

JAPAN

Challenges in Management of Electoral Rolls

1 Introduction

Under the Japanese election system, there are two types of electoral rolls. One is a voters list, and the other is an overseas voters list. Both of them are prepared by the election management committee of each city, town, and village, that is to say, basic municipality closest to residents.

Voters list is a list commonly used for all national and local elections. Once a voter is registered on the list, the registration remains permanently valid until he/she is removed from the list owing to his/her death, loss of nationality, or the lapse of four months after his/her removal to another municipality. On the other hand, overseas voters list is a list used only for national elections.

In this paper, the brief history of the way to prepare each list is described.

2 Voters List

In 1889, the election system was established in Japan, and the voters list has been prepared since then. At first, the list had been prepared once a year, at a fixed time, by each municipal election management committee, empowered to register ex-officio voters.

The current Public Office Election Law was enacted in 1950. Since then, besides a basic voters list prepared once a year, an additional voters list based on each voter's application had also been prepared before each election.

This voters list, however, still had some problems as follows:

- In 1945, the right to vote was given to women and the age for the right to vote was lowered to 20 years. As a result, the number of voters has doubled and it has become more difficult for each municipal election management committee to manage voters list.
- As the economy grows, internal population movement has intensified, people have concentrated in big cities, and their social life has pluralized and become more complex. As a result, it has become more difficult for each municipal election management committee to grasp the voters' addresses accurately.
- In preparing an additional voters list, applications for registration by voters has concentrated before each election, and each election management committee had to prepare the voters list for a very short time period. As a result, possibility of mis-registration and double registration has risen.
- In preparing a basic voters list once a year, mis-copy could happen, and each election

management committee had to repeat the same survey every year, including voters with no status change.

Considering these situations, permanent voters list system was adopted in 1966. This system was a model for current voters list, but the procedure for registration was based on applications by voters.

In 1969, about forty years ago, the current voters list system was established. The registration system of the voters list has improved along with the maintenance of the Basic Residential Registers. That is to say, according to the Basic Residential Registers Law, the address of each Japanese citizen shall be registered on the Basic Residential Registers when he/she determines his/her address.

In preparing a voters list, information on the Basic Residential Registers is utilized. A municipal election management committee is empowered to register ex-officio a Japanese over 20 years of age who has a residence within the area of the municipality concerned and whose name has been on record in the Basic Residential Registers of the municipality for more than three months successively from the day when the Resident Card is made, or, as for a person who has newly moved into the municipality, from the day when he/she notifies the moving-in address to the municipality. Besides, Public Office Election Law stipulates following provisions on the voters list:

- The bench mark day for the registration is periodically designated four times per year, and specially designated by each election management committee before each election.
- After registration, the election management committee of each municipality is required to make available for public inspection the voters' names, addresses and the dates of birth registered on the list.
- When a voter has an objection in regard to his/her own registration or that of others, he/she may lodge an objection with the municipal election management committee concerned during the period of public inspection.

This permanent voters list system has enabled each election management committee to grasp effectively and rightly residents who have the right to vote, and secure the justice of elections.

3 Overseas Voters List

Japanese citizens who live overseas are allowed to vote only for national elections. This system was established in 1998. Voters who would like to vote need to register for the overseas voters list, which is a list for voters who have addresses outside of Japan.

A Japanese citizen over 20 years old who lives within the area over which the consulate

controlling his/her address exercises jurisdiction may apply for registration on overseas voters.

A voter is registered to the overseas voters list based on his/her own application. This is different from the voters list, on which a voter is registered ex-officio by each municipal election management committee.

Currently, about 110,000 in about 1,120,000 overseas Japanese are registered to the overseas voters list.

4 Conclusion

As I explained above, voters list in Japan is already efficiently and rightly prepared, and this list contributes to the right electoral management. The number of registered overseas Japanese voters, however, is still small. From now on, I consider that further enlightenment to promote applications for overseas Japanese who have the right to vote but are not registered on the overseas voters list will be needed.