

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: JAPAN AS A LEADER ON INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS?

This research mainly studies ‘the role of Japan towards environmental issues’ with the objective of studying the distinguished role of Japan and analyzing her potential and efforts towards environmental issues, in particular of the area of waste management, in order to gain a position as an international environmental leadership. The initiative role, cooperative role as well as environmental assistance of Japan at the international level are the focus of the research can be concluded as the below-mentioned.

At present, the government of Japan has highly regarded the environmental issues as one of the priority of concerns for her domestic and foreign policies. The active response and foresight of Japan have been considerable and appeared since the post-Cold War period. International efforts of Japan towards the global environment problems in international affairs have been strengthened. The government of Japan has sought leadership regarding environmental issues. There are motivations behind Japan’s interests in the area of environment in order to assert herself as the leadership in the international community. The strong desire and eagerness of Japan to exert the leadership role towards environmental issue at the international level can be explained by the realism theory. Realists believed in motivations and desires behind actors’ behavior.¹ National interest of states is normatively strong. The basic idea regarding national interests are the top priority of concern for state survival emphasizing that all states have strong perceptions of national interests and political preferences in order to obtain a greater power and ultimately become a powerful state in the international arena. They use of power to fulfill their own national interest. According to realists, reputation may also have instrumental value in the pursuit of power or gain.² Japanese policy responses to international environmental issues are motivated by her national

¹ Matthew Paterson, *Global Warming and Global Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 120.

² Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *International Economy: Introduction to International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 68-80.

interest. In the beginning of the industrial era increased awareness about environmental degradation in the international community and the foreign pressure are the key motivations pushing Japan to improve her response towards environmental issue through pollution reduction. At the same time, the government of Japan realized her own global responsibility in order to assume the greater role in the international community. In the aftermath of the Cold War, Japan has changed her interest to actively participate in the area of environment domestically and internationally. The government of Japan would like to rectify her environmental image and bad reputation from negative international perceptions in the past. Especially the former Prime Minister Takeshita administration, the global environmental issue was a new priority that the government of Japan really wished to involve and enhance her national pride and broaden her leadership. It is said that Japanese leaders tried to make the national interest the world's interest. The government of Japan has sought to increase Japan's status questing for internationalization as the country's national interest. Japan has been interested in playing a greater international role and standing on the considerable stature. International credit and prestige are the aspirations that Japan strongly desires to achieve. The rise of global environmental concerns is one of the important factors for Japan's contribution to the world. Environmental movement has become a new positive direction of Japan responding to the international community. Japan can make a positive stance on major international issues to show more responsibility. Today environmental problems are critical, universal and require urgent international responses. In this regard, the government of Japan has realized that coping with environmental issues serve Japan's aspiration for an international role in the international community. The successful experience of waste management and recycling at home is the main driving force behind her movement. According to Morgenthau, international politics is a struggle for power.³ Japan has had a strong intention to emerge as a leading country since war time and sought for an alternative channel for international contribution as well as foreign policy and power exertion in

³ Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, "Realism," in *The Globalization of World Politics*, eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 142-143.

line with global issues. Demonstrating a significant role on environmental issues to assume more responsibility, Japan will also gain the international prestige, the influence and acceptance as the potential leadership on environmental involvement in the international community.

The significance and potential role of Japan in this research is examined regarding the waste management issue. The domestic experience and collaboration of Japan to cope with the issue of waste treatment has been very successful as a result of the policy implementation with collaboration of all stakeholders. Japan's experience with the 3Rs Policy is a priority to ensure proper waste treatment nationwide at all levels. The national and local governments of Japan have disseminated the 3Rs policy, environmental information and promoted environmental concerns, through Japan's white paper and campaigns, to children, citizens and business sector in order to enhance Japanese public awareness and understanding. For example, in Japan, environmental education and recycling activities have been stressed significantly in the school system with the aim of raising environmental awareness and consciousness significantly for children for long-term development. Furthermore, cooperation at the community and household level is a key success of Japan to handle with the problem of waste at the domestic level. Japanese people in local communities have taken a significant role cooperating the recycling activities and creating special campaigns, such as Yokohama G30 Plan in Yokohama City and My Bag Campaign in Hino City, in their local communities in order to reduce the volume of waste. Cooperation of business and industrial sectors is one of the important efforts to cope with the problem of waste. In business sector, the Zero Emission Concept, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Voluntary Environmental Programme and Eco-Community project have been stressed to urge companies to share their responsibilities.

