

***Going Global: The Use of International Politics and Norms
in Local Environmental Movements in Japan***

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Abstract

Environmental movements in Japan face many political and cultural barriers to organization and were relatively quiet from the mid 1970s to the late 1980s. Since the early 1990s, however, Japan has experienced a wave of citizen-led environmental activism. To understand how environmental activists have recently overcome some of the domestic barriers to organization, this paper looks at the role of international institutions in legitimizing and supporting environmental movements at the national level. Building on the new literature on transnational advocacy networks and transnational social movements and using the cases of citizen protest campaigns against the Nagara River Estuary Dam and the Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project, we show how international actors, organizations and norms were effectively used by activists to build national networks, gain media attention, establish legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and call into question state practices that had long excluded citizens from the policy-making process.

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I. Introduction

The environmental movement in Japan has undergone various ebbs and flows over the past several decades, with the 1990s marking a period of greater activity by civil society actors calling for tougher environmental standards and policies. The citizen protest campaigns against the Nagara River Estuary Dam and the Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project are prominent examples of this renewed citizen activism and were significant events for recent movements as models for action and for their important role in raising the level of public interest in environmental issues and sustainable development in Japan in the 1990s. Considering the many organizational and political obstacles facing NGOs and other activists in Japan, the ability of these campaigns to organize national networks of support, garner media attention, generate public sympathy and effectively question state policies marked an important turning point in the Japanese environmental movement.

This paper calls attention to the role of international factors and forces in mobilizing social action and to the link between global and local environmental movements. International factors, I argue, were key to legitimizing and supporting these two watershed campaigns in Japan. Building on the new literature in political science and sociology on transnational advocacy networks and transnational social movements, this paper examines the ways in which grassroots activists and NGOs in Japan were able to use international opportunities and

^{*} I am indebted to Richard Forrest for providing invaluable assistance in the case study portions of the paper. As a participant in many of the events described, he supplied “practitioner” insights and information that only an insider could know. Currently an advisor to Pact (a Washington, D.C.-based international NGO), Richard was the East Asian Representative of the National Wildlife Federation for most of the 1990s.

international norms to advance their cause. Placing these two domestic campaigns in the larger context of global movements and international politics, the paper shows how international allies, organizations and standards were effectively used by activists to build up national networks, gain sympathetic media attention, establish legitimacy in the eyes of both the public and state actors, and call into question state policy processes that long excluded citizens and environmental considerations.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section of the paper provides a background for the new environmental movements of the 1990s in Japan. It also outlines why organizing advocacy NGOs and protest movements is so difficult in Japan, and lays out the puzzle of the paper, namely: why did one see in the late 1980s and 1990s the rise of new environmental protest movements which – unlike the previous wave of movements in the 1960-70s – were national in organization and tended to focus not on human victims of pollution but on the more postmaterial goal of preserving nature for its own sake? The second section introduces my argument concerning the role of international politics, allies, norms, and opportunities in helping domestic environmental advocates in Japan gain legitimacy and place their issue on the national agenda. This section draws from recent work in political science and sociology in the area of transnational advocacy networks and transnational social movements. The third main section presents the specific cases of protest campaigns centered on the construction of the Nagara River Estuary Dam and the Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project. Through a careful study of each case, I show when and how international actors and international norms were instrumental in mobilizing and advancing the cause of environmental activists.

II. Background: The New Environmental Activism of the 1990s

Writers on environmental movements in Japan have all noted the fact that although there was a proliferation of local environmental protests and activism in the 1960s and 1970s, these activities never fully coalesced into a strong national-level movement led by national associations as they did in many other industrialized countries. Until very recently, these scholars have noted, most environmental advocacy NGOs in Japan were very local in

organization and membership, and tended to focus on local anti-pollution and victim compensation issues. (McKean 1981; Krauss and Simock 1980; Schreurs 1996; Vosse 1992; Cameron 1996; Broadbent 1998) Moreover, by the 1980s, tough anti-pollution measures enacted by the Japanese government in the 1970s had improved environmental pollution conditions to a tolerable level and much of the momentum gathered at the height of the environmental movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s was lost. In general, the mid 1970s and 1980s was a period of less visible protest activity by environmentalists in Japan. (McKean 1981; Schreurs 1996) Although there were movements for recycling and promoting organic produce, for example, these sorts of consumer movements were of a very different nature than the more explicitly political and confrontational environmental movements of the 1960s and early 1970s that emphasized pollution victims.

