

Political Participation of Noncitizens in Japan: Continuity and Change in the 1990s

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1. Introduction

The 1990's saw the growing importance of granting municipal voting rights and institutionalization of political participation of foreign residents in Japan. It was significant in the sense that old-timers and newcomers, who had been mutually isolated, first met together in the political arena. On the one hand, resident Koreans actively claimed for enfranchisement, which can be regarded as formal manifestation that they are permanent residents¹. On the other hand, municipalities began to integrate foreign residents at the local level.

However, we should not overlook the historical roots of political participation of foreign residents, which is engrained in the social movement of resident Koreans. The Koreans' experience will tell us much about Japan's integration policies (or lack of), which have to be understood on both national and local levels, since these two levels of government responded to claims of foreign residents in contrasting ways.

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In this essay, I will first review the historical development of social movements from the struggles of resident Koreans. Secondly, I will examine how the national and municipal governments responded differently to these movements. Thirdly, I will evaluate integration policies of foreign residents by municipalities, emphasizing the diversification of political actors. Finally, I will consider policy challenges for the national and municipal governments with regard to political integration of foreign residents.

2. Civil Rights Movements of Resident Koreans Since 1945

Citizenship is composed of three elements: civic, social and political (Marshall and Bottomore 1992). Marshall described the historical development of citizenship distinguishing these three categories: civic rights for the eighteenth century, political rights for the nineteenth century and social rights for the twentieth century. With the exception of those movements oriented toward home country politics, postwar social movements of resident Koreans can be seen as civil rights movements. The elements of citizenship they asserted have expanded in the course of time. In the case of resident Koreans, civic, social and political rights have become the focus of movements, one after another (See Figure 1 and Table 1)².

"Deprived citizenship" is the starting point of postwar social movements by Koreans. Though they had voting rights during the colonial period, they were disenfranchised after the end of World War II. Ironically, one-sided deprivation of the Japanese nationality for Koreans was brought by the principle to recover the Korean peninsula and its citizens to their status before colonization (Onuma 1979-80). The idea of "disenfranchisement" is clearly expressed by *Zainichito* (Resident Korean Party), which demands national voting rights that used to be granted to resident Koreans before the end of World War II.

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Figure 1: Chronological change of citizenship movements by resident Koreans

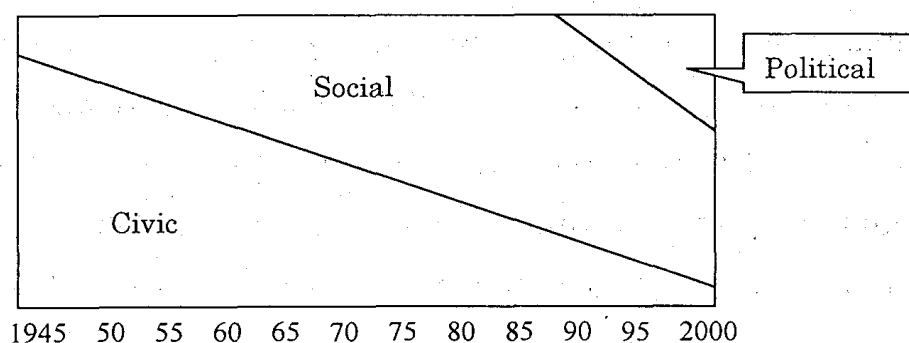


Table 1: Citizenship Movements by Resident Koreans

	Year	Claims
Civic rights	1948	Opposition to closure of Korean schools
	1965	Opposition to Japan-South Korea agreement on the legal status of resident Koreans
	1968	Opposition to the Alien School Act
	1968-75	Opposition to the revision of the Immigration Control Law
	1970-74	Against employment discrimination of Hitachi Manufacturing
	1975-79	Elimination of nationality requirements for professors of national and municipal universities
	1975-	Elimination of nationality requirements for public service personnel
	1980s	Elimination of fingerprinting imposed on foreign residents
	1980s	Elimination of nationality requirements for teachers of public schools
Social rights	1970s	Elimination of nationality requirements for public housing and child allowance
	1980-	Revamping of the education policy for foreigners
	1990-	Financial aid for the aged excluded from national pension system
Political rights	1990-	Municipal voting rights for permanent residents

Social movements of Koreans were not negligible in the Japanese social movement sector soon after the end of World War II³. In this period, they claimed mainly civic rights, but their claims also contained social rights. The most impressive protest was a series of campaigns against the order to close Korean schools in 1948, especially the Hanshin protest in which thousands of Koreans demonstrated in Osaka and Kobe⁴. In these confrontations, social movements were suppressed, leading to forced closure of many schools. In the Hanshin protest, of a total of 3,076 Koreans who were arrested, 207 were prosecuted (Park 1989).

