

SOUTH KOREAN DIASPORA IN JAPAN: SUFFRAGE AND COVID-19 ISSUES¹

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Abstract: Ever since the conclusion of the Second World War, the Korean diaspora in Japan remains as one of the largest diaspora groups in the country even when compared to that of other nations. Currently, the majority of the diaspora are South Korean-affiliated, with their primary diaspora organization being the *Mindan* organization. This paper explains how *Mindan*, along with other South Korean-related organizations such as *Seinenkai* (Korean Youth Association) and Korean Chamber of Commerce in Japan (KCCJ), have taken actions to support the advocacy of the South Korean diaspora's rights in the economic, cultural, politics, and many other fields. With varying levels of success, *Mindan* has become the most prominent Korean diaspora organization in Japan over the past few years as well as *Seinenkai* and KCCJ in advocating the living rights of the South Korean diaspora to create better living standards for their welfare in Japan.

Keywords: *Mindan*, South Korean diaspora, *Seinenkai*, KCCJ, rights

INTRODUCTION

Both Japan and South Korea have underwent a hundred years-long historical relationship. In the current 21st century, the South Korean diaspora in Japan (*Zainichi Kankokujin*/在日韓国・朝鮮人) is the second largest foreigner diaspora in Japan after the Chinese diaspora that takes up the most amount of foreign diasporas in the country on 2020.⁴ From 474,460 Koreans who live in Japan in the year 2020, about 446,364 people are affiliated with South Korea and the remaining 28,096 are not South Korean-affiliated (either Koreans who align with North Korea or Koreans who are not registered as citizens from both countries).

In Japan, the title "Zainichi Koreans" (在日コリアン) refers to Koreans who have stayed in Japan after the conclusion of the Second World War who were (and are) the descendants of Korean people who came voluntarily or were brought to Japan as forced labor workers during the 1910-1945 Japanese Occupation on the Korean Peninsula.⁵ Despite the term *Zainichi* itself can be defined as a

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⁴ E-Stat Japan, "Foreign Residents by Nationality/Region of Residence (Purpose of Residence)", 2021, <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00250012&tstat=000001018034&cycle=1&year=20190&month=24101212&tclass1=000001060399&tclass2val=0>

⁵ Jeffrey T. Hester, "Datsu Zainichi-ron: An emerging discourse on belonging among Ethnic Koreans in Japan," in Nelson, H.H., Ertl, J., Tierney, R. Kenji (Eds.), *Multiculturalism in the new Japan: crossing the boundaries within*, (Berghahn Books, 2014), 144-145.

foreigner who “resides in Japan for a certain period of time”, the term continues to be used by Koreans who reside permanently in Japan since before, during, and long after the Second World War ended.⁶ When referring to the origins of Japan-Korea relations that have taken place for hundreds of years, interactions between both societies started with the transfer of metallurgy and agricultural knowledge from Korea to Japan during the Yayoi period.⁷ Although interactions continued at a certain level from the Yayoi period to the Meiji era, the modern emergence of the Korean diaspora in Japan began with the signature of the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876, which initiated the opening of more extensive trade relations between both countries.⁸ Prior to the Japanese Occupation on Korean Peninsula that started in 1910, it was deduced that there were only four Koreans who resided in Japan in 1882 before the number developed into 790 Koreans in 1909, according to the *Teikoku Tokei Nenkan* (Statistical Yearbook of the Empire).⁹ Considered by historians as the reliable source of Japanese population data prior to the occupation, the yearbook noted that these Koreans were known as students, diplomats, and political asylum seekers.

As the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1910 came into effect, Korean Peninsula and its population were ceded into an integral part of the Empire of Japan.¹⁰ Over the duration of the Japanese Occupation on the Korean Peninsula in 1910-1945, many Koreans immigrated to Japan to seek better living conditions and job prospects in Japan when compared to those that existed in Korea at the time.¹¹ Upon arriving in Japan, many Korean workers took up jobs as low-wage workers as compared to native Japanese workers who were paid in greater amounts. Apart from being commonly relegated to physically taxing manual jobs, ethnic Koreans in Japan also had to contend with social and racial discrimination issues that affected their livelihoods.¹²

Country of Origin	Number of Populations in Japan
China	813,675
Korea	446,364
Vietnam	411,968
Philippines	282,798
Brazil	211,677
Nepal	96,824
Indonesia	66,860
Taiwan	64,773
United States of America	59,172
Thailand	54,809

Table 1: Data table of the highest amount of foreign diaspora population in Japan on a 2020 survey¹³

Although the majority of Koreans who immigrated to Japan before the Second World War were dominated by those who immigrated based on their own discretion to look for better living

⁶ Yasunori Fukuoka and Tom Gill, *Lives of young Koreans in Japan*, (Trans-Pacific Press, 2000), xxxviii.

⁷ Keiji Imamura, *Prehistoric Japan: New Perspectives on Insular East Asia*, (Routledge, 1996), 13.

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Empire of Japan and the Kingdom of Korea, Treaty of Kanghwa, Kokato Treaty*, (Tokyo, Japan: Diplomatic Record Office of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1876), 1-8.

⁹ Toshiyuki Tamura, “The Status and Role of Ethnic Koreans in the Japanese Economy,” in *The Korean Diaspora in the World Economy*, ed., ed. C. Fred Bergsten and Inbom Choi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 80.

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Declarations as to the Annexation of Korea to the Empire of Japan*, (Tokyo, Japan: Diplomatic Record Office of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1910), 340.

¹¹ Rennie Moon, “Koreans in Japan: Pre-war Japan and the Origins of the Korean Diaspora,” Stanford: Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, 2010, https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Koreans_inJapan.pdf

¹² John Lie, “Zainichi: The Korean Diaspora in Japan,” *Education About Asia: Asian Intercultural Contacts* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 16.

