

A Study of Political Party Instability in Korea

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Abstract: A notable feature of South Korea's party politics is its overall instability, which stems from the influence of many factors. The main driving factors are the high degree of individualization among South Korean political parties, the weak social class foundation of political parties, and the frequent corruption. Under the influence of these factors, the replacement and reorganization of South Korean political parties have become more frequent, the competition between parties is more intense, and the negative emotions of the South Korean people towards the president and political parties have further deepened. Although South Korea's party politics is unstable, on the whole, the diversification and dynamism of South Korea's party politics development provide a series of useful inspirations for the stable development of China's party politics. The development of China's party politics should pay more attention to grasping the balance between economy and society, correctly use the power of media guidance and flexibly meet the needs of the people. In the context of globalization, political parties of various countries should learn from each other and make positive contributions to the prosperity and progress of the global political system.

Keywords: South Korea; Political Party; Instability; China and South Korea

1. Reasons for The Instability of South Korea's Political Parties

South Korea's political parties often undergo frequent changes and adjustments, showing a certain degree of internal turmoil and uncertainty. This characteristic can be summarized as the instability of South Korea's party politics ^[1]. The reasons for the instability of South Korea's political parties include the following three points:

First, South Korean political parties are highly personalized. South Korean political parties have a strong tendency to personalize, which is specifically reflected in the power structure of party leaders, the organizational structure of party operations, the media's focus on party leaders, and voters' attention to the personal charm of party leaders. These factors together reflect the status of party leaders as the core of the party. This highly personalized characteristic affects the operation of the entire party ^[2]. In terms of the power structure of party leaders, party leaders, as the core of the party, have significant authority, and their decision-making and guiding role are crucial to the direction of the party. This power structure concentrated in individuals may lead to policy formulation being overly dependent on the subjective decisions of individual leaders, ignoring the full expression of diversified opinions within the party. There has been a long-term lack of extensive party consultation and sufficient discussion, making it more difficult to integrate the interests and views of all parties in policy formulation. The organizational structure of political parties is also affected by personalization. Highly personalized parties will have a greater tendency to centralize power in their organizational structure, so that the institutions and decision-making processes within the party are directly influenced and controlled by individual leaders ^[3]. This organizational structure not only weakens the decentralization mechanism within the party, but may also lead to a decrease in the sense of participation of party members in the policy-making process, which is not conducive to the overall cohesion of the party. In terms of media factors, the media's focus on party leaders is also an important manifestation of party personalization. The media often pays more attention to reporting the words and deeds of party leaders and ignores the voices of other important members of the party. The imbalance of media attention will exacerbate the trend of personalization within the party, making the party's image dependent on the performance of the party leader rather than the overall party strength and philosophy. In terms of the relationship between parties and voters, voters are easily influenced by the personal charm of party leaders and ignore the overall philosophy of the party. If the party leader changes, voters may face the situation of re-selection.

Second, the social class foundation of South Korean political parties is weak. The social class

foundation of South Korean political parties faces unique challenges. Its weakness and solidification pose challenges to party building and the overall cohesion of society. In South Korea's political system, although the constitution stipulates the freedom of party establishment and activities and promotes citizens' active participation in politics, this has also led to large differences in the breadth of the foundations between political parties, and the stratification of the "party-society" relationship has emerged, and the two are in an unstable, unbalanced and disordered state. On the one hand, due to the political environment and historical reasons, the class structure of South Korean society is relatively complex, and there are significant differences in the ability of political parties to attract and represent different social classes. Some parties may be more inclined to specific social classes, while others may not be able to effectively reach a wide range of social groups, resulting in an imbalance in the social foundation between political parties, and the voices of different social classes cannot be fully expressed. On the other hand, the interaction between various social classes in political participation is not orderly and coordinated, but rather fragmented and ineffective. The connection between political parties and social bases has not formed a close network, which makes it difficult for political parties to fully absorb the wisdom and needs of various social classes. Policy formulation and decision-making are out of touch with the actual social situation and lack comprehensive consideration of diverse voices. South Korea's administrative divisions have historically been divided into Lingnan, Honam, Lingdong, and Kanto. Lingnan refers to the general term for Busan Metropolitan City, Daegu Metropolitan City, Ulsan Metropolitan City, North Gyeongsang Province, and South Gyeongsang Province. Honam includes Gwangju Metropolitan City, North Jeolla Province, and South Jeolla Province. Due to historical reasons, these two regions show differences in support for different political parties. Geographically, there is a clear difference in the votes of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The Democratic Party received more votes in the Busan area, but received almost no support in the Chungcheong and Honam areas. In contrast, the Republican Party's votes are mainly concentrated in the Chungcheong area. In terms of regional conflicts, the imbalance in the selection of social elites is an important factor that causes regional conflicts^[4]. The preference and discrimination for specific regions in the process of selecting social elites has become an important reason for causing regional conflicts. Judging from the appointment of elites in various departments in South Korea, it is an undeniable fact that they are leaning towards the Lingnan region^[5]. In addition, the regional differences between urban and rural areas and between the north and the south in South Korea have made some political parties more inclined to pay attention to the problems of certain regions when formulating policies, causing people in other regions to feel the imbalance of political resources and feel marginalized politically^[6]. This behavior of political parties favoring the needs of specific regions may lead to differences in the image and position of political parties among different social classes, making it difficult to form a unified support base across the country.

