

Overseas Japanese Statistics in Pre-war Period

HAYASHI Reiko

The number of overseas Japanese before World War II is available through statistical yearbooks of Japan as well as Taiwan, Karafuto, Kwantung, Korea and South Seas Islands. Many of the original statistics are now downloadable as PDF on the National Diet Library Digital Collections. The data exploited here is compiled in the electronic format, which also gives the links to the original documents.

Initially, the number of overseas Japanese was counted by subtracting the number of passports granted by the number of passports returned. The overseas Japanese in 1875 is thus estimated as 3,291 persons. From 1889, the number was replaced by the direct counts by the reports from the overseas consulates. As Japan expanded its territory, the number was removed from the overseas Japanese statistics and entered into the population statistics of each area under Japanese control. The number increased to 3.35 million in 1940.

Although the number increased monotonously, the destination countries and areas changed drastically over time. Up to the 1880s, many lived in neighbouring Korea and China. The proportion of those living in Europe and the US was not negligible, as many Japanese visited and studied there to learn from the advanced societies. Based on the Japanese-Hawaiian Immigration Convention signed in 1886, the number of emigrants in Hawaii and then in the US increased. By 1894, the proportion of overseas Japanese in Hawaii and the US rose to 68%. The number kept increasing, but the number in Taiwan, Karafuto, Kwantung, Korea increased even more. The proportion of overseas Japanese in these Japanese territories remained around 70% until the end of WWII.

In 1940, 4.4% of the Japanese were living outside of Japan proper. Also, many were born overseas. At present, as many as 16% of Japanese were born before WWII. In addition to the importance of the Nikkei people, the descendants of Japanese emigrants, now living in Japan, the trend of overseas Japanese in the pre-war period is an important subject to understand the present population in Japan.