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Title: From Kyoto to Glasgow: Is Japan a Climate Leader?

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## **Abstract**

The term ‘climate leadership’ became popular in the 1990s, in relation to international negotiations aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental mitigations. Since that time, international attention – borne out by scientific study and a rapidly changing planetary climate - has shifted from global warming, the ozone layer and greenhouse gas emissions, to energy production, scientific innovation, and, by the 2020s, a strong focus on decarbonisation and securing net zero carbon output by the middle of the century. One important strand of negotiation has been the annual Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which has witnessed different states playing lead roles at different times. By interrogating the main academic debates about climate leadership, this article examines Japan’s participation in the COP process along a structural-normative axis. In so doing, it charts the path from Japan’s apparent success at Kyoto in 1997 and its growing green reputation, to its subsequent ‘fall from green’ in later years and in the wake of COP26 in 2021.

## **Key words**

Japan, climate change, Conference of the Parties (COP), Kyoto Protocol, leadership

## **From Kyoto to Glasgow:**

### **Is Japan a Climate Leader?**

How many, many things  
They call to mind  
These cherry-blossoms!

*Basho*

#### **Introduction**

The 1992 Rio, or ‘Earth’ Summit, inaugurated the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a treaty designed to combat ‘dangerous human interference with the climate system.’ Since 1995, annual Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC have been held in different states to support and advance the treaty. These COP meetings have exemplified different approaches to the global management of climate change, and have acted as a barometer, both for how seriously climate governance is taken by states, and also for understanding some of the domestic challenges participating states face. As a result, some COP meetings have been deemed more significant than others. For example, COP13 in Bali in 2007 initiated a new round of negotiations to agree a post-2012 framework, and also set a roadmap for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol; COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 included a long-term goal of limiting the global maximum average temperature to no more than 2°C; COP17 in Durban in 2011 committed all countries, including developing states (like Brazil, China and India) to reducing their emissions; and the important COP21 in Paris in 2015, saw participating states agree to keep global warming below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to continue to work to try and limit it to 1.5°C.

Throughout all the COP meetings, various commitments and leadership styles have issued from different states and there is no definitive approach to ‘climate leadership’ in evidence. Indeed, at different times states (notably the US) have withdrawn from the process and the treaty; used the UNFCCC framework to raise collective concerns about the reality of climate degradation (such as the Alliance of Small Island States); or used the UNFCCC to present international credentials (such as China in 2020). The nature of the COP itself has also changed, and therefore different leadership styles benefit at different times.

A key reference point for all these meetings has been COP3, held in Kyoto in 1997. This meeting resulted in the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, agreeing targets for the reduction of

greenhouse gas emissions. There followed the difficult process of implementation, which illustrated many of the challenges inherent in international climate agreements. Kyoto 1997 also apparently showcased Japan's growing 'green' reputation. First, it was seen to give Japan new leadership credentials in its foreign policy. Japan's relationship with the United States, through the Mutual Security Treaty, and its relatively limited room for manoeuvre in international affairs, as well as the legacy of Japan's war in the Pacific, had precluded Japan to a large extent from taking a leadership role in or beyond the region. In the 1990s, climate leadership appeared to offer one means for Japan to display a stronger international profile. Second, the Protocol was seen to be grounded in a particular relationship with nature, which resonated with Japan's own historical narrative of in-betweenness, in which Japanese people regard themselves as both superior to, and intrinsically connected with, their natural environment (Moon 1997). Third, enshrined in the principles of Kyoto were the foundations for instrumentalising aid for environment policy, which enabled Japan to highlight a mainstay of its foreign policy approach. Finally, this 'green' approach aligned Japan to the growing narrative of ecological modernisation (EM), which Japan began to embrace. These factors remain important for understanding the Japanese government's approach to climate action today.

