

UNIVERSITÄT  OSNABRÜCK

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Veröffentlichung der Forschungsstelle Japan # 13
(ISSN 1437-5117)

**Japan's Approach to becoming a Global
Environmental Flagship - more Lip
Service than Reality***

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*1st published in: Internationales Asienforum,
Vol. 31 (2000), No. 1-2, p. 109-125

Introduction

In the early 1990s Japan was often referred to as the "head goose" of flying geese, which implies that Japan is the permanent leader in the Asian region. Despite the economic downturn suffered by Japan in recent years and subsequent record high unemployment rates right up until April 1999, Japan must be considered in absolute and relative terms as being healthy enough to fulfil its announced intention to become the global environmental flagship.

Rapid economic growth in East, South, and Southeast Asia is creating an increasing number of environmental problems not only on a local and regional basis, but also globally. Black chimney smoke, the release of untreated industrial and household wastes into the rivers, growing transport problems, and increasing energy consumption are just some of the problems which correspond to the situation in Tokyo during the late 1960s (JICA 1994, p. 17f). There is no doubt that following the Japanese development model of the 1950s and 1960s would be equal to ecological suicide.

As an economic power with huge financial resources and well-developed technologies Japan is increasingly faced with the task of assisting less developed countries in the fight against environmental pollution (Aita 1995, p. 7). Less developed countries can learn much from Japan's rejection of even the most minimal of ecological responsibilities during its rapid economic growth period. For this reason, Japan's experience may usefully inform the design of their development strategies.