In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, however, a new type of environmental activism appeared in Japan that combined the old-style local focus with a new national dimension. From the late 1980s, a variety of environmental protection movements appeared in which local activists and groups banded together into national issue-oriented networks, and coordinated their campaigns and strategies with national-level environmental groups. Such movements were able to attract national media attention and have included activism to save the Shiraho coral reef on Ishigaki Island in Okinawa, national campaigns to prevent dam construction on the Nagara River, a series of campaigns in several Japanese localities to save wetland areas, and campaigns against the construction of new nuclear power plants. Compared with many of the movements of the 1960s, these movements were notable for not only their connection to national organizations and/or their ability to build a national network of support, but for the sort of issues they championed and how the issues were framed. In contrast with the past media images of the 1960s of protesters as victims of pollution, most of these movements aimed to protect the natural environment, ecosystems and endangered species from future harm, and framed their struggles as preserving and defending the environment for its own sake. They also were ambitious movements, since they targeted large development projects that were promoted by both local and national government agencies, and in doing so directly called into question the state's emphasis on infrastructure-led economic growth and public-works-oriented

development. The new environmental movements of the late 1980s and 1990s thus represent a new wave of environmentalism in Japan.

These were rather remarkable developments, given the fact that organizing national-level protest and advocacy movements in Japan has been a very difficult undertaking. As numerous political scientists and sociologists have noted, the organizational and cultural barriers facing activists in Japan are high. In terms of legal and fiscal structures for nonprofit organizations, it has been very difficult for advocacy groups to incorporate, raise money and solicit memberships, which has resulted in a very small number of national-level environmental groups specializing in advocacy. (Pekkanen 2000 and 2001; Imata, Leif and Takano 1998; Reimann 2001) Information barriers and the difficulty of using the legal system for policy change have also been cited as obstacles to citizen-style activism. (Upham 1987) Cultural norms have also discouraged challenges to authority and changes from below, and the state has been able to exploit this by using such norms to isolate protestors and make their demands appear selfish. (Pharr 1990; Broadbent 1998)

III. International Movements and Organizations as Political Opportunities

If it has been so difficult to organize larger scale, national environmental movements in Japan, what are some of the factors that have contributed to their rise in the past decade? Although there are numerous reasons for the emergence of these new movements, this paper looks at one factor that – while only a partial explanation – is a common element of many of the new environmental campaigns in Japan which have succeeded in capturing national attention and, in some cases, were able to reach their ultimate goals. An important changing context of the late 1980s and 1990s that influenced and shaped the emergence of more viable national level movements, I argue, was the international context and the greater availability of international opportunities. New environmental movements that emerged in the 1990s in Japan (and elsewhere) were part of a larger global growth and spread of environmental activism that both responded to and strategically used international partners, international organizations and international norms. This section outlines how these three international elements fed into the organization and growth of national environmental movements.

International partners and allies. As the work of Sikkink, Keck, Brysk and others have shown, transnational networks of activists have allowed “blocked” activists to circumvent obstacles at the local and national level and turn to the international arena for support. (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Brysk 1994) International allies provide activists and NGOs with resources that may be lacking in the domestic context. These resources are both material and nonmaterial. Materially, foreign actors such as private foundations, foreign governments, and wealthy international NGOs can provide needed financing for NGO projects and activities that are unlikely to secure funding domestically. In terms of nonmaterial resources, international allies can help groups acquire international attention that in turn provides various possible benefits at home, such as greater domestic legitimacy and increased media coverage. When they involve powerful foreign governments that are sympathetic to the group or movement, these alliances can provide groups with the external political pressure needed to influence their own government. (Martin and Sikkink 1993; Sikkink 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998; McAdam 1998) The greater a targeted government is committed to international institutions and concerned about its position in international society, the more effective such international alliances are likely to be.

International organizations. International organizations and their various conferences and treaties are often important political opportunities for national groups excluded from the policy process domestically since they offer a new and separate channel of access to decision-makers. International conferences and meetings of international institutions (e.g. the United Nations agencies, the World Bank, conferences of the parties of various treaties, etc.) are alternative political spaces where groups can voice their concerns and attain international exposure which can be used as a political resource to gain access to domestic policymaking processes from which they are otherwise excluded. (Risse-Kappen 1995; McAdam 1998) Lobbying opportunities at international conferences, formal mechanisms set up by some governments to consult with NGOs at international meetings, and even more elaborate arrangements such as NGO representation on official delegations or the establishment of pre-conference policy “dialogues” at home, all provide incentives for groups to organize or “go international.” Extensively covered by the press – especially when they take place in one’s home country –

participation in the meetings of international institutions also provides potential public relations functions for NGOs and helps them legitimize their cause as part of a larger international movement, especially when their movements can be portrayed as conforming to international standards or approaches.

UN and other official international conferences also often serve as focal points around which national and local groups mobilize, coordinate activities, and work together. By providing activists with a unified target, venue or basis for common action, international organizations and treaties and their conferences have stimulated new connections between local and national groups that previously had worked separately. The increasing number of international conferences from the late 1980s and the emergence of international environmental treaties in the 1980s and 1990s were important international developments that helped domestic actors interested in similar environmental issues find each other and join forces. As groups prepare for an international conference, for example, they often create new networks which stimulate new forms of activism and collaboration at the national level as well.