Japanese legislation regarding waste-related issues has become one of the world's most advanced systems.⁴ The Japanese systems are not perfect, but a large majority of people do follow the law and are willing to cooperate with the central and local governments including local communities. Japanese people agree with their

⁴ Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan, "Toward a Sustainable Asia Based on the 3Rs," www.meti.go.jp/policy/recycle/main/english/council/reports/report_sustainableasia_en.pdf.

government's policy and response towards environment as a priority issue. For instance, Japanese people agreed to share their responsibilities to pay the collection and recycling fee when they discard the home appliances in accordance with the Home Appliance Recycling Law. They are willing to become involved and cooperate closely with the environmental laws, measures and campaigns. The success of domestic experience the promotion of the 3Rs with close collaboration of all stakeholders towards waste management is a great opportunity and potentially pushing Japan to stand on the fore front on this matter. Japanese citizens are satisfied with the role of Japanese government and policy implementation on waste treatment. In addition, they think that Japan can be a leadership in this field enhancing environmental awareness and concern internationally.⁵

The government of Japan has been determined to take important consideration on environmental issues both national and international level with a great effort to affirm the leadership role internationally and to find solutions to environmental problems. The successful domestic waste treatment of Japan is at a significant step and potential move to play the leadership role and effort in the international community. The Japanese government has shown her real intention of becoming a leading environmental nation at the international level since the post-Cold War period. Regarding the issue of waste management, the government of Japan has made an effort and an active role of bringing the proposal of 3Rs Initiative to the international agenda at the G8 Summit in 2004. The meetings for 3R Initiative have been officially and continually organized since then. The government of Japan has shown her initiative role calling for other countries to closely collaborate and cope with the problem of waste through the concept of 3Rs along with creating Japan's Action Plan to Promote Internationally the Establishment of a Sound Material-Cycle Society at national and international levels. Japanese domestic experience and knowledge towards waste treatment and recycling activities have been disseminated to other countries at workshops and on the international stage where a waste-related issue was discussed. The Japanese concept of reduce, reuse and recycle is a simple but practical one which can be carried out at the individual level. Moreover, the Japanese

⁵ Interview with Mr. Hironobu Takano, Executive Production Engineering, Leading Japanese Company, 20 August 2006.

word 'mottainai' and the use of furoshiki of Japan can be applied in daily life. The leadership of Japan through the context of 3R Initiative, Japan's Action Plan, the concept of mottainai including furoshiki has been internationally agreed to deal with waste management. After the G8 Summit, the leading role of Japan has been seen in every meeting of the 3R Initiative and workshops.

Having long and successful experience to cope with the proper waste management at domestic level, Japan has great potentialities for assisting other countries with her knowledge, budget, human resource and technological capabilities. The government of Japan has provided financial contributions, technical experts and advanced technological resource supporting international organizations and helping developing countries to tackle waste management. For example, the JICA's Cooperation for Solid Waste Management has been operated in many countries such as Cambodia and Bangladesh for three to four years with the purpose of developing a master plan for solid waste management, improving and strengthening the capabilities and skills of the recipient countries and transferring technology.⁶ The cooperative movement of Japan through international organizations brings positive benefits to international community. Environmental assistance of Japan has long been crucially considered significant to support, develop and improve environmental management for developing countries. Due to Japanese educational projects relating to proper waste management, people in many recipient countries have been more consciously and concerned about waste treatment and recycling activity. The environmental awareness and capacity to deal with the problem has been enhanced. The waste situation problem in recipient countries has become better. The result of waste management project in eight areas in Vientiane City of Laos, for instance, was supported by JICA during 1991-2000, showed an increasing number of waste collection 50 percent by 1995 and 100 percent by 2000 as well as better operation of

⁶ For Cambodia, The Study on Solid Waste Management in the Municipality of Phnom Penh in the Kingdom of Cambodia had been carried out during February 2003 - March 2005. In case of Bangladesh, the Study on the Solid Waste Management in the Dhaka City had been operated during November 2003 - March 2006.

