High Noon in Japan: Embedded Symbolism and Post-2001 Kyoto Protocol Politics

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Introduction

After the George W. Bush administration pulled the United States out of the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001, Japan found itself the pivotal actor in the global battle over the survival of the treaty. With the US out of Kyoto, the costs of ratification rose significantly. Japan would be expected to take painful and costly measures to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions without US industries having to take similar steps; this threatened to place Japan at a competitive disadvantage with the US and developing countries, which were exempted from taking action under the agreement. For numerous industries this was seen as making what was already a tough set of requirements even more unpalatable. As a result, they pressured politicians and bureaucrats to do something to assure that they would not be left with unacceptably high costs. This meant either getting the US to return to the agreement, abandoning the agreement, or at a minimum reducing its impact on the economy by assuring industry that they would not have to carry the bulk of national emission reduction requirements.

Still, many interests within the government (and especially the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)), and some industries (e.g. the nuclear, insurance, and pollution control industries) had a strong interest in seeing the agreement enter into force.¹ Perhaps even more importantly, the Japanese public and NGOs were largely behind the Kyoto Protocol. As one indication, the Japanese Consumer Cooperative Union, representing over 500 university, housing, medical, insurance, and retail unions and a combined membership of over 20 million urged early ratification.²

As a result of these competing perspectives, there was substantial political

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and bureaucratic debate on how to approach ratification. Because of the global impact of Japan’s decision, international diplomacy intensified. European Union (EU) officials and different European heads of government tried to persuade their Japanese counterparts to stick to the Kyoto Protocol. Meanwhile, Japanese politicians flew to Washington to lobby US officials to rejoin the agreement and to Europe to explain their efforts to find a solution that would be amenable to the US. The stakes were very high for Japan’s environmental and global foreign policy. This was high noon when Japan, under the international spotlight, was forced to take a stance.

Two main sets of questions are asked in this article. First, given the power of anti-Kyoto interests and bureaucratic actors, why did the Japanese government ratify the agreement? In the US case, anti-Kyoto forces were able to prevent ratification. Why did the same kind of politics not play out in Japan? The balance of interest group politics, bureaucratic politics, and foreign policy priorities certainly could have led to the agreement’s collapse. With an anti-Kyoto coalition including powerful elements within Keidanren (the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations), the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and a prime minister (Jun’ichiro Koizumi) who was committed to strengthening US-Japan relations, it is certainly not inconceivable that Japan would have sided with the US. After all, the proponents of the agreement were led by a weak MOE, a poorly developed EU partnership, under-resourced NGOs, and an opposition party with no hope of winning the Upper House elections of July 2001.

Japan’s decision to ratify cannot be explained by the balance of interests, bureaucratic positions, electoral politics, or foreign relations alone. Another key factor was necessary to tilt the outcome in the favor of the pro-Kyoto coalition. The decision of earlier LDP leaders to pursue global environmental leadership, reinforced by media discourse, public opinion, and bureaucratic actions, helped to build the Kyoto Protocol into a symbol of Japan’s new policy identity. In other words, embedded symbolism constrained the ability of anti-Kyoto forces to get their concerns onto the political agenda and limited the freedom of action of political leaders in the wake of the US withdrawal. The rallying effect of Kyoto essentially trumped the decision in favor of ratification. It allowed weaker actors to mobilize in the name of this national symbol, much as they had done at several earlier junctures when Japan’s commitment to addressing global warming had come into question. Had the international agreement borne the name of a city outside Japan, it is not at all certain that Japan’s policy leaders would have chosen to side with the EU rather than the US.

Second, did Japan’s ratification really signify a profound commitment to action? To answer this question, it is important to separate ratification from implementation. The battle for ratification was a binary choice between the EU and US positions. It was also a highly visible decision, one with tangible reputation stakes and multiple audiences. Implementation, on the other hand, is the outcome of countless lower-level battles, many of which are quite technical and
hidden from the public eye. Japan has taken incremental and primarily voluntary measures towards fulfilling its emission reduction goals. The outcome has been a middle-of-the-road soft implementation that positions Japan between the EU approach (focused on mandatory emissions trading) and the Canadian approach (no effective measures). The post-ratification battles over implementation have been more technical and less visible to the public. As a result, embedded symbolism has not been as much of a factor; in implementation decisions, industrial interests have had a stronger voice.

The remainder of this paper proceeds in four steps. Section one examines how interests, institutions, and ideas affected decision making. It underscores the limitations of an analysis purely rooted in interests and institutions. Section two looks at ideas and embedded symbols. Section three analyzes the empirical sequence leading to ratification. Section four contrasts ratification with the messier and less symbolic politics of implementation.

**Interests**

*Japanese Industry and the Ratification of Kyoto*

Japan is well-known for the power of its business interests (zaikai). Several factors enhance the voice of industry: the existence of a peak organization, Keidanren; the structural links to a stable long-term government party, the LDP; and the strong links to policy-making through the powerful METI. Industrial interests can thus be expressed through different routes: direct appeals to the public, policy inputs through government councils (shingikai), and lobbying of politicians in the conservative governing party.