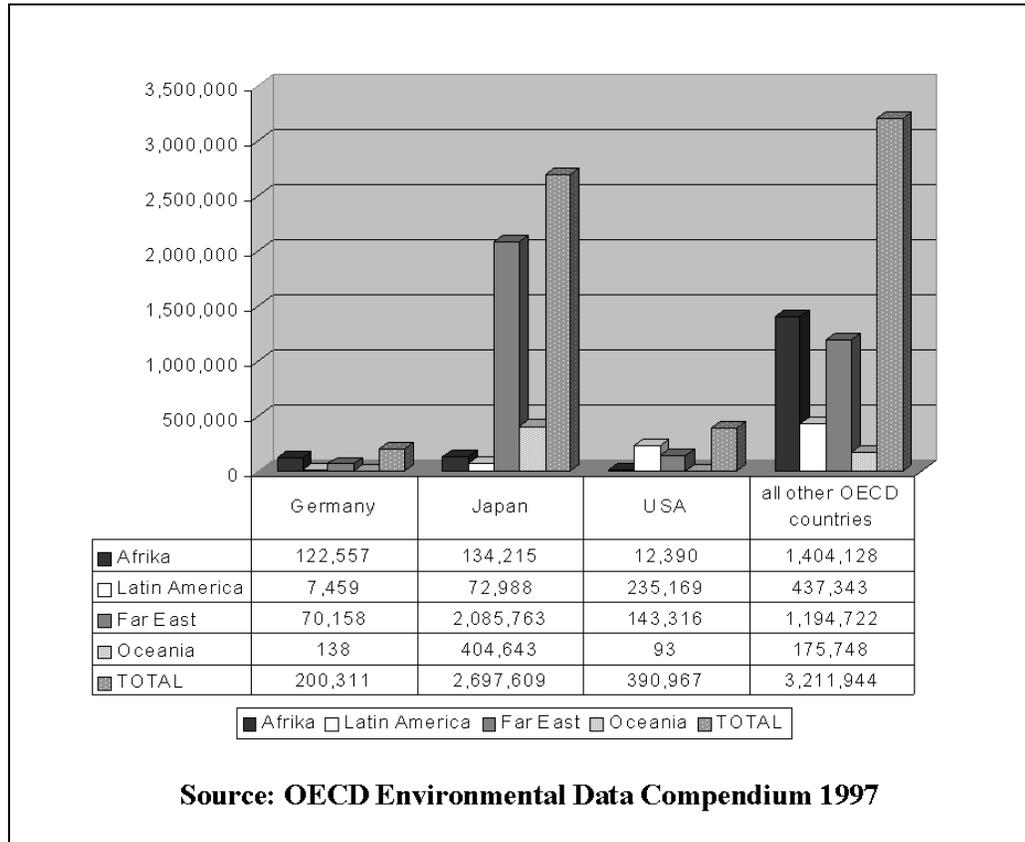
Japan's global environment impact

The transnationality of some environmental problems on the islands of Japan is becoming increasingly clear. Examples include the growing damage to forests on the west coast as a result of unfiltered emissions from lignite burning in mainland China, and also the increasing pollution levels in the Sea of Japan. Furthermore, environmental statistics demonstrate the enormous impact of Japan as a resource poor importer of raw materials and oil, coal and lignite, food-stuffs, metals, timber, ore, etc.

Figure 1 shows that Japan is the number one importer of cork and wood from tropical countries. The export of wood from tropical forests to OECD countries is a significant cause of tropical deforestation, which also has an impact on the world's genetic resources and the increasing CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. Japan's total amount of imports of cork and wood has, however, decreased from US\$ 2.697 billion in 1995 to 1.145 billion in 1998 (OECD 1999b, p. 134), which is equal to a 58 per cent decrease within three years. One

important reason for this reduction, as Japanese officials explain, is the fact that chopsticks are now largely produced with domestic timber.

Figure 1: Import of Cork and Wood from Tropical Countries in 1995
(in US\$ 1,000)



Figures 2 and 3 illustrate clearly the man-made emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and sulphur oxides (SOx). The figures refer to the major categories of emission sources of these pollutants, which include motor vehicles, power stations, fuel combustion, pollutants emitted in manufacturing, waste incineration, and agricultural burning, etc. Japan ranks second lowest in a direct comparison of per capita emissions of NOx from OECD countries. Japan is also located behind Norway and the Netherlands in regard to its SOx emissions. One has to keep in mind, however, that since the beginning of the 1980s Japanese companies transferred much of their production to other Asian countries in order to benefit from the strength of the yen, the low storage costs and, importantly, the less rigid environmental controls in other countries. Japan's recent environmental record must, nevertheless, be considered exemplary by international standards. In response to the energy crisis in the 1970s Japan is among the most energy-efficient countries in the world per GDP and per

capita (OECD 1999b, p. 22 1). Yet, this cannot obscure the fact that, in total amounts, Japan is the fourth largest emitter of CO₂ (OECD 1999b, p. 53).

Figure 2: Nitrogen Oxides (NOx) Emissions (1995) (in 1,000 tonnes)