International Norms. In the past decade, scholars have become interested in the role of international norms as a source of policy change and a mechanism for cooperation among states. (Finnemore 1996; Florini 1996; Klotz 1995; Axelrod 1986) Some have looked specifically at how transnational actors and NGOs have helped create or strategically used international norms to promote policy changes at the domestic level in a variety of areas such as human rights (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999), immigration policies (Gurowitz 1999 and 2000) and the use of landmines (Price 1998). For this paper, we shall examine how NGOs that face barriers domestically can turn to international norms to gain legitimacy and bolster their position vis-à-vis the state by exposing it to international criticism and comparison. By appealing to international standards or agreements and showing how state policies fall short of pledges or ideals, NGOs are able to more effectively counter attempts by the state to paint their demands as excessive, disruptive or illegitimate.

The rising number of international environmental treaties and conferences in the late 1980s and 1990s collectively brought with them a new normative ideal of “sustainable

development” which was comprised of both specific policy measures, such as environmental impact assessments, as well as a more ideational goal of respecting the natural environment. (Held et al. 1999: Ch. 8) Sustainable development also was increasingly seen as necessitating democratic decision-making processes useful to advocates who confronted “blockages” caused by lack of participatory decision-making, transparency and mechanisms for accountability of the state. Although the ideal of sustainable development first appeared in the international arena in the 1970s, it was only in the late 1980s and 1990s with advancements in scientific knowledge about global environmental degradation and the increasing international institutionalization of environmental regulations that pro-environment norms gained an international ideational power that was exploitable by domestic actors. By 1992 and the commencement of the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), the concept of sustainable development was one that few industrialized states would publicly challenge. With the creation of new international environmental treaties, it was now possible for NGOs and other societal actors to hold states accountable for environmental policies by referring to international standards and appealing to international norms.

Some states are more sensitive to international norms than others. Japan, according to several accounts, has been historically concerned about its role in the world and in finding ways to “internationalize” or fit in. (Dore 1979-80; Tamamoto 1993; Murakami and Kosai 1986; Gurowitz 1998) For environmental activists in Japan, the late 1980s and 1990s proved to be a particularly good moment for the strategic use of international norm arguments. During this period, the emergence of new international environmental norms coincided with Japan’s rise as a global economic superpower. Under the international spotlight and under increasing pressure to show global leadership, Japan was in search of new ways to contribute to international society. Limited by Article Nine of its constitution to non-military types of international contributions, policymakers and politicians in Japan turned to official development assistance (ODA) and the environment as alternative areas in which Japan could provide international public goods and be seen as an international leader. However, in choosing to pursue a leadership role in global environmental assistance and technology, Japanese policymakers also provided domestic activists with a new line of attack: if Japan’s domestic environmental policies did not live up to international standards, how could it claim to be a world leader on environmental issues?

IV. The Cases: The Nagara River Estuary Dam and Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project

The two cases chosen for this paper represent two of the more famous environmental campaigns of the 1990s in Japan which were landmarks in the history of contemporary Japanese environmental movements due to their ability to create national networks of groups, attract high levels of media attention and gain widespread public support. Although they ultimately failed in their ostensible objectives, the campaigns to stop the construction of the Nagara River Estuary Dam and the Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project succeeded in publicly calling into question state policies that placed public works construction projects and economic development over environmental preservation and biodiversity. These campaigns also had an enormous influence in raising public awareness in Japan on environmental issues, and their highlighting the failures of the state to adequately consider environmental and citizen concerns in turn paved the way for successes in other cases that came after them. The unsuccessful fight against the Nagara dam, for instance, was followed by the successful campaign to halt construction of a dam on the Yoshino River. The failure to save the wetlands of Isahaya Bay led to the more recent success of similar campaigns to preserve the Fujimae wetlands in Nagoya Bay and the Sanbanze tidal flats in Tokyo Bay. The campaigns also revealed the need for the Japanese government to increase participation, transparency of decision-making and accountability to the public—norms that were being promoted through international conferences as integral aspects of the new paradigm of sustainable development.

Both cases are public works projects with long histories of opposition that date back to the 1960s, when the projects were first proposed. Until the late 1980s, however, the contention and battles against the projects remained confined largely within the localities, especially among local commercial fishing communities, and in the courts. It was only in the late 1980s that these local struggles became nationally known cases that developed nation-wide support networks of NGOs as well as individual support from Japanese citizens concerned with Japan's dwindling natural habitat, such as scientists, birdwatchers, outdoors sports enthusiasts, celebrities, journalists and authors. The rest of this section examines each case separately and traces how

the international context of the late 1980s and early 1990s aided the campaign organizers in their efforts to gain public legitimacy, call into question state policies that were previously considered business-as-usual, and bring about a new awareness in Japan of the environmental consequences of public works projects and the closed nature of much of decision-making up to that point in Japan.

