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Reevaluating Prefectural Assemblies in Prewar Japan: A Case Study on Ishikawa's Budget Amendments from 1890 to 1898

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ABSTRACT

Prefectural assemblies in Japan before World War II are generally considered to have been powerless because the governor could enforce his original draft under the home minister's direction. However, formal institutional structures do not always explain their actual functioning. This article examines the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly from 1890 to 1898, measuring the ratio of the assembly's amendments to the governor's original budgets. It finds that while most postwar assemblies have never amended budgets, the Ishikawa assembly from the 1890s through the 1920s passed only eight budgets without amendment. By tracing the transition of the budget from the governor's original proposal through three readings until the home minister's direction in the 1893 ordinary session, it reveals that the assembly, dominated by the faction favoring the prefectural government, readily cut the governor's budget; that the governor also compromised significantly during the budget negotiation process; and that the amount revived by the execution of the original draft was much smaller than the reduction during the second reading. The article concludes that prewar prefectural assemblies were more influential than the formal rules suggest, with the execution of the original draft under the home minister's direction being just one step in the final adjustment process.

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Introduction

Prefectural assemblies in Japan before World War II are generally considered to have been powerless vis-à-vis governors, who were Home Ministry officials appointed by the national government. Steven R. Reed argues, 'Authority was concentrated in the offices of local chief executives, leaving local assemblies almost functionless' (Reed, 1986, p. 44). To be sure, a variety of control devices were incorporated in the Prefectural System (Fukensei), introduced in 1890.¹ For example, if the prefectural assembly failed to act or took action 'injurious to the public interest', the governor could apply to the home minister for direction, and the directive replaced the 'lacking or faulty' assembly action ('discretionary disposition'; *senketsu shobun*). The governor could thus enforce his original budget under the direction of the home minister, even without assembly approval ('execution of the original draft'; *gen'an shikkō*). The governor could even ask

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¹The National Diet Library's Japanese Law Index (<https://hourei.ndl.go.jp/>) provides access to laws and their amendments from the implementation of the Public Documents Act in February 1886 onwards. Unless otherwise specified, the laws and their enactment dates cited in this article are sourced from this website.

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the home minister to dissolve the prefectural assembly, whereas the assembly had no power to replace the governor. '[T]he subjects on which the prefectural assembly could act were limited, while the governor exercised a "general control"' (Steiner, 1965, pp. 51–53).

Many studies share this perspective. Ōishi (1990) mentions the power of the governor to execute the original draft under the prefectural system, stating that the control and supervision powers over the prefectural assembly, held by the governor and the central government, were extremely strong. Takeshita (2018) characterizes the assembly's authority as highly passive, limited to approving or rejecting the governor's proposals. Takagi (1976) cites the governor's power to execute the original draft and the home minister's power to dissolve the assembly, stating that the Meiji local government system significantly restricted the assembly's autonomy and established a system where the governor was superior to the assembly. Takayose (2004) asserts that a governance system favoring administrative superiority was established in the local government system, and the decision-making power in local assemblies had become a mere formality, lacking any real substance. Yamanaka (1999) states that the function of the prefectural assembly as a deliberative body under the predecessor of the Prefectural System, the Regulation of Prefectural Assemblies (Fukenkai kisoku), was extremely incomplete, and that the absolute superiority of the administrative power was thoroughly enforced, from the fact that when a conflict arose between the assembly and the governor, the governor held the authority for execution under the direction of the secretary of the interior (later the home minister), and the power to dissolve the assembly was held by the governor and the secretary of the interior.

However, the formal structure of institutions does not always explain their actual functioning. Most current prefectural assemblies very often approve bills proposed by the executive branch without amendment, although they have more formal power and fewer restrictions than in the prewar period. Over the 70-odd years,² postwar prefectural assemblies have discussed and passed budgets proposed by governors every year.³ Throughout this period, the majority of assemblies have never amended budgets, and no assemblies have made more than five amendments (Figure 1).⁴ In addition, there is only a single case in which a prefectural assembly amended a budget by more than 1 per cent (Figure 2).

By contrast, the prewar Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly, examined in this article, looks much more aggressive (Figure 3). Among the 38 budgets from the 1890s through the 1920s for which material indicating the original amount remains, only eight passed the assembly without amendment. When the assembly amended the budget, it did so by 4.7 per cent on average. In prewar local politics, the prefectural assembly was the only local body elected by voters, and perhaps this fact allowed it to have more significance than in the postwar era. Whether or not the prewar assemblies were actually as powerless as suggested by their formal rules deserves a closer look.

²Fifty years for Okinawa Prefecture.

³Henceforth, *budget* refers to an initial general account budget (*ippan kaikei tōsho yosan*), and *amend* or *amendment* refers to cases where the prefectural assembly amends the amount of money of an initial general account.

⁴The author conducted a survey with the secretariats of all 47 prefectural assemblies from April through June 2022, asking how many times and how much they have amended initial general account budgets since the end of World War II. Of the 47, six answered with some reservations: 'for the past 20 years' (Akita), 'to the extent that the material remains' (Nara), 'since 1968' (Osaka), 'since 1991' (Tokushima), 'to the extent possible' (Kagoshima), and 'since 1972' (Okinawa).

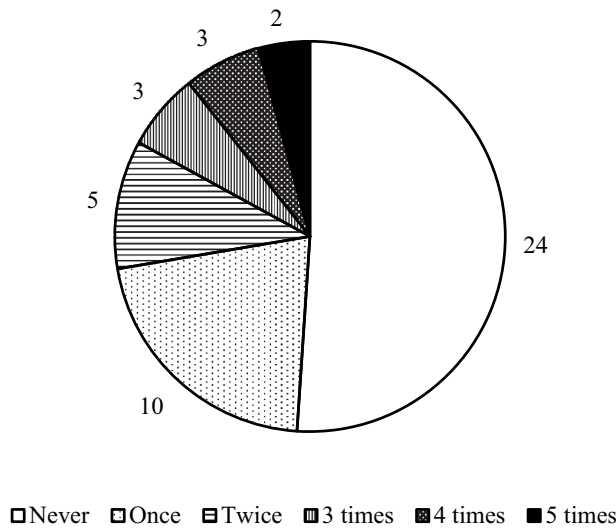


Figure 1. Number of amendments of initial general account budgets by prefecture from the end of World War II through 2022. Source: the author, based on a survey conducted with the secretariats of all 47 prefectural assemblies from April through June 2022.

