

## **Japanese Activists, the Environment, and Border-Crossing Movements in Asia**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the emergence of Japanese environmental groups involved in overseas activism in the 1970s. It argues that two key factors help to explain the appearance and evolution of this activism. First, although seemingly counterintuitive, the article argues that local attachment, local sentiment, and local experience were extremely important in motivating activists to reach out beyond national borders. Traumatic experiences with industrial pollution at home nurtured a desire among some activists to communicate the Japanese experience abroad and to assist overseas groups in preventing a repeat of the tragedy elsewhere. Second, the article points to the important role of movement intermediaries in this process. Utilizing the concept of “rooted cosmopolitans,” the article shows how these intermediaries served as communicators between geographically separated movements and, significantly, how they connected local actors across national borders in East Asia into transnational mobilizations.

### **Keywords**

Japan, environmentalism, transnational activism, rooted cosmopolitans

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Until around the early 1970s Japanese environmental activism was predominantly a domestic phenomenon characterized by manifold small local movements opposing industrial pollution and governmental infrastructure projects around the archipelago. The majority of these movements were typical NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) mobilizations whose primary concern was to protect and/or restore local living spaces and to obtain compensation for damages suffered. Most of the activists involved did not see their specific mobilizations as part of any wider political struggle or movement and, even if they did, their strategies and objectives tended to focus on solving the environmental damage and health risks within their immediate vicinity. From the early 1970s however a new stream of extra-local environmental initiatives emerged alongside this established localist model of activism. Significantly, some of these initiatives eventually transcended national borders in the form of transnational alliances among Japanese environmental activists and their counterparts in East Asian countries such as Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, and Malaysia. In the coming decades these border-crossing initiatives intensified and the types of groups involved proliferated, expanding well beyond antipollution protestors to include professional associations of lawyers, scientists, and medical doctors.

Numerically speaking, this new transnational stream of activism was not as extensive as the earlier—and, in many ways, extraordinary—wave of domestic environmental protest in Japan of the 1960s and early 1970s nor did it replace the domestic sphere of activism which continued thereafter in myriad forms. Rather, the rise of transnational groups represented a creative expansion in the scope and ideational underpinnings of Japanese environmental activism which would have knock-on effects for the development of environmental movements in East Asia, the behavior of Japanese corporations abroad, and the evolution of civic activism and civil society within Japan. Together with pioneering Japanese humanitarian relief and developmental NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) formed in the 1970s, the new transnational environmental groups became models for the professionalized, advocacy-focused civic movements which became more and more prominent in Japan from the late-1980s onward.

In this article I examine the origins and ideational foundations of the new Japanese transnational environmental activism in East Asia. Why did these groups form and why did some activists with an earlier focus on local and domestic issues become interested in environmental struggles in other East Asian countries? The fact that many of the same Japanese corporations which had polluted at home were now polluting throughout East Asia certainly offered a potential new issue for activists to address. But, as social movement theorists note, the “existence of tensions and structural conflicts” does not explain the emergence of collective ac-

tion since these are always and everywhere present (Della Porta & Diani 1999, 8). The capacity for mobilization is a function of the material and nonmaterial resources accessible to a specific group. The unlikelihood of activism is only further exacerbated when geographical distance and national borders are involved because activists are less likely to have interpersonal ties and relationships of trust and reciprocity (Tarrow 2005, 6). If civic mobilizations are to occur they need material resources and ideational frameworks with which to convince people to offer support and to help them to act.

In attempting to answer the puzzling rise of Japanese transnational environmental activism in the 1970s, this article focuses on two crucial intervening variables operating between the issues (i.e. pollution in other countries) on the one hand, and the mobilizations (i.e. transnational movements) on the other. One of these factors is somewhat counterintuitive, while the other is more obvious. First, I will argue that local attachment, local sentiment, and local experience (especially in localized protests and struggles) appear to have been important in motivating activists to reach out beyond local and national borders. Needless to say, this proposition appears counterintuitive at first sight since localism, *ipso facto*, should heighten the insularity of groups. Nevertheless, by reference to the evolution of Japanese activists' "translocal sentiment," I will show the relevance of the local in the emergence of Japanese transnational environmental activism from the early 1970s. My second argument focuses on agency and, specifically, the centrality of movement intermediaries or so-called "rooted cosmopolitans" who have the capacity or, at least, the curiosity to try and look across borders (broadly defined) all the while keeping one eye firmly focused on the local. Their key role in the case of the Japanese environmental movement was to transfer information to local activists about related issues and movements abroad and, moreover, to connect local actors across national borders throughout East Asia into transnational mobilizations glued together by translocal sentiment.

