

# Political Suffrage of Korean Residents in Japan before World War II

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In recent years, the political suffrage of foreign residents has become a social problem in Japan. Case studies of the suffrage of permanent foreign residents in various countries have been conducted,<sup>1</sup> but there has been no research that has attempted to look at this issue from a historical perspective. In this essay, I try to shed light on the history of the exercise of the rights to vote and to stand for election by Korean residents in the period before World War II.

## 1 Establishment of Political Suffrage of Korean Residents

In the Japanese Empire, although the sovereignty of the emperor wholly applied to the colonies, the laws of the Japanese mainland, including the constitution, only partially applied. In other words, the colonies had legal systems that were distinct from that of the mainland.

The Elections Law of the House of Representatives illustrates the difference. It established electoral districts in the mainland but not in the colonies, and it was thus not possible for residents of Korea, Taiwan and other such places to vote in their home jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup> If they visited the mainland, where the Elections Law was in force, however, Koreans theoretically had political suffrage, because they were officially considered to be “imperial subjects” after the Annexation of Korea (1910). (In the Elections Law of the House of Representatives which came into force in 1889, the first item under Article 6, “Voters must satisfy the following conditions” is simply “male subjects of Japan of at least twenty-five years of age.”)

However, it was not until after World War I that the Japanese government came to express an interpretation of the political suffrage of colonized people residing in Japan, and in this process, the bestowal of political suffrage was not necessarily thought of as an obvious principle.<sup>3</sup>

After World War I, the number of Koreans coming to live in the mainland gradually increased, and a resident Korean community started to develop. In 1920, the Home Ministry issued an interpretation of the law under which Korean residents had the right to vote.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the House of Representatives elections at the time were restricted, with the franchise limited to men who paid at least three yen a year in direct national taxes, and it is estimated that only around ten Korean residents in the whole country were actually eligible to cast ballots.<sup>5</sup> For the Home Ministry, the political suffrage of Korean residents was not a particularly important matter.

When the Elections Law of the House of Representatives was amended by the 50th Diet in 1925, however, and a system of universal manhood suffrage was established, many people expressed concern at the prospect of large numbers of Korean residents exercising their right to vote. In the House of Peers, Mizuno Rentarō 水野鍊太郎, former Vice-Governor-General

of Korea, rose to speak in the debate over the issue of extending the franchise, observing that “tens of thousands of people entering the mainland with no knowledge of home affairs . . . will immediately have the right to vote.” He went on to ask, “Should we accept this without any reservations?” He argued that granting Koreans and Taiwanese living in the mainland the right to vote was unjustifiable. Hanai Takuzō 花井卓蔵, a well-known lawyer, expressed the same concern. In response to this, the government changed the minimum period of residence required to attain the right to vote from “at least six months,” as had been specified in the original draft, to “at least one year,” thereby excluding transient Korean residents from the electorate.

Despite these objections and qualifications, the universal manhood suffrage that was implemented in the late 1920s saw the emergence of large numbers of Korean voters. Let us take a look at their voting behavior.

## 2 Exercise of the Right to Vote by Korean Residents

In the general election of 1928, the first national election based on universal manhood suffrage, the number of eligible resident Korean voters was around 12,000, which represented around 9.3% of the total resident Korean population. As the number of Korean residents rapidly increased, the number of eligible voters also increased, but the percentage of voters with respect to the resident population remained at around 8% to 9% until the early 1930s (Table 1). This low percentage, which was roughly half the corresponding percentage for Japanese voters (around 20% of the total population), was caused by the strict residence period requirement described previously and the fact that votes cast in the *hangŭl* alphabetic script were initially not recognized.

Table 1. Exercise of the Right to Vote by Korean Residents

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of resident Korean voters</u>	<u>Resident Korean population</u>	<u>Rate of eligibility to vote</u>
1928	11,983 (nine prefectures)	128,406	9.33%
1930	24,244	298,091	8.13%
1932	35,888	390,543	9.19%
1936	41,829 (ten prefectures)	337,454	12.40%
1937	25,812 (eight prefectures)	198,150	13.03%

Source: *Fukuoka nichinichi shinbun* 福岡日日新聞, 5 February 1928, Naimushō Keihokuyoku 内務省警保局, ed., *Shakai undō no jōkyō* 社会運動の状況 (1936, 1937), in Pak 1975–76, vol. 3, pp. 561–562, 737.