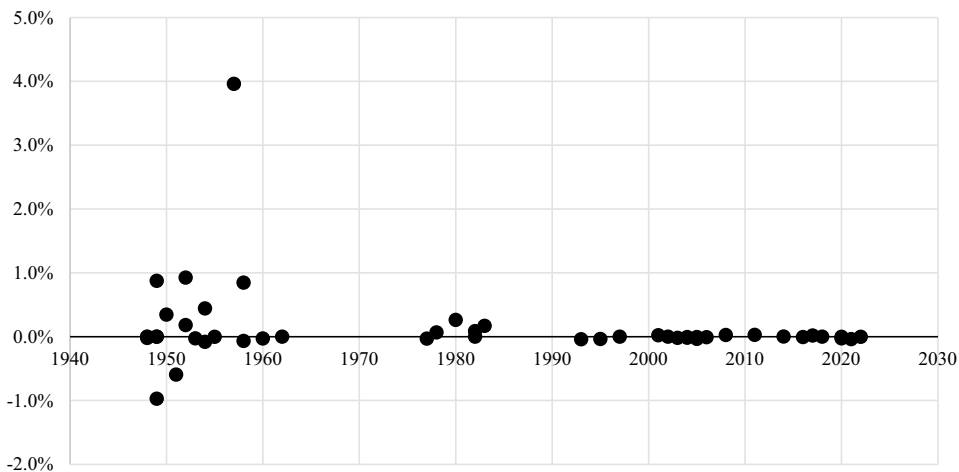


Figure 2. Ratio of the assemblies' amendments to the original budgets proposed by governors (postwar Japan). Source: the author, based on a survey conducted with the secretariats of all 47 prefectural assemblies from April through June 2022.

Many studies exist on prewar Japanese prefectural assemblies. In particular, early- and mid-Meiji prefectural assemblies are the most studied because of their importance in the history of national politics, namely the Popular Rights Movement (*Jiyū minken undō*), culminating in the establishment of the Imperial Diet. A number of studies point out the key role the assemblies played in establishing representative democracy in Japan while in absence of their counterpart at the national level (Kim, 2007; Masumi, 1988; Ōishi, 1990).

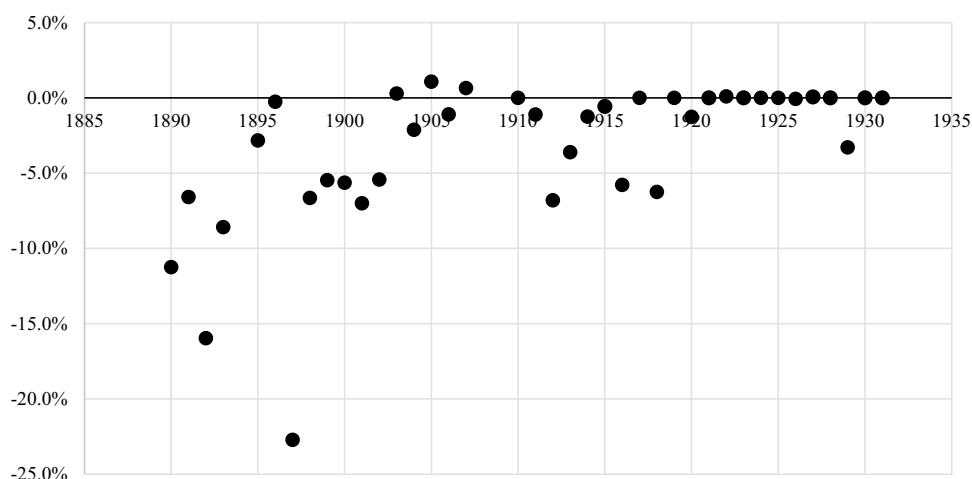


Figure 3. Ratio of the Ishikawa assembly's amendments to the original budgets proposed by governors (prewar Ishikawa). Source: the author, reproduced based on IGH (1968, 1969) as well as minutes and resolutions of ordinary sessions owned by the Library of the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly.

Among these studies, some do a systematic analysis by comparing the governor's original budget and the assembly's amendment (Abe, 1996; Takayose, 2002), just as the present study does for a later period.

On the other hand, there are fewer studies regarding prefectural assemblies after the establishment of the national assembly in 1890. Among those that do exist, many mention the prefectural assembly rather collaterally when discussing other issues, such as industry and politics (Ericson, 1996), elections and party organizations (Sakurai, 1998a), and the political strategies of prominent national party politicians (Itō, 2014; Nishiyama, 2014). Other studies introduce a handful of episodes involving the assembly, such as a conflict between the governor and the assembly, instead of systematically discussing the whole picture (Takayose, 2006).

As such, this case study of the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly aims to clarify the relationship between the governor and the prefectural assembly from the enactment of the Prefectural System in 1890 until the appointment of Shiba Sankurō⁵ (1850–1903) as the first political-party governor in Ishikawa by the Waihan (Ōkuma-Itagaki) cabinet, Japan's first political party cabinet, on 16 July 1898. As illustrated in Figure 3, the influence of the assembly on budgets diminished with the development of party politics. However, during the period examined in this article, the prefectural assembly had a significantly greater impact on budgets than the formal rules would suggest. The governor and the home minister exercised their formal powers in a notably restrained manner.

In order to analyze the workings of the assembly, it is important to consider not only the political and social conditions of the time, but also original sources such as minutes and bills, as well as biographical backgrounds of key actors in the assembly, such as

⁵The pronunciation of some people's names is not confirmed and is guessed based on the kanji. Those that follow are the same.

assembly members and governors. For the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly, access to such a wide range of documents is possible. *Ishikawaken gikaishi* (Ishikawaken gikaishi hensan'ininkai [IGH], 1968, 1969) includes detailed descriptions of each session as well as excerpts from the minutes and biographical backgrounds of all former members. As for profiles of governors, *Ishikawaken rekidai chōkan monogatari* (Sengoku, 1929) provides a variety of episodes of governors. It was written as serial articles from 1927 in the local newspaper *Kanazawa shimpō*, mainly based on interviews with contemporaneous people. Other sources, such as the minutes, *Ishikawakenshi* (Ishikawaken, 1927–1933), *Ishikawakenshi gendaihen* (Ishikawaken, 1962), other official documents (for example, Ishikawaken, 1893), *Hokkoku shimbun*, and Ishibayashi's (1972) *Ishikawa hyakunenshi*, complement the argument of this article.

Ishikawa Prefecture is known for its intense political party conflicts, sometimes involving violence (Shimode, 1970; Wakabayashi, 1970). This makes it relatively easy to contrast the movements of different political parties. Along with access to high-quality sources mentioned above, this makes Ishikawa an appropriate case for examining the relationship between the assembly and the governor's budget proposals.

As a methodology, this article measures the ratio of the assembly's amendments to the original budgets proposed by governors and uses it as a quantifiable and comparable metric for the impact of the assembly on the budgets. Although not all assembly activities took place within the assembly, and the bills debated in the assembly were not limited to the budget, this study focuses on the budget because most policies ultimately came into the budget and therefore the budget is useful for understanding the overall policies of the prefecture.

A simple formal analysis would risk missing important factors that are not present in the data. Instead of setting a hypothesis in advance and verifying it with data, this study, without prior judgment, refers to historical records and primary sources such as bills and minutes housed in the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly Library and clarifies the actual dynamics of budget deliberations in the prefectural assembly based on facts and remarks of governors and assembly members.