In contrast to the earlier movements, civil rights movements after

the 60's were crowned with great success. Resident Koreans won the campaign against the revision of the Immigration Law in the late 60's and early 70's. In the 1980's, resident Koreans also gained substantial concessions from municipalities in their protest against the mandatory fingerprinting of non-citizens. Likewise, they made substantial gains to abolish the nationality requirement for employment in public service, such as municipal administrative personnel, teachers, and professors.⁵

Meanwhile, social rights movements actually began in the 70's, although the living rights were already one of the slogans of movements soon after the end of World War II. Before the 70's, foreign residents were not eligible for most social benefits. While the Association of Koreans in Japan (hereafter referred to as *Mindan*) and the General Association of Koreans in Japan (hereafter referred to as *Soren*) also participated in these movements, it was the independent civic groups that led the effort to lay claims on municipalities for social rights after the 70's. These civic groups demanded that foreign residents be qualified for national health insurance, public housing and child allowance. In the 1980s, municipalities in Kanto and Kansai regions published educational policy that vowed to respect the uniqueness of resident Koreans, in response to the voices of civic movements. Nowadays, the movements of resident Koreans and their supporters raise such issues as special allowance for those without old age pensions and the institutionalization of multicultural education.

Movements for suffrage started in 1987, when *Mindan* and *Mintoren* (a network of grassroots movements) set the acquisition of suffrage as their goal. Claiming municipal voting rights had previously been regarded as a taboo, because it meant voluntary assimilation.

lation into Japanese society. However, it became the most remarkable movement of Koreans in the 1990's. This is due to the policy change that formally recognized Koreans as denizens.

A series of campaigns began when individuals or small groups contested the legality of granting municipal voting rights to foreigners. At first, *Mindan* was not very supportive of the movement, but from the mid-90's it powerfully organized a petition campaign to local assemblies, which gained a broad attention from Japanese society in general.

In my view, the most revealing are the contrasting policy responses of the national and the municipal governments. Urban municipalities in Kanto and Kansai areas have always developed progressive policy measures. In terms of civic rights movements, the municipalities were the ones that were sympathetic to the protest against fingerprinting of foreign residents. Municipalities were also the first to introduce the granting of social rights such as qualifying for public housing and national health insurance.

On the other hand, the national government was reluctant to expand the rights of resident Koreans. Moreover, what moved the national government was not voices of resident Koreans but external pressures: it was ratification of the treaty on the status of refugees that brought about equal treatment between nationals and non-nationals in terms of social security⁶. It was also the case with suffrage. The rights of foreign residents were not expanded until the national government recognized external pressures. The Japanese Government only began to consider granting municipal voting rights to resident Koreans when the Japan-South Korea treaty regarding the legal status of resident Koreans ratified in 1991 articulated, "the Korean government expressed a request to grant municipal voting rights to resi-

dent Koreans.” Therefore, enfranchisement must be examined in the context of Japan-South Korea relation.

In 1995, the Supreme Court ruled that suffrage for foreigners was not prohibited by the constitution. After this decision, the focus turned from judicial to legislative policies. In 1998, South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung requested the Japanese government to grant municipal voting rights to resident Koreans when he visited Japan⁷. After his stay in Japan, three different parties introduced bills to grant municipal voting rights for permanent residents, although none of them passed the Diet. Now, even the secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is positive toward suffrage for permanent residents, making it a quite realistic expectation.

When it comes to municipalities, Kishiwada was the first city to present a formal statement that supported municipal voting rights for foreign residents. *Mindan* says that 1494 municipalities (approx. 45 percent) have presented the same kind of statement as of October 2001. This is a result of the series of campaigns by *Mindan*. In addition, consultative institutions (to be discussed below) were also established in several municipalities.

What brought about these gaps between the national government and the municipalities? There are at least three factors to be considered.

First, it is at the local level that foreign residents raise issues that are closely related to everyday life. Municipalities cannot ignore claims closely associated with local administration, such as public housing and discrimination in public schools, while the national government can initially stick to rules.