Third, there is corruption in South Korea's party politics. Corruption is a major problem that governments of all countries generally face in the process of governance. The frequent corruption of South Korean presidents has disrupted the stable order of South Korean society. Since South Korea's democratic transition in the 1980s, most elected presidents have not had a "good end" due to various scandals. Corruption has always been a cancer in South Korean society, and many politicians cannot escape the "curse" of corruption^[6]. There are phenomena in South Korea where the president or uses the presidential power to abuse power, accept huge bribes in connection with enterprises, and people around him use their positions to seek personal gain. These phenomena are all involved in corruption to varying degrees. In the development of South Korea's economy, the government has always played a vital and even dominant role. The government's strong intervention in the economy has not only promoted the rise and growth of a number of chaebol groups, but also achieved remarkable achievements in the democratic transformation of South Korea's economy. However, due to its strong administrative power, the president has always been unable to get rid of its close ties with the chaebol. The chaebol relies on its close relationship with the government and has always occupied a pivotal position in the South Korean economy. Considering the importance of chaebols in the economy, the government has to attach great importance to the close relationship with chaebols, so the closeness of political and economic relations is difficult to weaken, and even shows a trend of increasing. For the Korean people, the damage to the public's trust in the political system caused by political and economic connections and corruption is an extremely serious problem. When the public perceives that political parties are corrupt when exercising power, the public's trust in the political system will be threatened, causing dissatisfaction and disgust with the government. Party corruption may lead to opaque and unfair political decision-making, and cause differences between political parties and society. For political parties, corruption will cause divisions and disputes within the party, making it difficult for the party to form cohesion, and ultimately reduce decision-making efficiency and execution. For the international image of political parties, corruption in party politics will also damage the country's

international reputation, cause difficulties in diplomacy and cooperation, and the ability of the ruling party will be questioned, resulting in party turmoil.

2. South Korea's Political Parties Are Showing Signs of Instability

First, political parties frequently change and reorganize. The replacement of political parties in South Korea generally includes party mergers, party splits, party dissolutions and party creation. South Korea's political system is basically ruled by two major parties. Overall, the merger and split of political parties in South Korea are the most frequent. In 2018, the People's Party of Korea and the Justice Party announced an agreement to merge into a new centrist party. Although the agreement was not finalized in the end, the event generated intense discussions at the time and triggered deep reflection in South Korea's political society. As an institution for striving for political power, the mission of political parties is to achieve more full political interests. At certain special moments, different political parties will temporarily put aside unnecessary contradictions between each other and start a force union to expand their own power to counter external forces and ultimately achieve some common political goals. In South Korea, the merger of political parties mainly stems from three aspects: election pressure, opposition between the ruling and opposition parties, and consolidation of status, which demonstrates the flexibility and rationality of political practice. Party split is an important manifestation of party changes in South Korea. The fundamental reason lies in the lack of ideological unity within the parties. The competition for seats, factional conflicts and leadership differences are the three main factors leading to party splits. These factors are intertwined, causing the parties to face serious internal pressure of division, which brings certain challenges to political stability and governance.