Even so, the spectacle of Korean voters clad in traditional white Korean clothes was reported in many newspapers as a phenomenon of universal suffrage (Figure 1).

Let us look at the parties supported by the Korean residents. Most of the Koreans that came to Japan were incorporated into the lowest tier of the labor market as construction or factory workers. These workers formed local labor unions, and in 1925, they formed the Zainihon Chōsen Rōdō Sōdōmei 在日本朝鮮労働総同盟 (Federation of Korean Labor in Japan),

which enjoyed a high membership rate. These Korean laborers looked towards the proletarian parties being formed by Japanese people as potential allies, and in places such as Kyoto and Kobe, the Korean labor unions, together with the Japanese labor unions, participated in the preparatory committees of the proletarian parties.<sup>6</sup>

By the time universal suffrage was implemented, Japan's proletarian parties had split into left-wing, moderate, and right-wing factions, and had undergone repeated complex reorganizations. In general, the party that received the support of Korean residents was the Rōdō Nōmin Tō 労働農民党 (Farmer-Labor Party), which was the most left-wing. Let us look at the results of a survey of the 1927 Osaka Prefectural Assembly election conducted by the Special Higher Police (Tokkō) Section of the Osaka Prefectural Police Department (Table 2).



Fig. 1. A Korean going to vote. Source: *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* 東京朝日新聞, 21 February 1928.

Table 2. Korean Voters' Support of Parties, 1927 Osaka Prefectural Assembly Election

Rōdō Nōmin Tō	550
Shakai Minshū Tō 社会民衆党	128
Other proletarian parties	75
Seiyūkai and Minseitō	65

Source: Aoki 1927, pp. 41–42.

Eligible voters constituted less than 10% of the Korean population of Osaka, and only around one quarter of these solidly supported a particular party. Even so, it is worth noting that more than 90% supported proletarian parties, with most support going to the Farmer-Labor Party, at nearly 70%. (In this election, the Farmer-Labor Party received less than 3% of the total vote, a figure that evidences the distinctiveness of Korean voters' orientation.)

In 1927, Prefectural Assembly elections were held in thirty-nine prefectures, and in February of the following year, House of Representatives elections were held. In many areas, the Farmer-Labor Party candidates received proactive support from Korean organizations, such as branches of the Federation of Korean Labor in Japan.<sup>7</sup> Through these support activities, Koreans also promoted their own ethnic agenda, which included criticism of the oppressive rule of the Korean Peninsula. Posters and letters of recommendation bearing *hangŭl* charac-

ters could be seen.

This situation changed greatly in the 1930s. First, the Farmer-Labor Party was forced to disband. The security authorities were alarmed at the way the illegal Japanese Communist Party had openly conducted public activities in the election via the Farmer-Labor Party, and arrested the top leaders of the Communist Party, the Farmer-Labor Party, and Korean organizations that had strong links with these parties. Second, the Federation of Korean Labor in Japan, which formed the base of the support given to the Farmer-Labor Party by Korean residents, was assimilated into the Nihon Rōdō Kumiai Zenkoku Kyōgikai 日本労働組合全国協議会 (National Council of Japanese Trade Unions). This was because the resident Korean communist movement was, in accordance with Profintern resolutions, assimilated into Japan's communist movement under the policy of "one country, one communist party."<sup>8</sup> Third, while the above political movements were taking place, in several areas related to elections, changes that were uniformly advantageous to Korean residents also took place. The number of Korean residents who were eligible to vote increased, as did the rate of settlement. The residency requirements were relaxed in a 1934 amendment to the Elections Law. Another event related to the increased level of political suffrage of Koreans was the recognition in 1930 by the Home Ministry of votes cast with *hangŭl* writing.<sup>9</sup> As the Korean constituency expanded, some Japanese candidates started to produce posters and billboards bearing *hangŭl* characters.