¹³ E-Stat Japan, “*Foreign Residents by Nationality/Region of Residence (Purpose of Residence)*”, 2021.

conditions, the situation changed drastically as the war broke out. Since many native Japanese populations were drafted as soldiers during the war, there was a critical lack of potential workers who could maintain the Japanese war effort. Between the year 1939 and 1945, about 700,000 to 800,000 Koreans were forcefully brought to Korea by the Japanese government to fill up positions as forced labors in Japan's war industries.¹⁴ When the war concluded in 1945, there were 2,100,000 Koreans living in Japan who came from Japanese companies' recruitment schemes as forced work labor recruitment.¹⁵

With the end of the Second World War and the liberation of the Korean Peninsula from Japanese occupation, the Korean diaspora living in Japan at the moment gradually managed to attain the chance to decide their own lives and homeland's fate. On October 1945, the Korean diaspora in Japan founded an organization - the Korean Federation in Japan (*Zainichi Chosenjin Renmei*), abbreviated as the Korean Federation (*Choren*) that combined all Korean diasporic associations in Japan at the time.¹⁶ However, there were disagreements between left-wing Koreans and other Koreans that eventually resulted in the separation and creation of a new non-left wing Korean diaspora organization, which was later named as the "Korean Residents Union in Japan" (*Zai-Nihon Chosen Kyoryu Mindan*/在日本大韓民国民団), or *Mindan* on October 3, 1946.

In Japan, the Korean diaspora is divided into the South Korean diaspora and North Korean diaspora, which in turn has resulted in the foundation of two distinctive Korean diaspora organizations in Japan. The first organization is the aforementioned *Mindan* (the South Korean-affiliated diaspora organization) and the second one is the North Korean-affiliated General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (*Chae Ilbon Chosonin Chongryonhaphoe*/재일본조선인총련합회), abbreviated as *Chongryon*.¹⁷ *Chongryon* itself was founded on 30 March 1955 at Tokyo, which considered itself as a fundamentally different diasporic organization compared to its predecessors, including *Mindan* in terms of political ideology.¹⁸

Originally, *Chongryon* was a larger and more complex Korean diasporic organization compared to *Mindan* due to its massive number of constituents in the 1960s, amounting to 500,000 to 600,000 members.¹⁹ However, beginning late 20th century, *Chongryon* began to be steadily viewed as a problematic and controversy-attracting diasporic organization due to a range of illegal activities, such as illegal money laundering schemes and secret information procurement from Japan to North Korea.²⁰ Moreover, the dwindling numbers of pro-North Korean diaspora and the issue of North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals in 1977 to 1983 further exacerbated the continuous decline of *Chongryon*'s reputation in Japan as a whole.²¹

Conversely, *Mindan* progressed as a Korean diasporic organization with much lesser notoriety compared to its northern counterpart, mainly because of its insistence in assimilating with the Japanese

¹⁴ Moon, *Pre-war Japan and the Origins of the Korean Diaspora*.

¹⁵ Michael Weiner, *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan*, (Routledge, London: The Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies/Routledge Series, 1994), 187-208.

¹⁶ *Mindan*, "What is the Korean Mindan?," 2021, <https://www.mindan.org/aboutus.php>

¹⁷ Ministry of Justice of Japan, "Focal Issues of International Public Security in 2006", 2006, <http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/PSIA/psia02-03.html>

¹⁸ *Chongryon*, "朝鮮総聯について～朝鮮総聯の結成 主体的組織の誕生 (About Chongryon – Formation of Chongryon: Birth of an independent organization)", 2022, <http://www.chongryon.com/j/cr/index2.html>

¹⁹ Kosuke Takahashi, "Chongryon still Pyongyang's pawn in covert operations: former intelligence officer," *NK News*, 28 February 2014, <https://www.nknews.org/2014/02/chongryon-still-pyongyangs-pawn-in-covert-operations-former-intelligence-officer/>

²⁰ "General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chosen Soren)", *Global Security*, 2010, https://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/dprk/chosen_soren.htm

²¹ Kosuke Takahashi, *Chongryon still Pyongyang's pawn in covert operations*.

society as opposed to *Chongryon*'s unwillingness to integrate with the Japanese society.²² Throughout the 20th century, *Mindan* has been active in its mission to advocate for the welfare of the Korean diaspora in Japan, such as providing channels for permanent residence application for 365,000 Koreans in Japan from 1969 to 1972 and abolishing the fingerprint system from the Alien Registration Law in 1983.²³ The abolition of the fingerprint system, in particular, was a major success in *Mindan*'s overall history, considering that *Mindan* at the time managed to gain the sympathy and participation from many Japanese citizens who also considered the fingerprint system as “undemocratic” in nature. As a result of the combined efforts of *Mindan* and Japanese sympathizers, the fingerprint system was successfully abolished permanently.

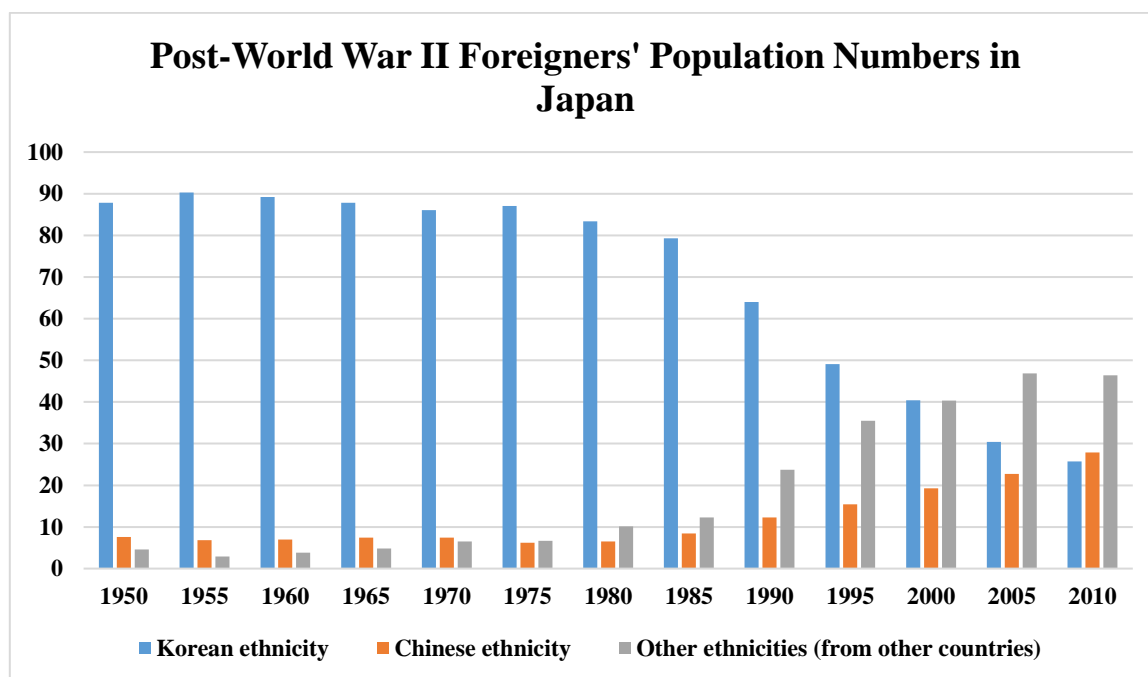


Table 2: Development of the foreigners' population numbers in Japan after the Second World War during Showa and Heisei eras (Statistics Bureau of Japan)²⁴