The aim of this article is to examine the ways in which the Japanese government presented its international climate credentials in the run-up to 1997, and to analyse how structural and normative challenges on the one hand, and directional and instrumental factors, on the other, have shaped the space for Japan to portray itself as a climate leader since that time. In so doing, it questions the bases on which claims to leadership were made by Japan during the 1990s, and suggests instead that the Japanese state has been consistently reluctant to become a climate leader. Notwithstanding this assertion, it is also important to understand a number of changes to Japan's position throughout the past two decades. The first section of the article examines the academic literature defining and narrating the terms of climate leadership. Section two outlines the history of the COP process from 1995 to 2015 and outlines Japan's role in key meetings. Sections three and four analyse the complex interplay of structural and normative factors in relation to Japan's leadership in the context of COP. Finally, the conclusion outlines the prospects and opportunities for Japan beyond Glasgow 2021 to play a meaningful role in climate negotiations.

## Climate Leadership

How do we identify a 'good' climate leader? What are suitable measurements for analysing leadership qualities in this field? From the 1990s, a body of scholarship began to grow around the concept of climate leadership, and issued primarily from the work of neoliberal institutionalists and regime theorists, to examine how formalised collective action responses to climate issues were being framed and implemented. Early work on climate leadership drew heavily on Young's definition of (diplomatic) leadership as the 'actions of individuals who endeavor to solve or circumvent the collective action problems that plague efforts of parties seeking to reap joint gains' (1991: 285). Young's institutionalist approach identified the three categories of structural, entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership. Structural leadership hinges on material resources being brought to bear as a form of bargaining leverage; entrepreneurial leadership uses negotiation skills to influence how issues are presented; and intellectual leadership takes an ideational route to influence, by shaping 'the way in which participants in institutional bargaining understand the issues at stake' and examining how they 'orient their thinking about options available to come to terms with these issues' (1991: 288). These elements address the behavioural approaches of specific actors, and much of the literature on climate leadership is indebted to this work.

Notably, in 2001 Gupta and Ringius identify structural, directional and instrumental leadership within a global climate context. Structural leadership is identical to Young's categorisation, whilst directional leadership refers to the setting of examples by the leader, through the domestic implementation of mitigations and changes. The European Union (EU) is frequently cited as an example of this directional approach, particularly in its setting of environmental standards, and this form of leadership can also enhance the 'symbolic power and legitimacy' of a particular leader. In contrast, instrumental leadership forges practical steps towards finding collective action solutions through mutual benefit, issue-linkage and coalition-building (Gupta and Ringius 2001: 282). Subsequent work offers a combination of these approaches, and includes analyses of domestic implementation and input. Helpful here is the four-pronged approach by Parker *et al.* (structural, idea-based, directional, and instrumental), which reinstates the normative, ideational element of influence (2015). As Parker *et al.* subsequently elucidate, this element involves 'problem naming and framing' (2017: 242). Similarly, Wurzel *et al.* include in their four ideal-typical forms of leadership the element of cognitive leadership, which brings forth ideas and knowledge (2016). More recently, Eckersley's 2020 work distinguishes between 'front-runnership versus substantive

leadership.’ Whilst frontrunners are defined as – either cooperative or competitive – initiators, substantive leadership ‘entails asymmetric roles between leaders and followers in the collective pursuit of collective goals’ (2020: 1180-1). Similarly, Liefferink and Wurzel distinguish between leadership and pioneership, and note that these approaches do not assume that others will automatically follow such leadership (2018: 135); whilst, in a similar vein, Hurri notes: ‘there is a difference between self-declared leadership and leadership recognized by potential followers’ (2020: 2). Other authors focus on the substantive contributions to leadership in climate action, including growing attention to scientific and technical developments (see Crowley and Nakamura 2018: 390). Most notably, this trend maps onto the growing dominance of an EM approach, which appeared in the 1980s, and which will be explored below (see Mol and Spaargaren 2000).