This article first explains the structure of the prefectural assembly, the governor, and the budget process under the Prefectural System, and then, using this metric, shows how budget deliberations in the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly from 1890 to 1898 compared to other periods. The prewar Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly made significant budget amendments, at least compared to its postwar counterpart, but this period was particularly marked by major amendments. Next, taking the ordinary session in 1893 as an example, it reveals the reality of deliberations and the execution of the original draft. The execution of the original draft under the direction of the home minister, viewed through the entire budget deliberation process, was not a matter of the governor ignoring the assembly and adhering to his original plan until the end. In reality, the governor and the assembly were looking for points of agreement while making concessions to each other, and the power to execute the original plan was one step in the final adjustment process.

Local Government System

The Constitution of the Empire of Japan was promulgated on 11 February 1889. The oligarchic government was rapidly advancing the creation of a modern state, and

alongside the drafting of the constitution, it was also working to establish governance structures under this new constitution, including local administration, the military, education, and the family system (IGH, 1969; Nakagawa, 1990; Oriishi, 2010; Takeshita, 2018). The Prefectural System (Fukensei), enacted on 17 May 1890, along with the County System (Gunsei), established on the same day, and the City, Town, and Village System (Shisei chōsonsei), enacted on 25 April 1888, defined the local administrative structure of prewar Japan. These systems aimed to reorganize local governance under a new order, building upon the Three New Acts (San shimpō), which had previously regulated local administration.

Prefectural Assembly

After its predecessor, the ‘Meeting’ (Kaigi), was first established by the Provisional Ordinance for the Meeting in 1872, the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly formally started its history in 1879. It was based on the Regulation of Prefectural Assemblies (Fukenkai kisoku), one of the Three New Acts, enacted by the central government in 1878 (Nakagawa, 1990).

In the assembly, there were 69 seats in 1879, but in 1882 the number was reduced to 49 (IGH, 1969). After the secession of Toyama Prefecture from Ishikawa Prefecture in 1883, there were 36 seats, until the number decreased to 31 in 1891. The number was further reduced to 30 in 1923, but in 1931, it returned to 31 (IGH, 1968).

The enactment of the Prefectural System in 1890 intensified the conflict between the assembly and governors. Originally, prefectural assembly members were elected directly by taxpayers who paid five yen or more in land tax (IGH, 1969). However, the then home minister Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922) changed it to indirect election under this act⁶ (Oriishi, 2010; Takagi, 1976; Takeshita, 2018). Through this system, he ensured that property owners and influential figures dominated the municipal council through a graded electoral system. Their votes would then elect county council and prefectural assembly members. At each level – municipal, county, and prefectural – it was expected that influential individuals, equipped with property and knowledge, would become the bearers of local administration. By placing the foundation of upper-level council or assembly members at the municipal level, it was anticipated that actions would be based not on ideology or liberal democratic theory to express dissatisfaction or resistance against the regime, but on non-political, everyday issues at the municipal level. It was hoped that they would align their interests with the state and support the regime. In addition, he believed that assemblies should be controlled by big landowners instead of former samurai and that under constitutionalism, the entire nation should share voting rights as well as a military duty (Nakagawa, 1990).

Consequently, as Yamagata expected, many big landowners were elected as assembly members. Among the 31 members in 1892, there are nine whose biographical notes in IGH (1969) have words meaning very wealthy farmers (*‘jinushi’*, *‘nanushi’*, *‘kimoiri’*, or

⁶Specifically, prefectural assembly members were elected by city and county council members (Nakagawa, 1990). City council members were elected by dividing voters into three classes based on property, with each class electing one-third of the members. County council members were elected one-third by large landowners (landowners with a land value of more than 10,000 yen) and two-thirds by town and village council members. Town and village council members were elected by dividing voters into two classes based on property, with each class electing half of the members.

'*tomura*'), three samurai ('*shizoku*'), a wealthy merchant ('*gōshō*'), and two from prestigious families ('*kyūke*' or '*tōshu*').⁷ However, big landowners were at the same time big taxpayers who were most sensitive to heavy tax, and they did not approve prefectural expenditures easily. Furthermore, to secure a majority in the prefectural assembly, it was necessary to secure a majority in the town and county councils. As a result, political parties began to focus their efforts on the town and county council elections (Takagi, 1976). Contrary to depoliticizing the prefectural assembly, indirect elections led to the politicization of the town councils. In Ishikawa Prefecture, the assembly passed a vote of no confidence against the governor, and the governor had the home minister dissolve the assembly three times: in 1894, 1897, and 1898 (IGH, 1969).

There were ordinary sessions and extraordinary sessions (Prefectural System, Article 21⁸). Whereas extraordinary sessions were held on a temporary basis to discuss particularistic issues such as additional budgets in response to disasters, ordinary sessions were convened every year to discuss mainly the following years' budgets (IGH, 1969). For the purpose of annual comparison, this article focuses on the latter.

In Chapter 5, 'Supervision', of the Prefectural System, it was stipulated that the administration of the prefecture was to be supervised by the home minister (Article 81), and that the dissolution of the prefectural assembly was to be carried out by imperial decree (Article 89).

Governor

Governors were appointed by the central government. According to Article 2 of the Local Government Official System (Chihōkan kansei), which was fully revised in October 1890, governors were defined as imperial appointees (*chokuninkan*), and according to Article 5 of the Cabinet System (Naikaku kansei), the appointment and dismissal of governors were to be decided by the cabinet. Article 9 of the Local Government Official System stipulated that governors generally belonged to the command and supervision of the home minister and were subject to the command and supervision of each minister for the main duties of each ministry.

When the home minister changed, the vice-minister, the director general of the Police and Security Bureau, and the superintendent general of the Metropolitan Police Department were determined, and then there was a major reshuffle of governors (Taikakai, 1971).⁹ Initially, governors were appointed from among those who had contributed to the Meiji Restoration, but as they gradually retired, there was a demand for governors who based their prestige on specialized administrative knowledge and abilities (Yamanaka, 1999).

In relation to political parties, at the time of the promulgation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan in 1889, which stipulated the opening of the Imperial Diet, the then Kuroda cabinet declared so-called transcendentalism (*chōzen shugi*) and was strongly

⁷The other 16 do not contain these words, but this does not necessarily mean that they did not belong to a prestigious lineage.

⁸As stated in note 1, the contents of subsequent laws, including the Prefectural System, are sourced from the National Diet Library's Japanese Law Index (<https://hourei.ndl.go.jp/>).