Second, it is the national government that is more likely to insist on the framework of a nation-state, and thus, it will be more reluctant

to give rights to foreign residents. Additionally, the national government tends to be negative towards expanding the rights of foreigners, since they prioritize diplomacy and defense rather than the rights of noncitizens. In contrast, municipalities can treat foreign residents on the basis of their status as local citizens regardless of nationality.

Third, as Anwar (1994) emphasizes, foreign residents concentrate in urban areas. Thus, they are politically more powerful in big cities. Moreover, since leftist parties have been strong in urban areas, municipalities in Kanto and Kansai were responsive to claims of minorities. In contrast, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party has dominated the Diet. Many conservative politicians still regard resident Koreans as politically dangerous.

3. Toward Political Integration by Municipalities?

As discussed above, the claims by social movements of resident Koreans expanded from civic rights to social rights and to political rights. As a result, the connection between municipalities and resident Korean groups has been strengthened. Because social rights are closely related to the services of municipalities, claiming social rights inevitably resulted in politicizing the relations between resident Koreans and municipalities. For example, resident Koreans in Kawasaki city have submitted petitions (listed in Table 2), which in conjunction with informal negotiations with administrative bodies, led to some policy results.

As is also the case in municipalities in Kansai region, relations between resident Koreans and municipalities have been gradually politicized since the 1970s. Behind the recent establishment of consultative institutions for foreign residents (see Table 3) lies this

massive wave of politicization. The importance of political participation of foreign residents is specified in most plans and principles of internationalization policy published by municipalities in the late 90's. While only a small number of municipalities has taken it seriously, institutionalization of political participation has been implemented.

Table 2: Petitions by Koreans in Kawasaki City, 1970-

Year	Proposer	Claims
75	Civic groups (twice)	Access for resident Koreans to public housing
76	<i>Soren</i>	Peaceful unification of Korean Peninsula by North Korea
80	<i>Mindan</i>	Peaceful unification of Korean Peninsula by South Korea
83	<i>Soren</i> , <i>Mindan</i> , Civic groups (each once)	Revision of the Alien Registration Law (abolishing fingerprinting)
84	<i>Mindan</i>	Inclusion of foreign residents to public sector employment
89	<i>Mindan</i>	On the Japan-South Korea treaty regarding the legal status of resident Koreans
90	<i>Soren</i>	Securing human rights of resident Koreans
93	<i>Soren</i>	Compensation to elderly and disabled Koreans without national pension
94	<i>Mindan</i> (three times)	Granting municipal voting rights to permanent foreign residents
96	<i>Soren</i>	Against granting municipal voting rights to foreign residents
98	<i>Soren</i>	Granting qualification of candidacy for university matriculation to Korean high school graduates

Source: Kawasaki-shi Gikai Jimukyoku, *Chosa Jiho*, 1970-1998.

Table 3: Consultative Institutions for Foreigner in Japan⁸

Municipalities	Year	Foreigner member	Japanese member	Members invited publicly	Note
Tokyo Metropolis	1997-	All	None	All	Half of the members are appointed by the Metropolitan government
Kanagawa prefecture	1998-	All	None	All	
Kawasaki city	1996-	All	None	All	Established by local regulation
Hamamatsu city	2000-	All	None	All	
Osaka prefecture	1992-	Half	Half	None	Composed of specialists
Hyogo prefecture	1999-	Three quarter	Quarter	None	Member organizations are appointed by the prefectural government
Kyoto city	1998-	Half	Half	Half	Japanese members are specialists in immigrant matters, foreign members are invited publicly
Osaka city	1994-	Half	Half	None	Composed of specialists

Because only five years have passed since the establishment of the first consultative institution, we cannot judge whether these consultative institutions effectively represent the interests of foreign residents, or if they actually improve the welfare of foreign residents, and so on. Instead, we can examine what issues were raised by the newly emerging institutions.

Consultative institutions invite newcomers to get involved in political matters. In my opinion, this is quite a significant fact, because it facilitates the politicizing of all newcomers in addition to resident Koreans. Furthermore, consultative institutions test the potential for political participation of newcomers. Although the Diet passes the law to grant municipal voting rights to foreign residents, these rights will be limited to those with permanent resident visa status. In contrast, consultative institutions are open to foreign residents after one-year residence, in which most newcomers are entitled to participate. Now the problem is not only expanding civil rights to foreign residents, but also creating an integration policy that can adequately embrace the diverse character of the foreign population.