Many of the works on climate leadership focus on specific case studies, notably the EU, which obviously involves the dimension of intra-state bargaining and ‘multi-level reinforcement’ (Jänicke 2017: 122), but also includes insight into the impact on negotiations of the regulatory framework (Skjærseth 2017). In addition, an important strand running through this literature is the normative dimension of climate action within the EU, as it is seen to have become ‘part of its self-image and international identity’ (Vogler 2009: 469). On the one hand, this element can be seen both as a form of ‘normative entrapment,’ tying in a commitment fostered by EU institutions in the face of different domestic interests and ambitions. On the other, a number of authors focus on the ways in which a normative commitment to addressing climate action aligns with an underlying concept of the EU as a ‘normative power,’ and a ‘belief in multilateralism, sustainable development and the precautionary principle’ (van Schaik and Schunz 2012: 169). Works on specific EU states also offer insight into domestic drivers (see, for example, Bocquillon and Evrard 2016; Vogler 2020).

In addition, studies on the US have followed Washington’s in/out participation in climate governance structures. Before the Trump era, there was a focus on the ‘green deal’ state of the US (see Bang and Schreurs 2010). More recently, a number of authors have focused on the polycentric nature of US climate decision-making (see, for example, Bang and Schreurs 2016). Alongside these states, works on China’s environmental credentials are also growing in number, as Beijing makes a more technical and proactive contribution to climate leadership. The Chinese leadership took advantage of the absence of US climate leadership in recent years in order to articulate its own vision, and is now an important player within

climate governance (Rudd 2020). Nevertheless, exclusion from a number of climate platforms has made it difficult for China to gain traction as a climate leader (see Hurri 2020).

Since the 2000s, there has also been a greater focus on non-state actors in climate action (Betsill and Corell 2001). The impact of large-scale demonstrations can add an impetus for a climate leader to find a tangible outcome (Rietig 2016), although in reality even years of involvement by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in international climate negotiations have yielded very little in terms of outcomes (Pandey 2015). O'Neill contends, nevertheless, that a frustration with official channels frequently leads to finding ways of bypassing them (2017: 6). Moreover, as Allan and Hadden contend, the ability by NGOs to frame issues (such as 'climate justice') can offer an important contribution to influencing climate negotiations (2017: 616).

Drawing on this eclectic literature, the present article examines Japan's climate behaviour within COP along the intersection of a structural-normative axis and a directional-instrumental one. In so doing, it is indebted to the work of Parker *et al.* who reinsert the need to understand the normative context of climate decision-making. Normatively, this article focuses on the ways in which both the 'problem' and Japan as climate actor are framed, in particular against the background of a projection of 'soft power.' At the same time, it gives equal weight to the prevailing structural conditions, which incorporate 'the capacity to take actions or deploy power-resources that create incentives, costs and benefits that may sway other actors to change their behaviour' (Parker *et al.* 2015: 242). This element enables us to examine the dynamics of international climate regimes, Japan's geopolitical position, and its material resources (including energy vulnerabilities).

This structural-normative line pinpoints both the opportunities and constraints within which Japan exercises its climate role. However, in combining elements of the extant literature, this work represents the structural-normative axis as cutting across a directional-instrumental axis, rather than as different factors on the same continuum. Parker *et al.*'s directional leadership highlights a state's ability to instigate and initiate policy change, and as applied here, includes Young's entrepreneurial negotiation skills; whilst Gupta and Ringuis' instrumental implementation of strategies, notably at home, chart the follow-through of collective decision-making. *See figure 1*

Drawing on inductive process-tracing mechanisms to situate Japan's behaviour along the intersection of a structural–normative axis and a directional-instrumental axis, this article



seeks to create an event-history map, by examining Japan's participation at COP meetings from 1995 to the run-up to COP26 in 2021 (Waldner 2015: 132). The aim of such an approach is to set out a minimally sufficient explanation as to why Japan's environmental commitment appeared to dwindle and to offer up 'snapshots at a series of specific moments' (Beach and Pedersen 2013). In order to achieve this outcome, I examine secondary literature and contemporary UN reports to define clearly the intervention (climate change action) being evaluated; analyse Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) documents to identify the outcomes considered by stakeholders; and assess what was done to achieve the selected outcomes. Essentially, this results in a narrative analytical report to document these findings (Anguko 2019). This approach reveals how subtle transformations in Japan's position have been arrived at and enables us to question whether Japan was in fact a climate leader when it hosted COP3 in 1997.