⁹Although not during this period, it is evident from the major reshuffling of governors conducted by Home Minister Hara Takashi (1856–1921) during the second Saionji cabinet in 1906 the home minister wielded significant power in the appointment and dismissal of governors (Najita, 1967; Taikakai, 1971).

opposed to the entry of party colors into local administration (Taikakai, 1971). Nationally, there were instances such as the appointment of a few Jiyūtō (Liberal Party) governors by the second Itō cabinet under Home Minister Itagaki Taisuke (1837–1919) in 1896, and the appointment of a few Shimpotō (Progressive Party) governors by the second Matsukata cabinet in 1897 (Itō, 1999). However, the systematic appointment of party-affiliated governors began in earnest with the Waihan (Ōkuma-Itagaki) cabinet in 1898. It was in this year that Ishikawa Prefecture saw the appointment of its first party-affiliated governor, Shiba Sankurō. The first political party cabinet of Japan, led by Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922) and Home Minister Itagaki, was instrumental in fostering the growth of parliamentary democracy and party politics at the national level.

Budget Process

The prefectural assembly deliberated and resolved budgets (Prefectural System, Articles 15 and 76), and budgets were drafted and proposed by the governor (Article 75) (Tajima, 2012). When the prefectural assembly rejected or reduced a budget, or did not make a decision, the governor could execute the original draft under the direction of the home minister. At that time, the home minister could approve the full amount, deny the full amount, or determine an appropriate amount within the range of the original draft (Articles 85 and 87).¹⁰ The budget expenditure items ranged widely from police, civil engineering, and health and hospital to education, industrial support, and parks, and were divided into ordinary expenses and extraordinary expenses.¹¹

In reality, it is not clear how the governor drafted the initial budget proposal, as it is not reflected in the minutes. However, as the next section demonstrates, the Home Ministry was not always siding with the governor during conflicts with the assembly. Therefore, it seems that rather than the Home Ministry directing each prefecture's budget, the prefectural staff, including the governor, were likely drafting the initial budget proposal. Of course, during this process, it is presumed that they were naturally conscious of the intentions of the government, including the Home Ministry.

Takayose (2004) has estimated that nationally delegated duties accounted for about 60 per cent of local government expenditures in this era, despite the lack of official government surveys or specialized research on how much of a proportion nationally delegated duties occupied. However, this analysis is a rather rough estimate due to the lack of data; it is an analysis from the perspective of whether the expenditure should be borne by the nation or by the local government and does not deny that local governments had discretion in the specific execution of nationally delegated duties. For example, Takayose's analysis categorizes elementary school education as a nationally delegated duty because it is compulsory education mandated by the nation, but this does not mean that the government was directing when, where, and how many elementary schools to establish and how much to budget for them.

¹⁰As discussed later, the role of the home minister was not merely to supervise governors but to mediate between governors and prefectural assemblies.

¹¹For the complete list of budget expenditure items, see Table 2.

Furthermore, in the official process, the governor was supposed to go through the discussion of the prefectural advisory council (*sanji kai*) before submitting a bill to the prefectural assembly (Prefectural System, Article 75). The governor was not required to follow the opinions of the advisory council, and if the governor's opinion differed from that of the council, the governor could submit the budget with the council's opinions attached. The prefectural advisory council consisted of the governor, two senior prefectural officials, and four individuals elected mutually from the prefectural assembly members (Article 38). The extent to which the prefectural advisory council influenced the budget creation could be a major research subject in its own right. However, as seen later, since the budget was significantly revised in the prefectural assembly afterwards, it does not seem that the budget adjustment was completed in the prefectural advisory council.

Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly from 1890 to 1898

Background

Ishikawa Prefecture is a prefecture in the Hokuriku region with a population of slightly more than one million. The Kaga domain, the predecessor of this local government, was the most populous domain, with a tax base valued at 1.2 million *koku* during the Edo period (Takazawa et al., 2000). Its capital, Kanazawa, was said to be the next largest city after the Three Capitals (Santo: Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo).

However, the Meiji Restoration put an end to its prosperity, as Ishikawa Prefecture went into a protracted recession. Former samurai, who accounted for about half the population of Kanazawa Castle Town, lost their hereditary stipends and instead received less-valuable bonds (Ishikawaken, 1927–1933, Vol. 2; Takazawa et al., 2000), and merchants and artisans also suffered because they depended on the economy of samurai. Ishikawaken (1927–1933, Vol. 4) illustrates how miserable the people of Ishikawa were, such as women becoming wandering prostitutes and older people singing for small change.

This misery and dissatisfaction of former samurai led to the establishment of some nationally famous samurai political groups (*shizoku kessha*), such as the Chūkokuisha and Eishinsha (Takazawa et al., 2000). The chief of the Eishinsha, Endō Hidekage (1853–1911; chair of the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly, 1889), exercised significant power in prefectural politics and was even recognized as a leader of the Daidō Club in national politics (IGH, 1969).

This period corresponds to that during which a significant spurt of industrial development unfolded in Japan (Gordon, 2019). Capital started to accumulate, and the focus of the Ishikawa Prefectural Government in industrial policy gradually shifted from regulation to promotion (IGH, 1969; Takazawa et al., 2000; Wakabayashi, 1970). Prior to this shift, the prefectural government had been placing a strong emphasis on regulations such as inspecting raw meat in the beef sales industry, with the aim of promoting product distribution and realizing the national policy of 'enriching the country and strengthening the military' (*fukoku kyōhei*). However, as this period saw the beginning of the autonomous development of private capital, policies that supported this development started to take precedence, while regulatory measures continued to be implemented. In 1892, the construction of the Hokuriku Railroad Line was decided, and transportation developed, although Ishikawa was well behind other prefectures connected to the Tokyo-Osaka corridor by railroad and ferry, such as Okayama and Hokkaidō (Hashimoto & Hayashi, 1987; IGH, 1969; Young, 2013).

National and Ishikawa Prefectural Politics

In national politics, the Jiyūtō (Liberal Party) was formed in 1881 with Itagaki Taisuke as its leader, aiming for a radical French-style democracy (IGH, 1969). However, the Jiyūtō dissolved in 1884. Former members of the Jiyūtō then joined other political groups such as the Daidō Club and the Aikoku kōtō (Patriotic Public Party). As previously mentioned, Endō Hidekage exercised significant power in prefectural politics and was even recognized as a leader of the Daidō Club in national politics. These groups were reintegrated into the Rikken jiyūtō (Constitutional Liberal Party) in 1890, and from 1891, they once again called themselves the Jiyūtō. On the other hand, the Rikken kaishintō (Constitutional Progressive Party; abbreviated as Kaishintō) was established in 1882 with Ōkuma Shigenobu as its leader, modeling itself on moderate British-style democracy. In 1896, it merged with other parties to form the Shimpotō (Progressive Party).