Among the more influential political parties in South Korea, there have been five dissolutions of political parties, including democratic resistance, military and political interference, and political party dissolutions caused by unconstitutional parties. In addition to the above, the phenomenon of party name changes in South Korea also occurs frequently in party changes, which has a certain historical background and complex reasons. This phenomenon is mainly manifested in the fact that political parties change their names in order to get rid of political scandals, renew policies or adjust their political positions. The motivation behind this includes establishing a new and good image and consolidating the support base. It can be understood that the phenomenon of party name changes in South Korea reflects the complexity of South Korea's political turmoil and competition between political parties. In order to cope with severe political challenges, some political parties use name changes to give new images and mass cognition, redefine political concepts, and enable the party to gain an advantage in the fiercely competitive political arena. On December 27, 2023, former National Power Party Chairman Lee Jun-seok announced that he would officially withdraw from the party and establish a new party about 100 days before next year's general election. On the same day, Lee Kuan Yew submitted a report on the establishment of a preparatory committee for party establishment to the Central Election Commission, tentatively named "Reform Party", and stated that provincial and central political parties will be registered as soon as possible. On the same day, the People Power Party and the Era Transformation Party completed their merger, with the number of seats reaching 112, reflecting the variability and diversity of South Korea's political parties.

Second, the confrontation between political parties is severe. Korean society divides the current political parties in South Korea into two camps: democratic and conservative. From the perspective of political ideas, the current democratic camp mainly pursues social liberalism and is also regarded as a mixed force with multiple positions. South Korea's conservative parties are also ambiguous in nature, but they are different from the conservative camp. As its name suggests, the goal of leading the democratic faction regime is the source of its political identity. The conservative camp once believed in nationalism, Cold War anti-communism, authoritarianism, conservatism, cooperatives, economic liberalism, national conservatism, social conservatism, liberal conservatism, right-wing liberalism, and neo-conservatism. At present, it mainly believes in conservatism. In terms of ideological comparison, the conservative camp emphasizes the importance of traditional values and conservative social order, and regards national security and social stability as the top priority. This position is rooted in the adherence to South Korea's traditional culture, moral concepts and national identity, and reflects the strong demand for social order and stability. Relatively speaking, the progressive camp pays more attention to progressive values such as social equality, human rights and environmental protection, advocates an open and inclusive society, and emphasizes individual rights and social common responsibilities. For the progressive camp, social development is not only about economic prosperity, but also about the realization of social equity and environmental sustainability. This position reflects

the desire for social change and justice, and embodies the concern for issues such as human rights and environmental protection. In terms of the comparison of core policy propositions, the conservative camp and the progressive camp in South Korea show completely different ideas of governing the country. There are profound differences in core policies such as economic development, national security and foreign policy, which have also profoundly affected South Korea's foreign policy. In terms of the relationship between party leaders, mutual competition has become a key point of political confrontation. The competition between leaders has intensified the political confrontation between the two camps and promoted the deepening and strengthening of the core concepts of each camp. (13) It can be seen from this that there are confrontations and differences between the progressive and conservative camps in South Korea's party politics in many aspects.

Third, the negative sentiment of the Korean people towards political parties has deepened. The negative sentiment of the Korean people towards political parties has become prominent. In recent years, corruption scandals have repeatedly been exposed in South Korean politics. Some political parties and their members have been exposed for corruption and bribery, which has led to doubts about the public's trust in the Korean party political system. The internal confrontation of South Korean political parties has cast a shadow on the image of the political parties. These internal disputes have hindered the parties from forming a unified voice and coherent policy formulation, making it difficult for the parties to make effective decisions quickly at critical moments, bringing insecurity and dissatisfaction to the people, and deepening the negative impression of the people on the political parties. After the political parties came to power, the people would examine the measures of the political parties. When the people generally felt that the policies proposed by the political parties were ineffective in actual implementation, it would weaken the people's confidence in the government and political parties and deepen their negative views on the political system.