Due to the noteworthy continuance of the Korean diaspora in Japan, the existence of *Mindan* and *Chongryon* as well as their respective populations have been acknowledged by the South and North Korean governments. Over the years, the government of South Korea commended the role of *Mindan* as a diasporic organization that ensured the diaspora's steady development in Japan and status as the primary Korean diasporic organization in Japan.²⁵ Such acknowledgment and commendation have been steadily expressed by the South Korean government through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which foreign ministers such as Yun Byung-se from Park Geun-hye Administration and Kang Kyung-wha from Moon Jae-in Administration were sent to meet their *Mindan* counterparts in Japan

²² Lee Chi-dong, “(News Focus) Two Korean groups in Japan seek reconciliation”, *Yonhap News*, 17 May 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061003225439/http://english.yna.co.kr/Engnews/20060517/630000000020060517174714E7.html>

²³ Akemi Nakamura, “We are all ‘Residents of Japan’: The Construction of Common Identity and the Success of the Anti-fingerprinting movement,” *Japanstudien* 16, no. 1 (2005): 145.

²⁴ Bureau of Statistics of Japan, “第 16 章 外国人人口 (Chapter 16: Foreign Population),” 2010, <https://www.stat.go.jp/data/kokusei/2010/final/pdf/01-16.pdf>

²⁵ Ministry News, “강경화 장관, 재일본대한민국민단 여건이 단장 등 간부진 접견 (Minister Kang Kyung-wha meets with executives including the head of the Korean People's Association in Japan),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 7 January 2020, https://www.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_4080/view.do?seq=369909

in 2013, 2017, and 2020 respectively.²⁶ Through the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Mindan* voiced its concerns to Seoul regarding anti-Korean sentiment, the diversification of members, *Mindan*'s generational change, and the worsening Japan-South Korea relations in the late 2010s.

Likewise, the pro-North *Chongryon* also pursues the better development and interests of the pro-North Korean diaspora in Japan. At the same time, *Chongryon* also functions as the *de facto* embassy of North Korea in Japan due to the officially nonexistent diplomatic relations between both states.²⁷ For this reason, North Korea relies on the existence of *Chongryon* to foster some sort of diplomatic relations with Japan to protect its pro-North diaspora in Japan and national interests, despite the increasingly complex conditions to sustain a pro-North diasporic organization in Japan due to rising geopolitical tensions.²⁸

Nonetheless, despite the challenges that *Mindan* faces throughout the years as the current primary Korean diasporic organization in Japan, it retains a less problematic status when compared to its Northern counterpart in the context of advocacy of Korean diaspora in Japan. With the number of the Korean diaspora remaining significant long after the conclusion of the Second World War, South Korean diaspora's rights in Japan remains a considerable issue in contemporary Japan. Problems such as retaining legal status as citizens in Japan after a prolonged period of time, assimilation and naturalization for the South Korean diaspora who seek Japanese citizenship, suffrage for Korean diaspora in Japan, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic issues are some of the most prominent problems faced by the South Korean diaspora in recent years.²⁹

RESEARCH THEME AND QUESTION

This research focuses on the roles of *Mindan*, *Seinenkai*, and KCCJ in their mission to ensure the South Korean diaspora's rights in Japan from the year 2000 until 2021. This research poses the question as to how a diasporic organization and related organizations can assist the diaspora from its country of origin (South Korea) who live in a foreign country (Japan) in order for the said diaspora to be able to gain equal human rights and have similar welfare benefits like the native population of the host country.

HUMAN MIGRATION

Institutionalization

In discussing human migration from the sociology perspective, Douglas Massey determined that migrations with considerable intensity and number of immigrants may end up with the migration processes being institutionalized.³⁰ The point behind this institutionalization is the foundation of legal or illegal profit organizations and non-profit organizations that provide transportation, work contract,

²⁶ Ministry News, "Foreign Minister Meets with Delegation from Korean Community in Japan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 7 February 2017, https://www.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_4080/view.do?seq=369909

²⁷ Yalla Venkata Surya Rama Narasimha and Rushabh Kotecha, "Chongryon's Scenario in Japan," *International Journal for Advance Research and Development* 3, no. 1 (January 31, 2018), <https://www.ijarnd.com/manuscript/chongryons-scenario-in-japan/>

²⁸ Yaechen Lee, "Japan's North Korean Diaspora," *The Diplomat*, January 5, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/japans-north-korean-diaspora/>

²⁹ Kazuko Suzuki, "The State and Racialization: The Case of Koreans in Japan", 2003, https://ccis.ucsd.edu/_files/wp69.pdf

³⁰ Roel Peter W. Jennissen, *Macro-economic determinants of international migration in Europe*, (Amsterdam: Dutch University Press, 2004).

official documents (either genuine or forged), legal counseling, and other assistances for the new immigrants.³¹

In this theory, there lies an imbalance between the number of immigrants who wish to go to developed countries and the number of available visas for these immigrants.³² For this reason, immigrants are prone to contact illegal organizations or official human rights organizations in order to collect official documents and advices during their endeavor as new immigrants in foreign countries. As the time goes on, these organizations may become stable after operating for a significant period of time and may be able to create a new form of social capital.³³

The Concept of Diaspora

Diaspora is a population from a certain ethnic group or country that lives in a separate geographical location. A considerable characteristic of an ethnic or national diaspora is its strong sense of identity. As an ethnic community living in a country or place beyond its place of origin, a diaspora takes up a great deal of actions to ensure their living rights and welfare, with the example being lobbying the local government to guarantee their living rights.³⁴ Considering the significant amount of foreign diaspora in a country, the impact of their presence will not only affect their countries of origin, but also their current country of residence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the authors discuss the ways in which the *Mindan* organization and other Korean organizations affiliated with *Mindan* ensure the livelihood of the South Korean diaspora living in Japan, whether they have lived in Japan for a long time or have recently arrived in the country. As a diasporic organization that has been functioning for decades, *Mindan* has released information about the missions they carry out in Japan through their official website which provides an overview of their institutional activities in Japan.