The Nagara River Estuary Dam

The national campaign against the construction of an estuary dam on the Nagara River had its roots in the collapse of a long local struggle against the dam that started in 1968 and ended in 1988 when the final lawsuits by the fishing industry were settled.¹ As the Ministry of Construction and its subsidiary Water Resources Development Corporation began making plans with local authorities to implement the dam project in 1988, a new movement emerged with the quick mobilization of the Society Against the Nagara River Estuary Dam Construction (SANREDC), a network of 63 local groups supported by groups (local and national) from other parts of Japan. Coordinated by journalist and outdoorswoman Amano Reiko, this movement included fishermen, canoeists, biologists, writers, photographers, academics, local residents, national environmental NGOs, politicians and celebrities. (Cameron 1996: 147) With annual “Nagaragawa Day” events that drew crowds of up to 15,000 people, the campaign against the dam stimulated a national debate on the future of all rivers in Japan. (Kyodo News Service, 10/4/1992; JEM issues for November 1989, March 1991 and May 1991) As one of Japan’s most biologically diverse rivers and – since most major rivers were already dammed – one of the last “free-flowing” rivers in Japan, the Nagara River became symbolic as Japan’s last remaining natural river and this status was widely interpreted as a sad reflection of the environmental cost of development and public work projects in Japan.

From the movement’s early stages, Amano and SANREDC activists reached out to international allies, utilized opportunities provided by international organizations and

¹ Under Japanese law, the only nongovernmental parties with standing to contest national development projects affecting coastal waters are regional fishing cooperatives that have the exclusive right to fish in certain areas; if these cooperatives agree to accept compensation from the national government for loss of access to their fisheries, then the project can proceed.

conferences, and based some of their arguments on new international norms that were critical of dam construction as environmentally destructive.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). SANREDC joined as a member of a larger coalition of Japanese groups called '92 NGO Forum Japan that organized Japanese NGO participation at the June 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Amano actively participated in these preparations and the NGO country report compiled for UNCED included a chapter on the pollution of rivers, wetlands and coastal waters that mentioned the Nagara River. ('92 NGO Forum Japan 1992: 33) UNCED was thus a political opportunity for SANREDC to gain international publicity for its cause. In addition to this publication, Japanese NGOs also chose Amano to speak about dams at UNCED's "Japan Day" during the conference. This event was sponsored by the Japanese government to publicize Japan's "environmental leadership," and when officials decided to cut Amano out of the program, most Japanese NGOs boycotted the event. (Cameron 1996: 149-50) The confrontation was covered by the Japanese press and was an embarrassment for the Japanese government, considering the widespread participation of NGOs from other industrialized countries at most UNCED events.² (Daily Yomiuri 6/6/1992) Japanese NGOs, including SANREDC, learned through the UNCED process of the strategic usefulness of connecting Japan's domestic environmental record with its international ambitions to be a "leader" in the area of the environment.

Japanese NGO preparations for UNCED started in 1989 and it was during this time that Amano began making parallels between Nagara and dam struggles in other parts of the world. At the time (1989- 1992), other NGOs in Japan such as Friends of the Earth Japan (FoE-J) were actively organizing protests in Japan against the Sardar Sarovar dam project on India's Narmada River and had in 1990 succeeded in influencing the Japanese bilateral foreign aid agency the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) to withdraw financing for a portion of the Sardar Sarovar dam project. The inconsistency of the government of Japan withdrawing support from a controversial international dam project, and not the domestic Nagara River dam, assisted the

² Many industrialized nations, in fact, included NGO representatives as members of their official government delegations.

campaigners in their rhetoric calling for a halt to the project. Linkages with the Narmada campaign provided SANREDC with important symbolic international allies and the two movements supported each other publicly. In an NGO conference held in preparation for UNCED in Yokohama in February 1992 sponsored by '92 NGO Forum Japan, Amano appeared with Mehta Patkar of India's Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) and spoke of the similarities in their dam opposition movements. A well-known activist who went on to receive the Goldman Environmental Prize that year, Patkar's call for the cancellation of the Nagara dam brought SANREDC media coverage that linked it with a wider international environmental movement.

It was at UNCED that Amano made connections to other major international environmental organizations and to famous Western environmentalists such as David Brower, the former executive director of Sierra Club and founder of the Friends of the Earth-U.S. As a follow-up to UNCED, Amano traveled to San Francisco to further develop links between Japan's domestic and international policies, network with American NGOs concerned with similar issues, and generate media interest in both America and Japan. (Cameron 1996: 150)

International Actors Come to Japan. Immediately after UNCED, participation of international actors in the Nagara Dam campaign noticeably increased. Amano invited Brower to Japan to speak at different venues, and the annual "Naragawa Day" events in 1992 featured not only Brower but also important figures from America and Europe. These included Juliette Majot of International Rivers Network – one of the most active NGOs in the global anti-dam movement – and Robert Herbst, the Washington Representative of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) (Kyodo News Service 10/3/1992), in addition to activists such as Martin Arnould who opposed the construction of a barrage dam on France's Loire River.

