

First Local Election of Taiwan: An Analysis of Institutional Manipulation of Japanese Colonial Government

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ABSTRACT

In 1935, the Japanese colonial government held the first local election, allowing male adults above the age of 25 years to elect half of the representatives in city and village assemblies. On the surface, this policy seemed to be an act of granting self-government to Taiwanese. However, dominance by the majority Taiwanese would imply the minority Japanese losing representation in the government. Hence, well aware that such would threaten their political and economic interests and undermine colonial governance, the Japanese colonial government took preventive measures to prevent landslide victory of Taiwanese in the local election.

Specifically, measures executed to establish political advantage for the Japanese and to ensure their dominance included the following. First, universal suffrage was extended only to those who would afford to pay 5-dollar local taxes, thus restricting the voting population to the rich and the powerful. As a result, only wealthy landlords and merchants, and in particular, the Japanese of substantial means and high income were allowed to vote. Second, by releasing the restriction for residency, more Japanese were granted citizenship with the right of suffrage, thus ensuring higher chance of Japanese being elected. Third, through electoral redistricting, the colonial government created Japanese-majority districts, which were also given larger representation in the city assembly. Fourth, by adopting indirect prefectural election, the responsibility of choosing the candidates rest in the hands of a selected few, leading to cronyism and canvass of votes. Finally, introducing the single-nontransferable vote system resulted in vote-splitting among the Taiwanese, thus undermining their prospect of winning in the local election.

Keywords: Self-government, Taxation, Local Election, Electoral Redistricting,
Single-nontransferable Vote