The 1930s saw complicated trends develop in the support of political parties by Korean residents. Extreme left-wing activists who had been involved with the Japanese Communist Party and the National Council of Japanese Trade Unions rejected the legal parties and supported imprisoned Japanese Communist Party candidates. Of course, there was no chance of these candidates being elected, and rather than standard electioneering, support mainly took the form of street rallies.<sup>10</sup> Many Koreans pinned their hopes on the legal proletarian parties, and support movements organized by Koreans could be seen in many different areas. Rather than supporting the policies of these parties, we could say that Korean residents based their support on the daily activities of the individual candidates in areas such as health care, working conditions, and education among Korean communities. One beneficiary of this was Asanuma Inejirō 浅沼稻次郎 of the Zenkoku Rōnō Taishū Tō 全国労農大衆党 (National Labor-Farmer Masses Party), which later became the Shakai Taishū Tō 社会大衆党 (Social Masses Party). Asanuma consistently received the support of Korean residents in Tokyo because he assisted in relief activities during strikes by Koreans and worked to solve housing problems among the Korean community<sup>11</sup> (Figure 2).

In 1932, the proletarian parties, which had split into many different groups, united to form the Social Masses Party. At this time, illegal activist organizations related to the National Council of Japanese Trade Unions had almost entirely disintegrated, and it seems that the Social Masses Party was able (during the short period up to its disbandment in 1940) to garner the votes of Korean residents that had been split among other parties.<sup>12</sup> Favorable assessments of the Social Masses Party could be seen in the newspapers published by Koreans at the time.<sup>13</sup>



convenient to divide the period into three phases: 1929 to 1933, 1934 to 1938, and 1939 to 1943. The respective numbers of candidates for these periods were 33, 131, and 219, indicating a particularly significant increase at the end of the 1930s. However, due to a proliferation of fringe candidates, the success rate actually decreased. Also, the number of candidates that ran in House of Representatives elections and Prefectural Assembly elections was relatively small, with most candidates running in relatively minor elections, such as those held in towns, villages, wards, and school districts.

Table 3. Periods of Candidacy and Types of Elections

<u>Type of election</u>	<u>1929-33</u>	<u>1934-38</u>	<u>1939-43</u>
House of Representatives	2	4	6
Prefectural assembly	2	0	11
Assemblies of cities, towns, villages	25	111	163
Assemblies of wards, school districts	4	33	58

Source: Naimushō Keihokkyoku, ed., *Shakai undō no jōkyō* (1936, 1937), in Pak 1975-76, vol. 4, pp. 685-701, 910-919, *Tokkō geppō* 特高月報 (1943) in Pak 1975-76, vol. 5, pp. 138,174, 231.

Next, let us consider the occupations of these candidates (Table 4). In comparison with the average Korean resident of the time, not only were relatively few of the candidates unemployed, but also their occupations were quite different. Many were involved in commerce or intellectual occupations, and among those classed as “laborers,” many were employed as foremen or were engaged in work that gave them influence over others, such as the recruitment and placement of laborers, the subcontracting of civil engineering projects, and the management of laborer accommodation facilities. People in such positions often created mutual aid organizations, and it was quite easy for them to secure a sizeable number of votes. Also, kickbacks received from lower-tier laborers would have helped them become relatively well funded.

Table 4. Occupations of Korean Candidates

Laborer	122
Commerce	91
Intellectual occupation	31
Other	18
Unemployed or unknown	19

Source: Same as Table 3.

Finally, let us look at the affiliations of these candidates (Table 5). From the late 1930s onwards, although the number of independent candidates increased, this was because the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Health and Welfare pursued a policy of disbanding the existing private Korean organizations and incorporating them into the Kyōwakai 協和会 (Har-

monization Association), which was the officially sanctioned controlling body for Korean residents.<sup>16</sup> Setting aside these issues, and considering only candidates with clearly defined affiliations, we see that most belonged to “*yūwa shinboku* 融和親睦” groups (groups in favor of conciliation between Japanese and Koreans); of the successful candidates, a relatively large number belonged to such pro-Japanese groups. In recent years, interpretations emphasizing the mutually assistive nature of these *yūwa shinboku* groups have emerged.<sup>17</sup> With respect to elections, these candidates appealed for Japanese votes by calling for conciliation between the mainland and Korea.

