

**Political realignment at the end of the Taisho period focusing
on the relationship of the National Association of Towns
and Villages to the Seiyuhonto Party**

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It was during Japan's second pro-Constitution movement that the Seiyuhonto Party was formed and began to open the path leading to the formation of the Minseito Party. However, due to a scarcity of source materials related to the Seiyuhonto and its chairman, it has been difficult to trace the most conservative element of the Seiyukai Party, in terms of the changes that took place in the Seiyuhonto within the process of its merger with the Kenseikai Party. The present article focuses on the relationship that was established between the National Association of Towns and Villages (NATV) and the Seiyuhonto during 1920-21 in an attempt to reexamine politics at the end of the Taisho era.

The author begins with a description of two political processes facing the fifteenth session of the National Diet; namely, enacting the Universal Manhood Suffrage Act and increasing the National Treasury's share of funding for compulsory education, in order to show the cooperation that was established between the Seiyuhonto and the NATV in implementing regional policy, which was followed by a joint effort to apply pressure on the Tripartite pro-Constitution Cabinet, in particular the Cabinet's Seiyukai faction. For the Seiyukai prior to the enactment of universal suffrage, cooperation on the part of the NATV was crucial in terms of both the party's platform and political influence.

Next, the author outlines the political process in the fifty-first session of the Diet surrounding the abolishment of county (*gun* 郡) administrative offices, within which the Seiyuhonto, forced to keep universal suffrage in view, decided to join together with the Kenseikai to implement increased Treasury funding for education, thus opposing the shutdown of *gun* offices, which was supported

by the NATV. There is no doubt that the prestige of the Seiyuhonto at this point in time was at its height, especially among the business community; however, its role as spokesperson for the NATV had definitely declined.

The changes that occurred in the Seiyuhonto as the result of these three political processes characterized the transition from spokesperson for the NATV, which governed Japan regionally, to a party of the masses in anticipation of general elections. However, the tokonami Takejiro faction of the Seiyuhonto, which was formed as a new electoral base, being organizationally similar to the Wakatsuki Reijiro faction of the Kenseikai, lacked any uniqueness as a political party at the time. Consequently, as tokonami's dream of the revitalizing the "Great Seiyukai" became more and more remote, the formation of the Minseito became more of a possibility on the political scene of the last years of Taisho.