In this case, the authors have used a qualitative research approach to discuss this phenomenon. According to John W. Creswell, a qualitative approach can be defined as a research method that focuses on the ongoing process along with the existing product or end result. Here, qualitative research is a type of research that explores and understands certain meanings in an individual or several groups of people in a social phenomenon.³⁵ In general, it is a known fact that qualitative research is used to conduct research on social phenomena in a society.

DIASPORA AND SUFFRAGE

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, Article 21 Paragraph 3 states that “The will of the people is the basis of government authority; this will be expressed in periodic and honest elections held by equal universal suffrage and conducted by secret

³¹ Douglas S. Massey, “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal,” *Population and Development Review* 19, No. 3 (1993): 431-466.

³² Massey, *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*, 450.

³³ Massey, *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*, 451.

³⁴ Yoshi Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution”, *SAIS Review* 22, No. 2 (2002): 115-144.

³⁵ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (California: SAGE Publications Inc., 1994).

ballot or by an equivalent free election procedure”.³⁶ The existence of such a provision in a universal declaration issued to the United Nations indicates that the right to vote is an example of a human right that must be fulfilled in all countries and societies.

Meanwhile, in Japan, a person's suffrage is manifested in the ability of a Japanese citizen to vote in general elections starting from the age of twenty years and older.³⁷ As for permanent foreign residents such as the Korean diaspora in Japan, they are only allowed to provide their votes during elections in 40 from 1,500 municipalities across the nation, reflecting the limited number of Japanese municipalities that allow permanent foreign residents to vote in local elections.³⁸ To date, only two major municipal cities in Japan allow foreign permanent residents who have resided for more than three months to vote in local elections without any other form of special conditions, which are Toyonaka in Osaka Prefecture and Zushi in Kanagawa Prefecture.³⁹

In this regard, there is an imbalance in the implementation of provision of suffrage rights to all permanent foreign residents in Japan. For the South Korean diaspora in Japan, they do not have the right to vote as stated by the Supreme Court of Japan in 1995.⁴⁰ At the same time, the granting of Japanese citizenship by the Japanese government to the South Korean diaspora has been hampered by critics. The difficulty of the South Korean diaspora in Japan, whether they have lived in Japan before 1952 or after, in obtaining citizenship status remains a major issue for the South Korean diaspora in Japan today.⁴¹

The problem comes from the perception of several Japanese lawmakers that granting the right to vote to foreign diaspora in Japan, with the South Korean diaspora being a prominent example, is an “unconstitutional” act.⁴² In addition to the issue of the incompatibility of suffrage rights with the Japanese constitution regarding the right to vote for its citizens, there is an ongoing debate about whether or not the right to vote should be granted to any foreign diaspora in Japan. In the case between Japan and the South Korean diaspora in Japan, according to opponents of granting the right to vote for the South Korean diaspora, it is feared that the diaspora will replace the role of native Japanese in local governments, especially for areas that have a large demographic of South Korean diaspora.⁴³ On the contrary, supporters of granting the right to vote for the South Korean diaspora argue that the granting of this right is in line with the potential of reciprocity in providing voting rights to foreigners in both

³⁶ United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1948, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.

³⁷ Ace Project, “Election System in Japan,” 2007, <https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/asia/JP/election-system-in-japan-free-choice-foundation>.

³⁸ Kyodo News Writers, “Tokyo city committee Oks plan for foreigners to vote in referendums,” Kyodo News, 14 December 2021, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/12/4cdf1190b2aa-tokyo-city-committee-oks-plan-for-foreigners-to-vote-in-referendums.html>

³⁹ Zushi City Government, “住民投票制度 (Referendum System)”, Zushi City Official Website, accessed 20 January 2022, F

⁴⁰ Supreme Court of Japan, “1993 (Gyo-Tsu) 163,” 1995, https://www.courts.go.jp/app/hanrei_en/detail?id=201.

⁴¹ Mindan, “Mindan (Korean Residents Union in Japan) Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Japan (3rd Cycle) on Discrimination Against Zainichi Koreans (Korean Residents in Japan),” United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), 2017, <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=4328&file=EnglishTranslation>

⁴² Adachi City Assembly, “20-7 永住外国人への地方参政権付与をしないよう求める陳情 (20-7 – Petition not to grant local suffrage to permanent resident foreigners),” 2008, https://www.gikai-adachi.jp/g07_SeiganView.asp?SrchID=163&Title=%89i%8FZ%8AO%8D%91%90I%82%D6%82%CC%92n%95%FB%8EQ%90AD%8CA0%95t%97%5E%82%F0%82%B5%82%C8%82%A2%82%E6%82%A4%8B%81%82%DF%82%E9%92%C2%8F%EE&keyword1=&keyword2=#gsc.tab=0

⁴³ Nagasaki Prefecture, “永住外国人への地方参政権付与の法制化に反対する意見書 (Opinion against the legislation of granting local suffrage to permanent residents),” 2009, https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/gikai/2111teirei/tayori2111_ikensyo.html

countries to improve the relations between Japan and South Korea.⁴⁴ In the issue of sovereignty and the potential increase in the intensity of political activity by the South Korean diaspora in Japan, critics have laid out other reasons behind their disapproval for granting suffrage to the South Korean diaspora. A prominent reason is the status of immigrant/foreign resident when residing in and the status of validity to vote in elections in Japan that was partially inspired by the European Union.⁴⁵ In the European Union, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty obliges the main member states of the European Community such as Germany and France to grant the right to vote for foreigners who have officially become citizens of the two countries.⁴⁶ At the same time, Germany and France do not grant voting rights to immigrants who have not obtained official citizenship in these two countries.⁴⁷ Taking the example of some parts of the constitutions of these two countries that have not been amended in the section on voting rights for non-EU residents, several Japanese politicians consider that granting the right to vote for foreign residents who are not naturalized is a violation of the constitution.⁴⁸