### **From Kyoto to Paris**

In 1995, the inaugural annual COP took place in Berlin, in order to put in place the mechanisms needed to achieve the goals of the UNFCCC. Progress started only slowly, illustrating to the Japanese government ahead of COP3 how hard it would be to get consensus on the more intractable issues. COP3 took place from 1-11 December 1997 with over ten thousand participants from governments, NGOs, other non-state agencies and the press. The final agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, saw a commitment by developed states to reduce their overall emissions of six different greenhouse gases by a minimum of five per cent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. Other important initiatives included in the Protocol were emissions trading and a clean development mechanism to encourage cooperation among developing and developed states in the reduction of emissions.

The level of commitment required by Japanese negotiators to formulate and gain agreement for the Protocol should not be underestimated, and it took two weeks of 'marathon' negotiations to get to the finish line, demonstrating directional leadership by Tokyo (Johnston 2017). A number of trade-offs were negotiated throughout the process. Notably, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto shifted his position from a zero reduction in emissions prior to the meeting, to agree with the US proposal of six per cent for Japan, eight per cent for the EU and seven per cent for the US, with no commitments from developing countries (Kolmas 2017: 469). This achievement was secured through complex internal discussions among key

ministries, notably the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), MoFA and the Environment Agency, with the mediation of the Cabinet Secretariat (Kawashima 2001: 175; see also Watanabe 2012). The Japanese government played an important role in mediating between various positions, but it could not have achieved success without the high-level participation of US Vice President Al Gore, or without the constant corridor to-ings and fro-ings among US, Japan and EU representatives. Adding to comments by the UN Executive Secretary of the Climate Change Secretariat, the IISD reflected on the ‘hammer,’ the ‘hotline,’ and the ‘hype’ of COP3 (IISD 1997).

The following three COP meetings attempted primarily to carve the difficult path to the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, but COP6 even had to be suspended due to the lack of agreement. The eventual Bonn Agreement, reached at COP6bis in 2001, saw Japan adopt a ‘critical role in forging consensus,’ given the pressures to get other states to ratify Kyoto despite the US position (Asselt *et al.* 2009: 320). The COP7 meeting, in 2001 in Marrakesh, did manage to secure a package deal after lengthy closed-door negotiations. However, it was also clear that the US would not be able to ratify the Protocol, and the ‘usual division between developed and developing country positions’ continued. Moreover, at both COP6 and COP7 Japan had failed to promise the implementation of Kyoto and in fact sought to reduce penalties for non-compliance, thereby illustrating its absence of instrumental leadership, and winning the Japanese government the ironic Fossil of the Day Award by the Climate Action Network, given to the states seen to be ‘doing the most to achieve the least’ (Kagawa-Fox 2012: 72). Japan would go on to win it again (along with many other states), including in 2010 at COP16 for ‘trying to kill the Kyoto Protocol’ (Climate Action Network International 2021a, 2021b; IISD 2002, 2004). In 2004, COP10 in Buenos Aires celebrated Russia’s ratification of Kyoto (thanks in large measure to EU support for Russian membership of the World Trade Organisation), and looked back on a decade of COP meetings, highlighting successes in securing the Kyoto Protocol. However, discussions emphasised the need for greater engagement with developing states, the pressing need to bind states (notably the US) to 2020 targets for reducing emissions, and for a focus on issues related to poverty alleviation. Japan’s role in facilitating the Kyoto Protocol was recalled in a number of statements, but there was no clear line from Tokyo as to how to progress to a post-Kyoto context. During this period, the Japanese government showed itself to be

increasingly limited by its domestic and external structural context, and signs of both directional and instrumental leadership were lacking.