I begin with a discussion of the three key theoretical assumptions underlying the analysis, namely, localism as a motivational source, the role of translocal sentiment, and the function of rooted cosmopolitans. I then offer case studies to show, first, how the local activist experience in Japan laid the roots for transnationalism, second, how rooted cosmopolitans connected Japanese activists with other Asian activists and, third, how a number of important transnational initiatives resulted. I end the paper by thinking through some of the longer-term implications of border-crossing Japanese environmental movements, particularly the ways in which experience in overseas activism folded back to shape the cognitive parameters of civil society within Japan. I see this process in which transnational activism shapes domestic civil societies as an important but understudied aspect of the new trans-

national activism.<sup>1</sup>

## **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: TRANSLOCAL SENTIMENT AND ROOTED COSMOPOLITANS**

In an age of globalization and global-level problems, the “local” in all its ideational and spatial permutations has come under increasing scrutiny. Nowhere is this trend more palpable than in research on the environment and environmentalism. With the emergence of global-level problems such as climate change, declining biodiversity, cross-border pollution, and stratospheric ozone depletion, many are calling for a radical reconceptualization of local space in terms of interconnectedness and extra-local responsibility. For some, the local has even become an impediment to the development of a “sense of planet” deemed more appropriate for our global age (Heise 2008). The prominent eco-critic Ursula Heise, for instance, argues that ecological thinking has simply not “come to terms” with globalization theories which highlight the relentless processes of “deterritorialization” in the contemporary world.<sup>2</sup> According to such theories, the “increasing connectedness” wrought by globalization is creating “new forms of culture” which “are no longer anchored in place” (Heise 2008, 104). For Heise and globalization advocates, this deterritorialization is a positive development. Indeed, Heise (2008, 46) speaks of the “ambivalent ethical and political consequences that might follow from encouraging attachments to place.” She criticizes proponents of the local such as deep ecology founder Arne Naess who assume the spontaneity and naturalness of “sociocultural, ethical, and affective allegiances” at the local level, on the one hand, and their assumption of the difficulty of creating meaningful attachments at larger scales, on the other (Heise 2008, 34). There is nothing natural about local attachment according to Heise, so “rather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness” (Heise 2008, 21). In other words, “ecological awareness” and “environmental ethics” in a global age must abandon a “sense of place” for a superior “sense

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1 Keck and Sikkink (1999, 93) have proposed a “boomerang” pattern of transnational activism wherein “international contacts can amplify the demands of domestic groups, pry open space for new issues, and then echo these demands back into the domestic arena.” I am referring to a similar phenomenon here but focus on the effect of transnational activism on domestic civil society as opposed to government policymaking.

2 On the domestic pollution crisis see Avenell (2012a).

of planet” (Heise 2008, 55).

Heise’s call for a global vision makes good sense against the backdrop of ever-intensifying cross-border and global environmental problems and, indeed, it dovetails with other prominent theorizations on globalization and new forms of cosmopolitanism (Appiah 1997, Nussbaum 1996, Beck 2006, Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003). Yet not all observers are satisfied with this depiction of an inexorable evolution in environmental consciousness from the local (read “insular”) to the global (read “broadminded”) either empirically or theoretically. In his seminal work on transnational activism, the social movement scholar Sidney Tarrow (2005, 2), for example, notes that “even as they make transnational claims,” activists continue to “draw on the resources, networks, and opportunities of the societies they live in.” Activists with local roots “do not migrate to the international level but utilize their domestic resources and opportunities to move in and out of international institutions, processes, and alliances” (Tarrow 2005, 28). What makes these activists interesting for Tarrow is not their abandonment of the local for the global but, on the contrary, the way they connect the two (Tarrow 2005, 2). The Japanese activists I examine in this article conform very much to this model of *domestically-rooted* transnational engagement.

From a different perspective, the STS (science, technology, and society) scholars Sheila Jasanoff and Marybeth Long Martello (2004, 6) have also questioned the “wholesale adoption of shared environmental ontologies among the nations of the earth.” They point to the absolute centrality of the local in environmental activism which has derived “emotional force” from attachments to “particular places, landscapes, livelihoods, and to an ethic of communal living that can sustain stable, long-term regimes for the protection of shared resources” (Jasanoff and Martello 2004, 7). Far from defending an antiquated local perspective, they criticize social science for not adequately incorporating “the resurgence of local epistemologies and their associated politics in the context of globalization” and they call for a more complex conceptualization of the local far richer than the epitome of everything “prescientific, traditional, doomed to erasure, and hence not requiring rigorous analysis” (Jasanoff & Martello 2004, 14). Specifically Jasanoff and Martello identify the ways in which the local has been fundamentally reconstituted and made “richer” through policymaking for the environment and development. No longer is the local constrained to “spatial or cultural particularity” but it also becomes a signifier for “particular communities, histories, institutions, and even expert bodies” (Jasanoff & Martello 2004, 13-14). The “modern local,” Jasanoff and Martello (2004, 14) argue, is distinguished not by parochialism but in the way it produces “situated knowledge” that creates “communal affiliations” built on “knowing the world in particular ways” (Jasanoff & Martello 2004, 14). Here they

borrow from the globalization scholar Roland Robertson (1995, 26) who proposes the notion of “glocalization” in an attempt to highlight the entanglement of the local in trans-local, supra-local, and global processes. The local is certainly being re-constituted through globalization but it retains import as a situated—or rooted—perspective. As the feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1988, 590) astutely puts it, “the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular.”