However, there are differences in the implementation of the constitution regarding the right to vote for foreign residents between the Japanese central government and local governments. In 2014, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan (the main party of the Cabinet of Japan) issued a statement preventing local governments from granting voting rights to non-Japanese residents.⁴⁹ According to the LDP, granting the right to vote for foreign residents will threaten the validity of the Japanese Constitution and disrupt the political sovereignty of the Japanese people.⁵⁰ Echoing this statement, Akira Momochi, a lecturer in constitutional law at Nihon University, also stated that the right to vote could be abused by the foreign diaspora in Japan to advocate their origin country's national interests that may conflict with Japan's national interests.⁵¹

In spite of LDP's official standing regarding the foreign residents' suffrage, local governments to some degree undertake efforts to issue an ordinance to provide suffrage for foreign residents resembling to Toyonaka and Zushi cities, albeit with varying results. The most recent example of such efforts is the discussion of a proposed ordinance regarding foreign residents' suffrage in Musashino, a city in the western part of the Tokyo Metropolis. In late 2021, Musashino Mayor Reiko Matsushita proposed an ordinance regarding foreign residents' suffrage that will grant foreign residents the right to vote without specified conditions.⁵² Nevertheless, due to the divided opinions of the city assembly's member regarding the ordinance, the proposal did not get approval during the plenary vote session on December 21. While Matsushita stated she would postpone the proposal for future discussions,

⁴⁴ “外国人地方参政権／各界の意見聴取し実現を (Foreign local government / Hearing and realizing opinions from various fields),” San-in Chuo Shimpo, 2010.

⁴⁵ Kazuhiro Nagao, “Granting Voting Rights to Foreign Residents Violates the Constitution,” Chuo Online, 1 March 2010, <https://yab.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/chuo/dy/opinion/20100301.html>

⁴⁶ The Council of the European Union, “Council Directive 94/80/EC of 19 December 1994 laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by citizens of the Union residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals”, EUR-Lex, 19 December 1994, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:31994L0080&from=EN&lang=e>

⁴⁷ Kees Groenendijk, “Voting Rights for Nationals of Non-EU States,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 22 May 2014, <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurz dossiers/184711/voting-rights-for-nationals-of-non-eu-states>.

⁴⁸ Nagao, *Granting Voting Rights to Foreign Residents Violates the Constitution*.

⁴⁹ Ayako Mie, “Debate on foreigner voting rights reignites ahead of 2020 Olympics”, The Japan Times, 20 August 2014, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/20/national/politics-diplomacy/debate-foreigner-voting-rights-reignites-ahead-2020-olympics/>

⁵⁰ Stephen Day, “Japan: the contested boundaries of alien suffrage at the local level”, in *Democratization* Vol. 16, No. 3 (2009): 571.

⁵¹ Ayako Mie, *Debate on foreigner voting rights reignites ahead of 2020 Olympics*.

⁵² Kyodo, “Tokyo suburb rejects proposal allowing foreigners to vote,” Nikkei Asia, 21 December 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-immigration/Tokyo-suburb-rejects-proposal-allowing-foreigners-to-vote>

currently there are no ongoing attempts undertaken by other local Japanese governments to implement a similar ordinance.

The uneven implementation of suffrage by local governments in Japan notwithstanding, *Mindan* persists on with its goal to ensure a balanced provision of suffrage for all South Korean diaspora in Japan. In 2008, *Mindan* declared their support for the Democratic Party of Japan and the Komeito Party for a permanent policy of allowing non-Japanese foreign residents to participate in local elections.⁵³ In support, representatives of the Democratic Party of Japan stated that they agreed with their support for *Mindan*. In addition, the Japanese Democratic Party also reached out to Lee Myung-bak (10th President of South Korea) in the hope of receiving political support from abroad regarding this cooperation.⁵⁴ However, *Mindan's* efforts met with opposition from local lawmakers who argue that if the South Korean diaspora seek the right to vote in local elections, they must first naturalize as naturalized Japanese citizens.⁵⁵

Although this cooperative effort did not produce the desired results, *Mindan* continued to make every effort to obtain assistance in obtaining the right to vote for the South Korean diaspora in Japan, including through educational symposium events. An example of such educational symposium events in 2020 held by *Mindan* was titled “Let’s Think Together! Referendum Symposium” (みんなで考えよう！住民投票シンポジウム), in which *Mindan* invited everyone regardless of their citizenship status to become more aware of the issue of the right to vote for foreign residents in Japan.⁵⁶

This symposium was held close to the Osaka referendum in 2020, in which the referendum discussed the merging of the various 24 wards (electoral subdivisions) in Osaka city to resemble the urban system of the Tokyo metropolis.⁵⁷ By bringing all these wards together, resource management for Osaka urban management is expected to become more effective, for example in dealing with Osaka's growing elderly population. The issue with this referendum is that Osaka is one of Japan's major cities with the largest population of *Zainichi* Koreans, with a total of 67,024 population in 2018.⁵⁸ However, many of these *Zainichi* Koreans were not able to vote in the referendum because of their status, which upset many *Zainichi* Koreans residing in Osaka. This obviously resulted in the referendum’s failure to integrate all existing wards in Osaka city.⁵⁹

MINDAN’S AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS

Not only through its own organization, *Mindan* also advocates the needs of the South Korean diaspora in Japan through its collaboration with several other Korean organizations in Japan. Each of these

⁵³ Kyohei Matsuda, “民団、民主・公明支援へ 次期衆院選 選挙権付与めざす (Mindan aims to grant election rights to the next House of Representatives election to support democratic and public affairs),” *Asahi*, 12 December 2008, <https://megalodon.jp/2008-1212-1234-59/www.asahi.com/politics/update/1211/TKY200812110336.html>

⁵⁴ Kyohei Matsuda, *Mindan aims to grant election rights to the next House of Representatives election*.