In fact, the potential schism between resident Koreans and newcomers can be seen in opinion polls of foreign residents. Table 4 shows that old-timers and newcomers can clearly be divided in terms of their attitudes to municipal voting rights. Without the history of extra-institutional political participation that resident Koreans experienced, newcomers are not very keen to play an active role in the political arena.

Table 4: Different Opinions on Municipal Voting Rights between Old-timers and Newcomers

City		Necessary	Rather necessary	Not necessary	No opinion/no answer
Kyoto	Old-timers	79.5%	11.3%	3.9%	5.3%
	Newcomers	46.7%	31.5%	12.2%	9.7%
Toyonaka	Old-timers	73.6%	-----	3.3%	23.1%
	Newcomers	46.0%	-----	16.2%	37.8%

Source: Kyoto-shi, 1997, Toyonaka-shi, 1999.

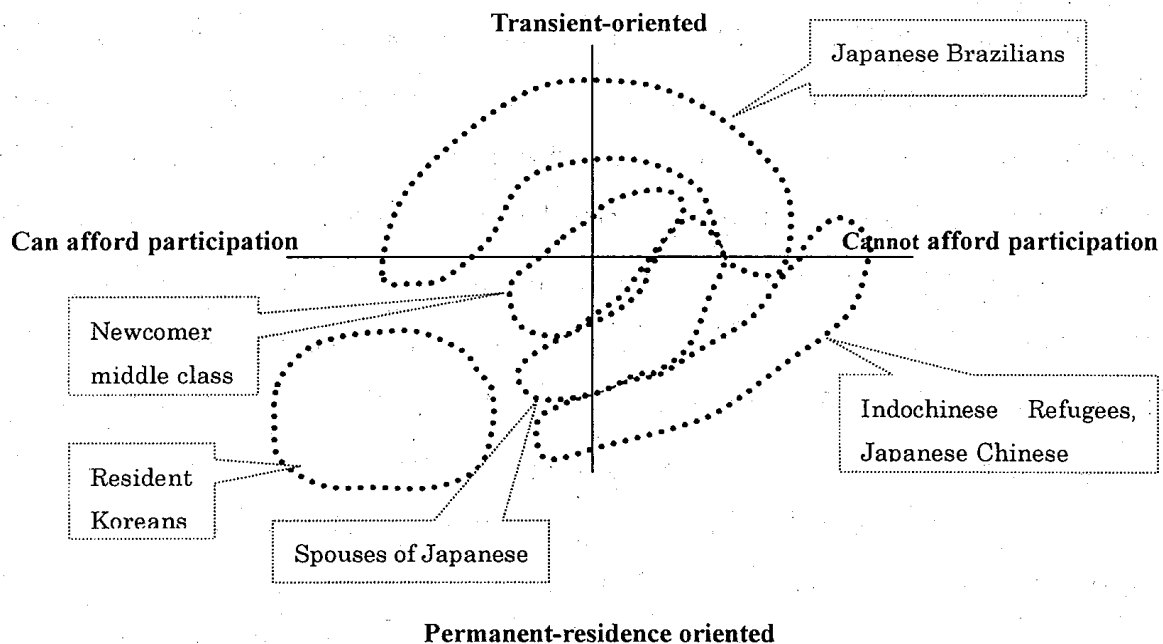
I have discussed elsewhere that political behaviors of newcomers will widely vary in accordance with human capital, organizational basis and prospects to stay (Higuchi 2000, 2002). The rule is simple.

First, individuals with human capital and/or organizational basis tend to be politically active. Second, permanent-residence oriented persons will participate more than those who are transient-oriented.

In this view, Japanese Brazilians are least likely to participate individually: they do not have enough human capital and are transient-oriented. (Newcomer) Korean, Chinese, and Westerner new middle classes possess sufficient human capital to participate. Spouses of the Japanese, mainly composed of Filipinos and Thais, are ambivalent: while they are underprivileged with human capital, they are still highly motivated to participate through their experience in raising their children. Indochinese refugees and Chinese of Japanese descent are less likely to participate: while they are permanent-resident oriented, they are not blessed with human capital.

Figure 2 is a categorization of these major segments. The horizontal axis is based on human capital and organizational strength. The vertical axis shows the subjectively planned length of stay. Among the five categories, resident Koreans, represented in the lower-left quadrant of Figure 2, are by far the most capable of political participation. They are actually, and subjectively, permanent-residence oriented and they own as much human and social capital as the Japanese themselves. On the contrary, most of the newcomers are represented on the right half of Figure 2. This means that consultative institutions for political participation do not always lead to actual participation, because most newcomers cannot take advantage of these opportunities.