Ultimately, all of these approaches point to the continuing centrality of the local in a global age—a theoretical position I endorse and illustrate utilizing evidence from Japanese environmental movements. Indeed, if the example of Japanese transnational environmental activism is indicative of anything, then it must certainly be the way the local becomes a crucial staging ground under conditions of globalization for the construction of multidimensional activist identities capable of sustaining commitment to *both* extra-local (i.e. transnational), intersubjective communities and struggles, as well as the situated relationships of geographically distinct locales. As the Japanese case reveals, the glue binding together activists across borders throughout East Asia was not originally or primarily a product of global awareness—although this certainly played a role—but, more directly, an empathetic impulse best described as “translocal sentiment.” I borrow here from Arif Dirlik (2005, 397, 407) who uses the notion of “translocal” to invoke a conceptual realm quite distinct from nations and civilizations and based instead on a plastic notion of place in which “processes” trump “settled places”—much in the spirit of Haraway’s idea of situatedness. Important in terms of my notion of translocal sentiment is the way Dirlik’s (2005, 407) translocal emphasizes the borderless “contact zones” that become “locations for the production of cultures and spaces.” It is in these contact zones—some actual physical places, others shared ideational spaces—that I see translocal sentiment at work, binding activists together in transnational mobilizations. On the most rudimentary of levels this is certainly a case of seeing the self in the other. But synergies also result when disparate local activists come together. Larger visions (sometimes global) inevitably develop, the local itself is often recalibrated, and activists go home changed, sometimes transformed. But transformation does not imply deracination. While transnational engagement tends to multiply the contexts in which the local is understood and strategized it does not seem to undermine the import of the local as a primary source of identity and struggle for activists. Japanese transnational environmental activism is an excellent case in point because we witness in it all of these processes—border-crossing empathy, identity transformation and recalibration, as well as the persistence of locally-rooted attachment.

But—and this is the second major point I want to make—contact zones and translocal sentiment do not materialize out of nowhere to be somehow spontane-

ously populated by broadminded locals. What Japanese transnational environmental activism also confirms is the critical intermediary role of so-called rooted cosmopolitans. Tarrow (2005, 29) defines these transnational activists as “people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts.” By “rooted,” of course, Tarrow (2005, 42) is pointing to the way these activists remain linked “to place, to the social networks that inhabit that space, and to the resources, experiences, and opportunities that place provides them with” even as they “move physically and cognitively outside their origins.” Tarrow identifies a number of general characteristics of rooted cosmopolitans which seem particularly germane in the case of Japanese activists. First, most begin as domestic or even local activists and only a few ever become fulltime international advocates with most returning to domestic activism after transnational involvement; second, they are usually better educated, travelled, and speak more languages than other domestic activists; and, finally, they are skilled at shifting between and bridging scales of activity from the local to the global and everything in between (Tarrow 2005, 43). Not surprisingly, in the earliest Japanese transnational environmental movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, scholars figured prominently precisely because they had the resources to travel and were also already socialized into the practices of international academic exchange. But, as Japanese civil society matured, these pioneers were joined by a cadre of professional NGO activists who became important connective tissue between local movements and movements throughout East Asia. To illustrate, I turn now to discussion of Japanese transnational environmental activism from the early 1970s onward.

## THE LOCAL SOURCES OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM IN JAPAN

From around the mid-1950s until the early-1970s Japan experienced a historic spurt of economic growth which was only interrupted by the “Nixon Shock” of 1971 (removing the gold standard) and the Oil Shocks of 1973 and 1979. Economic growth continued thereafter, only coming to an abrupt halt in 1990. Not coincidentally, the phase of high-speed economic growth also produced in Japan some of the worst forms of industrial pollution ever experienced in the contemporary world. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s in particular, numerous shocking cases of food contamination involving arsenic and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) occurred. As early as 1955, for example, infants were poisoned by arsenic mistakenly introduced into powdered infant formula manufactured by the Morinaga Milk Company. The arsenic caused fever, severe diarrhea, skin spotting

and, in severe cases, death. Survivors suffered from impeded bone development, abnormal brain activity, hearing loss, and lower IQ levels. Another infamous food poisoning case occurred in 1968 when thousands of people consumed rice bran oil contaminated with PCBs. Victims experienced painful eye discharge, skin maladies, respiratory difficulties, joint and muscle pain, and general lethargy. Offspring of mothers poisoned by the rice bran oil had dark-brown pigmented skin and were found to have lower IQs.