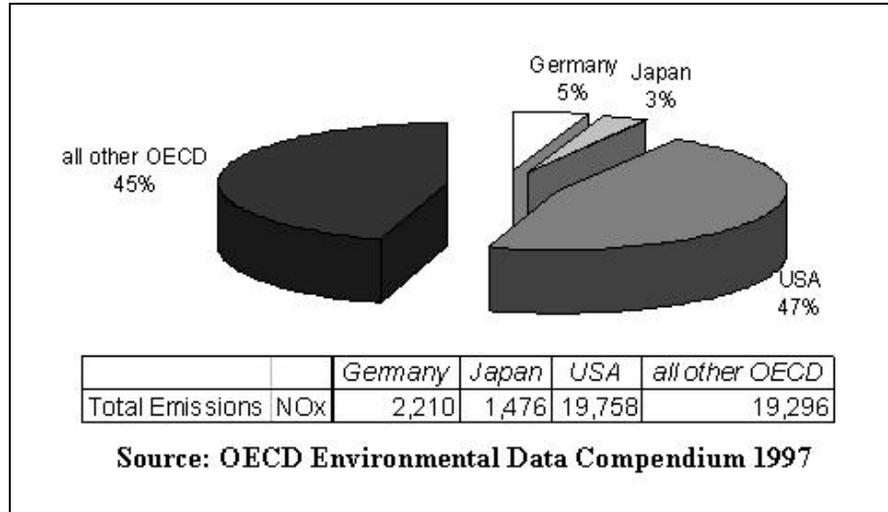
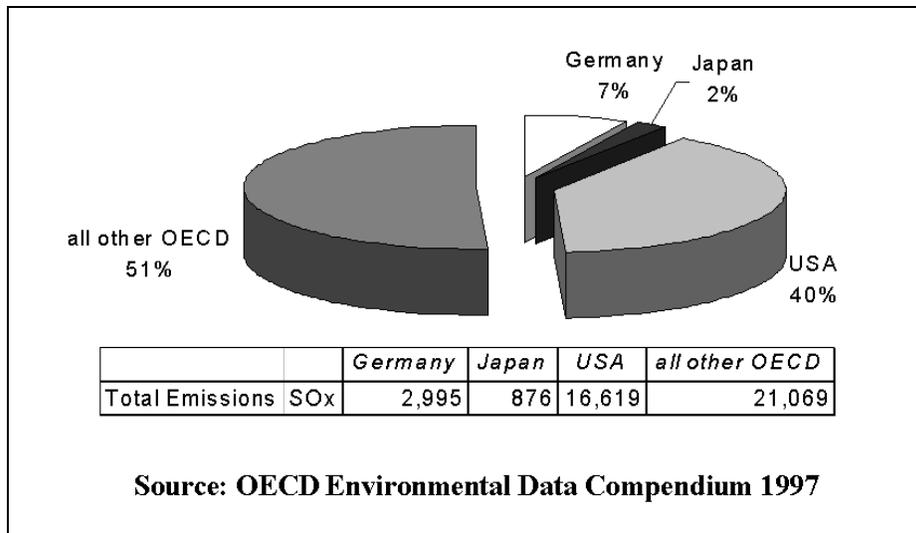


Figure 3: Sulphur Oxides (SOx) Emissions (1995) (in 1,000 tonnes)



Growing world-wide responsibility

Being an international industrial and economic world power, Japan's firms have found their way into most countries around the world. Japan, accordingly, exerts a sizeable influence on the state of the environment in developing countries, especially in Asia.

At the same time Japan has, for eight consecutive years now, been the largest provider of official development aid (ODA), and plays a substantial role in supporting other Asian states.¹ Since the Rio Conference (UNCED) in 1992, the Rio+5 Conference in New York in 1997, and the Kyoto Climate Conference in 1997, Japan's efforts in terms of ODA are being concentrated increasingly on environmental problems.

With the end of the Cold War Japan is faced with increased responsibility, including the need to find solutions to various environmental problems. In the meantime, leading politicians have announced a growing number of initiatives in the transfer of environmental technology and the establishment of various environmental centres. The Japan-China Friendship Environment Protection Centre in China, the Environmental Research and Training Centre in Thailand, the Environmental Management Centre in Indonesia, the Environmental Centre in Chile, and the Environmental Training and Research Centre in Mexico are currently involved in monitoring the environment with the help of Japanese ODA. Furthermore, other research and training initiatives undertaken at these centres are intended to draft a clearer country profile in regard to environmental conditions, and to strengthen human capacity (Kühr 1997, p. 214).

In addition, private enterprises are increasingly showing an interest in taking part in official projects of technical co-operation for environmental management. With their help, new institutions have been established for the transfer of environmentally sound technology, e.g. the International Environmental Technology Centre of UNEP (UNEP/IETC) in Osaka and Shiga, the International Centre for Environmental Technology Transfer (ICETT) in Yokkaichi, and the Kitakyushu Training Centre.

¹ In 1978 Japan started a series of five-year plans, which made it the world's largest donor. But in the context of the announcement of an overall fiscal reform in 1997, the aid budget was cut by 11,2 per cent. Nevertheless, Japan remained the leading bilateral donor in 1997 in terms of net ODA. The cut has been offset by subsequent provisions of new aid, and the further cuts which had been targetted have been frozen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999, p. 5, and OECD 1999a, p. 13).

As Japan's ODA was designed basically to support Japan's international trade, can the transfer of environmental technology be seen as an attempt to secure new markets in Asia? Did Japan just pay lip service during international conferences, essentially 'eco-labelling' its ODA for the growing markets resulting from the rapid economic development of the Asian region under the "Grow First!" paradigm?