Keidanren represents about four-fifths of Japanese manufacturers. In 1997, in the months leading up to the Kyoto Conference, Keidanren issued a Voluntary Action Plan for the Environment, which called upon its members to voluntarily cut back their greenhouse gas and other emissions. At its start, 36 industries, representing 137 firms and organizations agreed to develop plans to reduce their environmental footprint. In the area of climate change, this led to many corporations developing voluntary targets and timetables for greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Keidanren pursued voluntary actions in the hope of avoiding governmental regulations.

Sawa Akihiro and Kikukawa Jingo suggest that since the formation of the Kyoto Protocol, Japanese industry had shared the concerns of many US industries that developing countries were not obligated to take any measures to limit their own greenhouse gas emissions. As long as the US was in Kyoto, Japanese industry was somewhat shielded from the competitive pressures the agreement

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placed upon them. But once the US pulled out, many industries became nervous that something more than the voluntary measures they had already committed to would be required; momentum against Kyoto emerged.4

In considering the power of Kyoto symbolism, it is useful to consider just how costly a bargain Japan had committed itself to at Kyoto and how far off trajectory Japan was towards meeting its target at the time the Japanese leadership decided to ratify the treaty. In 2002, Japan’s CO₂ emissions were up 7.5 percent from 1990, meaning that emission cuts of 13.5 percent of 2002 levels would be necessary in a mere eight years, although the government evaluated the real gap as being closer to only 12.0 percent (+6 percent from 1990) given that temporary shut downs in the nuclear sector had driven emissions up in the previous years (Table 1).5

Given Japan’s relatively high energy efficiency and previously introduced voluntary emission reduction measures, it was clear to political and business leaders that making further cuts in emissions was not going to be easy. In terms of its per capita CO₂ emissions, Japan (9.3 tonnes per capita in 2000) was doing considerably better than the OECD average (11.3) and somewhat better than Germany (10.0). It was performing far better than the US (20.0) and Canada (16.8) although its emissions were still substantially above those of France

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(6.0), where nuclear energy accounts for approximately three-quarters of the country's electricity.\(^6\)

Armed with this knowledge, Japanese industry issued strong words of warning regarding the implications of Kyoto ratification in the absence of US and developing country participation.\(^7\) In 2005, when the Kyoto Protocol was coming into force those ideas had not changed. Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Nobuo Yamaguchi criticized the government for its "diplomatic failure" in allowing the US to withdraw from the agreement, putting Japan at a serious disadvantage vis-à-vis Europe.\(^8\)

Yet, industry was not able to speak in a single voice. In July 2001, the head of Keidanren, Takashi Imai, made his opinion clear that Japan could not afford to stay in Kyoto if the US stayed out.\(^9\) But at the same time, the chairman of the Japan Federation of Employers' Association (Nikkeiren, which in 2002 merged with Keidanren to form Nippon Keidanren) expressed the position that global climate change was a problem the industrialized world needed to tackle and that, therefore, the decision to ratify the bill was one that should be respected. The representative of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Douyukai) suggested that ratification was a positive step. The differences in these unions' positions largely reflected the industries they represented and the extent to which each depended on fossil fuels. Energy utilities and manufacturers that used large amounts of energy were concerned about what Kyoto's ratification would mean for their international competitiveness. In contrast, the nuclear industry saw in Kyoto a vehicle to justify the building of more nuclear power plants.\(^10\) The service industry and manufacturers of consumer goods had an interest in presenting an environmentally progressive image to consumers. They were also eager to prevent boycotts of their products by environmentally-conscious consumers in Japan and Europe as had already started to occur against some US companies.\(^11\)

Because of these divisions, Keidanren did not launch an all-out fight against ratification. Instead, it focused on two points: making sure, first, that Japan's diplomats worked on developing a framework that the US and developing countries could eventually become part of, and second, that industry would not be expected to carry the bulk of the responsibility of bringing emissions down.

Beyond this, it has been argued that Japan's eventual decision to ratify


\(^7\) Schreurs' interview with Ken Takeuchi, Asahi Shimbun journalist, 19 June 2006.

\(^8\) Foreign Press Center Japan, 17 February 2005. Available at http://www.fpcj.jp/e/mres/japanbrief/jb_2.html?PHPSESSID=512ff4f73aa946fc242dcb7b42357670.


\(^10\) Numerous discussions with METI officials dealing with nuclear power issues related to the Kyoto Protocol, including Schreurs' interviews in June 2006.

Kyoto was connected to its changing foreign economic and political interests. There is certainly awareness among Japanese industry that success in the European market can be enhanced by a strong environmental positioning (both in terms of image and technology). Moreover, Japan has shown a growing willingness to demonstrate independence from US foreign policy decisions, especially in relation to various environmental treaties. The empirical record shows that Japanese policy-making is becoming increasingly independent of the US and that Japan is siding more frequently with the EU on various foreign policy matters. Still, with both the EU and the US lobbying Japan, it is difficult to imagine that the EU’s pull would have been strong enough on its own to persuade Koizumi to choose ratification given that so many Japanese industries were complaining that the agreement would disadvantage Japan economically. Other factors need to be considered.