Pollution from industrial facilities wrought havoc on surrounding residential communities during this period. Emissions from petrochemical complexes caused chronic and sometimes fatal cases of asthma, as in the city of Yokkaichi where affected residents literally coughed themselves to death. Chemical wastes dumped into bays and rivers also caused terrible cases of human poisoning. Cadmium dumped into the Jinzū River in Toyama Prefecture, for instance, contaminated fish which, when consumed, had devastating health consequences. Victims' bones became so brittle as to fracture on the slightest movements such as coughing. So painful was the condition that it was dubbed *Itai Itai-byō* or "It Hurts, It Hurts disease." The largest number of bone fractures recorded for an individual sufferer was seventy-two, twenty-eight of which were located in the bones of the rib cage alone. Just as devastating were instances of mercury poisoning, most infamously at Minamata Bay in Kumamoto Prefecture but also later in Niigata Prefecture. Both instances were the result of industry illegally dumping organic methyl mercury into the water system. Trace elements of the mercury subsequently entered the food chain and through the process of bioaccumulation reached dangerous levels at the top of the chain. Cats who had consumed contaminated fish showed the first signs of severe neurological dysfunction. They were followed soon after by humans who displayed horrifying symptoms such as constriction of the visual field, sensory disturbances, speech impediment, hearing loss, motor coordination disturbances, and convulsions. Tragically, methyl mercury can also cross the placenta. Infants born of women who consumed contaminated fish had shocking symptoms such as mental retardation, involuntary reflexes, and coordination disturbances. On top of these terrible cases of industrial poisoning, urbanites also suffered the effects of pollution—though to a lesser extent than regional communities. In major cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, residents dealt with dangerous levels of air pollution from industry and automobiles. So bad was ambient pollution that officials in Tokyo erected air pollution monitoring stations in busy downtown areas. By the late 1960s Japan was justifiably labeled a "polluters paradise" and the "canary in the mineshaft" for the rest of the industrialized and industrializing world.

How did this domestic environmental crisis of the 1950s and 1960s connect

to transnational activism? The answer can be found in the resulting grassroots protests and the personal profiles of the individuals involved. Although early on victims of industrial pollution tended to suffer in silence, by the mid-1960s a wave of environmental protest was spreading throughout the nation and it would not recede until the early 1970s. Government officials initially took the side of industry, attempting to dismiss claims of industrial pollution with dubious scientific data. Officials also appealed to the “national interest” of economic development and labeled protestors unpatriotic “local egoists.” Nevertheless, pressure from the protest movements intensified throughout the 1960s and eventually government officials were forced to respond by passing stringent regulations, first at the local level and then at the national level in a historic session of the Japanese parliament in 1970 known as the Pollution Diet. After this session Japan boasted some the strictest environmental standards in the world enforced by a new cadre of environmental bureaucrats. Industry was also forced to clean up and, in some cases, enter into pollution prevention agreements with local authorities and residents’ associations. As a result, by the mid-1970s Japan had turned the corner on environmental pollution, prompting some to speak of a pollution miracle in the country. To be sure, Japan’s rivers and bays were less polluted and its air was certainly cleaner. The environmental protest movements could rightly claim many local victories (although victims would have to live with the health consequences—often for life).

One of the enduring legacies of the wave of environmental protest was the emergence of a victimization consciousness—or victimization “frame” in sociological language—among antipollution activists.<sup>3</sup> Many of those involved felt that their communities had been sacrificed for the good of corporate profits and national growth. Activists rightly believed that their localities were under siege and needed to be proactively defended, hence the strong NIMBY character of these movements. This victim consciousness was based on the existence of what activists perceived as discordant and antagonistic binaries: the national versus the local, the center versus the periphery, and the urban versus the regional. Importantly, this victimization frame was not only shaped by such geographical and political realities but also by notions of legitimacy, authenticity, and genuineness. The environmental tragedy, which most severely impacted local communities, exposed the disturbing contradictions and paradoxes beating at the heart of an urbanized, modern, and affluent Japan. In its most unadulterated form, the victimization frame was deeply skeptical of industrial modernity which seemed to be premised on voracious abuse of the natural environment and exploitation of the very weak-

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3 On framing processes see Snow and Benford (2000).

est groups in society.

Of course, not all or even most local protestors thought about their movements or articulated their objectives in such reified terms. But I believe that this critique—or the potential for it—existed within many local protest movements, laying the conceptual groundwork for future transnational involvement. It made it possible for some activists to understand their victimization in the context of other instances of victimization—that perhaps their predicament may not be unique but part of a wider systemic problem; that there were other victimized locales. Again, for most this realization was never more than a somewhat indistinct afterthought but for some it would provide the opportunity for rethinking and repositioning the local and for recalibrating objectives and commitments as conditions allowed. More concretely, when activists positioned victimization within wider configurations of exploitation and power, the “local” itself could encompass more than a specific geographic place, becoming a symbol of situated, rooted and, hence, genuine resistance to industrial modernity. I am suggesting, then, that the consciousness of local victimization and the experience of local struggle effected more than a closing of ranks, it also created the potential for some to develop a wider vision which transcended the local (i.e. translocal sentiment) and, when the opportunity arose, a receptivity to involvement in transnational initiatives.

But this wider vision of local victimization and subsequent translocal sentiment and action did not happen spontaneously. There were crucial intermediaries—rooted cosmopolitans—who nurtured its development. Almost from the outset of the pollution crisis in the 1950s a group of pioneering activist-scholars had actively supported antipollution protest movements. At the time they were a rare breed, representing almost the entirety of specialist knowledge on industrial pollution in Japan. When eight of them formed the pioneering Research Committee on Pollution (RCP) in 1963 their group was essentially the only nongovernmental group of specialists devoted to the issue in all of Japan.<sup>4</sup> The membership of the RCP reads like a who’s who of antipollution specialists in contemporary Japan, including the Harvard-trained economist Tsuru Shigeto, the environmental economist Miyamoto Ken’ichi, the legal scholar Kainō Michitaka, and the engineers Shōji Hikaru and Ui Jun. In the context my argument about the role of rooted cosmopolitans, members of the RCP embodied two critical perspectives: first, a concern for local struggles in and of themselves but, second, because of their socialization in international academic networks, an awareness from the outset that local struggles were deeply entangled in, and indeed had to be understood and addressed within wider institutional configurations which often transcended na-

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4 On the RCP see Avenell 2012b.

tional borders.