From the phase of ecological ignorance to a Janus-faced environmental policy

In the years of rapid economic growth after the end of the Second World War, economic development was the number one priority in Japan. National economic policy concentrated decisively on heavy industry and chemical organisations (ICETT 1994, p.3). This shift in focus ushered in an era of mass production for Japan in which the black smoke billowing from the chimneys of industrial plants became a symbol of prosperity, and not of the destruction of the environment. Furthermore, in the mid-1960s heavy oil became a more relevant source of energy than coal and lignite. In general, the expansion of the industrial sector brought an increase in the problem of sulphuric acid gas emissions in the atmosphere.

Just two years after the establishment of the petrochemical industry on the Bay of Ise near Yokkaichi, Mie Prefecture, an increase in respiratory tract diseases, such as asthma, became apparent. At the beginning of the 1960s, epidemiological investigations already pointed to the health threat from the petrochemical industry located in Yokkaichi. Yet, responsible bodies failed to introduce effective measures for the protection of the environment and enterprise capacities were, in fact, expanded further. In 1972, after a five-year lawsuit, the civil courts granted the compensation demands of victims of 'Yokkaichi asthma' and its equivalent and declared the managers of the petrochemical industry of this region responsible (Imura 1993, p. 65).

The Japanese public learned of 'Minamata Disease' only after the discovery of an unknown cerebral disturbance in a child in 1956. A comprehensive investigation undertaken by Kumamoto University, 1959, endorsed conjecture that mercury, released by enterprises in the Bay of Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture, caused this disease. Pathologists discovered a high mercury concentration in tissue samples of fish and fishermen of this region (Ui 1992, p. 11). Despite this evidence, however, concrete measures on the part of state

institutions, under the Public Water Zone Conservation Law and the Industrial Effluent Law, to pinpoint the source of the mercury contamination failed to materialise.

Similar diseases appeared in June 1965 several kilometres further along the Aganogawa River in Niigata Prefecture. As in Minamata, these diseases frequently led to death. Again, a mercury combination was assumed to have caused this disease and, again, initiatives for a lasting solution to the problem were not forthcoming.

At this point, a family effected by the pollution decided to demand compensation through legal channels and, simultaneously, to clarify responsibility. From the actions of this single family a citizens' movement developed among victims of Minamata Disease and of Itai-Itai-Disease in the Toyama Prefecture (cadmium contamination with adverse effects on bone formation). The lawyers, doctors, and scientists representing the interests of the victims also participated. This movement is still active and has been successful in four large environmental civil lawsuits. The movement has also succeeded in obtaining high compensation payments from the accused enterprises (Weidner 1988, p. 145).

The influence of the citizens' movements, the opposition parties, the city administrations, and the prefectural governments, along with the courts' acknowledgement of the guilt of the state government for not recognising the massive pollution of the 1950s and 1960s and for not taking action, have all been analysed at great length in the relevant literature (e.g. McKean 1981; Reed 1986; Tsuru and Weidner 1989). These investigations show that it was the citizens' movement, along with its pluralistic interests and the jurisdiction of the courts, that prompted the governing LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) to put pollution on the political agenda. This decision was due mainly to the continual loss of votes in the LDP's rural strongholds. It is worth emphasising that only the civil movement succeeded in making the local and national governments react to visible problems with changes to their industrial policies. Thus, the ability of Japanese politicians, especially in the field of environmental policies, has to be questioned.

Finally, the government reacted to the increased public pressure in a special Diet session with the decree of fourteen laws and ordinances on environmental protection as well as measures for the reduction of unhealthy pollutant emissions. The repressive, at best symbolic, Japanese environmental

policy of the 1950s and 1960s (Weidner, Reh binder and Sprenger 1990, p. 35) which adopted a purely economic set of policy objectives and refused even minimal ecological responsibility, was now taking an ecopolitical turn.

Stricter environment laws were later enacted and realised. While these laws were aimed, primarily, at improving the existing situation, they also had an indirect effect on the preventive actions taken by private and public enterprises.