The Rise of Environmental NGOs and the Role of the Media

Nongovernmental organizations concerned with such issues as environment, natural disasters, and human rights have been on the rise in Japan since the early 1990s. The 1995 Hanshin earthquake, global climate change, and Japan’s expanded official development assistance programs have ushered in a new era of limited cooperation between NGOs and government. Breaking with the past confrontational relationship, at least some elements within the government—most notably the Environment Ministry and the Foreign Ministry—have come to accept NGOs as credible partners, information providers, and links to the public even though some skepticism of their approach and potential remains. NGOs, in turn, have developed greater expertise and ability to contribute in substantive (as opposed to simply ideological) ways to policy formulation. This rise of NGOs and their growing access to policy-making through involvement in summits, ministerial councils, and Diet testimonies represents a degree of transformation in Japan’s environmental policy-making.

One former NGO representative, Tetsuro Fukuyama, who participated as a member of Kiko Forum ‘97 in the run-up to the Kyoto Conference, later even became a member of the House of Councilors. He maintains a strong link to environmental NGOs.

Numerous NGOs such as Greenpeace Japan, Kiko (Climate) Forum, WWF, and Friends of the Earth, A SEED JAPAN, and Citizens’ Alliance for Saving the Atmosphere (CASA) repeatedly lobbied the government to ratify the agreement. In June 2001, thirteen Japanese NGOs organized the Stop Global Warming! Parade attended by 500 people in downtown Tokyo. They released a statement de-

12. Kawashima 2000; 2003; and Broadbent 2002. We are grateful for the insights of one anonymous reviewer on this matter.
manding “policymakers in the Japanese Diet and government, even without US participation, to stand firm and push ahead with the protocol.” 15 Several dozen representatives of the press covered the parade. 16 The Japanese press was in general very supportive of the NGOs’ activities and the Kyoto Protocol itself. 17 The Nikkei Weekly called the Kyoto Protocol’s ratification a “victory” for Japan’s NGOs. 18 This changed milieu helped provide some degree of counter balance to the dominance of economic interests. It is doubtful, however, given their relatively small size and numbers that NGOs on their own were strong enough to convince Koizumi of the importance of ratification.

**Institutions**

What about institutional factors? The Japanese administration is both broad in its regulatory reach and vertically entrenched. Environmental policy-making is both top-down and divided. 19 Climate change policy is complex because it involves so many actors and interests (e.g. energy, land use, transportation, construction). It is a classic case of a multi-functional shared policy arena. The MOFA is in charge of foreign relations, but is itself divided between its dominant North American bureau (prioritizing the US-Japan alliance) and its increasingly strong bureaus in charge of treaties and global issues. The MOE has a strong interest in climate change, but is weak relative to other ministries. METI is in charge of energy policy and most aspects of industrial policy. METI’s overall priority is industrial and economic competitiveness, although it also has a large interest in developing nuclear energy and new environmental technologies and its global environmental affairs bureau often champions environmental causes. On the whole, METI is opposed to punitive regulations on industry or to giving too much power to MOE. Moreover, at the time ratification was being debated the Cabinet office in charge of global warming (naikaku honbu) was led by a METI official on loan to the Cabinet (shukkosha). 20 On balance one would anticipate the stronger METI to win battles related to climate change matters over MOFA and MOE. Yet, at several junctures, including 1990, 1997, and 2001, this was not the case. Power politics alone fails to explain Japan’s decision in 1997 to agree to a 6 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions or its 2001 ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

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17. This was pointed out in interviews with newspaper journalists who suggested that the press was supportive of ratification.
During the 1997 negotiations, three main ministries were involved in determining what Japan’s negotiating position would be. The Environment Agency, basing its calculations on the work of researchers at the National Institute of Environmental Studies, argued that a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on the order of 7 to 8 percent by 2010 would be possible if an energy tax was introduced and renewable energies widely promoted. The MOFA came out with a proposal for a 6.8 percent reduction by 2010. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI, predecessor to METI) had a vastly different view, arguing that emissions in 2010 could at best be kept to 3 percent higher than they were in 1990. MOFA and the Environment Agency eventually agreed to shift their positions down to a 5 percent reduction target. MITI countered by moving its position to a flat stabilization goal. The deputy cabinet secretary also weighed in and gave his support to the 5 percent reduction target. To have done otherwise as host to the Kyoto Conference would have been problematic for Japan’s foreign relations and environmental leadership goals.21 This may also explain why Japan agreed in the end to go even further and accept a 6 percent reduction goal.

The same ministerial battle lines have remained to this day. On ratification as well as most implementation battles, the MOE pushes for pro-Kyoto policies, METI puts on the brakes in the name of competitiveness, and MOFA oscillates between its interests in advancing Japan’s global image and its primary commitment to the US-Japan alliance.

A second underlying institutional lens relates to changed party competition in the wake of the fragmentation of the LDP in 1993, its 10-month long loss of power, and the electoral reforms of 1994. The electoral reforms changed the system from a system of single non-transferable votes in multi-member districts to a mixed system of first-past-the-post votes in single member districts (300 seats) and proportional representation in several large districts (initially 200 seats, but changed to 180 after 2000) for the Lower House, which selects the prime minister. The new system, it was hoped, would lead to issue-based competition and to a United Kingdom-style party system characterized by an alternation in power between two major parties. This has yet to happen; the combination of single-member districts and proportional representation seats ended up approximating the situation under the old system and blurring incentives. Counter-intuitively, the LDP’s grip on power remains strong in the Lower House.