equipment and cleaner streets.⁷ In addition, the waste management project in eleven cities of San Salvador metropolitan area in El Salvador has been carried out since 1995-2004. The rate of waste collection has reached 73.8 percent in 1999 and 88.3 percent by 2003.⁸

After pushing the 3R Initiative as an international agenda, the government of Japan has never abandoned her support for developing countries; the effort of Japan to assist in waste treatment has been carried out continually every year. For instance, the Japanese government has launched the 3r-related projects through JICA in Malaysia, Vietnam and Philippines for about three years in order to help these countries to formulate a master plan, action plan as well as policy to promote recycling activities in these communities.⁹ From the perspective of developing countries, they appreciate Japanese government's assistance to manage solid waste management in the country. The environmental awareness in developing countries is growing. Many developing countries, such as Vietnam, Laos, Philippines and Sri Lanka, are alert and pay attention to the issue of waste and have solicited further assistance from Japan.¹⁰ The environmental involvement and contribution of Japan in the area of waste treatment at the international level can broaden her role in order to take the responsibility and step forward as an environmental leadership.

The government of Japan has played a positive and significant role in engaging international environmental issues. The role of Japan in dealing with the issue of waste treatment is very distinguished. Nevertheless, there are challenges for Japan to demonstrate the leadership role in environmental field. At present time, the

⁷ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Supporting Capacity Development for Solid Waste Management in Developing Countries: Towards Improving Solid Waste Management Capacity of Entire Society* (Tokyo: JICA, 2005), pp. 130-136.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-141.

⁹ The Study on National Waste Minimization in Malaysia has been operated during July 2004 - July 2007. For Vietnam, the Project for Implementation Support for 3R Initiative in Hanoi City has been carried out from November 2006 - November 2009. In Philippines, the Study on Recycling Industry Development in the Republic of the Philippines has been provided during July 2006 – February 2008.

¹⁰ Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka, "Minister Seeks Japanese Assistance for Solid Waste Management Program," http://www.news.lk/index2php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3425&Itemid=44.; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Japan-Vietnam Joint Statement Toward a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia," <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/vietnam/joint0610.html>.; Viet Nam News, "Ha Noi Looks to New Recycling Programme in War Against Trash," <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01SOC190307>.

problems of environment are significant never ending. Unfortunately, some countries, given the environment a low priority and governments are not willing to cope with environmental problems because of the high expense and huge burden. It is difficult for the Japanese government to persuade such countries to collaborate in the international environmental area. Working hand in hand with residents and local communities though community-base activities are the significant measure to change their attitude and enhance environmental concerns. The global environmental problems are a top priority of Japan, in addition sharing the technology and know-how with other countries.¹¹ Japan should ensure that transfer of technological resources is suitable to the needs of recipient countries. In addition Japan's Action Plan for Global Promotion of Zero-Waste Societies, Japan should play the important role in the agenda setting, formulating common practical measures or standards towards waste treatment which should be gain widespread acceptance by the international community in order to collaborate for further improvement and development mutually. Furthermore, the government of Japan must be confident that the Japanese environmental contribution and cooperation, in line with financial and technical assistance, which can really enhance environmental awareness and capacity development in the recipient countries. Japan should be certain that those recipient countries are able to apply the knowledge and find the long-term solutions by themselves without depending on Japanese assistance in the future. Setting common rules in the international community and boosting capacity development for developing countries would be successful of and enable Japan to take the role of environmental leadership at the international level in the near future.

Increasing international attention and deepening environmental problems on the global environment, Japan has made a considerable progress showing her constructive efforts and assistance on environmental development internationally. To further study the role of Japan in environmental field at the international level, focusing on issues of waste management; issues of industrial waste are a very interesting topic to study. Being a leading industrialized nation, the issue of how the government of Japan takes the response to the industrial waste at the domestic level is

¹¹ Yu-Jose and Lydia N, "Global Environmental Issue: Responses from Japan," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 5(1): 23-50.

an important one. The implementation of domestic policy and legislation including Japan's international contribution concerning waste management of the industrial sector should be reviewed in order to analyze the movement of Japan to deal with the problems both at the both domestic and international levels. The Japanese response to the issue of industrial waste could be either an obstacle or advantage for Japan to assert her role as an international environmental leadership.