Despite this apparent environmental turn, ecologically inconsiderate depletion of resources persisted. This mainly occurred in the countries of South East Asia because of the lack of adequate environmental laws (Maull 1992, p. 362ff.). The citizens' movement was in some cases, once again, the driving force to change the industrial policy of a number of Japanese companies.

Just as Japan's foreign policy has been characterised as 'Janus-faced' (Kevenhörster 1993, p. 16), its environmental policy during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s may be considered likewise. One face displayed the partly successful efforts towards an effective environmental policy in Japan itself, the other face, the massive exploitation of nature, predominantly through Japanese enterprises in countries of the Asian-Pacific region.²

Growing global environmental consciousness

The protection of the environment and natural resources has moved into the centre of international foreign aid discussions within recent years (Nuscheler 1995, p. 247f). Most recently, the UNCED in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the Rio+5 conference in New York (1997), and the Kyoto Climate Conference (1997) stressed the need for political action with regard to the global environment problem. At the end of the 1980s, the politicians within Japan perceived the relevance of environmental policy for die second time after the tragic cases of mercury poisoning, cadmium poisoning, and asthma during the 1950s and 1960s. Various representatives from Japan propogated a leading role for their country in international environmental policy.

This interest stands in sharp contrast to Japan's attitude prior to 1988. Before 1988 the Japanese public, environment groups, media, and political parties paid hardly any attention to the global environment. Large US newsmagazines such as Business Week, Time and Newsweek sharply criticised Japan's role as a global polluter. They referred to the contribution of

² For example the high amount of tropical timber from South East Asian rainforests imported by Japan

Japanese enterprises to the deforestation of tropical rain forests Japan's rank as foremost importer of tropical timber, drift-net fishing, trade in products using threatened animal and plant species, as well as the shift of highly polluting industry to South East Asia. Until 1988, an increased interest by the Japanese public in global environment problems was not recorded. Nor were there any immediately apparent transnational environmental problems in Japan.

Prior to 1988, Japan's international environmental policy had been branded as reactive because of the lack of research in the global environment field, the absence of strong eco-political representation, and a weak environment authority (Environment Agency [EA]) (Schreurs 1994, p. 36f). As a part of the present discussion of political reforms, the Environment Agency, currently under the Prime Minister's Office, will become a ministry in 2001. The necessary movement of bureaucrats from other ministries to such a new ministry, however, may not necessarily increase the EA's power to undertake more environmental friendly actions within Japan.

A number of factors combined to influence change in Japanese policy. Pressure increased from international environment organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (Imamura 1989, p. 43ff). Internationally active enterprises, which had been confronted with environmental themes and activists in other countries, also began to pressure the government for change. More importantly, other national governments increased pressure on the Japanese government to change its environmental policies. Furthermore, all these factors became significantly more effective once renowned Japanese politicians themselves discovered that they could combine environmental involvement with their own interests.

At the same time that political pressure was building up, the climate problem began to feel like a very real threat for the Japanese public because of increasingly hot summers with growing drinking water problems in some regions, and colder winters. The influence of these factors was compounded by the increasing forest damage caused by emissions originating from the Chinese mainland (Park 1995, p. 32).

Furthermore, the rapidly emerging international focus on environmental issues provided a new opportunity for the Japanese government to become actively engaged in a global setting within a non-military arena (Lincoln 1993, p. 148). For years Japan had been criticised for failing to undertake sufficient international responsibility as an economical and technological giant.

Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita adopted a more active foreign policy during his term in office (06/11/1987-02/06/1989). The desire for a more active international role stemmed, in large part, from the changes in the international system, the decline of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and the political dissolution of the Soviet Union (Kaufmann 1990, p. 20). During his time as Prime Minister, Takeshita understandably showed little interest in eco-political themes. As a member of the Tanaka-Faction he was basically considered as a "power-broker" and lobbyist for the construction industry. The G-7 summit in Ottawa can, however, be seen as a turning point. Prior to the summit Takeshita asked the former Prime Minister Fukuda for advice and Fukuda recommended raising the population issue and global environment problems at the summit meeting.

