the Japanese case, not only because the formation of Japanese welfare systems came first chronologically, but also because, within the region, Japan was "an onward exporter of social welfare policies" (C. Pierson, 2004:11).

POLITICS OF SOCIAL POLICY-MAKING IN KOREA AND JAPAN

One-Party Dominant Regime and Clientelistic Politics in Japan

In Japan, as a precocious industrializer of Asia, the basic orientation of the government toward welfare has not changed significantly, in the sense that priority has always been on economic growth and industrial development (Goodman & Peng, 1996:201). The economy-first priority and developmental welfarism of Japan were shaped under one-party dominance with prolonged conservative rule. In 1955, it seemed that a two-party system (the LDP and the main opposition, the Japan Socialist Party [JSP]) was in the process of formation. But Japan then acquired a "one-party dominant regime" (Pempel, 1990), as the conservative LDP has enjoyed a majority in Japan's bicameral legislature for most of the post-war period.

In this situation, the ruling conservative elites generally only accepted the institutional concept of social welfare when confronting a political crisis (Goodman & Peng,

5. In fact, social policy and its legacies also shaped the ideas, interests, and policy choices of political actors. In other words, "state policies are regarded not only as outputs of the political process constrained by institutional settings but also as crucial inputs that reshape socio-economic conditions and institutional arrangements" (Shin, 2003:197).

1996). Anderson (1993) also insists that Japanese conservatives responded to periodic electoral threats with changes in party platform that touched on welfare. For instance, then-Prime Minister Tanaka of the LDP declared the year 1973 as the “First Year of Welfare.” This change owed much to the ruling LDP’s electoral concerns together with strong pressures from non-LDP local governments. Until the mid-1960s, the conservative LDP had no strong interest in diverting resources away from its major constituent groups (e.g., farmers and small businesses) in order to fund welfare benefits for the general public (Estevez-Abe, 2002). In the 1967 elections, however, the LDP’s electoral support declined, although the party managed to sustain an overall majority in the Diet. The LDP also needed social policy to woo the growing number of wage earners while keeping its core constituencies.

Moreover, in the early 1970s the LDP lost governorship in most of the major prefectures and cities. As Takahashi (1997) points out, the improvement of social policy was essential for the non-LDP governors and mayors in ensuring the support of voters. But the LDP responded by pre-emptively adopting the JSP’s popular social policy platforms at the national level (Estevez-Abe, 2002). The First Year of Welfare sought to introduce more generous welfare systems but soon altered its direction in response to the oil crisis and subsequent economic recession. The slogan of 1973 was gradually replaced by the “Japanese-style welfare society” that re-emphasized individual responsibilities, mutual aid, and company welfare (see Izuhara, 2003). The Japanese model of welfare society espoused by the LDP was based on the significant role of the private sector in welfare provision, not on the expansion of state welfare. The LDP also accused the Western-style welfare state of causing welfare diseases. The welfare society model was largely reached by consensus between leaders of the ruling LDP, high-ranking bureaucrats, and business circles as three essential power-elite groups in Japan.

With the acceptance of the conservative party, it was the state bureaucracy that promoted the formation of Japan’s welfare state (see Takegawa, 2005:177-8). As the developmental state approach argues, strong bureaucracies, especially economic ministries, were key actors in the post-war economic miracle of Japan. Given the fragmented bureaucratic authority over social policy, the Ministry of Finance as an overall overseer of the budgeting process played a coordinating role over issues cross-cutting ministerial boundaries (Estevez-Abe, 2002). Although social bureaucracy attempted to develop policy proposals to modernize the Japanese welfare system, it was not prepared to undertake an explicit political battle with the Ministry of Finance as a strong opponent of budget increases (H.J. Kwon, 1998). Overall, bureaucrats as well as LDP politicians “sought to limit the institutional means for generating public funds, so as to create fiscal pressures against expanding public programs, especially redistributive

ones” (Immergut & Kume, 2006:5). As a result, they favored fragmented social insurance and corporate welfare, instead of advancing a policy agenda for universalism and state responsibility for providing welfare.

As noted before, intra-party politics under the multi-member SNTV system (i.e., strong factionalism in combination with a bottom-up structure) holds the key to understanding the politics of policy-making in Japan. The prolonged one-party dominance of the LDP enabled itself to enlist the supporters of different policy areas. This was accompanied with the development of policy tribes (*Zoku*) within the LDP. The LDP politicians, with the assistance of *Zoku* specialists, dealt with the problem of internal factional rivalry and vote-splitting by providing selected groups of voters with pork and other welfare benefits. The multi-member SNTV encourages “candidates to seek support from small well-organized groups rather than to appeal to voters in general, since it takes only a relatively small percentage of votes to be elected” (Estevez-Abe, 2002:169). As long as the LDP politicians had a reasonable core vote, they could win seats without needing to appeal to “outsiders” or citizens as a whole. The one-party dominant regime gained political support through social policy “designed for organized interests and individual workers rather than rights of all citizens” (Anderson, 1993:156). Consequently, one-party dominance and intra-party dynamics resulted in clientelistic politics based upon patron-client relationships.