⁵⁵ “「選挙権ほしいなら帰化を」 県会議長発言” ([Naturalize if you want the right to vote]: Remarks by the prefectural chairman),” *Asahi Shimbun*, 2006, http://mytown.asahi.com/hiroshima/news.php?k_id=35000000606290002

⁵⁶ Osaka Mindan, “「みんなで考えよう！住民投票シンポジウム」開催のご案内 (Information on the event [Let’s Think Together! Referendum Symposium]),” 30 September 2020, http://www.mindan-osaka.org/kccbbs/kannews_viewbody.php?number=990

⁵⁷ Eric Johnston, “Referendum a pivotal moment for Osaka and its politicians”, *The Japan Times*, 13 October 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/10/13/national/osaka-election-merger-faq/>

⁵⁸ Osaka City Government, “住民基本台帳人口・外国人登録人口” (Basic Resident Register Population/Alien Registration Population),” 7 February 2019, <https://www.city.osaka.lg.jp/ikuno/page/0000427171.html>

⁵⁹ Kyodo, “Osaka rejects plan to break up city in referendum for 2nd time,” *Nikkei Asia*, 1 November 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Osaka-rejects-plan-to-break-up-city-in-referendum-for-2nd-time>

organizations has their own expertise, considering that the needs of the South Korean diaspora in Japan requires different solutions. This signifies *Mindan's* efforts to adapt to the conditions of Japanese society so that *Mindan* and other Korean organizations can mutually strengthen each other in order to build a better reputation in the eyes of the Japanese people. In this study, the affiliated organizations that will be discussed are the Korean Youth Association (*Seinenkai*) and the Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (KCCJ).

KOREAN YOUTH ASSOCIATION (*SEINENKAI*)

The first organization to be discussed in this article is the Korean Youth Association, or *Seinenkai* (在日本大韓民国青年会). According to the official *Seinenkai* website, they are an official Korean youth organization that is an affiliate of *Mindan* in Japan.⁶⁰ In recent years, the focus of the *Seinenkai* organization has been to improve the quality of education and social rights of the South Korean diaspora youth in Japan. At the same time, *Seinenkai* aims to be a bridge for cultural exchanges between Japan and South Korea which is dominated by youths. For this reason, *Seinenkai* has opened cultural courses ranging from traditional Korean music and dance courses to Korean language courses from basic to advanced levels for everyone.

Other than culture, employment is one of the most important aspects of life for younger Koreans in Japan. Therefore, *Seinenkai* cooperates with relevant institutions to help find employment opportunities for young Koreans in Japan. One of the most striking collaborations in this area is with Workport, a Japanese job search company that was founded in 2003.⁶¹

Together with Workport, *Seinenkai* gained benefits from Workport in the field of employment such as gaining access to companies that are actively seeking employment from the South Korean diaspora in Japan. Upon registering as a member of *Seinenkai*, fresh graduates benefit from being able to apply for job vacancies directly in Korean companies in Japan and being able to do career change consulting.⁶² The existence of a job portal from a well-known job seekers company in Japan is one of the most important features of *Seinenkai* in their joint efforts with *Mindan* to ensure the livelihood of the South Korean diaspora in Japan.

Moreover, the presence of Workport as a job search company in Japan is equally striking, considering that there is currently a labor shortage crisis in Japan for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and in other sectors.⁶³ In the face of this crisis, Workport emerged as a job-seeking company in Japan that fights for the participation of foreign workers in the Japanese economy.⁶⁴ To that end, Workport has expanded job opportunities that could be accessed by various job seekers from the IT field to other fields, such as system engineering, mechanical design, game programming, marketing (overseas sales), and designers.

To use this collaboration service between *Seinenkai* and Workport, job applicants are allowed to fill in the identity form and job application directly on the Workport website. In the form, job applicants from young Koreans in Japan can fill in the location of the destination prefecture where they want to work and the choice of employment opportunities they wish to work in. If they do not use

⁶⁰ *Seinenkai*, “組織概要 / 紹介” (*Organization Overview/Introduction*), 2021, <https://www.seinenkai.org/%e7%b5%84%e7%b9%94%e6%a6%82%e8%a6%81/%e7%b4%b9%e4%bb%8b>

⁶¹ Workport, “会社情報 (About Us),” 2021, <https://www.workport.co.jp/aboutus/>

⁶² Workport, “在日本大韓民国青年会 x Workport (Korean Youth Association x Workport),” 2021, https://www.workport.co.jp/seinenkai_wp/

⁶³ Keiichiro Hamaguchi, “How Have Japanese Policies Changed in Accepting Foreign Workers?,” *Japan Labor Issues* 3, No. 14 (2019), 2-7.

⁶⁴ Excite, “転職支援のワークポート、在日本大韓民国青年会と業務提携 (Workport for job change support, business tie-up with Korean Youth Association in Japan),” 2020, https://www.excite.co.jp/news/article/Ptimes_2020-01-27-39106-46/

the form to apply for jobs, job applicants can directly search the Workport website to select the jobs they want. In addition, there are job opportunities at Workport, ranging from work positions for experienced workers to workers with no experience at all (e.g. Fresh graduates).

In line with the explanation by Massey's theory, the emergence of diaspora organizations do indeed play an active role in helping the needs of the members they shelter. Racial discrimination is one of the problems often faced by the South Korean diaspora in Japan.⁶⁵ Therefore, to help stop the practices of racist behavior towards the South Korean diaspora by the Japanese, *Seinenkai* contacted the Tokyo government and the respective Tokyo ward governments to prohibit the use of public spaces for racism-related activities against the South Korean diaspora in May 2017.⁶⁶ Led by its Chairman Park Yushik, *Seinenkai* submitted an official request to the government entitled “Request for Disapproval of Requests for Use of Public Spaces for Racial Discrimination Purposes” which aimed to issue an official policy by the Japanese government to stop discrimination and further recognition of the South Korean diaspora. Not only in Tokyo, *Seinenkai* was also considering making a similar request to the local Japanese government through *Mindan* branches spread throughout Japan after May 2017. However, it is not known how successful the organization is.

KOREAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY IN JAPAN (KCCJ)

In the economic sector, the Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (KCCJ/在日韓国商工会議所) exists as an organization engaged in the economic field to assist the economic development of the Korean community in Japan. Originally founded in February 22, 1962, KCCJ assists the South Korean diaspora by forming regional committees specifically for certain industrial fields, opening tax consultations, holding economic seminars, and so on.⁶⁷ Through the KCCJ, various Korean businesses in Japan can gain access and the economic and legal assistance needed for these businesses to remain operational.

In the face of a modern economy that changes every year, KCCJ carries out several economic activities to help the South Korean diaspora economy.⁶⁸ To do so, KCCJ performs its function in making proposals or for members of the South Korean diaspora who wish to receive business permits from the local Japanese government and assisting the development of South Korean diaspora-owned MSMEs by promoting the use of the loan system and subsidized public funds. Furthermore, KCCJ also occasionally holds tax consultation services for South Korean diaspora business owners regarding the current Japanese taxation system that currently has no discernible adaptation to the long-time non-Japanese residents.⁶⁹

Additionally, KCCJ also provides credit union support for South Korean diaspora-owned businesses through the unification of separate Korean-owned credit unions and job search support for

⁶⁵ Mari Fujisaki, “ルーツは在日、国籍は日本の私 両方に壁を感じながら、多文化を生きる” (I have roots in Japan and my nationality is Japanese – Living multiculturally while feeling the walls on both sides), 2020, <https://globe.asahi.com/article/14048822>

⁶⁶ Mindan, “[Youth Association Central Department] Discrimination purpose is not permitted... Requesting form for use of public facilities (<青年会中央本部>差別目的は不許可に... 公共施設利用で要望書),” 2017, https://www.mindan.org/news/mindan_news_view.php?cate=0&page=1&number=23254&keyfield=title&keyfield=body&key=%E5%9C%A8%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E5%A4%A7%E9%9F%93%E6%B0%91%E5%9B%BD%E9%9D%92%E5%B9%B4%E4%BC%9A

⁶⁷ KCCJ, “一般社団法人 在日韓国商工会議所とは (What is the Korean Chamber of Commerce in Japan?),” 2021, <https://kccj.org/about/>

⁶⁸ KCCJ, “事業活動 (Business Activities),” 2022, <https://kccj.org/activities/>

⁶⁹ Kyodo, “Japan plans tax breaks for foreign nationals to attract financial experts”, The Japan Times, 25 November 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/11/25/business/japan-tax-breaks-foreign-nationals-finance/>

new and old Korean workers in Japan to adapt with the new workforce recruitment schemes in Japanese companies after the 2008 global economic crisis.⁷⁰ Moreover, KCCJ also works on the well-ordered transition from the older Korean immigrant generations and their successive descendants to younger generations in the field of youth industry and business association development.⁷¹

All of these activities are the core of the KCCJ's mission in shaping the economic capacity of the Koreans in Japan as one of the prominent South Korean-related organizations in Japan alongside *Mindan*. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, KCCJ has helped various MSMEs owned by Koreans as part of local MSMEs affected by the pandemic.⁷² As of April 2020, the Japanese government through the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) issued a policy regarding economic assistance for MSMEs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷³ Since KCCJ has adhered to the METI policy regarding the management of economic assistance either before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, the distribution of information on such assistance by KCCJ remains important for MSMEs belonging to the Korean diaspora who use KCCJ as their source of information. METI's involvement in handling economic assistance to MSMEs in Japan both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic is related to its function to develop Japan's economic development by assisting private companies. The purpose behind this function is to ensure a proper development rate of economic development of Japan's economy starting from its small and medium level units of enterprises.⁷⁴ To that end, parts of the Japanese government's assistance for various MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic were channeled through the Safety Net Guarantee policy no. 5.⁷⁵ In the official list released by METI, there are 587 types of industries in various fields that are considered capable of obtaining the safety net guarantee assistance during the pandemic. To be able to use this assistance, the affected MSMEs must provide detailed information about the decline in financial profits that occurred in the midst of a sluggish economy.

In order to ensure that foreigners including South Korean diaspora in Japan are still included as people who are entitled to receive government assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Mindan* through the KCCJ moved quickly to contact the Japanese government to discuss the assistance. On April 11, 2020, KCCJ representatives consisting of Mr. Ro and Mr. Kim Junji visited the House of the 2nd Member of the Komeito Party to discuss the request for economic assistance and granting operating permits to the pachinko industry (a type of legal Japanese gambling machine) which is operated by the South Korean diaspora in Japan.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Peter Firkola, "Japanese Recruitment Practices –Before and After the Global Financial Crisis-," in *Economic Journal of Hokkaido University* Vol. 40 (2011).

⁷¹ Shigehiko Shiramizu, "在日外国人と日本人とのコミュニケーション--地域における交流・支援活動の実態(特集 異文化交流・異文化理解) (Communication between foreigners living in Japan and Japanese People – Actual conditions of exchange and support activities in the region [Special feature: Intercultural exchange and understanding of different cultures])," (Hiroshima University International Student Center, 1999).

⁷² KCCJ, "(経済産業省)「新型コロナウイルス感染症に係る資金繰り対策の対象事業者を拡大する方針です」 (Ministry of Economy, Industry, and Trade "We plan to expand the number of businesses targeted for financing measures for new coronavirus infectious disease")," 2020, <https://kccj.org/info/2173/>

⁷³ METI, "METI's Support Measures for Companies Concerning the Impacts of the Novel Coronavirus Disease," 2020, <https://www.meti.go.jp/english/covid-19/index.html>

⁷⁴ METI, "Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Basic Act: Chapter I General Provisions," 1999, https://www.chusho.meti.go.jp/sme_english/outline/08/01_01.html

⁷⁵ METI, "Industries Subject to No.5 Safety Nets for Financing Guarantee to be Designated (target industries for the first quarter of FY2020)," 2020, https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2020/0323_005.html

⁷⁶ *Mindan*, "「Don't exclude foreigners from support measures...」 *Mindan* requests to Komeito (「支援策で外国人除外せぬよう」... 民団が公明党に要望書)," 2020, https://www.mindan.org/news/mindan_news_view.php?cate=0&page=1&number=26022&keyfield=title&keyfield=1=body&key=%E5%9C%A8%E6%97%A5%E9%9F%93%E5%9B%BD%E5%95%86%E5%B7%A5%E4%BC%9A%E8%AD%B0%E6%89%80