Surrounded by scandal, Takeshita tried to polish up his reputation through his involvement in environmental policy in the hope of a second term as Prime Minister. At the beginning of the 1990s, when the other major industrial powers (e.g. USA, Germany, and France) were focusing predominantly on other issues, Tokyo decided to play an important role in the global environmental sphere. In March 1992 the government conducted, in a co-operative endeavour between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and International Trade and Industry, as well as the Environment Agency, an international financial meeting to ensure the success of UNCED through sufficient financial support.

With Takeshita's change in focus, the interest of LDP politicians in the environment increased. This domestic change occurred in conjunction with the assumption that international involvement in environmental policy would promote a higher foreign policy profile and establish Japan as an "international state" (*kokusai kokka*) with global ambitions (Potter 1994, p. 200). Moreover, Takeshita's initiatives for the transfer of environmental technology can be considered as basically economically driven and promoted by engineers and, not necessarily, strictly environmental.

Growing environmental orientation in ODA

With the adoption of the "Council Recommendation on Environmental Assessment of Development Assistance Projects and Programs" and the "Council Recommendation on Measures Required to Facilitate the Environment Assessment" through the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1985 resp. 1986, OECD members were called to take

environmental concerns increasingly into their development aid programmes (OECD 1985). As a reaction to this demand JICA authorised a "Study Group", to demonstrate ways of linking environmental themes in development co-operation. The concluding report of this investigating committee discusses possibilities of improving the abilities of developing countries to cope with environmental problems, to expand and improve environmental projects, to use environmentally sound technologies efficiently, and to push for the protection of natural resources (JICA 1988).

At the same time a round of discussion evolved through the Environment Agency of Japan under the title "Basic Directions for Environmental Considerations in Development Assistance" with the strengthened linking of the environment problem to development co-operation (Forrest 1991, p. 30). Thereby, Japan undertook to base its future development aid on its own experience with pollution.

In 1988 global environment aspects were included, for the first time, in the white paper of the Environment Agency. In a report published in June 1988, Japan's successive commission to the WCED, the "Committee on Global Environment Problems", recommended an expansion of Japan's eco-political development assistance. What this "ad-hoc" commission submitted, however, was essentially as little as had been submitted previously. It included the establishment of short-term teams to offer concrete suggestions for the acceptance of global environment problems on the agenda for development aid. The report did encourage the sixteen ministries and state authorities, which are jointly responsible³ for the formation of development aid policies (EA 1988, p. 43f), to determine a set of environmental guidelines. It was also recommended that applications from potential recipient countries should be examined in terms of their environmental compatibility.

The problem with the system established is that, instead of proposing ODA projects directly to developing countries, the developing countries must themselves submit applications through the appropriate Japanese embassy to obtain benefits from the Japanese development aid fund.

³ The so-called Yonshocho (four ministries) has a co-ordinating and leading function. It is a committee, meeting regularly, consisting of vice-ministers and ministry officials from MITI, MOFA, Economic Planning Agency (EPA), and the Ministry of Finance (M017). It is responsible for applications to finance projects of developing aid. The allocation of grants and TC is incumbent on MOFA. exclusively.

Political motives for the new policy

In the age of multi-polarity after the breakdown of the former Soviet sphere of influence, Japan, as a foreign-trade, technological, and ODA world power is confronted with more global responsibility (Kevenhörster 1993, p. 15). One reason for putting environmental problems on Japan's development co-operation agenda is based on the endeavour of some Japanese politicians to give their foreign policy a new profile. Environmental policy pushes, therefore, meet with a great deal of interest so as to weaken the reproach of a timid and reactive foreign policy (Maddock 1994, p. 37). With the growing global interest in environmental problems there is strong involvement in this policy

Likewise a foreign policy motive might be the extenuation of the deep-seated fear of Japan's neighbours of a larger international responsibility for Japan through the contribution of the growing involvement of Japanese politicians in global environmental policy (Yamada 1995, p. 12). With the help of a decisive weighting of eco-orientated aspects in Japan's development aid, criticism of a lack of quality in Japanese ODA, despite its being the largest financial ODA budget world-wide, ceased. Clearly reached development goals could be seen to be indicative of the growing effectiveness of Japanese policies. Even so, it must be still considered that Japan has failed to reach its target. For example, the excellently equipped Environmental Centres in Beijing and near Bangkok are seldom used to capacity. The quantitative increase in Japan's eco-political bilateral and multilateral development assistance within the last few years can be misleading if the countless defects in terms of quality are not taken into account.