Nevertheless, the incentives of individual backbenchers have changed. To ensure reelection, Diet members must gain the support not just of favored interest groups, but also a large enough portion of the general public. They increasingly make alliances with civil society groups.

The shock of losing power in 1993 and the arrival of coalition politics helped to transform the LDP’s mind frame and created opportunities for legisla-

tive innovation. The LDP has had to acquiesce to some of the projects presented by coalition partners, especially New Komeito, its partner in government since 1999. The Buddhist party, which expresses a stronger concern for social and environmental issues than other parties, has pressured the LDP on climate change at several junctures. On July 12, 2001, New Komeito formally sided with opposition parties in the Diet urging the government to commit to ratification. \[22\]

It is also significant that the LDP lost its Upper House majority in 1989. After a particularly shattering defeat in July 1998, the LDP was forced to rely even more heavily on coalition partners. The ensuing sense of vulnerability has made the party’s leadership more open to tactical reforms that have the possibility to bring electoral gains.

This fluid context of changed electoral incentives and party dynamics is not sufficient to explain the decisions of 2001–2002, but forms a new political environment that is more fertile to political entrepreneurship. Indeed, despite changing incentives, the LDP remains divided between coalitions of politicians associated with particular interests. Within the LDP, the environmental coalition (kankyo zoku) remains a minority one; links with Keidanren and economic interests remain dominant. For leaders, however, the calculus is different. Breaking coalitional stalemates and arbitrating in favor of Kyoto can be a long-term strategic move for either a party leader in search of new urban voters, or for more junior politicians attempting to build their reputations.

**Ideas and the Power of Embedded Symbolism**

Domestic and foreign policy-making are usually understood to be either the outcome of pragmatic decisions in response to pressing problems or of clashing interests, party politics, and institutional structures. Yet, ideas can wield a powerful influence on policy outcomes, especially when they become embedded in public and political discourse as symbols that resonate.

There are countless ideas in the world; only a small number ever obtain the attention of the public or policy makers and make it to the policy agenda. It is even a smaller subset that take on such significance that they gain the status of a symbol. We argue that the Kyoto Protocol took on such significance. It became a symbol of the pressing problem of global climate change and Japan’s bid to be a larger foreign policy player and a leader in global environmental protection.

Ideas can be introduced into the political process through multiple channels. Policy change can be incremental, in response to knowledge that changes slowly over time, or more abrupt. In John Kingdon’s classic analysis of agenda-setting, issues rise to the agenda when windows of opportunity open allowing particular problem definitions, policy ideas, and political realities (the three policy streams) to couple. For Kingdon, this convergence usually involves a po-

itical entrepreneur who steers the process of agenda-setting. Political entrepreneurs can be thought of as individuals or organizations who sponsor particular policy ideas and, or problem definitions. While the policy-making process is often thought about as a search for a solution to a problem, it can also be the case that policy entrepreneurs are searching for problems to which they can attach policy solutions they have long championed.

Not all policy ideas have equal symbolic potential. For an idea to rise to the status of a symbol, it must not only make it to the policy agenda, it must also take on a larger political significance, become ingrained in public and political dialogue, and play the function of a focal point around which expectations converge. This does not usually happen on its own. Rather, specific individuals, groups, or organizations work to make such associations and to turn an idea into a symbol.

While ideas come and go, symbols typically have longer staying power. They become embedded as ideas that are associated with larger matters, such as a national identity or priorities, and can be supported by public opinion. Symbols can attract new supporters and empower weaker societal interests, such as civil society groups, who can latch onto them and use them to lend support to their own policy objectives.

While symbols can be empowering, they can also be constraining. They can exert influence even after their initial creators no longer wield strong political power. Thus, even when there is a shift in the underlying balance of power among interest groups, the political agenda can remain constrained by the presence of the symbol. The balance of political power ebbs and flows; embedded symbols, on the other hand, have a longer political time horizon and can constrain the agenda of future governments.

Deborah Stone defines a symbol as “anything that stands for something else. Its meaning depends on how people interpret it, use it, or respond to it.” When an issue, such as the Kyoto Protocol, becomes a symbol of other things—like global warming, foreign policy prominence, and political leadership—it becomes imbued with larger meanings. This raises the stakes in political confrontations. Because symbols can have so much influence on policy outcomes, political actors have a strong interest in trying to shape how people understand them. Often a group of powerful actors forms around the symbol, and works to attach certain definitions to it. They form a kind of “policy monopoly” as they are the ones who are in a position to influence which concepts are associated with the symbol (Kyoto as a symbol of Japanese leadership in tackling a major global problem as opposed to as a symbol of costly economic cutbacks). Opponents can find it extremely difficult and costly to enter the fray, and as a result may have little ability to change the meanings tied to the symbol.