Under the SNTV system, voters also paid less attention to policy- or ideology-based competition and voted for candidates rather than political parties. In accordance with the change in the electorate, which became fragmented and issue-oriented rather than ideologically driven in its voting, a large part of non-LDP supporters voted for the smaller centralist parties instead of the main opposition, the JSP (H.J. Kwon, 1998). Therefore, the multi-district SNTV helped the conservative LDP occupy the driver’s seat in Japanese politics for most of the time since 1945—although it gave minor parties and independent candidates a higher chance of winning a seat.

Within the context of conservative dominance over government and bureaucracy, trade unions as forces from below were not closely involved in shaping public policy at the central government level. Unlike the corporatist welfare regime of Western societies, Japanese social insurance and mutual aid have been constructed by the state rather than by the social partners. In fact, Japan’s social democratic forces initially did not place an emphasis on enhancing social policy within their policy framework, because within the Cold War structure, security issues (i.e., the peace-oriented Constitution, the alliance with the United States, and the Self-Defense Forces) were the focus of confrontations between the ruling and opposition parties (Takegawa, 2005). Another obstacle was the JSP’s strong commitment to orthodox socialist visions, which viewed the welfare state merely as the system of protecting the survival of capitalism

and limiting the evolutionary transition to socialism. Even after the JSP began to pay more attention to welfare issues, it failed to win national elections in which it offered support for universal welfare spending (Anderson, 1993). Such a failure can be explained partly in terms of the transformation of the LDP to a “catch-all party” by developing “its own system of coordinating political and economic interests within a wide and multifaceted scope of interest groups in order to reinforce and stabilize voters’ support in elections” (Takahashi, 1997:99). In electoral campaigns, the LDP thus embraced the establishment of welfare systems as one of its main political goals, whereas the JSP could not get enough support from non-LDP voters for its idea of the welfare state.

Under company-based unionism in Japan, labor movements “favored workplace goals and often emphasized firm-specific benefits over universal social policies; nationwide social programs did not arise primarily from labor organizations” (Anderson, 1993:150). The core basis of the JSP was the General Council of Trade Unions (*Sohyo*), founded in 1950, representing militant and radical labor movements. However, within the gradual disintegration of social democratic movements and the conservative dominance in electoral politics during the post-war period, both the JSP and the *Sohyo* as two pillars of leftist movements and forces from below have waned in influence.

On the basis of group-based coordination, antagonistic industrial relations were replaced by more consensual ones, especially at the workplace level. In a sense, sustaining cooperative industrial relations itself became an ultimate goal; a phenomenon that can be referred to as the “displacement of goals” (S.M. Kwon, 2004:304). The *Sohyo* lost its hegemony within labor movements and finally merged with the new moderate unions, the National Federation of Private Sector Unions (*Rengo*), in 1990. The JSP, once the largest opposition party, also lost a large number of its seats in the 1996 elections, and since then has shown further signs of decline.

Therefore, as Tamai (2003) argues, the core (or pre-war ideal) of the Japanese model that had centered on family and company welfare remained in the post-war development of the country’s welfare schemes. This situation was attributable to prolonged conservative one-party dominance, clientalistic politics under the multi-member SNTV system, declining influences of the JSP, divisions of labor movements, and company-based unionism.

Strong Presidential System and Bureaucratic Politics in Korea

The developmental strategy and developmental welfarism of Korea were formulated by conservative forces from above, whose power was based upon the power-concentrated policy-making framework. In social policy-making, “the top decision mak-

ers, the presidents in particular, placed economic development at the centre of their strategy and economic policy always came first” (H.J. Kwon, 1999:134). The political power and status of the presidency then magnified the Presidents’ ideas on the structure of welfare provision and infused these ideas into welfare institutions “through formal legislation, financial supports, stimulation through government campaign and regulation through monitoring and supervision” (Yi, 2002:308).

The economy-first developmental strategy established a powerful economic bureaucracy whose status in the government structure was placed above other ministries. Economy-related ministries decided upon the overall budget and expenditure items of each ministry. In addition to the control of the budgetary process, senior economic officials were often promoted into leadership positions in other ministries and powerful presidential secretariats in the Office of the President. At this point, economic officials can be seen as veto players who are “individual or collective decision-maker[s] whose agreement is required for the change of the status quo” (Tsebelis, 2000:442). The position of economic officials as veto players within the government reinforced the dominant paradigm of the economy-first developmental idea.