Security concerns will also have contributed to the perceived need for action in regard to eco-political development aid. Close regional co-operation is essential for enduring stabilisation within the region. Such efforts may help to reduce tensions in trouble spots in East and South East Asia and the Pacific region. Regional environmental co-operation may have a positive impact on developments on the Korean peninsula and help to alleviate tensions between the Peoples Republic of China and Taiwan (Nashima 1995, p. 6).

Ecologically compatible growth contributes to sustainable development in such rapidly growing, so-called Newly Industrialised Economies. It thereby weakens the potential for possible conflict through such factors as environmentally caused migration (Fasbender 1995, p. 361ft). In addition, a more sustainable use of natural resources, of which Japan as a resource poor country is import-dependent, also adds to the political, economic, and ecological

stabilisation of the region. Prime Minister Nakasone called this an existential feature of Japan's foreign policy. Thereby Japan is considered to be open to securing energy and raw material sources.

Furthermore, the tremendous growth market for environmental technology has also pushed the interests of more Japanese politicians towards involvement in environmental policy and must be considered as a foreign trade motive. Japan's bitter experiences in the 1950s/60s also act as motivation for Japanese politicians who recognise that exclusively economically oriented development in countries like Indonesia and China could mean the ecological collapse of the earth.

In domestic politics, numerous politicians have tried to polish up their negative images, often caused by corruption, through activities in the area of global environmental policy. At the same time, they have tried to use development policy to weaken criticism in regard to domestic immobilism.

An explanation of Japan's eco-political development aid purely in terms of foreign-trade motives would be too short-sighted considering the complexity of events and their interdependence. Japan no longer follows the primacy of foreign trade interests in its development politics. Altogether, six different sources of motivation have helped to put global environmental policy on to the political agenda, namely foreign trade politics, development politics, domestic policy, security policy, and environmental policy.

Japan - an international eco-flagship?

With the passing of the 1990s, Japanese development assistance still remains problematic. Development plans will have a negative affect on the social situation of various regions and their populations over the long term. Some of the questionable plans include the building of gigantic lakes in and zones of Africa, the dam construction on the Yangtze in China, gigantic infrastructure projects connecting Indonesian islands through bridges, and afforestation projects with exotic trees in countries such as India and Thailand.

Considering this evident deficit in terms of quality, the announcement of the UNO, and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' proclamation of a year of "environmental diplomacy" in January 1989 seem to pay only lip service to genuine environmentally sustainable development. Concrete attempts towards eco-political development aid have been lacking. For example, in some

instances, questions concerning Japan's ODA have been forwarded only as far as political speechwriters and have failed to reach the responsible officials. According to Richard Forrest this is further evidence that Japan's development politics have been little more than rhetorical announcements (Forrest 1991, p. 32).

The Conference on the Global Environment and Humane Response Toward Sustainable Development (11.-13. September 1989), arranged by Prime Minister Takeshita, demonstrated few alternative activities. The conference succeeded only in elucidating Takeshita's particular interest in recovering political profile through his involvement in global environmental policy. Furthermore, the seriousness of the governing LDP's commitment to discussing alternative activities in development aid must be questioned because of the exclusion of all representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Holliman 1990, p. 288).

During the early 1990s, Japanese officials did not tire of testifying to the will of their country to take over a leading role in global environmental protection at global environmental summit meetings. In view of the Gulf War and the rapid changes that were taking place in Eastern Europe, these announcements were of secondary importance. At this point, concrete changes in politics and measures that identify global environmental protection as an urgent task were not immediately obvious.