Then, how were these candidates viewed by compatriot voters? In 1939, *Tōa shinbun* 東

Table 5. Affiliations of Candidates

	<u>1929–33</u>	<u>1934–38</u>	<u>1939–43</u>
<i>Yūwa shinboku</i> groups	17	28	1
Nationalist or communist groups	1	10	0
Others	3	4	1
Japanese political parties	1	4	14
No affiliation or unknown			

Source: See Table 3.

亜新聞, a newspaper published in Nagoya by pro-Japanese individuals, carried these remarks by a reporter from the paper’s Osaka bureau:

The current state of affairs in Osaka’s Korean community would suggest that, to some, elections are no more than an idle pastime. With a proliferation of heroes (?) who would normally have absolutely no interest in politics throwing their names into the hat, you need both hands to count the number of people rumored to be standing for the six places available in Higashinari Ward. This behavior should be called as “conduct that seems to be based on a desire for mutual destruction” and an “abomination.”<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned previously, in the late 1930s, due to an overabundance of Korean candidates, the success rate actually decreased. The reporter is criticizing this situation.

In *Minjung sibo* 民衆時報, a Korean-language newspaper published in Osaka by Kim Mun-jun 金文準, a former activist for the National Council of Japanese Trade Unions, the following appeared:

In Osaka, Korean organizations that offer to perform liaison services for election campaign brokers have become something of a local specialty. There are over 300 of these organizations in Osaka. Ambitious gentlemen who want to stand for election are listed as advisers in such organizations. If a compatriot is arrested by the police, these organizations have one of their advisers or another influential member talk to the police and arrange for the suspect to be released, for which service they receive financial remuneration and, potentially, the future support of the arrested individual in elections.<sup>19</sup>

This sort of criticism of the way that only influential people with strong links to the authorities would stand for election can also be found in *hangŭl* newspapers that were published in Tokyo.<sup>20</sup> It can be seen from these documents that, while Korean residents had some expectations of their compatriot candidates, they had become disillusioned about the gap between ideals and reality. Therefore, Korean residents would not necessarily have voted for Korean candidates, and as mentioned previously, some voted for Japanese candidates.

Lastly, we will examine the campaign activities of Koreans and the statements they made in the Diet or local assemblies when they were successful in winning seats.

Let us begin with Pak Ch'un-gŭm, the only Korean member of the House of Representatives in prewar Japan. Born in 1891 in Kyŏngsang-namdo 慶尚南道 province of Korea, he went to Japan when he was sixteen years old. Making a living as a construction worker or by selling ginseng, when he was young he gained a reputation for being too wild, since he often resorted to violence.

In 1922, he established a Korean organization named the Sŏaikai 相愛会 in Tokyo. The Sŏaikai attacked Korean labor unions or broke their strikes, thereby winning favor with the Japanese police, and under police influence it grew into a nationwide organization. Higher officials of the Government General of Korea, too, including Governor-General Saitō Makoto 齋藤実 and head of the Police Bureau Maruyama Tsurukichi 丸山鶴吉, supported Pak's pro-Japanese organization.<sup>21</sup>

Pak determined to run in a national election in early 1930s, when the Sŏaikai was gradually declining in power. He filed as a candidate in Tokyo's 4th district



Fig. 3. Pak Ch'un-gŭm (right), with Maruyama Tsurukichi 丸山鶴吉 (left) and Pak Itoko 朴いと子 (center; Pak Ch'un-gŭm's wife).



in the general election of 1932. Maruyama Tsurukichi, one of his most important patrons for more than ten years, supported him eagerly during the campaign. Maruyama said in his memoirs that he thought Pak's election could be "greatly effective in assimilating Koreans"<sup>22</sup> (Figure 3). In the campaign, ex-higher officials of the Korean Government General such as Maruyama and Saitō made speeches in support of Pak almost daily. The candidate himself appealed that unification of Koreans and Japanese was a necessity. He partnered with an organization of local shopkeepers to buy votes.

Trying thus deliberately to define himself as a "collaborator," he canvassed for Japanese votes. He eventually succeeded in obtaining 10.2% of the total valid votes, taking third place among eleven candidates in the district, and was elected to the Diet. After 1932, he ran for the election in 1936, 1937, and 1942; in 1937 he was once again successful in capturing a seat.