The Kyoto Protocol as a Symbol

There were numerous actors who had an interest in defining the Kyoto Protocol as more than simply an international agreement. Well before the protocol was even being discussed, LDP power-broker and former Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita backed the notion of acting on climate change. For Takeshita, who had been tainted by political scandal, it was a way to reinvent his own image as a green and clean politician and to make the LDP a more modern party, in the way Margaret Thatcher, George H. W. Bush, and Mikhail Gorbachev had tried to do in their own countries. Thus, in 1990, after initially hesitating to act, Japan announced a voluntary target for the stabilization of CO₂ emissions at 1990 levels by 2000. And in 1992, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Japan signed the UNFCCC and pledged to provide between 900 billion and 1 trillion yen over five years in environmental overseas development assistance. Takeshita also was instrumental in putting climate change onto the agenda of his successor as head to a powerful political faction of the LDP and eventual prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto. This was vastly important as Hashimoto was in power at the time the protocol was negotiated. For the Environment Agency, the backing that came from Takeshita and later Hashimoto made it possible to win support for ideas MITI/METI were not behind, including the voluntary emissions reduction target in 1990 and the 6 percent reduction target negotiated at Kyoto. Hashimoto was also among a group of Diet members (24 from the House of Representatives and 11 from the House of Councilors), all members of GLOBE, Japan (Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment) who signed a letter dated April 4, 2001 to President Bush urging the US to cooperate in addressing global warming.

There were other actors who saw in climate change a means of pursuing other agendas as well. For MOFA, it was an issue area where Japan’s voice could be projected and heard abroad as an essential component of the country’s global “soft power.” A proactive climate change policy allowed the government to present a leadership role in an issue area of global significance, mitigate the intense economic competition of the early 1990s, and construct a new national identity centered on the concept of sustainable development.

MITI/METI decided to join the band-wagon as well, establishing an office to address global warming. For Japanese industry, which had considerable experience with pollution control and energy efficiency improvements, making link-

ages to the climate change issue made some sense. It could be a way to improve
the image of corporate Japan, which had long been attacked for paying insuf-
ficient attention to matters of global corporate responsibility, at the same time
that it could open up new business markets. For the embattled nuclear industry,
climate change arguments could be used to support the building of more nu-
clear power plants. The important thing for METI and Japanese industry was to
make sure that the international playing field remained level. Climate change
policy became enmeshed in an array of different policy agendas.

For Japan, the successful negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol became a pow-
erful symbol. Kyoto came to represent Japan’s new global leadership, the
reinvention of its international image, and the transformation of domestic polit-
ics away from a pure battle of interests.

Strong public opinion was a critical factor as well. While for some months
after the US pulled out of Kyoto, the country’s leadership appeared to be wav-
ering on the question of ratification, public opinion would not have allowed Ja-
pan to walk away from the agreement.31

The Japanese public has shown consistent interest over time for the envi-
ronment and climate change. As early as 1987, an opinion poll conducted by
the prime minister’s cabinet office found 74 percent of respondents concerned
about climate change (32 percent were very worried and another 42 percent
somewhat worried). Polls conducted a decade later in 1998 and again in 2001,
found an even higher 82 percent of respondents concerned about climate
change.32 A February 2002 government poll showed that 49.8 percent of respon-
dents wanted Japan to take the lead in ratifying Kyoto, even if the US was not
going to ratify. Another 26.4 percent supported ratification, although only on
condition of the US also ratifying. Only 9.3 percent opposed ratification en-
tirely, because of the economic burden it would impose.33 In response to the
question: “should Japan strengthen its climate change diplomacy, for example by
continuing its strict adhesion to the Kyoto framework?” that appeared in a 2004
Yomiuri Shinbun poll, 71.6% of those polled responded yes.34

While public concern with climate change was high, it appears to have
been the symbol of Kyoto, rather than the protocol itself that the public was re-
sponding to. The July 2001 poll noted above found that while 67.2 percent of
respondents expressed awareness of the Kyoto Protocol, 47.4 percent said they
were only familiar with the word and not the content of the agreement.35 The
symbolism of Kyoto appears to have been sufficient to win public support for

32. Inoue Takashi, “Yoronchosa ni Miru Chikyu Ondanka no Henyouchi,” Mitsubishi Research Institute
0821IT.html.
35. Naikakufu Daijin Kanbo Seifu Koho shitsu, “Chikyu Ondanka Boshi ni Kansuru Raifu Sutairu
ni Kansuru Yoronchosa,” July 2001. Available at http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h13/h13-
donka/index.html.
ratification, regardless of the public’s limited knowledge about the details of the protocol.

The Battle over Ratification in 2001: Interests, Entrenched Symbolism, and Political Reinforcement

Japan’s immediate reaction to the Bush administration’s March 28 announcement that the US would no longer participate in Kyoto was one of surprise, dismay, and in some cases, anger. On March 30 Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori sent a letter to President Bush expressing his deep concern about the effect this would have on the international negotiations and urging the US to work with Japan to ensure the entry into force of the agreement. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda announced that same day, “What the Japanese government must do is to continue to call on the United States (to ratify the treaty), and keep up diplomatic efforts to ensure the Kyoto Protocol will take effect.”

On April 9, Environment Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi, having just met with a group of EU delegates, made a formal statement comprising five major points. First, he stated that the EU and Japan share a common concern regarding the US pronouncement. Second, climate change is urgent and the developed countries have a responsibility to act first. Third, the protocol contains tools that would enable cost-effective reduction of emissions and create economic opportunities. Fourth, Japan and the EU remain committed to the entry-into-force of the Kyoto Protocol by 2002. Lastly, US participation is extremely important, and therefore, both Japan and the EU will urge the US to reconsider its position. Kawaguchi had some harsh words for Washington, calling its action, “inward-looking as it only pays attention to its own domestic economy” and blind to the “needs of the next generation.” In the following week, she traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with Environmental Protection Administrator, Christine Todd Whitman, a trip she was to repeat several months later.