The situation changed with the G-7 summit in July 1991 in London. It was here that the Japanese delegation undertook to strengthen Japan's co-operation efforts in development assistance to the countries of the developing world. The delegation also committed itself to put to good use the technology and experience gained through the Japan's handling of her own environmental problems during the rapid economic growth period between 1950 and 1970. Additionally, it was noted that Japan must be able to react variably to the different development stages of the recipient countries. ODA should, it was argued, pay particular attention to poverty reduction and population growth. These two issues must be understood in terms of their direct relationship to environmental problems. On this occasion Japan granted priority in its development aid to such issues as the protection of the forests and re-forestation, the preservation of natural energy sources, the employment of clean technology, pollution control, and soil protection (JICA 1995, p. 2).

At the UNCED (1-14. June 1992) Tokyo attracted attention by announcing that it intended to provide JPY 900 billion - JPY 1 trillion (US\$ 6.75 billion -

US\$ 8.5 billion) for eco-political ODA within the coming five fiscal years up to and including 1996. With US\$ 8.168 billion at the end of the fiscal year 1994 this goal - the five-year plan - was already surpassed. Furthermore, the Japanese delegation underlined the importance of the transfer of technology for the protection of the natural environment (Pollack 1992, p. 11). As a first concrete measure, the Japanese government introduced the establishment of an International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC), under UNEP's umbrella, as an interface between the producers and users of environmental technology. With the final declaration, called Agenda 21 or Charter for Lasting Development, the Japanese government obliged itself to set up a new, global partnership. The government committed itself to adopting new methods for co-operation between nations, crucial questions of man and society and thus to follow the integral and mutually dependent character of life on earth (Strong 1992, p. 234ff.). In addition to the preamble, Agenda 21 includes twenty-seven principles that should together serve to orient the international community at the threshold of the 21st century (UNCED 1992). Japan's official position on global warming measures in preparation for the Kyoto Climate Conference in 1997 has inevitably been labelled a victim of Japan's impenetrable, interest-based, political system. Japan's position was taken as evidence that the country lacked the ability to take a leadership role in global environmental policy making. It may be that the results of Kyoto can be considered as important steps towards a radical cut of CO₂ emissions (Simonis: 1998).⁴ It can however also be classified as a new element of Japan's foreign alliance policy. Japan may have been reluctant to adopt a deeper emission cut for fear of isolating the USA. Although Prime Minister Hashimoto played an important role in finding an agreement on the decrease of green-house gases immediately after Kyoto at a political level, he devoted himself to the mobilisation of the economy without taking emissions into account.

Conclusions

Despite many official announcements and some changes in its policies, Japan has a long way to go before it can claim to be a international environmental flagship. Although it assumed an increasing level of environmental leadership during the powerful engagement of Prime Minister Takeshita in Japanese politics, it seems that politicians, as well as the mass media, have

⁴ Yoshi Hatano (former Ambassador to the UN on 2112/1997 in *Asahi Shimbun*)

forgotten about the importance of global environmental issues with the collapse of Japan's bubble economy. Obstacles to transforming a substantial, and solid, supporting role into leadership in this area must be understood in terms of the nature of power in Japan, and in the predominance of things economic.

Political decisions are made mainly by countless, and almost nameless, bureaucrats who are not willing to make their work more transparent. Japanese bureaucracy, with its origins in serving the Emperor, does not always serve the public effectively. Thus, the present Japanese system does not contribute to governance with long-term concepts, as is required to solve environmental problems in a sustainable way. Moreover, solutions that are easy to grasp and control are often favoured. This explains Japan's interest in technical solutions, while often forgetting about the social dimension of sustainability that would require a much more holistic approach. Likewise, an emphasis on technical solutions offers the possibility of securing shares in the growing market of environmental technologies. Furthermore, the interests and motivations involved in environmental policy are so disparate that consensus would often be at the cost of political leadership and with mediocre results.

It will take time until Japan can again play a leading role in environmental issues. For this to occur, it will also be important that the USA intensify its own levels of environmental engagement which are carefully observed by Japanese politicians and industry. Hopefully, it will not be the case that civil movements, initiated in response to the harmful effects of environmental pollution, are required to push the Japanese government into action. To date, visible effects of transnational environmental pollution to the archipelago of Japan remain rare. When they do become visible, it may be too late for change.

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