In his first term as a member of the Lower House, from 1932 to '36, Pak emphasized the importance of sending Korean emigrants to Manchuria and objected to controlling imports of Korean rice to the mainland. We can see that he generally filled the role of a spokesman of the Korean Government General in some of the controversial issues between the colonial government and the Japanese counterpart. In his second term, Pak advocated the introduction of a military service option for Koreans and supported the Japanese invasion of China.<sup>23</sup>

Pak Ch'un-gŭm's brand of pro-Japanese campaign and relative lack of interest in issues affecting local Koreans, however, made him a rather peculiar case. Let us take another example—Pak Pyōng-in (Figure 4), who was a member of Amagasaki 尼崎 city assembly during almost the same period as Pak Ch'un-gŭm.

Pak Pyōng-in was born in Ch'ungch'ōng-namdo 忠清南道 in 1901. While working as a public letter writer in Japan, in 1926 he established a pro-Japanese organization named the Naisen Dōaikai 内鮮同愛会; in 1933, he set up the Amagasaki Kokubō Seinendan 尼崎国防青年団, another group that is regarded as pro-Japanese since it held a celebration in January 1938, when the introduction of voluntary military service by Koreans was made public. We cannot easily conclude that he was a mere tool of the Japanese authorities, however, if we scrutinize his activities as a member of Amagasaki city assembly from 1932 to 1936 and 1940 to 1943. In the assembly, he protested against a Japanese assembly member who had opposed allowing Korean residents to live in public housing, and he requested that mea-



Fig. 4. Pak Pyōng-in. *Ōsaka asahi shinbun* 大阪朝日新聞(大阪版), 31 May 1932.

asures be taken to control flood tide in the areas where many Koreans were living.<sup>24</sup> Pak Pyōng-in may have leaned toward pro-Japanese positions on many issues, but he also acted as an advocate for the interests of the city's Korean residents.

Other Koreans who were elected to local assemblies in various parts of Japan shared much in common with Pak Pyōng-in. Many of them laid emphasis on the problems affecting the life of local Korean residents, such as housing problems or restrictions on Korean emigration to the Japanese mainland. In many cases, the positions of Korean candidates were rather vague, and could not be characterized as either nationalist or pro-Japanese.

#### 4 The Deprivation of the Korean Residents' Suffrage

In December 1945, a few months after Japan was defeated in World War II, the elections law of the House of Representatives was revised. Although it is famous for its liberal provisions—it extended the right to vote to women and lowered the eligibility age to twenty—the rewritten law deprived Korean residents of their political suffrage. With regard to this process, I would like to point out just two important facts, though there remain not a few other problems that call for further investigation.

First, the Japanese government recognized Korean residents' right to suffrage in the immediate aftermath of the war, but reversed this position in very short order. An amendment to the elections laws of the House of the Representatives in October 1945 stipulated that “the suffrage of Korean and Taiwanese in Japan . . . shall be admitted as in the past,”<sup>25</sup> but the next month the Cabinet decided that “the right to vote and the eligibility for election shall be stopped in case of those who are excluded from the application of the Family Registration Law.”<sup>26</sup> That meant that Koreans and Taiwanese in Japan—whose family registration systems were separated from that of (genuine) Japanese—would be deprived of their suffrage.

Secondly, this change of policy mentioned above involved a legal contradiction relating to renunciation of Japanese colonies. Kiyose Ichirō 清瀬一郎, an elder member of the House of the Representatives, wrote a memorandum that is thought to have exerted great influence on the policy change of the Japanese government. According to his memorandum,

Taiwan and Korea left our sovereignty on September 2 this year, when we sealed the instrument of surrender and the emperor promulgated the rescript. These areas cannot be regarded as our territory from that day on. . . . We should say that Koreans and Taiwanese have lost the Japanese nationality with the renunciation of these territories.

From this point of view, he claimed, the suffrage of Korean and Taiwanese residents should be denied, since its first requisite is having Japanese nationality.<sup>27</sup> We can

find the same logic in the explanation of Home Minister Horikiri Zenjirō 堀切善次郎 in the Diet few months later.