Whereas economy-related ministries were the dominant forces at the level of national state administration, social bureaucracy was peripheral to decision-making. The marginalization of social welfare was further fuelled by the marginal status and hence passive administrative culture of social bureaucracy. As Skocpol and her colleagues (Evans et al., 1985) point out, officials of the treasury and finance departments tend to be profoundly conservative in their policy orientations. Consequently, opposition from inside the government, such as economic officials’ anti-welfare tendency, was the main obstacle for pro-welfare groups as well as for social bureaucracy to overcome. Thus the disproportionate institutional power between economy bureaucracy and others was a key shaping factor of the developmental strategy and developmental welfarism.

The developmental strategy of the previous authoritarian regimes centered on the repressive control of labor in order to maintain the containment of labor costs in labor-intensive manufacturing for export. Accordingly, big businesses learned “how they could lower production costs by following the government initiatives of developmental strategies” (Shin, 2003:197). The export-oriented developmental strategy also promoted the interests, incentives, and resources of management at the expense of labor and sided with the business groups in labor disputes. The underlying idea of economy first and labor exclusion was supported by the division into South Korea and North Korea, which resulted in an exclusive inclination toward a conservative and right-wing political culture.

As P. Pierson (1994) argues, policies “bring about the policy-induced emergence of

elaborate social and economic networks that greatly increase the cost of adopting once-possible alternatives and inhibit exit from a current policy path”(42). In Korea, the prevailing idea of economic supremacy and labor control, supported by the dominant state-business alliance, functioned to keep social welfare issues off the political agenda. Such a de-prioritizing of significant social issues might be regarded as part of non-decision-making (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963). The policy feedback of the developmental strategy provided resources that strengthened the capacity of conservative forces from above to make non-decisions by preventing the ideas and interests of pro-welfare forces from below from getting on major policy agendas.

In contrast with the strong presidency and bureaucracy, party politics and civil society had remained underdeveloped and weak under the authoritarian military regimes. However, massive and intense pro-democracy movements, organized by the grand pro-democracy coalition of civil society organizations and the opposition party, caused the authoritarian breakdown and democratic transition of 1987. Although political democratization is closely related to welfare development, the level of democratization per se—namely the achievement of formal democracy—might not be a sufficient condition for a deviation from earlier policy trajectories, that is, the expansion of state welfare away from policy legacies of developmental welfarism. For instance, social security expenditure decreased from 0.93 percent of the GDP in 1991 to 0.76 percent of the GDP in 1995.

After the democratization of 1987, the President and the Blue House continued to exert strong power over (social) policy making (Chung, 2001; Yi, 2002). However, Presidents Roh Tae-woo (1988-92) and Kim Young-sam (1993-97) appeared more than willing to agree with conservative (economic) officials and other entrenched coalitions of the right on welfare issues. For instance, the key concern of the Kim Young-sam government was based on market-conforming priorities in an overall strategy designed to strengthen competitiveness in the context of economic globalization (see Lee, 1999). As a result, the Roh and Kim administrations were not sympathetic to pro-welfare reform, which would break away from the overwhelming primacy of economic growth over welfare.

Because of the democratization process, the government could hardly push through key legislative programs without controlling the National Assembly. However, as discussed before, the regionally-based party structure benefited the major (conservative) parties at the expense of progressive groups. The first-past-the-post and single-member constituency systems in the “winner-takes-all” climate of Korean politics also made the entrance of a new progressive party into the Assembly difficult. Furthermore, the party system was not “an organ for interest articulation in the liberal democratic sense, but for political patronage and the maintenance of oligarchic political

elites” (Chung, 2001:17). Apart from the absence of governmental changes among political parties prior to 1997, there were no significant differences between the parties in terms of their political ideologies, policies, or organizational structures (H.J. Kwon, 1999; Shin, 2003).

It should also be noted that, despite the development of civil society after the 1987 democratization, during the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam administrations there was rarely any direct, significant influence driven by pro-welfare forces from below in social policy-making. Since 1987, civil society has been rapidly activated with the proliferation of diverse civil (society) organizations. But civil organizations, which did not form a pro-welfare alliance within civil society or with conventionally influential forces from above, had limitations in exercising formidable influence over the politics of social policy-making under the Roh and Kim administrations