The Diet was also set in motion. One of the strongest indicators of the symbolic importance that the Kyoto Protocol had taken on was the complete support it received in both houses of the Diet. Both the House of Councillors (April 18) and the House of Representatives (April 19) unanimously passed very similarly worded resolutions calling for the US to reenter the negotiations and for the Japanese government to “ratify the Kyoto Protocol early, and inter-

nationally, take a leadership for the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol in the year 2002."\textsuperscript{41} It seems as if the dice was cast early on for ratification. The embedded symbolism of Kyoto had shaped political reactions. No politicians dared to speak out against Kyoto in the way their American counterparts did or to even abstain from voting on the resolution. Politicians found themselves constrained by the symbolic status of Kyoto. They could not take positions based purely on economic interests or the US-Japan relationship.

With so many indications that Japan was set on ratification, why then did so many European, American, and even Japanese observers believe that Japan might join the US in abandoning the protocol? Why did European leaders feel it necessary to lobby Japan so hard?\textsuperscript{42}

On May 24, 2001 EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom stated that the EU would step up cooperation with Japan. She expressed concern that, "It could be difficult for some of those traditionally tied very close to the United States to actually take sides against the United States."\textsuperscript{43} Dutch Environment Minister, Jan Pronk, who was slated to be the chair of the June Bonn Conference (Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP) 6, Part II), even felt it necessary to travel to Narita Airport to meet with Kawaguchi for a few hours and find out what it would take to keep Japan in Kyoto.\textsuperscript{44} Was Japan really behind Kyoto? Was Japan willing to take a stance independent of the US?

On April 24, the LDP elected a new president: Jun’ichiro Koizumi. Koizumi was popular, combative, and a reformer who wanted to shake up the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{45} Koizumi did not have the reputation of being a politician with much of an interest in climate change. In fact, after a group of six NGOs succeeded in winning a 15-minute audience with him on May 31, 2001, they came out of the meeting with the impression that Koizumi was basically leaving the matter of Kyoto to Environment Minister Kawaguchi.\textsuperscript{46}

Yet, climate change was one of the biggest foreign policy issues confronting Japan. Would Koizumi follow the political current and choose for ratification or would he succumb to pressure from the US and the interests of fossil-fuel consuming industries?

On June 30, Koizumi met with President Bush at Camp David; he left many with the impression that he was unwilling to proceed without US participation. He stated that Japan wanted to work "together with the European Union and the world in collaboration with the United States in dealing with global

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} House of Representatives, Japan, 2001. See also House of Councillors, Japan, 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Fisher 2004, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} This idea was suggested by Asahi Shimbun reporter, Toru Ishii, in an interview. Tokyo, Japan, 19 June 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Japan Center for Climate Change Action, "Kankyo NGO, Koizumi Shusho ni Kyoto Giteisho Hakko ni Muketari Riidaashippu o Chokusetsu Yousei." 31 May 2001.
\end{itemize}
“warming” and “that it would be more effective if Japan and the United States were to work closely with one another and that the world would benefit as a result.” Koizumi offered to initiate high-level Japan-US government-to-government consultations on Kyoto. In a post-summit press conference, Koizumi stated “that Japan was willing to work until the last minute to rally support for the treaty, but that, in the end, it would not proceed without the United States.” The US was emboldened by Koizumi’s remarks, having read them to mean that Japan shared its negative view on Kyoto. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said on July 1 that the protocol appeared to be dead and that the US would continue to push alternative plans for increased research and voluntary approaches. He went on to say that he was “glad to see Japan joining us in taking that position.” The called Koizumi’s statements on the Kyoto Protocol “as changeable as the weather.”

The Koizumi administration’s ambiguous statements elicited strong reactions domestically. New Komeito urged Koizumi to ratify even if efforts to bring the US back into the agreement failed. Japan Communist Party leader, Kazuo Shii, stated that Koizumi should let Washington know it is breaking an international treaty and urge it to return to the agreement. The Social Democratic Party’s Takako Doi criticized Koizumi’s response as “an example of weak-kneed diplomacy.” Yukio Hatoyama, leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, charged that Japan’s attitude might lead to speculation that Tokyo wants to lower the targets after being pressured by business groups. Even members of Koizumi’s own party, like Kenichi Mizuno, the vice-president of the environment division within the LDP since 2001 and parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs in 2001–2 was pressuring Koizumi to act.

Jennifer Morgan, climate change program director at World Wildlife Fund International, summed up the situation in a 2001 interview:

I think Koizumi’s uncertain and ambiguous statements demonstrate what a difficult decision this is for Japan and how much rides on their decision. They are the ones who can bring this protocol into force. Their name’s on it, and he’s under a lot of domestic pressure to move forward. But, internationally, his key allies are split. . . . The cultural situation comes in on two fronts. The first is that this is the Kyoto Protocol, . . . the only international agreement with the name of a Japanese city on it. And that’s something that the

Japanese have pledged to fulfill. And their honor in pledging that I think plays a major role in them wanting to stick with it. But then you have a situation where making a decision to necessarily choose between two allies is very difficult—to lose face with one or the other.\(^5^4\)