According to survey statistics, from January 2023 to December 2023, the Gallup polling organization in South Korea conducted a survey on the approval rate of Yoon Seok-yeol's administration. From January, the approval rate was 37%, 37%, 34%, 31%, 33%, 36%, 33%, 33%, 33%, 30%, 33%, and 32%, respectively. Compared with the 48.46% approval rate when Yoon Seok-yeol was elected, it can be seen that the Korean people have a negative evaluation of Yoon Seok-yeol. Through the analysis of the survey data, it can be observed that the public's evaluation of Yoon Seok-yeol's administration shows a certain fluctuation trend. The public's negative evaluation of the president and dissatisfaction with political parties are often complex, and are affected by a combination of factors such as diplomacy, national security, economy, and people's livelihood. In the face of these challenges, the South Korean president and political parties need to judge the situation, adopt flexible and pragmatic policies, pay attention to and solve problems at all levels of society, so as to better respond to people's expectations and win their trust and support. This is also the key to building a stable social and political environment.

3. The Characteristics of South Korea's Party Politics Development And Its Implications for The Stable Development of China's Party Politics

In addition to instability, the characteristics of the development of South Korea's party politics also reflect diversity and dynamism. Diversity lies in the fact that South Korea's multiple political parties represent different political views and interest groups, injecting diverse voices into the political arena. Although it is competitive, its positive effect is to make the political system more dynamic, reflecting the vitality and openness within the party. The dynamics of political parties and the president are a common phenomenon in the South Korean political system. The periodic power shifts have made the political landscape full of changes. South Korean political parties have continuously adjusted their policies to adapt to the new social, economic and international environment.

From a comparative perspective, China's party politics generally presents the characteristics of unity and "honesty". The development of China's party politics has shown obvious unity, which is reflected in the dominant position of the Communist Party of China, the highly organized internal structure, and the collaborative cooperation model formed in national governance. As the ruling party, the Communist Party of China has strong organizational cohesion and leadership capabilities, and its dominant position provides a solid core for the political system. The structure of efficient organization within the party enables the rapid communication and implementation of central policies in the process of decision-making and policy implementation, ensuring the stability of national politics. At the same time, China's party politics has developed a paradigm of multi-party consultation and cooperation in national governance. Different parties have reached consensus in policy making and national affairs

management through consultation and cooperation, forming a situation of internal unity. This characteristic of unity enables China's party politics to better achieve overall unity within and outside the political system, and effectively promote the country's progress and long-term development.

There are differences in the institutional sources, organizational structures, and characteristics of the political party development in China and South Korea, but the political party development of each country has its own advantages and can be used as a reference. The characteristics of the political party development in South Korea have the following three implications for the stable development of the political party in China:

(1) Maintaining a Balance Between Social And Economic Development

Maintaining a balance between society and the economy is of far-reaching significance for the stable development of a country's party politics. The balance between the two areas of society and economy is directly related to the country's long-term prosperity, and involves the legitimacy, credibility and close ties between political parties in governance and the people [7]. The balance between society and the economy helps to ease social contradictions and class differentiation, and promote social harmony and stability. Too fast or too slow social development may lead to structural imbalances, exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor, social injustice and other problems. Political parties need to adjust their structures through reasonable social policies to ensure fair distribution of resources and avoid social unrest and accumulation of dissatisfaction. Good economic development provides the government with ample financial support, enhances the party's ability to govern and credibility, and the party meets the people's expectations for a better life through specific economic policies, improves the people's sense of gain, and consolidates the political foundation of the party. When the people feel social justice, equal opportunities and economic growth, they are more likely to trust the government and support the formulation and implementation of party policies. On the contrary, if social and economic imbalances occur, the people will lose confidence in the government, generate dissatisfaction, and increase the risk of social unrest. When political parties are in a balanced state in all aspects, they are more likely to gain the recognition of the people to ensure the continuation of the regime. Political parties need to pay real-time attention to social and economic changes, adjust policies in a timely manner, maintain close contact with the people, and ensure the stability of the regime. Therefore, maintaining a balance between society and the economy is not only the current task of the country's party politics, but also a strategic measure that affects the long-term stability of the regime. In this process, political parties need to fully understand the relationship between society and the economy, actively adjust policies, and ensure the smooth and healthy development of the country's party politics [8].