A step forward for international agreement was taken at Montreal at COP11 in 2005, which took place during the year of the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol and following a July G8 Summit focused on climate change, and which sought to articulate a set of future mechanisms beyond Kyoto. It also inaugurated the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (MOP1) and adopted a five-year work programme on adaptation to climate change. Interestingly, it was during the early 2000s that Japan participated actively in the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (APP), adopting a region-wide initiative to develop voluntary and technological mitigations to climate change, and to show 'political leadership in Asia' (Asselt *et al.* 2009: 320).

There followed meetings focused on how to manage the post-Kyoto context, and although the 2007 Bali Roadmap went some way to delineating a post-2012 regime, on the whole these meetings were noted as having no significant outcomes. At Copenhagen in 2009 more than 40000 people from NGOs, faith-based and intergovernmental organisations applied for conference accreditation alongside the over one hundred leaders in attendance, and there was unprecedented public and media attention. Negotiations took place at multiple formal and informal levels, many of the latter facilitated by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon through the night. In the event, the resulting Copenhagen Accord could only be noted, and attached as an unofficial document. For many commentators, this was a far from an effective outcome and representatives of civil society berated the lack of transparency in the negotiations and argued that a number of countries remained disenfranchised (McGregor 2011). Indeed, for Sterk *et al.* it was no more than a cop-out (2010), demonstrated how fragmented the leadership of climate governance had become (Parker *et al.* 2012), and called into question the very legitimacy of the UNFCCC process itself (Stavins and Stowe 2010). Whilst Japan's structural and normative leadership credentials were also lacking throughout this period, at Copenhagen the Japanese government did demonstrate some directional leadership. Following criticism from international NGOs in Bali for Japan's rejection of a 'strong quantified emission reduction commitment' (Asselt *et al.* 2009: 322), and in the wake of 2008 Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's pledge to take action, the Japanese government committed to cut emissions by 2020 to 25 per cent

below 1990 levels, ahead of EU pledges, and to implement some of the fast-start financing to support developing countries with adaptation and mitigation (Light 2010).

Some confidence in the overall process was restored at COP16 in Cancún in 2010 with the signature of tangible agreements, although ‘most participants acknowledged that it was a relatively small step in combating climate change’ (Green Climate Fund 2018; IISD 2010; MoFA 2021). And COP17 in Durban confirmed the Green Climate Fund (GCF) proposed at COP16, designed to provide developing countries with the finances necessary to mitigate against, and adapt to, climate change. Japanese government documents illustrate how the GCF supports its soft power objectives by strengthening ties with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which in 2017 would be accredited to the GCF; and by complementing Japan’s development assistance and showcasing Japanese expertise in areas such as disaster management. The Durban Platform represented a pledge by 195 countries to negotiate a new international climate treaty by 2015 and to enact a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol. Despite these promising signs, however, criticisms continued to be levelled against the UNFCCC for its lack of urgency and for its limited content (Death 2012), and the lacklustre contribution of the Japanese government was increasingly explained by post-Fukushima dilemmas at home (see below).

It was at Paris in 2015 that over 36000 participants came together to agree and adopt a legally binding set of decisions designed to fulfil the remit of Durban. The Paris Agreement includes the aspiration to maintain an average global temperature increase to significantly less than 2°C (Morgan 2016), but for some observers this pledge offered little more than a ‘promissory note’ (Christoff 2016). Subsequently, the hard-hitting 2018 *Special Report on 1.5°C of Global Warming* by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was merely acknowledged at COP23. In 2019, the Japanese Cabinet published its strategy under the Paris Agreement, in which it sets out a future vision based on renewable energy; reduced dependency on nuclear; continued efforts to reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions; the pursuit of hydrogen usage; and the promotion of energy efficiency. This growing emphasis on technological solutions represents the heart of Japan’s official attempts to define a new form of ‘energy diplomacy,’ and can be regarded as an attempt to take forward its directional leadership, as examined below (IISD 2019; MoFA 2018).

