The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the members' legislative behavior based mainly on electronic voting records for the plenary session of the Korean National Assembly. More specifically, it has systematically investigated the influence of party, constituency, and ideology factors on individual members' voting decisions at the final passage of legislative bills. And the dissertation has also done complementary case studies of selected bills from the stage of committee review through that of final decision on the floor. The case studies have attempted to illuminate the effect of the bills' policy content on the nature of legislative process and on the members' legislative behavior as well.

Since the second half of the Sixteenth Assembly, all the bills reported from the committees to the plenary session have been voted on electronically. Introducing this voting method has made it much easier than before to compile individual members' voting records and hence parse the determinants of member's voting behavior.

Members' voting records suggest that their legislative behavior pattern remains highly consensual at the plenary stage: most of the legislative bills pass the National Assembly with a high rate of approval as they used to do so. This prevailing pattern can be largely explicable in light of the committee-centered legislative process and also the mechanism dominated by party leaders for resolving disagreements. The members of the Korean National Assembly recognize that committees constitute the main workshop for legislation. Under such committee-centered notion, they seldom dissent to the decision made even over previously controversial bills at the committee stage. This is due to members' lack of interest across various policy issues and also their reciprocal acceptance of decisions rendered by the other committees than one of their own affiliation. More often than not, party and committee leaders can forge a compromise over originally controversial bills, and the rank and file tend to toe the line.

Notwithstanding the prevailing consensual pattern, conflictual behavior pattern cannot be left aside as insignificant at the plenary stage of legislative process. Prior to the introduction of electronic voting, legislative conflict was explained overwhelmingly by the party factor. But now with readily available data on electronic votes, any systematic observer can search for multiple voting cleavages and their determinants beyond the party factor.

In accounting for members' legislative voting behavior, the study has considered three kinds of independent variables. The first is the member's party affiliation. The Korean political party, with a highly centralized power and control over candidate selection and resource allocation, makes the members of the national legislature very obedient to the party. The second is the member's constituency. Under the electoral system having the single-member plurality rule as its dominant component, most members of the National Assembly are made very attentive to their constituency interests. And the third is the member's ideological inclination. While the first two relate to political institutions, the last is a personal political trait. In the study, the dependent variable is the member's voting decision on the floor, which is dichotomized into two categories: (1) assent, and (2) dissent plus abstention.

A series of binary logistic regression analysis have been performed. Any one or more independent variables have shown a statistically significant impact on the dependent one only in the case of 27 legislative bills. The statistical tests concerning the other bills have generated no meaningful results, because there exists little variation in the value of the dependent variable: just a small number of members cast a dissenting vote or abstained themselves.

The key findings are as follows. First, when party voting takes place, the voting cleavage takes on the pattern of the ruling party versus the coalition of opposition parties. And the chances of party voting are relatively high in case of voting on the floor amendments. The bills over which party voting has occurred share no particular policy content among them. These bills include some of political nature, such as those regarding legislative check on presidential and administrative power, the assessment of performance by former presidents and
their governments, and demarcation of constituency boundaries. But there are many more bills having no such policy content. In the U.S. Congress, party voting is predominant in redistributive policies, such as income tax or social security bill. By contrast, in the Korean National Assembly, the members have exhibited similar legislative behavior in voting on one bill alone, the Health Insurance Act. All this suggests that Korean political parties among themselves do not have fairly distinct policy stances in certain policy areas.

Second, constituency has a remarkable influence on the members’ voting decision especially over regional development bills. In the U.S. Congress, these bills are recognized as distributive in their policy content, and frequently pass the legislature by unanimous consent. But this is not the case in the Korean National Assembly. In this country, regional development bills cause serious regional dissonance surrounding the perceived policy costs and benefits, and they can be hardly characterized as the win-win policy for all constituencies. Those members who see costs for the development bill to be burdened by their constituencies oppose it staunchly. But the other members, expecting their constituencies to garner considerable benefits from the bill and wishing to take full advantage of it for their credit claiming toward reelection, support it vehemently.

Third, ideological voting deserves special attention. Ideology impinges upon the members’ voting decisions about the bills as follows: the Industrial Relations Bill, and the Constitutional Civil Rights Bill. The issues concern governmental regulation over workers’ right to strike, or over civil liberties for assembly and demonstration. The more ideologically progressive members are, the more opposed to governmental regulation, and the more favorable toward workers’ rights as well as civil rights. In the U.S. Congress, ideological voting prevails in economic redistributive policy, while in the Korean National Assembly it is predominant in social policy.

The in-depth case studies of selected bills, based on Wilson’s scheme of the relationship between policy and organizational activity or legislative behavior, have also confirmed the influence of party and constituency factors. For one thing, in “entrepreneurial politics” related to the kind of policies with concentrated costs and dispersed benefits, such as environmental protection, nonprofit civic organizations play an entrepreneurial role and make members vulnerable to their pressure for legislation.

The implications of major findings may be further discussed. First, as shown by the cases of party voting, political parties represented in National Assembly do not effectively perform as policy-based political groups. Under these existing conditions, it is not desirable that political parties impose strong party discipline on their members in the legislature. Second, highly consensual legislative behavior in the plenary session should be understood with some caveats. Very often consensus results from members’ unawareness about the importance of thorough floor deliberation and also from leaders’ prior adjustments of conflicting interests or opinions and then muting ordinary members’ voice thanks to strong party discipline. Such consensus is by nature fragile, because it is built upon the rank and file members’ lack of policy concern and activism. Last, judging from the policy content of the bills which reveal members’ conflictual legislative behavior, not economic issues but political or social issues loom large in drawing the Korean society into controversy.

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