RCP members were drawn into the domestic environmental struggle out of a concern for the rights of victims and they spent a good deal of time offering specialist knowledge to local movements and supporting activists in legal proceedings as expert witnesses and advisors. Their background in research and academia gave the group a distinct advantage in connecting the many dots into an overall picture of the causes and dynamics of industrial pollution in the country—a vision which local activists alone might not otherwise have been able to formulate. Significantly, RCP members not only fanned out to the countryside to assist local movements, some such as the Tokyo University engineer Ui Jun also set about creating a national network of antipollution struggles. In 1970, for instance, Ui commenced a series of public lectures entitled the Independent Lectures on Pollution in which he explained the history and dynamics of industrial pollution in Japan to packed audiences. The lectures proved so popular that transcripts were subsequently published as newsletters and then as a bestselling bound volume.<sup>5</sup> After the initial series of lectures a group of supporters—students, housewives, and, teachers—mobilized around Ui with the aim of creating a national network of antipollution movements. As Ui's network expanded over the coming years it became a crucial contact point and clearing house for the exchange of ideas and strategies among geographically dispersed groups around the archipelago. Ui appropriately described the Independent Lectures movement as a kind of telephone exchange for the environmental movement in Japan.

The RCP and the Independent Lectures movements, because of their nationwide reach, provided local protest movements with a wider vision than might otherwise have been impossible. Significantly, almost from the outset of their activism in the 1960s RCP members pursued a two-pronged strategy, the one domestic and the other transnational. Within Japan they assisted local movements and built networks, while outside Japan they communicated the story of Japanese pollution and collected data to relay back to local activists at home. That individuals like Ui Jun and Tsuru Shigeto were seasoned world travelers—somewhat rare in 1960s Japan—also meant they could provide an international angle on the Japanese situation, not to mention providing Japanese activists with information about movements abroad. Ui, for instance, travelled through Europe in the late 1960s examining environmental policies and practices and cases of industrial pollution. He also informed his European counterparts about the terrible pollution tragedy unfolding in Japan, especially the methyl mercury incident at Minamata Bay. In short, I see RCP members as the first generation of rooted cosmopolitans in the

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5 See Ui (1990).

Japanese environmental movement. Their travels and their public activities in Japan and abroad laid the groundwork for transnational movements involving Japanese activists and their counterparts throughout East Asia from early the 1970s onward.

## **JAPANESE TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN EAST ASIA**

In terms of structural causes, the rise of Japanese transnational environmental activism in East Asia had much to do with the changing profile of Japanese patterns of capital investment. The 1970s marked an important transition in Japan's economic engagement with East Asia in the postwar era. Growing frictions with the United States and West European countries over trade imbalances coupled with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 and the tripling of oil prices after the first Oil Shock of 1973 encouraged Japanese policymakers and industrial elites to turn their vision "westward" and "southward" in the direction of East Asia. According to T. J. Pempel (1996/97, 18), Asia "became a more important component in Japan's overall economic strategy" during this decade. Notably, the character of economic engagement changed. Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) into East Asia became more prominent than the earlier economic interaction based on simple trade. As Pempel (1996/97, 18) notes, total Japanese FDI from 1973 to 1976 virtually doubled that of the preceding twenty years.

Needless to say, wherever industry travelled pollution tended to follow, especially when industry moved from highly regulated jurisdictions such as Japan to others with few or very lax regulations on environmental pollution and environmental standards. Yet, as I have suggested, the occurrence of Japanese industrial pollution in East Asia did not—in and of itself—cause a transnational response in Japan. This required a human intervention: the relaying of information, the desire to act, and the resources to do so. Here extant movement networks such as Ui's Independent Lectures group and elements of the earlier Japanese anti-Vietnam War movement, *Beheiren*, played a vital role.

For example, in the early 1970s some Japanese activists involved in these movements began to display an awareness of what would later be called the "pollution export" problem. Their first "wake up call," so to speak, came at one of the landmark postwar events for global environmentalism and activism, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE), held in Stockholm in 1972. Ui Jun and a group of pollution sufferers travelled to Stockholm to take part in the many NGO forums held parallel to the main UN event. Their primary