Koizumi may have been playing a more shrewd political game than his critics realized. He was involved in a two-front diplomacy, working to appease conflicting domestic interests and foreign allies. Given the symbolic power of Kyoto and supportive public opinion, it would have been difficult for Koizumi to abandon the agreement. As noted above, under Koizumi’s predecessor, Mori, and with the unanimous resolutions of both houses of the Diet, Japan had already signaled its intentions to ratify. As Yoshitomo Tamaki, Director of the Environment and Ocean Division Policy Bureau in the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport summed it up: Japan ratified the Kyoto Protocol because Japan had hosted (chaired) the COP where the Kyoto Protocol was drawn up. To have withdrawn support for the Kyoto Protocol would have meant losing face. There was broad consensus in Japan on this point.\(^5^5\)

Yet, had Koizumi been as immediately supportive of Kyoto as Mori was, he would have weakened Japan’s hand at the international negotiating table. This may explain Koizumi’s ambiguity on the question of ratification. He showed willingness to cooperate with both the EU and the US, without letting either side know for sure where he stood. The EU needed Japan if the Kyoto Protocol was to survive. By arguing that Japan was uncomfortable with moving forward without the US (which was, in fact, the reality of the situation), Koizumi was creating a situation where Japan would be able to extract many concessions from the EU that it had been unable to achieve in earlier negotiating rounds. These concessions were couched in the COP 6, part II and COP 7 negotiations as conditions that would be needed to keep the door open for a possible US return to the agreement. They were concessions that would also appease, to at least some extent, domestic opponents.

The sixth COP to the UNFCCC was reconvened in Bonn in late July 2001. Going into the meeting, METI Minister Takeo Hiranuma, eager to protect business interests, argued that it was necessary to make the protocol more “flexible” and to revisit the agreement to prevent the US from drifting away.\(^5^6\) MOE officials countered that if Japan became too flexible, the Kyoto Protocol’s effectiveness would be greatly reduced.

Whereas the EU had long argued that there should be strict limitations on how much of a country’s emission reduction target could be achieved through use of the flexibility mechanisms or offsets in the form of carbon-sequestering sinks (forests and other carbon absorbing land uses), at Bonn the EU agreed to

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Japan’s demands that countries be allowed to rely heavily on these instruments. The EU also agreed to drop the idea of including punitive measures for countries that failed to meet their emission reduction goals. The one major concession that Japan was unable to win was including nuclear energy under the clean development mechanism. The concessions that Japan won were seen as crucial if Japan were to have a chance at fulfilling its Kyoto obligations. They were also viewed as necessary if there were to be any chance of wooing the US back into the agreement.

Having achieved most of what it had demanded in the negotiations, on November 11, 2001, Koizumi indicated in a Diet question and answer session that Japan would ratify Kyoto. He delegated to MOE Minister Kawaguchi the responsibility for drafting an implementation plan, and asked industry to appreciate the importance of protecting the environment. In his February 5, 2002 Policy Speech to the Diet, Koizumi stated:

> The issue of global warming requires an urgent response and I will aim to see that this session of the Diet approves the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and provides for the necessary domestic legislation.

The actual ratification process was quick. The bill was introduced in the Lower House on May 10 and passed on May 17, 2002. The significance of Japan’s move was great, demonstrating its willingness to side with the EU’s precautionary approach to global policies and politics over the more realist, and—some might argue—ideological, US position.

### Implementation Measures and Competing Policy Interests

The power of embedded symbolism propelled the ratification process forward. It has not played an equally powerful role in relation to domestic policy implementation. Instead, interests and institutions have been able to exert considerable influence on the shape of policy. Japanese policies have focused on voluntary action and avoided carbon taxes or a mandatory cap and trade system. This suggests the influence that industry has been able to wield over the kinds of implementation measures that have been adopted. Implementation often deals with more specific questions and technical matters that can be harder for the public, the media, and even NGOs to understand, and thus, address.

The Japanese government has introduced global warming legislation, amendments, and action plans in 1998, 2002, and 2005. They all build on the idea of voluntary action as has been pushed by Keidanren since at least 1997.

58. *Japan Times*. Available at [http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/np20020205b7.html](http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/np20020205b7.html).
Once the government decided to ratify Kyoto, there was a fierce inter-ministerial struggle over the establishment of sector specific targets as part of a Guideline for Measures to Prevent Global Warming. Significantly, the focus of the guideline was on technology development, citizen efforts and the prioritization of climate change projects as part of ODA; it was not on regulations. In May 2002, the Diet formally passed the amended Law Concerning the Promotion of Measures to Cope with Global Warming. By and large, this followed the March guidelines although economic incentives were also introduced, such as reduced tax rates for fuel-efficient automobiles and some further measures, such as mandating energy conservation measures in new buildings and that all government vehicles be low-emission types by 2004.

Because the legislation avoided compulsory measures, it was criticized in press editorials and by the opposition for falling short of needed action. Yet, to date, the environmental and opposition voices have not succeeded in pushing through stricter measures. Heavy lobbying by industry prevented the inclusion of economic instruments (e.g. carbon taxes) that had been promoted by the MOE. Instead, the plan relied on boosting nuclear power by 30 percent (with 13 new reactors by 2012), heavy use of forest sinks, and introduction of Kyoto flexibility mechanisms post-2008.