In Ishikawa Prefecture, as mentioned earlier, the samurai political group Eishinsha was active in the early 1880s (IGH, 1969). Within the prefectural assembly, there were factions led by assembly members Kawase Kan'ichirō (1855–1916) and Koma Shiku (1843–1900), but these factions were largely independent of the central political parties. It was not until the late 1880s that these factions aligned with national parties, with the Eishinsha and the Koma faction joining the Jiyūtō, and the Kawase faction aligning with the Rikken kaishintō. The alignment of Ishikawa's factions with national parties occurred after a fierce election battle in August 1886, where Kawase was elected with the support of the Eishinsha. However, a conflict arose when Kawase did not support Endō's political activities, leading to a split between Kawase's faction and the Eishinsha. The Eishinsha, having members with connections to central Jiyūtō members, joined the Jiyūtō in May 1887. This suggests that the alignment was driven more by personal relationships and obligations than by policy similarities. Shimode (1970) evaluates the actions of the Eishinsha, which became the core of the Jiyūtō in Kanazawa, as being driven by personal feelings and private obligations rather than ideological principles.¹²

Reflecting the changes in national politics, Ishikawa also saw repeated alliances and realignments among assembly members (IGH, 1969). In the 1890s, the composition of political parties in the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly can be broadly divided into the Jiyūtō factions (Jiyūtō, Daidō Club, and Aikoku kōtō) and the Kaishintō factions (Rikken kaishintō and Shimpotō), with the Jiyūtō factions consistently maintaining a majority (Table 1). Despite the alignment of Ishikawa's factions with national parties in the 1890s, personal rivalries, such as those between the Kawase and Koma factions, persisted. IGH (1969) notes that the conflicts were less about policy differences and more about intense, sometimes violent, struggles for positions such as prefectural and national assembly seats. In addition, there were few discernible trends in the backgrounds of assembly members based on party affiliation. For example, in the 1895 election, 20 members of the Jiyūtō and 10 members of the Kaishintō were elected. According to the biographical sketches in IGH (1969), both groups included individuals from backgrounds such as big landowners, very wealthy farmers overseeing many villages (*tomura*), farmers, and sake brewers.

¹²Sakurai (1998a) is an edited collection of papers that analyzes regional politics in the Kanto prefectures of prewar Japan. The summary chapter (Sakurai, 1998b) concludes that during the Meiji period (or at least before the Russo-Japanese War), the connection between prefectural assembly factions and central political parties was not as strong as it became later. Prefectural assembly members were relatively independent from political parties, and factional conflicts within prefectural politics were primarily power struggles driven by personal ambitions and individual interests.

Table 1. Election results of the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly in the 1890s.

Election date(s)	Jiyūtō	Daidō Club	Aikoku kōtō	Rikken kaishintō	Shimpotō
25 January 1889	31			5	
10 August 1890		25 (14) ^a	6 (2) ^a	5 (2) ^a	
15 October 1891	24 ^b			7 ^c	
30 September, 18 October, and 4 November 1893	– (13) ^a			– (3) ^a	
11 March 1895	20			10 ^d	
5 June 1897	26 ^e				5
1 April 1898	21 ^f				9 ^g

Source: IGH (1969).

^aThe numbers in parentheses for the 1890 and 1893 elections indicate the number of members elected in years when half of the seats were up for election. The numbers outside the parentheses for the 1890 election include the total number of seats held after the election, including those not up for reelection. The total number of seats held after the 1893 election, including those not up for reelection, is unknown due to numerous changes in non-reelected members and the inability to confirm their party affiliations from the sources.

^bAlthough IGH (1969) states that 25 members of the Jiyūtō were elected, the actual list of elected members shows 24, so the list is prioritized.

^cIncludes one ‘quasi-Kaishin’ member.

^dAlthough IGH (1969) states that 11 members of the Rikken kaishintō were elected, the list is prioritized.

^eIncludes two ‘quasi-Jiyū’ members.

^fAlthough IGH (1969) states that 10 Shimpotō and ‘quasi-Shimpotō’ members were elected, the list is prioritized. Includes two ‘quasi-Jiyū’ members.

^gIncludes one ‘quasi-Shimpo’ member.

Characteristics of This Period

The Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly in the 1890s was notable for its large budget amendments. This was especially significant when contrasted with the already considerable revisions of the prewar period, which exceeded those of the postwar period. The initial budget amendments for the 1890s, 1900s, 1910s, and 1920s were 8.9 per cent, 2.9 per cent, 2.5 per cent, and 0.5 per cent respectively, emphasizing the extraordinary scale of budget amendments during the 1890s (Figure 3).

After its establishment in 1879, the assembly had a contentious relationship with the governor.¹³ Governors dissolved the assembly twice in the 1880s: in 1882 and 1888 (IGH, 1969). After the enactment of the Prefectural System in 1890, the conflict intensified. The assembly passed a vote of no confidence against the governor, and the governor had the home minister dissolve the assembly three times: in 1894, 1897, and 1898.

The debate on prefectural budgets is characterized by activist governors promoting modernization and an assembly demanding fiscal restraint and ‘relief for people’ (*minryoku kyūyō*). This slogan was commonly used by so-called ‘parties of the people’ (*mintō*) to argue for cutting government expenditures to reduce taxes, with which the non-party government intended to develop traffic network, industries, public education, and many other projects to catch up with major developed countries (Suetake & Takeda, 2011). This dynamic echoed the national political structure, where the oligarchic government sought to strengthen military capabilities, while the parties of the people advocated for fiscal restraint and relief for people.

In many cases, the prefectural assembly reduced taxes and curtailed expenses from the budget proposed by the governor, and targets were not limited to two or three areas. For example, during the assembly’s 1897 ordinary session, the assembly reduced the land tax rate

¹³One well-known conflict between the assembly and the governor in another prefecture during this period was the Fukushima Incident in 1882. See Bowen (1980).

to alleviate the distress of landowners affected by the previous year's floods and lowered the business tax surcharge rate from 2 per cent to 1.5 per cent to ensure tax fairness (IGH, 1969, p. 1120). On the expenditure side, considering the economic strain on the populace, the assembly reduced the education budget by canceling plans to establish new agricultural, industrial, and three ordinary middle schools (IGH, 1969, pp. 1120–1121). It also cut the police budget by reducing police officers' salaries and eliminating the purchase of a steamship. In addition, the assembly reduced the industry support budget by cutting expenses for advisory committees, museums, livestock improvement, and national lacquerware exhibitions. The civil engineering budget was reduced by cutting road reconstruction expenses, and the health and hospital budget was reduced by eliminating two medical officer positions.

I want to draw attention to three characteristics of this period. First, the relationship between the prefectural assembly and the governors was mostly confrontational, regardless of members' party affiliation. The 1892 ordinary session (IGH, 1969, pp. 985–1007; Ishikawaken, 1893) is a good example. That year, governors had intervened nationwide in the House of Representatives election under the direction of Home Minister Shinagawa Yajirō (1843–1900).¹⁴ The Jiyūtō and the Kaishintō, although differing in degree, were united in their opposition to the Matsukata cabinet, particularly in areas such as the military budget and political freedoms (Itō, 1999). In response, the Matsukata cabinet adopted a hardline approach, and during the second session of the Diet, convened on 21 November 1891, the House of Representatives passed significant budget cuts on 25 December, leading to the immediate dissolution of the Diet. This election saw no fewer than 25 voters killed and several hundred injured (Gordon, 2019). The national conflict between the oligarchic government and the parties of the people, manifested through election interference, also resulted in conflicts between the governor and the prefectural assembly in Ishikawa.