objective was to communicate the shocking story of Japanese industrial pollution as a warning to the world, which they certainly did to great effect. But Ui and his compatriots were shocked when other activists told them about cases of Japanese corporate pollution and environmental destruction in East Asia. As Ui (1972, 66) later confessed, he and others had not really considered Japanese corporate pollution beyond the boundaries of the archipelago until UNCHE because of their concentration on domestic problems. But the stories they heard from East Asian activists at UNCHE demanded a fundamental rethinking of Japan's so-called "pollution miracle" of the early 1970s. After all, if domestic pollution was merely being relocated to or replicated in East Asia then it was a hollow miracle indeed. Reflecting on the lessons learned at UNCHE, the sociologist Isomura Eiichi pointed to the worrying inequalities developing between Japan and its neighbors. "From the perspective of Asians," he said, Japan represented the "factory owner" and Asians the "workers." This factory owner took resources from Asia back to Japan where they were processed and sold back to the "workers" at a higher price. More alarmingly, in this process the resources of the "workers" countries were appropriated, the natural environment destroyed, and the standard of living not necessarily improved (Isomura 1972, 104). UNCHE forced the Japanese attendees to rethink the nature of their local struggles in a wider regional framework: how was their affluent and now unpolluted daily life implicated in the spread of Japanese industrial pollution and environmental destruction throughout Asia? Rooted cosmopolitans like Ui Jun and others in the group communicated this information to activists back in Japan which, in turn, stimulated a domestic response.

Activists involved in extant transnational mobilizations, especially the Japanese anti-Vietnam War movement, also played a role in communicating instances of Japanese industrial pollution in East Asia to a home audience. Beheiren, the Citizens' Federation for Peace in Vietnam, was among the most important transnational antiwar movements in Japan during the late-1960s and early 1970s. The movement began in opposition to the Vietnam War in 1965 and continued until 1974—one year after the end of direct U.S. military involvement. Beheiren or, more accurately, the many Beheiren chapters throughout Japan, were transnational in outlook and strategy from the very outset, connecting with antiwar activists in the U.S.A., Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia. From the late 1960s activists in the movement became more and more concerned about the involvement of Japanese corporations in the Indochina conflict, for example, through the supply of munitions and other military technologies. This sensitivity to Japanese corporate involvement in Southeast Asia continued after the movement officially disbanded and, indeed, became a new cause for activists to pursue. The novelist and primary public spokesperson for Beheiren, Oda Makoto, took

the lead in exposing Japanese pollution export.

In a historic union of the Japanese antiwar and environmental movements in 1974, Oda Makoto and activists from the former Beheiren joined with Ui Jun and members of the Independent Lectures to hold the inaugural Conference of Asians.<sup>6</sup> This landmark event ran for seven days in mid-1974 and brought together some 250 participants, including 40 participants from East Asian countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. During the conference the foreign participants visited pollution sites around Tokyo and met with local activists such as the group of farmers opposing construction of the Narita Airport. On the final day participants ratified *the Joint Declaration of the Asian People* and they issued resolutions condemning political imprisonments, discrimination against women in Asia, and Japanese corporate pollution. The Joint Declaration articulated the organizers' vision of a progressive, grassroots Asian regionalism which they hoped could form the ideational underpinnings of cross-border alliances among localized movements. The following extract succinctly captures this sentiment.

We, who are gathered here at the Conference of Asians are people, Asian people. We are not state powers nor ruling elites dominating our respective countries and Asia. Those who have power and money have destroyed and are destroying us—our health, our well-being and our human dignity. Because they want to keep power and money, because they want to get more, they have created and are creating the systems and structures for this purpose.... They extend such systems and structures to other countries, creating the networks of power and money all over Asia. The center of the network is Japan as well as the USA.... We want to live as human beings; to do so, we have to change the circumstances, bring a radical change to our own society and destroy the network of power and money.... In struggling, we are building up solidarity. Only solidarity can bring us the final victory. In this, we are common, we are one. In this, Asian people are one. (Tokyo, 15 June, 1974). (Oda 1976, 279)

Ui Jun and Oda Makoto's efforts in the early 1970s to inform local activists of industrial pollution export and to stimulate translocal sentiment proved highly successful. Activists involved in both the Independent Lectures movement and the former Beheiren began to address issues in other East Asian countries almost immediately and, significantly, they garnered support from many activists who

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6 On the Conference of Asians see Oda, Makoto (ed.).

had previously only been involved in local struggles within Japan. Consider the following examples of early transnational initiatives involving Japanese activists and their counterparts in Thailand, South Korea, and the Philippines.

After UNCHE in 1972 Ui Jun and Independent Lectures' activists started an English-language newsletter entitled *KOGAI: The Newsletter from Polluted Japan* as a conduit for building connections with East Asian environmental activists. The newsletter proved a great success, garnering a healthy readership among grassroots groups across East Asia. To communicate news from East Asia back home, Ui's group also established a new column entitled "Window on Asia" (*Ajia no Mado*) in the movement's widely-read Japanese-language newsletter, *Jishu Kōza*. The latter column carried reports from Japanese activists who had travelled to East Asian countries, observed cases of industrial pollution, and met with local activists. In the September 1972 column, the young activist Matsuoka Nobuo reported of his meeting with members of the nature conservation club at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (Matsuoka 2005, 106). During his visit Matsuoka gave a presentation on Japanese industrial pollution and distributed English-language materials on the topic. Matsuoka's visit to Chulalongkorn University proved to be a timely one because only months later Thai newspapers reported that the Thai Asahi Caustic Soda Company (TACS), a joint-venture with the Japanese Asahi Glass Company, had been identified as the source of caustic soda contamination of Bangkok's Chao Phrya River. The newspapers reported that, along with caustic soda, tests also detected traces of chlorine, hydrochloric acid, and mercury in factory effluent. The result was a massive die-off of fish and shrimp which local residents unwittingly consumed. These victims subsequently contracted skin afflictions and suffered with bouts of diarrhea. TACS officials denied that the factory had dumped contaminated waste and refused to take responsibility for the fish kill and the health impact on local residents. By coincidence, TACS parent company, Asahi Glass, was facing its own contamination back in Japan at around the same time. In mid-1973, fishermen from Chiba Prefecture blockaded Asahi Glass and other factories they accused of contaminating Tokyo Bay with organic and inorganic mercury (Hirayama 1974, 5). The timing of these localized incidents in Tokyo and Bangkok, combined with the connections forged between Japanese and Thai activists like Matsuoka some months earlier, provided fertile ground for the transnational movement which subsequently developed.