Herbst was a particularly important speaker for the event since he was a government official who gave the movement a powerful international case against dams that would have resonance in Japan. TVA was a well-known agency in Japan among public works specialists and was commonly cited, even in standard high-school textbooks, as an example of how government infrastructure investments, particularly for hydroelectric dams, led to regional economic

development in the United States. For many Japanese, the TVA was the model for Japan's approach to development that emphasized building dams and other infrastructure, and it was seen by them as the model upon which Japan's Water Resources Development Corporation was based. By 1992, however, TVA's policies had evolved, due to various political developments in the United States, including the controversy around TVA's construction of the Tellico dam on the Little Tennessee River, which eliminated the habitat of an endangered fish, the snail darter. Herbst reflected the TVA's new stance that was critical of dams and that acknowledged the environmental destruction past TVA projects had caused. A lay preacher with an impressive oratory style, Herbst made it clear to Japanese audiences that TVA's past promotion of dams was not a model to be followed and that the Nagara dam project would be environmentally destructive. While in Japan, Herbst also met with officials of the Ministry of Construction and made public statements identifying problems with the dam and suggesting that an independent team be assigned to review the project. Coming from an official of an American government agency that was the historical model for dam-led development in Japan, these were symbolically powerful statements that gave SANREDC's own arguments legitimacy and undercut Japanese bureaucrats' arguments for the dam. They also revealed to the public how Japan's government was lagging behind other industrialized nations' evolving environmental judgments and norms concerning dam projects.

In future years, Nagaragawa Day events and symposiums included other notable foreign experts and activists who presented impressive cases on the environmentally destructive effects of dams. These included Dr. Robert Goodland, an ecological expert at the World Bank; Janet Abramovitz, a freshwater biodiversity expert with the Washington, D.C.-based environmental think tank WorldWatch Institute; Dai Qing, the leader of the opposition to the Three Gorges Dam project in China; Fred Pearce, the British author of *The Dammed: Rivers, Dams, and the Coming World Water Crisis*; and Patrick McCully, author of *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams* and the campaign director for the International Rivers Network. All of these events, but the 1992 event in particular, generated considerable media coverage and linked the movement against the Nagara Dam to a widespread international trend that increasingly acknowledged the limitations and destructiveness of dam projects.

In February 1995, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA), with the assistance of SANREDC and the National Wildlife Federation, organized a symposium that featured Daniel P. Beard, the Commissioner of the US Bureau of Reclamation, which had been a major dam-building agency. Beard, a highly respected official who had come to reassess the wisdom of extensive large-scale dam projects, had given a speech the previous May at the annual meeting of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage held in Varna, Bulgaria. In his now famous speech, Beard declared that “the era of dam construction is over” and argued that non-structural approaches to water management, including land-use planning and financial incentives, could eliminate the need for dam construction. Beard repeated this provocative pronouncement at the JFBA symposium and discussed it in a lengthy prime-time television interview with popular newscaster Chikushi Tetsuya, sending a strong message across Japan that the Nagara anti-dam movement was in accord with the emerging international wisdom on dams. SANREDC and other NGOs also went to the United States on several study missions in 1996 – one hosted by the Bureau of Reclamation – to learn from government officials and NGOs how the debate on dams had evolved in the past decade.

SANREDC’s Amano also used the occasion of Beard’s visit and the study missions to the United States to educate members of the National Diet of Japan, who soon thereafter formed a new supra-party organization, the Dietmembers’ Association for a Mechanism of Public Works Review (DAMPWR), that pushed for the creation of independent reviews of public works projects, especially dams, and that has helped build a general consensus among the Japanese political leadership that public works projects must be reined in. DAMPWR representatives in 1996 traveled to Washington, D.C. for extensive meetings with American federal government officials and NGOs and have been active since calling for reviews of public works projects, a reduction in funding for public works, and the cancellation of planned projects that have not been started after a set length of time after their initial design.

In summary, international actors and movements provided important resources to the organizers of the movement opposing the Nagara River dam. By providing SANREDC with internationally respected experts critical of dam construction, international actors gave credibility to SANREDC’s appeals and arguments in Japan. The weight of international opinion gave the

movement a source of legitimacy that it could not get from domestic sources alone and helped undercut official attacks on its position. Furthermore, as the international anti-dam movement gained momentum, it also provided powerful ideational resources which SANREDC could use to discredit the Japanese government's defense of dam construction. International arenas such as UNCED provided SANREDC opportunities to meet other environmental activists and linked the movement to a larger support network outside of Japan. International actors were also a source of direct pressure on the Japanese government through their criticisms and lobbying, as well as a generator of press coverage of SANREDC events. Ties to the international anti-dam movement and international actors also provided a crucial source of encouragement for SANREDC and the Nagara River campaign.

The Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project

The Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project (IBLRP), sponsored by the central government's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), involved the reclamation of a portion of Isahaya Bay on the Ariake Sea in Nagasaki Prefecture, Kyushu. The project threatened one of the biologically richest wetland areas in Japan that provided the feeding ground for a reported 232 species of birds. After several decades of local opposition to the project by the commercial fishing industry, the fight over the project gradually became a national movement from the late 1980s as the last fishing unions caved into pressures by local and national government authorities and it became clear that a local level struggle would not be enough to stop the project. (Scheerer 1999) Led by Yamashita Hirofumi, a local marine biologist who had been active in the local struggle over Isahaya Bay since 1972, the next phase of the movement involved direct pressuring of central government officials, stronger collaboration with wetlands groups from other parts of Japan and national environmental NGOs, strategic use of international organizations and alliances with international actors, and the use of scientific research and data to show the severe environmental damage that the project would cause. Although the movement ultimately failed to stop the project, it succeeded in capturing widespread public support and was a historically significant case that raised public awareness in Japan of the importance of wetland areas in supporting biodiversity.