In Ishikawa Prefecture, while both the forces supporting the government and those opposing the government had been arming themselves, the prefectural authorities primarily had carried out the arrest and expulsion of the executives and activists of the forces opposing the government (Shimode, 1970). Ishikawa was one of the prefectures that had experienced the most severe intervention. This intervention led to the Jiyūtō-dominant assembly's unfriendly attitude toward non-party governor Suzuki Daisuke (1842–1907) (Sengoku, 1929) and a significant reduction of police expenditures (IGH, 1969, p. 1004). However, while most assembly members were angry over the intervention, the degree of their anger seems to have varied. The debate between Tagawa Shigeo (1863–1918; Jiyūtō) and Assembly Chair Minamitani Yosaburō (1857–1938; also from the Jiyūtō) shows this (Ishikawaken, 1893). Tagawa proposed to halve the number of police officers, arguing that this would be sufficient if the police stopped intervening in elections. On the other hand, Minamitani argued that the government had to abolish the police, which had killed innocent citizens, and that municipal police forces should be established instead. Eventually, Tagawa's relatively moderate proposal won by a vote of 14 to 10.

What is important in this first characteristic is that while there were often partisan conflicts within the assembly and the degree of confrontation depended on individuals and parties such as between Tagawa and Minamitani, even members closer to governors were not submissive to them and often amended or disapproved bills proposed by them. Although Minamitani's

¹⁴The House of Representatives elections and the prefectural assembly elections operated on separate cycles, and in this year (1892), no prefectural assembly elections were held (IGH, 1969).

radical proposal was defeated, Tagawa's proposal was still in harsh conflict with the governor. Eventually, the governor claimed that the amount of police officers in Tagawa's proposal was still unfeasible and later restored some officers under the direction of the home minister.

Second, unlike later members, the assembly's orientation in making amendments was almost always to reduce the budget. In addition, even though there were sometimes unrealistic demands caused by their contentious relationship with governors, their arguments were usually reasonable.

Third, although several party-affiliated governors had been appointed nationwide prior to 1898, as mentioned in the previous subsection, Ishikawa Prefecture did not have any governors affiliated with political parties until that year. In addition, under the home minister's direction, these non-party governors more frequently executed the original budgets than later political-party governors did in reaction to recalcitrant assemblies. Yet, more importantly, governors did not exercise this authority indiscriminately. In fact, they appealed to the home minister more selectively, and the home minister, too, did not always grant governors' requests as they were.

Example: The 1893 Ordinary Session

To illustrate the three characteristics above and what sessions in prewar prefectural assemblies were like, this subsection looks closely at the 1893 ordinary session (IGH, 1969, pp. 1009–1026; Ishikawaken, 1894, 1895). This session was as eventful as the previous one, but the conflict here was not so much that between the governor and the assembly as that between parties involving the governor in the assembly. The majority of the assembly was still made up of the Jiyūtō.

At this time, the Jiyūtō was beginning to approach the second Itō cabinet in national politics (Itō, 1999; Masumi, 1988). Although the Jiyūtō and the Kaishintō were in opposition to the Itō cabinet, as demonstrated by the House of Representatives' rejection of the battleship construction budget, the situation changed with the issuance of the Imperial Rescript on Compromise on 10 February 1893. This led the Jiyūtō to compromise with the government, and during the fifth Diet session, the Jiyūtō did not join the hardline faction (Kōroppa), which included the Kaishintō and the Kokumin kyōkai (National Association), advocating for a strong foreign policy. Similarly, in Ishikawa Prefecture, the Jiyūtō adopted a conciliatory approach towards the governor (IGH, 1969, p. 1026).

Governor Mitsuma Masahiro (1836–1899) was born as a samurai in the Nagaoka domain, now part of Niigata Prefecture, in 1836 (Sengoku, 1929). In the Meiji Restoration, he joined a rebel army and fought valiantly against the government army, causing distress to its commander, Yamagata Aritomo. He was arrested in May 1869, but later fought in the government army in the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877 and was then appointed as the first provost marshal in Japan in March 1890. Sengoku (1929) described him as a simple-minded soldier and complete amateur in local administration.

Chair Minamitani was again the central figure in this intra-assembly conflict. He originally ran for office as a Jiyūtō candidate and thus was elected as chair in 1892, but after the session, he converted to the Kaishintō (IGH, 1969, pp. 631–632, 635, 1025–1026). At that time, assembly members' tenure was four years, and there was an election of half the members every two years. Minamitani was not among those subjected to the assembly election in 1893. Dissatisfied with the converted chair,

Jiyūtō members argued that he was no longer the chair because there was an election of half the members and according to Article 19 of the Prefectural System, the chair and vice-chair should be elected at the first meeting after the election (IGH, 1969, p. 1010). They elected a chair pro tempore in his place (IGH, 1969, p. 1011). The general interpretation of the same article at that time was that even if there was a half-election, if the member who was the chair remained, he could be the chair for four years, so it was clear that there was no need for a chair reelection (IGH, 1969, pp. 635–636). Therefore, Governor Mitsuma declared that he would cancel this election because it was against the Prefectural System (IGH, 1969, p. 1011). However, the majority of the assembly filed a suit with the Court of Administrative Litigation against him, seeking the cancellation of the governor's cancellation (that is, the dismissal of Chair Minamitani) (IGH, 1969, pp. 1011–1012). Thus, the governor and the assembly ended up in a dispute in the administrative court, but because the majority of the assembly, who argued for Minamitani's dismissal, was closer to the prefectural government than Minamitani, the governor suspended his cancellation decision until the judgment came out (IGH, 1969, p. 1026). The assembly fell into disorder and ultimately, the majority members elected a new chair after Minamitani and 10 other members walked out (IGH, 1969, p. 1012). These 11 members later tried to attend the session again, but the majority voted to have them suspended from the assembly (IGH, 1969, pp. 636, 1026).

As previously mentioned, just as the Jiyūtō approached the government in national politics, the party also moved closer to the prefectural government in Ishikawa Prefecture, diverging from the Kaishintō, which sought to oppose the prefectural government (IGH, 1969, p. 1026). Local newspaper *Hokkoku shimbun* described this conflict as that between the faction in favor of the prefectural government (pro-PG faction), comprising the majority members who elected a new chair, and the faction not aligned with the prefectural government (non-PG faction), comprising the minority members who supported Minamitani (Chiba, 2006). A *Hokkoku shimbun* article on 23 November 1893 criticized the governor's 'flexible strategy' of declaring the cancellation of the chair pro tempore's election but then suspending it soon after to win the majority's favor (Chiba, 2006). In fact, this session without the non-PG faction was relatively calm among those in the 1890s. Among the 11 expelled members, the eight who attended the previous year's session had voted for Minamitani's proposal to completely erase the police budget then.