(2) Proper Use of The Power of Media Guidance

As the main channel for information dissemination, the media not only has the ability to influence public opinion, but is also a key force in shaping the political atmosphere and guiding social trends [9]. The positive guidance of the media helps political parties to shape a positive image. Through media propaganda, political parties can convey ideas and information to the public, show a good image and political achievements, and increase voters' trust in political parties. Reasonable guidance of media public opinion, emphasizing the achievements of political parties in governing and their practical actions to serve the people, will help enhance the credibility of political parties and consolidate their ruling foundation. In terms of media guidance, media guidance helps to resolve social contradictions and maintain political stability. Through the extensive dissemination of the media, the government can respond to social concerns in a timely manner, resolve disputes fairly, and reduce the expansion of social contradictions. On the other hand, media guidance can also publicize government policies and measures, make the public treat social problems rationally, and reduce the possibility of social unrest. By actively guiding media reports, political parties can convey to the general public the importance of participating in politics and expressing demands, encourage citizens to participate more actively in social affairs, further improve the transparency of the government, increase the openness of the political process, and thus establish a trust relationship between the government and the people. Finally, media guidance helps promote the dissemination and exchange of political ideas. Political parties can use media guidance to convey their political ideas and values to the international community, enhance exchanges and cooperation with other countries, learn from the successful experiences of various countries, and enhance the country's reputation on the international stage. The correct use of media guidance can not only make party politics more open and transparent, but also enhance the influence of political parties at home and abroad. In summary, the correct use of the power of media guidance is of great significance to the stable development of national party politics and can promote the realization of political stability.

(3) Encouraging Citizens' Active Political Participation

Encouraging citizens to actively participate in politics has far-reaching significance for the stable development of the country's party politics. Citizens' active participation in politics reflects the democracy of political life and the full rights of citizens, helps to establish a more open and inclusive political environment, and provides a solid foundation for the stable development of political parties. As an important part of the political system, citizens' opinions and demands reflect the diverse voices of society. By encouraging citizens to participate in political activities such as elections and referendums, political parties can help to better obtain public opinion. Political participation is the main way for citizens to express their demands and rights. Citizens can better express their opinions by participating in the political process, and the government can also understand the needs of society more promptly, reduce the accumulation of social contradictions, prevent social unrest, and maintain political stability. In addition, by participating in politics, citizens can better understand the political system, laws and regulations, cultivate the awareness of the rule of law and political literacy, and build a harmonious and rational political atmosphere. Finally, citizens' active participation in politics can promote the government to better perform its duties. The government needs to respond to citizens' concerns and needs in a timely manner. Citizens supervise government behavior through political participation and promote the government to perform its duties more transparently, responsibly and efficiently. On the other hand, political parties encourage citizens to actively participate, establish closer ties between the government and the people, and promote the government to better serve the society. In summary, encouraging citizens to actively participate in politics is crucial to the stable development of the country's party politics. Citizen participation is the source of vitality of the political system and an important support for party building. By creating an open and inclusive political environment, political parties can better listen to public opinion, resolve social conflicts, and achieve long-term political stability.

4. Conclusion

The instability of South Korean political parties is rooted in many factors, among which the high degree of personalization, weak social class foundation and frequent corruption are the main driving forces. The high degree of personalization means that the personal power of political leaders exceeds the interests of the party, which will lead to internal struggles and divisions within the party; the weak social class foundation makes it difficult for political parties to establish a broad social foundation, and they are easily manipulated by specific groups or interest groups, making it difficult to establish long-term stability; corruption not only damages the credibility of political parties, but also deepens the public's distrust of the political system. These factors are reflected in the frequent changes and reorganizations of political parties in South Korea, the fierce confrontation between political parties, and the negative emotions of the public towards political parties. However, the development characteristics of South Korea's party politics provide a series of useful inspirations for China's party politics. First, China should focus on social equity and economic balance in the process of development to reduce conflicts between different classes and thus improve the long-term stability of political parties. Second, the correct use of the power of media guidance is the key to shaping a good political atmosphere. Chinese political parties should pay more attention to objectivity, fairness, rationality and balance in public opinion guidance, so that the media can become a disseminator of political rationality rather than a promoter of political confrontation, and create a positive political atmosphere. Third, Chinese political parties should actively guide citizens to participate in politics, promote political decision-making that is closer to people's livelihood needs, and better serve the entire people.

In the current context of globalization, political parties in various countries should learn from each other, share experiences, and jointly promote the continuous improvement and development of political systems, better adapt to diversified challenges, improve governance effectiveness, enhance international cooperation and understanding, and make positive contributions to the prosperity and progress of the global political system.

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