International organizations, international partners and the use of international norms by movement organizers in their framing of their arguments were important factors that supported the movement throughout the 1990s. (Scheerer 1999) In 1991, Yamashita and wetland activists from other parts of Japan joined forces and established the Japan Wetlands Action Network (JAWAN). Aided by Maggie Suzuki, a member of Friends of the Earth Japan (FoE-J) who served as JAWAN's volunteer international liaison officer, Yamashita turned to national and transnational mobilizing to elevate the struggle in Isahaya from a strictly local one to a national one that went beyond local fishing issues and championed wetlands preservation as a national and international environmental public good.

International organizations. International conferences and treaties provided an important focal point for getting the movement off the ground and also supplied activists with a source of ideas and normative pressure from outside that they used strategically. To start with, the formation of JAWAN itself was stimulated by the announcement in 1990 that Japan would be bidding to host the Fifth Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention in 1993. Formally called the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the Ramsar Convention is a international system for the designation and protection of important wetland sites. Adopted in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, the parties to the Convention meet every three years, and the convening of the meeting in Kushiro, Japan came as surprise to wetlands activists in Japan, given Japan's very weak record on designating wetlands of international importance under the Convention. When Japan announced that it would compete to host the conference in 1990, it had only two sites listed with the Convention. (JEM 10/31/1989)

The Ramsar conference in Kushiro, however, turned out to be a very timely opportunity for Yamashita and was an impetus behind the creation of JAWAN. In 1991, the "International Wetlands Symposium 1991 Isahaya" was organized by Japanese NGOs and held in Isahaya, bringing together wetlands activists from all parts of Japan as well as from Hong Kong, Malaysia and California. (JEM March 1991: 15) With the upcoming Ramsar meeting in Kushiro in mind, JAWAN was established by the Japanese symposium participants with the goal of strengthening local movements and promoting wetlands preservation through national and international networking and action. (JEM June 1991: 4-7) The turn away from purely local towards

national and international strategies, thus, coincided with the run up to the Ramsar conference in Japan and increasing interest among wetlands activists in Japan in using the Ramsar convention as means to promote their cause.

The meeting in Kushiro in 1993 was a focus of much of JAWAN's activities in 1991-93. Prior to JAWAN's formation in 1991 there had been very little coordination and collaboration among the scattered local wetland campaigns and, as Maggie Suzuki noted in 1990, "So far Japanese NGO national networking initiatives have not been particularly encouraging." (JEM July 1990: 9) By the time the conference was over in 1993, however, a relatively strong network and united front was built. JAWAN organized and participated in a series of meetings in 1992 that were lead ups to the Ramsar meeting and provided on-going opportunities for local, national and international groups to meet and coordinate. In May 1992, an International Wetlands Symposium was held in Tokyo and featured ornithologist Mark A. Brazil as a keynote speaker. An expert on Japanese avifauna, Brazil noted that Japan had already lost most of its wetlands to development projects and that "because of the nature of wetlands and Japan's position in Asia [along the East Asia flyway for migratory birds traveling from the Arctic to the tropics], the crisis facing Japan's wetlands is an international crisis, and one which greatly concerns the international community" (Friends of the Earth and JAWAN 1993:6). Brazil also underscored Japan's laggard status internationally in the area of wetland preservation under the Ramsar Convention: Japan was the only industrialized country with less than five Ramsar sites and Japan ranked 54th in the world in terms of actual covered area of sites. Such international comparisons and the inclusion of Japan in a worldwide setting allowed Yamashita and other wetlands activists to redefine their movement from a local battle to a more universal one to preserve wildlife in Japan and the entire East Asian region. Such international comparisons and shaming tactics were ones that the movement would repeatedly turn to in order to give credibility to their claims and provide legitimacy to their ultimate goal. By calling attention to the widely recognized global nature of the problem, activists made it much harder for critics to denigrate their goal or portray their struggle as selfish.