Charting the changing narrative of the meetings, in response to UN reports of the 1990s, the early COP meetings focused on the need to garner an awareness of climate issues and to hone in on the need for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, this element was the mainstay of Kyoto in 1997 and its resultant Protocol. By the 2010s, attention had shifted to the need for decarbonisation. Whilst calls for urgency and for states to take a longer term view have become ever louder, the challenge to overcome disparities between developed and developing countries continues to drive a wedge among participants, whilst different vested interests among the ‘advanced’ economies continue to get in the way of the process. Most interestingly, the overall approach of the COP process has moved from a top-down to a bottom up framework, signalled by change at Paris. Along with a greater recognition of the importance of developing states and the inclusion of NGO participants, this change towards a more graduated and discrete policy approach has given greater leeway to the individual needs and preferences of participating states. (Kuyper *et al.* 2017; and Toft 2020). Against this background of fluctuating commitment, intensifying scientific evidence, shifting priorities and competing claims, Japan’s own experience of and responses to the COP process have waxed and waned as they resonate with changing structural and normative exigencies, as analysed in the following sections.

### **Structural challenges in Japan’s climate leadership**

This section highlights some of the principal international and domestic structures that have impacted on the development of Japan’s participation in climate negotiations, by examining whether and, if so, there is leeway for directional and instrumental leadership in the international regime for addressing climate change; domestic changes in policy and non-state behaviour vis-à-vis environmentalism; the ‘energy problem’ in Japan; the role of NGOs; and the ways in which aid policy has been used to shape and influence environmental responses.

#### ***A changing climate regime***

The first major international conference on the environment was the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, and resulted in the creation of the UN Environment Programme (O’Neill 2017). However, despite the fact that Japan’s own

environmental consciousness had been awakened prior to that (see below), it was in the 1980s that the Japanese government became actively conscious of climate concerns. During this period, the experience of acid rain and other environmental problems emanating from its own region, particularly China, was increasingly discussed among scientific and political groups, and as Wilkening notes, Japan's Environment Agency also drew on the 'culture of forests' in Japan, linking Japanese people culturally to this key element of their nature (2004). A growing public awareness of environmental damage arose, and was highlighted in opinion polls (Mitsuda 1997: 125). In addition, international criticism of Japan's environmental foot-dragging pushed Japan in 1987, despite its reluctance to participate in negotiations to regulate CFC-113 (fearing that any curbing of this cleaning solvent would impact upon Japan's semiconductor market), to sign the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Schreurs 2010: 145). And it was in the wake of this agreement that the Japanese government would focus more substantive efforts on global warming. In 1989, the Japanese government agreed to the EC-US proposal to phase out ozone-depleting substances, to accept goals as part of the Action Program to Arrest Global Warming in 1990, and to set up initiatives like the 1992 Environment Agency's East Asian Acid Deposition Monitoring Network (Kim 2007: 450; Miyaoka 1999). Japan also became the second largest donor to the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Protocol in 1990, which was designed to support developing countries to meet their commitments to this agreement (MoFA no date; Swanson and Mason 2003). Interestingly, commentary around this agreement not only drew out the need to address the human security threats from man-made climate-impacting behaviours, and the need to consider the concepts of environmental and ecological security, but also reinforced the human agency seen to lie behind both the degradation and potential repair (Brauch 2008; Oquist 2008). In addition, having joined the inaugural G7 (group of seven industrialised states) meeting in 1975, it was at the G7 summit in Toronto in 1988 that Japanese leaders discussed the issue of growing environmental degradation, including climate change. For Kawashima: 'It was then that Japanese policymakers clearly recognized that climate change was not merely a scientific debate but was already on the political agenda' (2001: 168). Arguably, it was the Rio Summit of 1992 that provided 'single largest impetus for this shift' in Japan's environmental thinking (Kameyama 2002: 68). Standing alongside its European partners, the Japanese government declared its commitment to establishing targets, and began to link its environmental strategy with its development aid (Gardner 1992: 9). In addition, Mikami *et al.* illustrate how domestic mass media covered the meeting and highlighted those environmental issues directly and immediately impacting on Japanese

citizens (notably the ozone layer and waste disposal), thus ensuring that the meeting obtained a high level of attention at civic as well as political levels (1995: 225).