In April 2005, the government did adopt the Kyoto Protocol Target Achievement Plan because it was clear that with the measures in place at the time, Japan would not be able to meet its target. Still, even with this plan, basic policy directions remained unchanged from the 2002 plan.

Another innovative component of the 2005 action plan was the launch of the summer “Cool-Biz” campaign, heavily advertised by Koizumi and MOE Minister Koike. This campaign requested all working men to shed jackets and ties from June to September. Ministers and government officials were ordered to lead by example. Offices were then requested to set the temperature of air conditioners to 28°C (82°F) and government offices were to cut use of air conditioners in the evening. While the plan is certainly interesting, it is looked at by many in the environmental community as a divergence from taking the real kinds of measures the country will have to take to meet its goal. In the implementation phase, the power of symbolism was no longer strongly at play. Rather, the interests of powerful economic actors and ministries were more clearly visible.

64. The 2005 results showed that 50 percent of all working men followed the requests and another 25 percent shed either coat or tie. An interesting side effect of this campaign was the stimulation of new fashion trends and of retail sales for clothing. See Japan Times, 2 June 2006. Available at http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20060602a8.html.
65. Schreurs’ discussions with members of Japan’s Rainbow and Green Network, Summer 2006.
Japan is also hedging its bets by cooperating with the US in the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development. Baumgartner and Jones might call this “venue shopping.” This so-called Kyoto alternative was introduced by the US in July 2005. The partnership brings together the US, Australia, India, China, South Korea, and Japan. Of the six, only Japan is an Annex 1 Kyoto ratiﬁer. The loose partnership emphasizes technology transfers rather than ﬁxed targets and caps. Japan’s decision to join the group was criticized by the EU and domestic opponents but was apparently a cabinet decision that was made to acquiesce to pressures applied by METI and MOFA. For METI, the Asia Paciﬁc Partnership is a way to involve the US in climate change policy. METI argues that the partnership is complementary to Kyoto, does not weaken it, and is better suited to combating climate change because it puts the private sector on the frontline instead of government bureaucrats. As for MOFA, it was probably a way for the North America bureau to reemphasize the primacy of the US-Japan alliance. For Koizumi any political costs to joining the Asia Paciﬁc Partnership were minimal. Thus, while having ratiﬁed the Kyoto Protocol—as necessitated by the symbolic power of the agreement—the LDP and the powerful METI and MOFA have continued to search for other policy alternatives that powerful domestic interests and Japan’s most important ally, the US, are willing to accept and support.

Conclusion

Whether or not Koizumi and his cabinet ever seriously considered abandoning Kyoto is unclear. What is clear is that they recognized that the Kyoto Protocol was imbued with symbolism. What elevated Kyoto to the level of a powerful political symbol was the convergence of several factors: the initial political choices of the LDP’s most prominent politicians (Takeshita and Hashimoto) to place their political capital on this issue and to link their party’s fortunes, at least in part, to an activist environmental foreign policy; the linking of other policy goals to the Kyoto Protocol; the importance of the agreement’s Japanese name; the gradual crystallization of public opinion around this politically-constructed symbol; and the formation of a network of NGOs who although weak were aided by a media that was willing to tell their side of the story.

The Kyoto Protocol was negotiated in an intense and heated conference that took place over the course of 12 days in December 1997. So important was the success of this agreement that Japan’s negotiators agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by levels the powerful MITI had said would be too costly. Five years later, when the US retreated from the agreement, Japan’s leadership deter-

68. Tiberghien’s interview with METI oﬃcial, February 2006.
69. This point was made repeatedly in interviews and discussions held by Schreurs in summer 2006 with individuals holding government, academic, and environmental positions in Japan.
70. See, for example, Kawashima 2000; and Shimada 2003.
mined that ratification was in their best political interest. Prior to ratifying, however, they managed to reshape the agreement to make implementation somewhat less burdensome.

While Keidanren was largely opposed to ratification, for most actors, Japan was already on the path towards ratification well before the US withdrawal. While there were certainly many politicians who knew little about the agreement or had doubts about it, they were not vocal in their opposition in the way that some US members of Congress were; Senator and former Chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee James Inhofe called “man-made global warming the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.” Japanese politicians were well aware that environmental interests had become important to the electorate and that the media had taken a largely supportive stance. Most Diet members presumably did not have a good understanding of what the Kyoto Protocol would mean for the economy; they simply saw it as a symbol of a strong foreign policy. While it looked to the outside world like Japan might not ratify, to most Japanese observers, this was not a question. Instead, the real battle was one over the shape that the agreement would take and how strong a card Japan would be able to play in international negotiations.

What is also clear is that once the agreement had been ratified and attention shifted to the important question of implementation, interest group politics became more dominant. There has been limited political leadership when it comes to pushing through the kind of hard measures that will be needed to achieve Japan’s target. Although Japan moved forward on Kyoto without the US, Japan has continued to engage with the US on the matter of climate change. Japan is keeping its own options open in this way as international attention shifts to the post-Kyoto period.

References


71. Schreurs’ interview with Mitsuko Tomon, Social Democratic Party Diet member (Lower House) at the time of the Kyoto Protocol’s ratification, Okinawa, Japan, July 2006.


73. Takamura and Yasuko 2005; and Kanie 2003.


