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Environmental Politics in Japan: The Case of Wildlife Preservation

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Abstract (summary)

Japan has successfully controlled domestic pollution problems and made far-ranging advances in energy efficiency, while at the same time it has been labelled an "environmental predator" due to its trading in and heavy use of endangered wildlife products (such as blue fin tuna, ivory and hawksbill turtle shells), import of rainforest timber, support for whaling and the killing of dolphins, and use of driftnet fishing. Danaher finds evidence that the Iron Triangle of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), insulated central government bureaucrats, and large businesses and corporations is very much intact and has out-manoeuvred supporters of wildlife preservation (World Wildlife Fund Japan, Wild Bird Society of Japan, and so forth) and the fledgling Ministry of the Environment.

Full Text

MIKE DANAHER. *Environmental Politics in Japan: The Case of Wildlife Preservation*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2008. 379 pp. US\$122.00, paper.

In 2009, Richard O'Barry documented the capture and slaughter of bottlenose dolphins in Taiji, Japan; his award-winning documentary *The Cove* used hidden, camouflaged cameras to uncover what he argued was a secret kept even from many Japanese citizens. This book - a slightly reworked version of the author's 2004 PhD dissertation for Griffith University - seeks to untangle a related environmental paradox. Japan has successfully controlled domestic pollution problems and made far-ranging advances in energy efficiency, while at the same time it has been labelled an "environmental predator" due to its trading in and heavy use of endangered wildlife products (such as blue fin tuna, ivory and hawksbill turtle shells), import of rainforest timber, support for whaling and the killing of dolphins, and use of driftnet fishing. That is, Japan has an excellent record in many areas related to the environment, but a very poor one in wildlife preservation. Why hasn't Japan been able to accede on a wide range of environmental concerns, especially given international pressure on issues such as whaling, ivory, and the preservation of wildlife habitats?

Through an investigation of Japan's participation in two international regimes - the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Ramsar Convention - Danaher tests arguments initially made by Frances Rosenbluth (1989) in the field of financial politics about the need for powerful domestic lobbies in order to catalyse international pressure. He argues that the core reason for Japan's poor record in wildlife preservation rests in the marginalisation of environmental nongovernmental organisations (ENGOS) and pro-environmental government agencies from the policy-making process. Danaher finds evidence that the Iron Triangle of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), insulated central government bureaucrats, and large businesses and corporations is very much intact and has out-manoeuvred supporters of wildlife preservation (World Wildlife Fund Japan, Wild Bird Society of Japan, and so forth) and the fledgling Ministry of the Environment. "Both conservative politicians and business leaders were moving to pre-empt any further public dissatisfaction and protest at the international and domestic levels toward their records on environmental issues" (p. 63). The power elite has successfully framed much of the discussion about the environment in terms of resource use, and this has hamstrung the work of activists who envision wildlife and habitats as having broader psychological, cultural and personal value. Invoking Robert Putnam's theory of two-level games, Danaher sees Japanese negotiators as simultaneously handling domestic and international pressures, and follows the work of Leonard Schoppa who, like Rosenbluth, emphasised the need for domestic audience pressure in order for foreign pressure (*gaiatsu*) to be effective.

For scholars seeking a historical overview of environmental policy-making, the book has some able summaries of 40 years of activities by the government, along with rich details on the activities of Japanese NGOs in these international environmental regimes. Danaher's description of the weaknesses of these NGOs until the late 1990s meshes well with previous research by scholars such as Robert Pekkanen. However, newer research by Kim Reimann (2006) suggests that the strength of NGOs in Japan needs to be re-evaluated due to new norms and institutional structures that have expanded their reach. Furthermore, with the rise of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in recent elections, future research may find more room for environmentally-focused lobbying in Kasumigaseki and Nagatachô (the areas of Tokyo where bureaucrats and politicians are most concentrated).

Much of the original data on which Danaher bases his arguments comes from interviews in the late 1990s with the staff of four environmental NGOs, along with other Japanese actors such as civil servants; it would have been helpful to know exactly how many interviews were conducted over the course of the project. I would also have liked to hear more about case selection; the author recognises the potentially tremendous gap between efforts at global environmental protection and stewardship of local, domestic environments (p. 342), but says little more about the use of two international regimes as a lens for study.

Regrettably, due to the high price of this book, I cannot recommend its purchase or use in classrooms. However, scholars interested in benefiting from Danaher's intensive case studies could access the original dissertation. Danaher's work on state-civil society interaction meshes well with new research by Simon Avenell (2010) and provides more evidence for the importance of approaching Japanese politics with an eye towards institutions, interests and

ideas, and not merely culture.

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