After 1987, labor movements successfully organized many trade unions. But they failed to use their newly won power to effectively influence social policy-making (Yi, 2002). This failure is closely related to a lack of political support from a pro-labor party, combined with the system of company-based unions favoring company welfare. On the other hand, dominant business groups started to increasingly challenge the government regulations, but nonetheless, the cooperative and symbiotic partnership between the government and these business groups continued (Shin, 2003). Within the administrations’ continuing propensity for an economy-first priority, the regionally-based party system, and the limited role of civil society, most of the policy legacies of developmental welfarism entrenched in the Korean welfare system remained largely intact.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of social policy-making needs to be set within an institutionally and historically sensitive framework. The present study has endeavored to utilize the key concepts and arguments developed in state-centered or institutionalist studies—rather than comprehensive theoretical approaches to agenda-setting and policy formation that are better suited to making sense of the pluralist (American) political system. In other words, it has incorporated crucial insights of the institutionalist studies into the examination of a specific policy sphere, namely social policy, among various domains of public policies. In seeking to enrich the notion of the politics of social policy-making, particular attention has been devoted to the way in which the interaction of institutional configurations and political strategies shape the conduct of social policy-making in Korea and Japan.

Social policy in these two East Asian countries was shaped to fit the strategic priority of economic growth and development. This situation generated the underlying characteristics of developmental welfarism that were common to the two countries: (a) the state's role as a regulator and a low social spender, (b) the link between work and welfare through an enterprise- and employment-centered system, and (c) a strong emphasis on human capital investment and self-reliance. The economy-first developmental strategy and developmental welfarism were driven largely by the ideas and interests of conservative forces from above.

The political purposes and strategies of the forces from above were considerably influenced—but not fully determined—by institutional configurations. Korea and Japan share some crucial institutional legacies, which are captured by the following distinctive features: the organizational arrangements of the developmental state (e.g., bureaucratic autonomy and powerful economic bureaucracy); and group-coordinated market economies (e.g., state-business alliance and company-based coordination). At the same time, we should also consider different institutional configurations, that is, a strong presidential system, single-seat districts, and first-past-the-post voting in Korea; and a parliamentary system of government, multi-seat districts, and single non-transferable voting (before the 1996 elections) in Japan. Cutting across these institutional similarities and differences is a focus on the politics of social policy-making that constitutes the unifying theme of this paper.

Given the strong presidential system of Korea, the role of the President has always been a crucial determinant in the politics of social policy-making. But the incumbents of the presidency prior to the 1997 economic crisis initiated and supported the economy-first developmental priority. Economic bureaucrats' interests and departmental views, enhanced by their institutional positions as veto players within the government and bureaucratic politics, were a crucial barrier to the expansion of state welfare beyond developmental welfarism. The policy paradigm of the developmental strategy and developmental welfarism not only advantaged the vested interests of the bipartite alliance of government and management, but also embodied the way of defining problems and providing policy solutions. The regionally-based party competition, in combination with the first-past-the-post voting and single-member district system, benefited the major conservative parties while preventing a new progressive or social democratic party from entering the parliament.

In Japan, the conservative LDP retained its status as the largest party in the Diet and maintained its control of the executive during the post-war period. Compared with the strong influence of the President in Korean politics, the Japanese Prime Minister exerted a less substantial role in the policy-making process. Despite the dominant position of the LDP, the Prime Minister often suffered from exercising relatively weak

leadership due to the prevalence of issue-specific factionalism within intra-party politics. In this context, the ruling LDP's electoral concerns and inter-factional relationships within the party were the critical determinants of social policy-making in Japan. The clientelistic politics, fostered by the multi-district SNTV system, were less concerned with universal welfare policies that could be beneficial to all voters, including non-LDP supporters. Instead, the one-party dominant regime sustained political support through fragmented social insurance and company welfare that targeted selected groups of voters.

On the other hand, pro-welfare forces from below, such as labor movements under company-based unionism, could not play a significant role in the social policy-making of Korea and Japan. But it is also noteworthy that although forces from above holding an effective decision point for social policy-making still play an important role, there is also the mounting influence of forces from below, given the process of democratic consolidation. In Japan, grassroots movements settled down successfully throughout the 1990s (see Schwartz & Pharr, 2003). Furthermore, the political realignments resulting from the end of the one-party dominant regime in 1993 engendered openings for policy innovations, which in turn allowed new civil society organizations to enter into the policy-making arena (Peng, 2004). Korean civil movements have steadily developed a cohesive agenda-setting capacity and played important roles as policy initiators (see Kim, 2000). The democratic transition of power from the conservative ruling party to an opposition party in 1997 provided a window of opportunity for forces from below.

Therefore, the new relationship between the state and civil society in a more democratic context has become the key determinant in the politics of social policy-making in Korea and Japan. The strategic maneuvering of pro-welfare forces from below can be more influential if they gain cooperation from forces from above with strong institutional resources. Future studies on the politics of policy-making behind contemporary welfare reform need to highlight the institutional legacies of the developmental state and group-coordinated market economies in line with the concern of institutionalist approaches, but without precluding the analysis of the increasing role of societal forces from below.

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