In October 1992, JAWAN and other NGOs met again to organize activities and strategies for the Kushiro conference proper. One outcome of the meeting was the creation of Wetland

Coalition '93, comprised of JAWAN and three national NGOs active in wetlands issues (Wild Bird Society of Japan, the Nature Conservation Society of Japan and FoE-J). This was launched to present a united front of Japanese groups at Kushiro and came in time for the Asian Wetland Symposia the same month held jointly in Otsu and Kushiro. These symposia were official ones connected to the UN convention process that allowed for NGO participation as observers, and gave Japanese activists an opportunity to access and pressure the Japanese government for more meaningful dialogue. International NGOs (INGOs) from the United States and Europe at the event were important allies for the Japanese NGOs and went out of their way to put the Japanese government on the spot during their presentations to the symposium. Upon learning how difficult it was for Japanese groups to meet with officials and have their views heard, for example, INGOs steered the discussion of the symposium to NGO-government relations and asked the Japanese government what mechanisms were in place for citizens and NGO opinion in environmental policy in Japan. (JEM October 1992: 7) Japanese NGOs arrived at the symposium well prepared, and compared to the past were, according to Suzuki, "not in their traditional state of disarray." The conference process had a unifying effect for Japanese activists and the more effective organizing was a major breakthrough for groups working on the wetlands issue. (JEM October 1992: 7)

The Ramsar Conference in Kushiro proved to be a watershed event for groups in terms of coordination and activism at the national and international level. (Finkle 1993a) Given the great interest of the Japanese media in international events held in Japan, the conference gave Japanese NGOs national press coverage for their cause. One newspaper provided space for Yamashita to write a "special report" and Yamashita used it to describe in detail how Japan lagged behind most countries in its protection of wetlands. (Yamashita 1993) At the conference itself, the Wetlands Coalition '93 used international pressure and shaming strategies by requesting that the Japanese government add Japanese wetlands to the Montreux Register, a list of wetlands in danger of losing their ecological character (in this case, due to development projects) that the Ramsar Bureau closely monitors. Given the international setting, this was one way to put pressure on Japan to respond, and for NGO activists the question was, as Suzuki put it: "Can we pressure (the Japanese government) into being so embarrassed that they have to agree to (implement our proposals)?" (Finkle 1993b) Japanese NGOs effectively criticized wetlands

policies in Japan, joined forces with INGOs at the conference, and held their own events in Tokyo and other locations to raise public awareness of the Ramsar Convention and the danger of the loss of Japan's remaining wetlands.

International actors. As in the case of the Nagara Dam, international actors were an important part of the network of support that Yamashita and others received in their campaign to save the Isahaya Bay tidal flats. In addition to yearly NGO-organized international wetlands symposiums that included fellow wetlands activists and specialists from other countries, more active participation by INGOs and other international activists picked up in 1997 as it became clear that the land reclamation project would soon begin. In 1997, a coalition of American NGOs centered around the NGO members of the U.S. Ramsar Committee (a national advisory body led by NGOs yet recognized by the American government) formed the American NGO Alliance to Save Isahaya Bay.³ In April 1997, the gates cutting off water to Isahaya Bay were closed and letters of opposition to the Japanese government streamed in from NGOs in Canada, Australia, Spain, Russia and the United States calling for a halt to the project. With the international spotlight on Japan, Japanese television gave extensive coverage to the closing of the seawall draining the Isahaya tidal flat—a dramatic “guillotine” closing off the sea that left the sea life on the mudflat to die dramatically in front of the cameras.

In June 1997, when then Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro was in the United States for the G-8 Summit and the UN General Assembly Special Session on the follow-up to UNCED, he was met with advertisements and demonstrations at the UN by protesters (mainly Japanese visiting the United States) calling for a stop to the Isahaya land reclamation project. At a press conference at the G-8 meeting in Denver, the last question to Hashimoto came from Richard Forrest, the Eastern Asian Representative for the National Wildlife Federation, who asked Hashimoto to respond to claims of critics of the Isahaya land reclamation project that the project violated the spirit of sustainable development. The Japanese press covered these events with headlines such as “In America Too, Isahaya,” and a large article in the Los Angeles Times on

³ The coalition included: the American Bird Conservancy, Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge, Friends of the Earth, International Rivers Network and the National Wildlife Federation. The alliance was nominally headed by Daniel Beard, who had just left his post at the Bureau of Reclamation to become Senior Vice President of the National Audubon Society.

Isahaya appeared on the day that Hashimoto addressed the UN on environmental issues. (JEM June-July 1997; Watanabe 1997)

In addition to these efforts, there were many other behind-the-scenes efforts to put international pressure on Japan that appealed to international standards and norms. In mid June, JAWAN, WWF-Japan, the Wild Bird Society and the American NGO Alliance to Save Isahaya Bay sent letters to Hashimoto, the US Secretary of State, other governments, and Convention Secretariats, stating that the Isahaya project violated international treaties and agreements such as the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biodiversity, and bilateral migratory bird agreements that Japan had signed with the United States, Australia, Russia and China. (Segawa 1997) WWF-Japan put in a related advertisement in the Japanese language version of *National Geographic* magazine and was able to get Prince Philip (the honorary president of WWF International) to send a letter to Hashimoto in late May asking him to take measures to prevent damage to the tidal flat ecosystem in Isahaya Bay. (JEM June-July 1997) In May, the internet bulletin board of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) was flooded with e-mails – many of them from abroad – protesting the project. (Mainichi Daily News 5/19/1997)

International efforts continued in 1998, and in April 1998 Yamashita received the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in recognition of his 27-year involvement in the battle to save Isahaya Bay. This prize put him in the ranks of recognized global environmental heroes and provided a very strong international message to the Japanese government as to who was on the just and right side. (Katayama 1998) After winning the prize, Yamashita became an even more famous figure within the international environmental community and Japanese media, even appearing in Time magazine.