Figure 2 Categorization of Foreign Residents



The example of the city of Kawasaki supports the argument illustrated in Figure 2. Chinese showed by far the highest rate of participation after public invitation by consultative institutions. Filipinos were in the middle, and Brazilians marked the lowest rate of participation. Among some important exceptions is the case of Hamamatsu, where a catholic-based Brazilian group has been organizing a campaign to enter national health insurance.

As a result, it is those segments represented in the lower-right quadrant of Figure 2 that will experience the most severe difficulty in political participation. They tend to be excluded from the political arena, since they do not have human capital and organizational basis. However, they need political participation as permanent residents to improve their vulnerable living conditions. In the next section, I will consider policy implications resulting from the issues discussed above.

4. Challenges for Political Integration

To conclude this essay, I will consider policy challenges for integration at the national and the municipal levels. As for the national government, external pressure has been the principal political factor in effecting policy changes. Virtually no integration policy has existed; not even a special department on ethnic minorities was ever established. However, even if the national government referred to integrative policy or political integration of resident Koreans, it would have encountered harsh criticisms from nearly every related party. Resident Koreans have always been distrustful of the exclusive and intolerant attitude of the Japanese government. As a result, the reluctance of resident Koreans to being co-opted, and the indifference of the national government to integrate them, have been ironically coincident in the sense that neither side wanted integrative policies.

However, this situation is changing rapidly. It is probable that municipal voting rights will be granted to permanent residents in five years. Additionally, resident Koreans (at least South Koreans) began to demand municipal voting rights as an important goal. The granting of suffrage by the national government has been considered on an *ad hoc* basis only, and as such it can hardly develop into any comprehensive integration program. The national government should take the opportunity to design comprehensive integration policies that are not based on assimilative ideas.

With respect to municipalities, they tried to present integrative concepts such as "multicultural symbiosis" or "inward internationalization". As is seen in the case of consultative institutions, some municipalities seek for effective ways of political participation of foreign residents. In this sense, the challenges for municipalities are not the absence of integration policies, but what the desirable political integration should be.

Table 5 Policies to Promote Political Participation of Foreign Residents

Area of participation	Organizational basis	Policies to promote collective participation	Policies to promote individual participation
(1) Ethnic subculture	Peer groups Self-help groups	Financial aids	
(2) Civil society	Immigrant associations	Financial aids	Japanese language training, vocational training, seminar on public institutions
(3) Direct participation	Social movement organizations, Labor unions	Petitions	Ombudsperson Consultative institutions (public invitation)
(4) Indirect participation	Political parties Interest groups	Consultative institutions (organization-based or elected)	Election

As I mentioned in Section 3, most newcomers cannot afford to use participatory institutions, since they do not have human capital and organizational basis necessary for political participation. Theoretically, therefore, it is necessary for political integration to prepare the policy package on Table 5. So far, measures for political participation have been limited, both in direct or indirect participation. It is crucial to promote political participation by developing the human capital and organizational basis of newcomers. Specifically, political participation requires policies that individually and collectively empower newcomers. This is valuable not only for political integration, but also for social integration of newcomers. The challenge of municipalities lies in constructing models of integration that embrace empowerment of newcomers.

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- 1 General Association of Koreans in Japan (*Soren*), the formal organization of North Koreans, opposes municipal voting rights for non-citizens, since *Soren* thinks voting rights lead to assimilation and intervention of Koreans in the internal affairs of Japan. However, a research conducted by the Kanagawa prefectural government in 1984 showed that most North Korean residents (78%) wanted voting rights.
 - 2 Claims of movements usually contain more than two elements of citizenship. For example, claims for multicultural education is composed of civic and social rights. Therefore, it is safe to regard three elements as ideal types.
 - 3 Description on social movements of Koreans is based mainly on Park (1989), Park (1999), Soh (1987, 1995, 2000).

- 4 Though Marshall regarded education as social rights, the focus of the Hanshin affair can be thought to be civic right.
- 5 Employing foreign residents in public services can also be regarded as a political right. But, I included it in the civic right, since it can be considered as the freedom of job opportunities.
- 6 Livelihood protection is administratively (not legally) applied. Therefore, foreigners do not have the right to claim it.
- 7 Now that Japan-South Korea relation is the best since 1945, requests from the South Korean government have strong political leverage.
- 8 In all cases, consultative institutions consist not of elected but of appointed members.

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