In Thailand environmental groups at Thammasat, Kasetsart, Chulalongkorn, and Mahidol Universities immediately convened a pollution exhibition which focused on the Japanese pollution experience and lessons for Thailand (*Jishu Kōza Ajia Gurūpu* 2006, 376). Meetings with Japanese activists at UNCHE and Matsuoka Nobuo meant that the Thai activists were able to offer attendees to the

exhibition with detailed knowledge about the dangers of industrial pollution (Inoue 1974, 52). By chance Hirayama Takasada of the Independent Lectures Asia Group happened to be visiting Kasetsart University when news of the TACS pollution broke. Hirayama was mortified by the news and resolved to mobilize support from Japan. As he explained in an article for *Jishu Kōza* in October 1973,

I was quickly filled with rage. I could not allow this. I simply could not allow it. Once again I engraved in my mind the purpose of this visit: to communicate the situation of Japanese pollution and to find a way to mobilize an anti-pollution movement based on cooperation between Japanese and Southeast Asian people (Hirayama 2006, 383).

In Japan activists promptly mobilized protest movements against Asahi Glass. In September 1973, some 150 protestors from groups such as the Independent Lectures, Beheiren, and the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Antiwar Shareholders Committee held a demonstration outside the Tokyo headquarters of the Asahi Glass Corporation. They held banners and placards—in Japanese and Thai—reading “Asahi Glass, Stop Exporting Pollution!” and “the Japanese people will not allow contamination of the Chao Phraya River by Asahi Glass” (Jishu Kōza Ajia Gurūpu 2006, 375, 378). The Tokyo protests were widely reported in the Thai press and soon thereafter Japanese groups received a deluge of letters from Bangkok citizens expressing their appreciation for the show of solidarity (Inoue 1974, 51).

In October 1973, Inoue Sumio, an antiwar activist of the Beheiren movement, established the Japan-Thai Youth Friendship Movement (*Nichi-Tai Seinen Yūkyō Undō*) which represented the Japanese side of the transnational movement against Asahi Glass (Inoue 1974, 51). Thereafter transnational connections intensified, through information sharing, site visits, and simultaneous events. In September 1974, for example, Thai and Japanese activists organized a simultaneous protest in Tokyo and Bangkok. In Tokyo some eighty protestors gathered outside the Asahi Glass headquarters with Thai-Japanese language banners reading “Asahi Glass, Get Out of Thailand!” (Inoue 1974, 52). Importantly, most of the Japanese protestors had never visited Thailand and knew no Thai people. What they did know, however, was the Japanese experience with industrial pollution and, thanks to the work of rooted cosmopolitans like Matsuoka, its repetition in Bangkok. These two factors were enough to inspire in them a sense of translocal sentiment and the motivation to come out in support of victims many thousands of miles away. As one participant put it, “there are many things we need to communicate. And there are so many things we need to learn. It is clear that the process of building connections between Thai and Japanese citizens has just begun. But to

the extent that we pursue the common objective of ‘eliminating pollution and that which produces it,’ there is a potential for us to build connections with the people of Asia. . . . The task from here on is to further strengthen diverse and substantive connections. This is necessary for our mutual survival” (Okuda 2006, 45).

The movement against Thai Asahi Caustic Soda in Bangkok marked the beginning of a new phase of transnational environmental activism in Japan. In 1974 Japanese activists joined with members of the Incheon City Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in a movement opposing the Toyama Chemical Company’s plan to relocate a mercurochrome plant to Incheon.<sup>7</sup> Activists exchanged information, translated materials into Japanese and Korean, lobbied government officials on both sides, and appealed to the mass media. Their efforts proved successful as Toyama Chemical announced soon after that the planned relocation would not go ahead. Similar movements mobilized thereafter against the Nippon Chemical Company’s plans to manufacture pollutive sodium bichromate and mirabilite anhydride in the Ulsan Industrial region of South Korea and Kawasaki Steel Corporation’s construction of a sintering plant on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. By the 1980s Japanese grassroots transnational environmental movements in East Asia included logging and deforestation, radioactive contamination from rare earth mineral extraction, and commercial shrimp farming. The first generation of rooted cosmopolitans were joined by other groups, such as the pollution committee of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, or Nichibenren, which had previously focused only on domestic pollution. In early 1976 the various movements opposing Japanese pollution export assembled in Tokyo for the Citizens Rally to Protest Pollution Export to Asia. At this rally participants established the Anti-Pollution Export Center (*Han-Kōgai Yushutsu Tsūhō Sentā*) which became the central node in the Japanese movement against pollution export and the point of contact with movements throughout East Asia. The joint declaration of the rally announced that