However, the official policy to the Korean residents in Japan at that time was, as is well-known, contrary to that; the Japanese government officially took the position that Korean residents would not lose their Japanese nationality until the peace treaty between Japan and the United Nations came into effect. (Therefore the Japanese government at that time claimed that Korean residents in Japan were obliged to receive Japanese public education, and attempted to suppress Koreans' establishment of their own educational institutions.) According to the explanation of the Home Minister in the Diet, the new elections law stated that Koreans' suffrage shall be "stopped for the time being," not "prohibited," because this was supposed to be a temporary measure until the conclusion of a peace treaty.<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of the Home Minister's pronouncement, Korean residents did not regain political suffrage, and they have not been able to vote since 1945. In the 1990s, a movement centered on the Zainichi Daikanminkoku Mindan 在日大韓民国国民団 (Korean Residents Union) became increasingly active, and one of its principal demands has been that foreign residents should be given the right to vote in local elections in Japan. Several political parties have prepared legislative bills for this purpose. Yet public opinion is divided on this issue, not only in Japanese society as a whole, but also among resident North and South Koreans.

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## NOTES

1 See Sō 1993, pp. 349–351.

2 Tanaka 1974, p. 70.

3 Soeda Keiichirō 添田敬一郎, the Chief of the Local Bureau of the Home Ministry, issued a notice denying the political suffrage of Korean and Taiwanese, though it was reversed two years later, as mentioned below (Matsuda 1995, pp. 20–22, Matsuda 2004, pp. 21–23).

4 Gūji 1927, p. 66.

5 According to *Keijō nippō* 京城日報, 24 May 1921, there were only two Koreans eligible to vote in Osaka, where there were approximately 6,000 Korean male residents, about 20% of the whole population of the Korean male residents in Japan. The restriction of voting rights to those who paid at least three yen in direct national taxes (an amount that had been reduced in 1919 from ten yen per year; from 1889 to 1900—i.e., before the Annexation of Korea—the

- amount was fifteen yen) was eliminated under the universal manhood suffrage law enacted in 1925. As is well known, women were not granted the right to vote until 1945.
- 6 Hōseidaigaku Ōhara Shakai Mondai Kenkyūsho 1973, pp. 213–215.
  - 7 Matsuda 1995, pp. 47–53, Matsuda 2004, pp. 47–52.
  - 8 Pak 1979, pp. 214–224, Iwamura 1972, pp. 181–187.
  - 9 *Chuō shinbun* 中央新聞, 2 February 1930.
  - 10 Matsuda 1995, pp. 62–65, Matsuda 2004, pp. 60–64.
  - 11 “Recommendation for Asanuma Inejirō,” 1932 (“Asanuma Inejirōkankei monjo,” no. 21), *Shakai shinbun* 社会新聞 9 December 1932, Ozawa 1978, p. 276.
  - 12 Matsuda 1995, pp. 71–73, Matsuda 2004, pp. 70–72.
  - 13 *Minjung sibo* 民衆時報, 1 March 1936.
  - 14 *Ōsaka asahi shinbun* 大阪朝日新聞(大阪版), 23 January 1929.
  - 15 Naimushō, *Shakai undō no jokyō* 社会運動の状況 1929–1941, in Pak 1975–76.
  - 16 See Higuchi 1986.
  - 17 Tonomura 2004, pp. 114–170.
  - 18 *Tōa shinbun* 東亜新聞, 5 August 1939, in *Senjika zainichi Chōsenjin shinbun shiryō* 1997, vol. 1.
  - 19 *Minjung sibo*, 15 July 1935.
  - 20 *Chosŏn sinmun* 朝鮮新聞, 1 February 1936.
  - 21 Ringhofer 1981.
  - 22 Maruayama-sensei Koki Shukugakai 1953, p. 52.
  - 23 Matsuda 1988.
  - 24 Yang 1992.
  - 25 *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* 東京朝日新聞, 14 October 1945.
  - 26 Chihō Jichi Kenkyū Shiryō Sentā 1961, p. 19.
  - 27 Kiyose Ichirō, “Naichi zaijū no Taiwanjin oyobi Chōsenjin no senkyoken hisenkyoken ni tsuite” (“Ōno Ryokuichirō kankei monjo,” no. 1347). Also see Mizuno 1996–1997.
  - 28 The remarks of Home Minister Horikiri Zenjirō, in the plenary session of the House of Representatives, 2 December 1945.