In the meeting, Ro demanded that foreign diaspora, including the South Korean diaspora, be not excluded from the Japanese government's emergency aid scheme during the pandemic. Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives for the Komeito Party, Michiyo Takagi, responded positively, that both MSMEs in general and pachinko entertainment venues belonging to the South Korean diaspora will be included in the assistance scheme after receiving an official permit request from Mindan. The pachinko industry not previously covered by the Safety Net Guarantee No. 5 by METI regarding the affected business industry has now been successfully included as an industry that is entitled to receive assistance from this economic guarantee.⁷⁷

The reason why the pachinko industry owned by the Korean diaspora in Japan is important is because of the industry's historic role in being a significant source of income for the diaspora since the 20th century.⁷⁸ As an industry owned by many Koreans due to their inability to find legal work, the pachinko industry remains a popular choice for Koreans who wish to make a living through this industry, despite efforts in recent years by the Japanese government to reduce the scale of operations in Japan.⁷⁹

To fulfill its role as the official institution of the South Korean diaspora in the economic field, KCCJ provides assistance channels for various MSMEs belonging to the South Korean diaspora affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through its collaboration with various Japanese prefectures. In Kanagawa Prefecture for example, the Kanagawa branch of the KCCJ has been working closely with the Kanagawa Prefectural government since the pandemic began.⁸⁰ In this cooperation, the existing cooperation assistance revolves not only in assistance to businesses that have to close earlier than usual, but also for people who have to face the risk of unemployment and cannot afford to pay taxes as in normal times.

Advocacy in this collaboration was clarified by the issuance of a flow of assistance and consultation for all business owners who experienced business continuity problems, lost their jobs, paid taxes, and so on. Through consistent cooperation between the Kanagawa branch of KCCJ and the Kanagawa prefectural government, the South Korean diaspora, owners of MSMEs in the region, are also entitled to the same assistance from the government. The assistance provided is such as applying for credit loans, delaying tax payments (tax deferral), monthly assistance for individual business owners and MSMEs, and so on.⁸¹

In order to maintain the sustainability of business ventures belonging to the South Korean diaspora, various consultation sessions on taxation during the pandemic were also conducted by the Kanagawa branch of the KCCJ. In accordance with the KCCJ's vision and mission to create an economic advocacy agency for the South Korean diaspora, KCCJ assigned tax experts who are familiar with several changes to the tax payment mechanism in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The tax consultation session, which was held in Kawasaki, Nanbu, and Yamato from 10 February to 2 April 2021, was attended by more than 200 business owners who urgently needed information about

⁷⁷ Mindan, ““Overcoming the corona damages and strengthening the bond to the future... Mindan Society 2020” (コロナ禍を乗り越えて未来への絆をより強く... 民団社会 2020年),” 2020, https://www.mindan.org/news/mindan_news_view.php?cate=0&page=1&number=26643&keyfield=title&keyfield=body&key=%E3%83%91%E3%83%81%E3%83%B3%E3%82%B3

⁷⁸ Todd Munson, “Contextualizing Min Jin Lee’s Pachinko”, in *Asian Literature in the Humanities and the Social Sciences* Vol. 24, No. 3 (2019), 54-57.

⁷⁹ Taiga Uranaka & Ritsuko Ando, “Japan’s pachinko industry braces for anti-addiction regulation”, *Reuters*, 27 July 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-pachinko-idUSKBN1KG35H>

⁸⁰ Kanagawa Prefecture, “To all businesses affected by the epidemic of the new coronavirus infection” (新型コロナウイルス感染症の流行により影響を受けている事業者の皆様へ), 2021, <https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp/docs/jf2/coronavirus2020/index.html>

⁸¹ Kanagawa Prefecture, “To all business owners in Kanagawa Prefecture” (神奈川県の実業者のみなさまへ), 2021, <https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp/documents/60393/chirashi0901.pdf>

adjusting with the tax system so that their business could continue to run.⁸² The above collaboration between *Mindan* the KCCJ has certainly improved the environment for Koreans living in Japan, regardless on a temporary basis or long term stay.

CONCLUSION

From the findings above, we have seen *Mindan*'s and other organizations' various efforts to improve the quality of life of the South Korean diaspora in Japan in various fields, such as politics, economy, culture, and so on. Although Massey mentions the emergence of illegal organizations aimed at helping immigrants to enter a country illegally, the findings of this case study illustrates that legal means for immigration and integration process have been quite successful and have been carried out through efforts deemed as acceptable in the Japanese laws and values system.

When compared to *Mindan*, similar organizations like *Chongryon* do not in fact receive the same recognition by the Japanese public. *Chongryon* tends to be labeled as a diasporic organization that incites controversies and is seen as dangerous because of their affiliation with the North Korean government which has no formal diplomatic relations with Japan due to the conflict and hostility between the two countries. Therefore, although *Chongryon* admits that they also support the promotion of the identity and livelihood of the Korean diaspora in Japan, many of their efforts are regarded as unofficial and illegal by the Japanese because of the less-than-stellar image of North Koreans in Japanese society. As a result, even though *Mindan* and *Chongryon* both claim to be diasporic organizations that strive for their diaspora's human rights, *Mindan* commonly receives better publicity and recognition within the society because the Japanese are favorable towards South Korea rather than their northern neighbor.

When researching *Mindan*'s policies and activities, there were several difficulties in the research process. The majority of the information contained in Japanese is sometimes not presented directly on the internet, considering that there is more information that can be obtained by the direct interview method. However, the information provided in this paper is expected to provide an overview of the role and strategy of *Mindan* as a diasporic organization in Japan for future research. Although there are some previous research discussing *Mindan* and its activities in the 20th century, there is not much official literature in English language that discusses their role in fighting for the rights of the South Korean diaspora in Japan in this decade. Through this paper, it is hoped that it will complement the existing literature on a foreign diasporic organization in Japan. This example of the *Mindan* organization is expected to contribute more knowledge on foreign diasporas in Japan and the dynamics of social interactions between institutions in the realm of international migration.

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