Nevertheless, the actual discussion in the minutes (Ishikawaken, 1894, 1895) shows that the relationship between the governor and the pro-PG faction was anything but collusion. The assembly did not hesitate to cut the governor's budget, even though it sometimes accepted his request to restore the budget. For example, it cut a budget for buying cowpox vaccines because even rural residents already knew how fearful smallpox was and they would buy vaccines themselves if the prefectural government did not purchase them with tax money. It reduced the school budget, arguing that there was no need to hire assistant principals in addition to school principals. The remaining members did not make absurd demands, but made requests that were reasonable, resulting in a 28,541-yen saving (Table 2). As shown in Table 2, the assembly made budget cuts across a wide range, including welfare, education, civil engineering, and industry support expenses.

Table 2. Comparison of the original budget proposed to the 1893 ordinary session, the assembly's amendment, and the execution of the original budget under the direction of the home minister (yen).

		Original budget (a)	Assembly's resolution (b)	(b) – (a)	Home minister's direction (c)	(c) – (b)
Ordinary	Police	73,714	72,116	–1,598	72,116	0
	Police facilities maintenance	720	505	–215	505	0
	Civil engineering	32,602	28,322	–4,281	28,322	0
	Prefectural assembly overhead	4,881	4,731	–150	4,731	0
	Health and hospital	15,508	14,910	–597	14,910	0
	Education	37,548	32,897	–4,656	33,845	948
	County government facilities maintenance	400	200	–200	200	0
	County government officer salary, travel, and overhead	37,296	33,896	–3,400	34,856	960
	Foster care	758	500	–257	500	0
	Shipwreck	4	4	0	4	0
	Orders and notices	2,251	1,869	–382	1,869	0
	Industry support	12,019	8,867	–3,152	8,867	0
	Prefectural tax handling	5,930	5,922	–7	5,922	0
	Prefectural government facilities maintenance	556	450	–106	450	0
	Prefectural prison	33,768	32,699	–1,069	32,699	0
	Prefectural prison maintenance	621	565	–56	565	0
	House of Representatives election	114	114	0	114	0
	Parks	801	667	–133	667	0
	Prefectural government officer	300	300	0	300	0
	Reserve funds	5,634	5,816	182	5,816	0
	Total	265,422	245,349	–20,073	247,257	1,908
Extraordinary	Police facilities maintenance	2,757	2,198	–558	2,198	0
	Civil engineering	10,062	12,215	2,153	12,215	0
	Civil engineering subsidy	19,800	21,800	2,000	21,800	0
	Health and hospital	1,633	1,402	–232	1,402	0
	Health and hospital subsidy	716	316	–400	316	0
	Education	830	177	–654	177	0
	Municipal education subsidy	23	23	0	23	0
	County government facilities construction	164	164	0	164	0
	Industry support	4,320	3,730	–590	3,730	0
	Industrial subsidy	1,830	3,320	1,490	3,320	0
	Prefectural government facilities construction	3,788	2,330	–1,458	2,330	0
	Prefectural prison construction	2,830	2,413	–417	2,413	0
	Parks	158	130	–28	130	0
	Prefectural loan	6,255	6,255	0	6,255	0
	Civil engineering expenditure for the current fiscal year	8,770	0	–8,770	0	0
	Industry support expenditure for the current fiscal year	2,749	1,746	–1,004	1,746	0
	Total	66,685	58,217	–8,468	58,217	0
Total Expenditure		332,107	303,566	–28,541	305,474	1,908

Source: the author, based on Ishikawaken (1894, 1895).

As noted earlier, this session was conducted in the absence of the non-PG faction. The second reading, where amendments were made by assembly members, was held over 10 days from 2 to 15 December 1893 (Ishikawaken, 1894). Of the 20 members who participated in at least one of these days, 19 were from the Jiyūtō and one (Kubota Zen [1845–1931]) was from the Kaishintō (IGH, 1969).¹⁵ Therefore, all proposals to reduce the governor's budget and all approvals of these reductions were made by the pro-PG

¹⁵In IGH (1969), Kubota is referred to as 'quasi-Kaishin' on page 628 and as a member of the Rikken kaishintō on page 1478.

faction members, most of whom were from the Jiyūtō. Kubota did not act significantly differently from the 19 Jiyūtō members; he supported most of the budget reduction proposals made by Jiyūtō members (Ishikawaken, 1894). In addition, his own proposal to reduce the police station repair budget was unanimously approved.

Another finding that can be seen from Table 2 is that the governor exercised the right of executing the original budget only sparingly. The assembly cut the 332,107-yen original budget by 28,541 yen (9.4 per cent) but the governor restored only 1,908 yen (6.7 per cent of the total retrenchment, 0.6 per cent of the original budget). To understand this number, it is necessary to understand the process of deliberating on bills in the prewar prefectural assemblies. The assemblies discussed bills including budgets through three readings: a first reading (for questions), a second (for amendments), and a third (for approval or disapproval) (Ishikawaken, 1894). In this process, the executive branch and members exchanged opinions: conceptually, the executive branch proposed a budget, the assembly amended the budget in a second reading, the executive branch and some members requested the restoration of deleted or amended budget in a third reading, and the assembly decided approval or disapproval of these requests. For example, the assembly cut the police budget in the second reading, but in the third, the executive branch explained that that amount of money was insufficient and the assembly accepted that request. If the governor still believed it necessary to conduct any project despite the assembly's disapproval, he could seek direction of the home minister as a last resort.

In this way, the execution of the original draft was the last process of a bilateral negotiation based on a compromise by both parties rather than a unilateral independent decision, and this partly explains its tiny proportion to the original budget or the whole retrenched amount. Figure 4 shows how the amount of the budget changed as deliberation went on. Governors were not willing to resort to the home minister too often, which

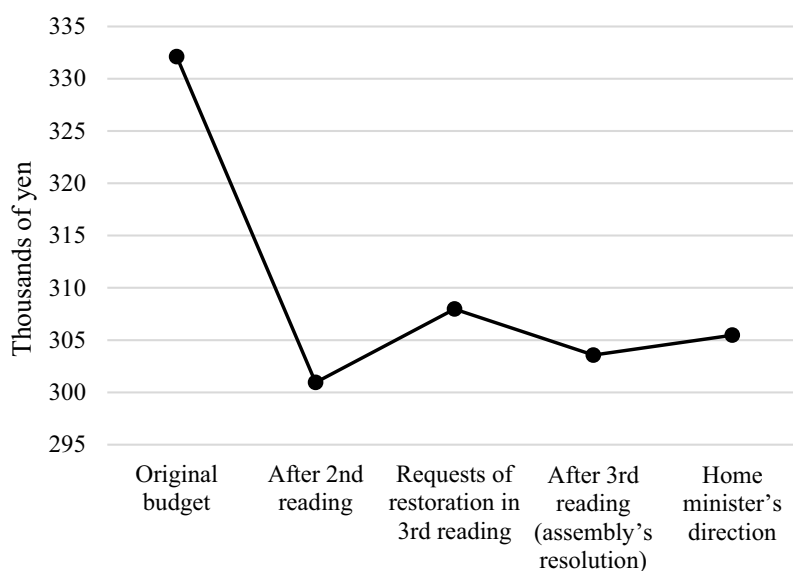


Figure 4. Transition of the amount of the budget through deliberation in the 1893 ordinary session. Source: the author, reproduced based on Ishikawaken (1894, 1895).

would have raised much controversy among the assembly. Even though they had strong formal authority, including the execution of original drafts, having a bad relationship with the assembly might have affected the minister's evaluation of their performance or future career possibilities (Masumi, 1959).