Continuing her efforts as JAWAN's international liaison officer, Suzuki met in May 1998 with US government representatives at the Department of State, Department of Interior and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and argued that the Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project violated the Ramsar Convention and bilateral agreements. Although Suzuki was not successful in convincing American government officials to put pressure on the Japanese government, international action did have an effect on officials at the Ramsar Convention

Bureau. When Delmar Blasco, the secretary general of the Ramsar Convention was in Japan to attend a wetlands conference in 1998, he publicly criticized Japan for not doing enough to protect its wetlands and to set an example for the world. The Ramsar Convention Bureau, he also noted, had been inundated with distressing reports and criticisms about the condition of the Isahaya Bay tidal flats and the Fujimae flats, two Japanese wetlands areas that the Bureau considered of vital international importance. (Yomiuri Shimbun 3/8/1998) In November 1998, the Chair of the U.S. Ramsar Committee, Constance Hunt (also a representative of WWF), attended a JAWAN symposium in Nagoya and joined the “Fujimae Declaration” calling for the conservation of tidal flats in Japan and Korea. JAWAN representatives in 1999 and 2000 also traveled to South Korea to meet with local activists and to visit major wetlands slated for destruction due to government land reclamation projects. These projects in Korea were seen as inspired by Japan’s postwar development model and the visits forged new personal and ideational links between the grassroots Japanese and Korean environmental movements.

In recent years, with the sudden death of Yamashita in July 2000, activism against the project quieted. Although implementation of the project continues, Yamashita and his movement have been vindicated, as it has become clear that the project has (as they claimed it would) done significant harm to migratory bird habitat and marine products harvests. After special investigations prompted by fishermen’s protests after *nori* seaweed harvests declined dramatically, in August 2001 MAFF announced that it would scale down the project. A Third Party Re-Evaluation Committee commissioned by MAFF has called for the reconsideration of the entire project and recommended that it be re-designed so as to include environmental factors. Nevertheless, local fishermen continued further protests into 2002, calling for a complete cessation of further work on the project.

On January 25, 1999, strengthened by the memory of the dramatic destruction at Isahaya Bay fresh in the public mind, the Japanese Environment Agency issued a decision halting the project that would have obliterated the Fujimae tidal flat for a garbage landfill for the City of Nagoya. The tide had turned for environmental advocates in Japan; after the failure at Isahaya, they had finally won a major battle against the government to save an important wetland site. Another important wetland, Sanbanze tidal flat in Tokyo Bay, was also subsequently the target of

efforts by Chiba Prefecture Governor Domoto Akiko, who called for a reassessment and reduction or outright cancellation of land reclamation plans.

V. Conclusion

As this paper has tried to show, environmental movements in the 1990s in Japan are different phenomenon than their predecessors of the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to the local scope of previous protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the new movements of the 1990s are multi-level and multi-layered ones that consciously link local, national and international forces. In contrast to previous movements that received national attention that were focused on human victims of pollution such as Minamata or *itai-itai* disease, the new movements have been arguably more successful in appealing to the average Japanese citizen and in stimulating postmaterial environmental values in the public at large. As the two cases of this paper showed, some of the recent environmental campaigns have also been very successful in calling into question the conventional wisdom in Japan that public works projects should be seen as business-as-usual and an unalloyed economic good for the country. Although they failed in their specific goals of stopping the construction of the Nagara River Estuary Dam and the Isahaya Bay Land Reclamation Project, both movements made it much harder for the government to justify environmentally destructive public works projects in other parts of the country and in the future. Indeed, further plans for wetland conversion and dam construction have been put on hold or scaled back.

International institutions, norms and actors played an important role in aiding these movements and the international political context of the late 1980, 1990s and early 2000s was quite different than that of the 1960s and 1970s when norms on sustainable development were just starting to find their way to the international sphere. The more pro-environment international context of the 1990s with its more elaborate web of international treaties, INGO activist networks, and concerned intergovernmental organization officials provided new opportunities and new idea “frames” for environmental activists in Japan. Although the battles were still very tough, Japanese environmentalists found willing and able international allies and

were able to locate their struggles in a larger global context that enabled them to redefine their campaigns as not merely local but universal ones. Since the Japanese government was also looking for ways to show its leadership in the world and chose the global environment as one area to champion, it was also more sensitive in the 1990s to criticisms about its environmental record at home, and this gave the movement new ideation leverage that it previously did not have.

As other studies have shown, Japanese activists have not been alone in their use of external pressure and alliances with international partners to gain legitimacy at the domestic level and further their cause. (See Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999) This paper's focus on Japan, however, does raise the interesting fact that the strategic use of international pressure is not restricted to developing countries with repressive governments, but can and does occur among industrialized democracies. Further work and comparative case studies among both advanced democracies and developing countries should be undertaken to investigate whether Japan is unique and under what conditions international norms and actors have more effectively aided domestic movements.

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