We can no longer be concerned only with the wellbeing of the Japanese people. We must start a new movement based on a new set of values in which anything that disadvantages the people of the Third World is something that we too must repudiate. In order to destroy all mechanisms which are obstructing the realization of both their and our common wellbeing, we want to join hands with them and struggle together with them (Han-Kōgai Yushutsu Tsūhō Sentā 2006, 275).

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7 On this movement see Inoue (1974).

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have attempted to explain the emergence of border-crossing Japanese environmental activism in East Asia in the early 1970s. Two factors appear to have been of particular importance: first, the domestic (i.e. local) experience with industrial pollution and its shocking effects on humans and the environment and, second, the role of rooted cosmopolitans in connecting activists across borders. Activists' experiences in local movements within Japan sensitized them to the fundamental violation of human rights inherent in industrial pollution. In the most extreme cases—for instance, as in the methyl mercury poisoning at Minamata Bay—human lives were negligently sacrificed for corporate profits and, ultimately, for national economic growth. To make matters worse, local activists often found themselves ostracized with few allies and resources to resist and having to fend off accusations of “local egoism.” This situation cultivated an understandable sense of victimization among pollution protestors which deeply informed their understanding of struggle, of politics, and of Japanese society more generally. The local became for them a stronghold of resistance and authenticity against an urban modernity nourished by voracious consumption and relentless, destructive industrial expansion. This understanding of the local as both a physical space and a critical perspective made it possible for some local activists to relativize their particularized victimization, seeing it in the context of wider structures of exploitation and inequity.

Of course, it is important to stress that this critical intellectual recalibration of the local was no guarantee of further activism, especially of a transnational kind. As I argued, this required the intervention of rooted cosmopolitans such as those involved in the RCP and Ui Jun's Independent Lecture's movement who literally put this conception of the local to the test. Reports about instances of Japanese industrial pollution in countries such as Thailand and South Korea relayed by rooted cosmopolitans like Oda Makoto and Hirayama Takasada challenged local activists to think about the nature of environmental victories won through domestic struggle. What did “victory” mean if it was based on the relocation and replication of industrial pollution in other less-regulated countries of East Asia? Needless to say, not all or even a majority of local activists responded to such questions. But, for those who did, the result was transformational. In the early 1970s, spurred by Ui Jun, Oda Makoto, and other rooted cosmopolitans, some Japanese antipollution activists began to participate in transnational initiatives for victims of Japanese pollution in Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere. They were drawn to these movements out of a sense of shared predicament and empathy for victims they had never met and who lived in countries they

knew little about. I have called this motivation translocal sentiment in an attempt to highlight how the local played an important role in transnational activism, even as the local itself underwent important transformations and recalibrations in the consciousness of activists in the course of these movements.

These transnational movements had numerous significant outcomes. First, in Thailand, South Korea, Malaysia, and numerous other countries throughout East Asia they forced Japanese industries to either stop operations or radically alter their environmentally irresponsible practices. Transnational engagement also offered activists in developing countries such as Thailand and the Philippines access to cutting-edge knowledge on industrial pollution and its human health effects from Japanese activists with many decades of domestic experience. Also, as I have suggested, transnational involvement compelled Japanese to rethink the “success” of their domestic struggle not to mention the basis of their sense of victimization. They realized that victims could also unwittingly become perpetrators.

There were also arguably longer-term outcomes for Japanese civil society from these transnational movements. The anti-Vietnam War movement, *Beheiren*, was one of the first major postwar citizens’ movements in Japan to question the victimization consciousness informing much postwar Japanese civic activism and to call for a sense of responsibility and action for others. Not surprisingly, a similar mindset developed in the environmental movement when it incorporated transnational initiatives. Local activists’ recognized their position as perpetrators—albeit indirectly—as citizens and consumers in a nation responsible for industrial pollution in East Asia. Transnational involvement made it possible for some of these individuals to engage in activism as a form of advocacy for the first time, which was a radical departure from the simple self-defensive activism they had practiced before. I believe the advocacy mindset born of transnational movements represented an extremely important cognitive transformation not only within antiwar and environmental activism in Japan but also within the logic of Japanese civil society more generally. This is not to argue that there had been no other-focused, advocacy-style activism before. Indeed, Japanese modern history is replete with examples of such activism among religious organizations, consumer cooperatives, labor unions, and other groups. Rather, it is to argue that transnational environmental movements of the 1970s—because of their important role in recalibrating the ideational core of postwar civic activism at a critical moment—greatly helped to embolden a new agenda based on advocacy and outward-looking activism which would become more and more prominent in Japanese civic movements and professionalized NGOs from the late 1980s onward.

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