Thus, in Ishikawa Prefecture, the amount revived by the execution of the original draft after the assembly's resolution (1,908 yen) was very small compared to the amount reduced in the second reading (31,157 yen) (Figure 4). Similar results can be confirmed in other prefectures, and there are even examples where the home minister rejected the governor's request. In 1902, the Okayama governor proposed a 200,000-yen subsidy for a waterworks installation in Okayama City, but the assembly curtailed it to 85,500 yen (Okayamakenshi hensan'iinkai, 1986). The governor appealed to the home minister, but the minister directed only a 100,000-yen (not 200,000-yen) enforcement. In Saitama Prefecture, upstream and downstream residents of the Kami Tone River were in conflict about how to repair a severely damaged levee in 1910 (Kosaka & Matsuura, 1995). The Saitama Prefectural Assembly amended the repair budget proposed by the executive branch. Even though the governor argued that the assembly exceeded its authority, the Home Ministry originally did not agree with the governor but adopted the view that the assembly's amendment was legal and effective. The ministry later changed its position, but still suspended the execution of the original draft for a while and consulted with Diet members from Saitama Prefecture. Even when it eventually directed the execution of the original budget, the Home Ministry maintained its position that compromise was necessary.

These examples demonstrate that the home minister did not always approve the governor's request for the execution of the original draft. Furthermore, even when the home minister permitted the execution of the 'original draft', it did not necessarily mean that he approved the full amount of the budget proposal. Therefore, even though the governor was an insider of the home minister and the execution of the original draft was common,¹⁶ it is misleading to conclude that the governor obtained the permission of the home minister and ignored the assembly to freely manage the finances.¹⁷

Conclusion

The vast literature on the history of the Diet and prefectural assemblies in prewar Japan has mainly focused on major political events rather than daily policy discussion. It is of course meaningful to examine political dynamics such as conflicts over power and posts and extreme cases that resulted in the dissolution of the assembly or execution of the original budget, but solely focusing on such exceptional cases might mislead a precise understanding of the prefectural assemblies in prewar Japan. Amendments of bills, which were perhaps relatively monotonous aspects of their activities, should not be overlooked.

¹⁶An example of the common practice of executing the original draft, although from a period later than that covered in this article, is provided by Harold S. Quigley (1932). He notes that the original budgets were enforced without the approval of the assemblies in nearly half of the prefectures in 1929. However, this does not mean that the home minister granted governors' requests as they were, as illustrated in this subsection.

¹⁷Taikakai (1987) provides another example, although from a period much later than that discussed in this article, illustrating that the Home Ministry did not always support the governor simply because he was a bureaucrat of the Home Ministry. In 1934, the governor of Fukui came into conflict with the assembly and attempted to enforce the original budget. However, the Home Ministry did not agree with him, and he quit as governor in the end.

The major contribution of this article is to clarify what the relationship between the governor and the prefectural assembly was like at the time, based on a case study of the prewar Japanese prefectural assemblies after the establishment of the national assembly in 1890. It has found that the prefectural assembly was more influential in local policy-making than is suggested by the formal rules; and that the governor and the home minister exercised their formal power in quite a restrained manner.

During the period covered in this article, the dynamics between the oligarchic government and national political parties significantly impacted local politics. The national conflict between the parties of the people and the oligarchic government led to election interference by the governor, causing conflicts with the prefectural assembly in Ishikawa. Conversely, the Jiyūtō's alignment with the second Itō cabinet in national politics, following the issuance of the Imperial Rescript on Compromise, resulted in Jiyūtō members in the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly moving closer to the governor. Nevertheless, national politics did not entirely dictate local affairs. The prefectural assembly, as the sole popularly elected body in local governance, asserted its influence by making substantial budget amendments, even when the dominant party was aligned with the governor. This finding prompts a reevaluation of prewar local politics in Japan.

In addition, this study provides insights into the dynamics brought about by the existence of government-appointed governors. Such governors, or more broadly, representatives of the central government at the local level, have been hardly studied in recent comparative politics or comparative public administration studies, even though they are still common in many European countries, including France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden (Tanguy & Eymeri-Douzans, 2021). The recently published *Prefects, Governors and Commissioners* (Tanguy & Eymeri-Douzans, 2021) is an edited volume about such representatives of the central governments of various European countries. It finds that regardless of the official system, they are political entities and act as a mediator between the central government and local politicians. The present study's finding that prewar Japanese governors executed original drafts in quite a restrained manner is in line with these findings and attests that they are not peculiar to Europe but applicable to prewar Japan as well.

As revealed in this article, the Ishikawa Prefectural Assembly of the 1890s made substantial budget amendments. However, subsequent assemblies (seen in Figure 3), while still significantly larger compared to the postwar period, saw a considerable decrease in amendment amounts when compared to the 1890s. This trend coincided with the development of party politics and the expansion of voting rights. The number of governors appointed by party cabinets increased, and prefectural assembly members strengthened their ties with central political parties,¹⁸ no longer representing only the interests of large landowners. Consequently, the political dynamics in Ishikawa underwent significant changes. Whether this coincidence was accidental or these changes were a result of the development of party politics and the expansion of voting rights will be the subject of a separate article.

¹⁸Sakurai (1998b) notes that after the Russo-Japanese War, the influence of central political parties on local politics grew, and elections, which had previously focused on individual candidates' personalities, became more organized around policies and party platforms.

Are the prefectural assemblies in today's Japan less influential in policymaking than in prewar Japan? This study suggests this possibility, but another study of today's assemblies is necessary to verify this. In addition, even though this article focuses on the assembly's exercise of formal authority to amend bills during sessions, the job of politicians is not limited to that. They might affect policymaking through informal channels, and the governor might cater to the assembly by incorporating their anticipated demands into the original budget as much as possible, which is not necessarily documented in minutes. Nevertheless, it can be safely concluded that the prefectural assemblies in prewar Japan were more influential in local policymaking than often assumed.

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