Participation in these negotiations aligned with a growing Japanese preference for multilateral forums, particularly from the 1990s, when it was also seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and attempting to cast itself as a 'soft power' (see below; and Kameyama 2021: 67). In so doing, the Japanese government has shaped in particular a preference for regional multilateralism, seen for example, in the formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Chiang Mai Initiative, and the APP (Yuzawa 2017: 460). This embrace of multilateral dialogue also formed the backbone of Japanese approaches to Kyoto 1997. Almost as soon as the signatures were dry on the Kyoto Protocol, however, it became clear that ratification would be challenged by a determined rejection of multilateralism by the US, thus imperilling Japan's approach to international cooperation. In fact, even before the US withdrew from the Protocol in 2001, Japan found itself between Washington and Brussels in the implementation of the agreement. With the US out of the picture, it was the EU in 'constant opposition to the cautious US climate policy' which helped to push through the Protocol (Hovi *et al.* 2003: 2). In addition to the EU's determination to see through the implementation, moreover, given the symbolic importance of the Protocol for Japan, embodied as it was in a narrative of nature and situated in the ancient capital of Japan, the failure of Kyoto 'would have been considered a huge diplomatic setback' (Pajon 2010: 45). In the event, signs of Japanese climate leadership quickly began to diminish once the Protocol came into force in 2005, and as multilateral engagement waned further, especially in the face of growing bilateral free trade agreements. Attempts to re-establish multilateral channels, not least to ensure the inclusion of the US in Asian regional groupings in the late 2000s and to allay Japanese 'fear of being abandoned within its own region by the US,' had little success (Yuzawa 2017: 475), and according to Kameyama, multilateral environmental channels 'became dysfunctional' as the later failure at Copenhagen illustrated (2021: 80)

By the 2010s, Japan's domestic problems also ensured that Japan was not in a position to pursue a leadership role in negotiations. Moreover, having presided over an era which delineated a clear distinction between developing and developed states, the change driven through at Paris in 2015, and ongoing concerns about the exclusion of most of the world in climate talks, ensured that responsibility shifted to all states. The net effect of this change was to engender diverse 'blocking strategies' and to highlight resistance to collective target-setting (Dagnet *et al.* 2019). As a result of these changes, Japan no longer had to contend

simply with US-EU divergences, but also with the introduction into negotiations of significant new players, and notably China. Thus, when the US withdrew from the Paris Agreement in November 2020, and the EU was consumed with intra-regional concerns (see Gilson 2019), it was China which sought to articulate its own vision and to become an important player within climate governance with its 2060 carbon-neutral pledges (Rudd 2020). President Biden did reinsert the US into the Paris Climate Agreement at the start of his tenure (February 2021), leading with a ‘whole team’ approach to climate action and underlining the need for technical innovation, along the lines of Tokyo’s approach (South *et al.* 2021). But the seeming clarity of the early days of climate regime building had been replaced by polycentric engagement. In these ways, Japan’s early directional leadership potential was not matched by instrumental leadership to implement change and bring coalitions together.

### ***Domestic transformations***

Japanese policy makers and citizens were also affected by domestic environmental changes from as early as the 1950s. In 1962 in the US, Rachel Carson published her ground-breaking book, *Silent Spring*, to expose the damaging impact of the indiscriminate use of pesticides. But in Japan by this date, there was already a groundswell of concern at the high costs of pollution on human health from Japan’s rapid industrialisation. In 1961, Toyama Prefecture undertook tests to determine that Mitsui Mining and Smelting was responsible for cadmium pollution; and, most infamously, from 1956, Minamata Disease was shown to be caused by the Chisso Corporation’s discharge of the highly toxic mercury compound, methylmercury, into Minamata Bay. The ‘ten years of silence’ from 1959 to 1969 reflected the challenges in seeking redress and compensation for this systematic poisoning of the natural resources of the area (Avenell 2012). As a result of these increasingly visible negative consequences of industrial development, the Japanese Diet (parliament) session of 1970 came to be known as the ‘Pollution Diet,’ as it passed fourteen anti-pollution laws, and new initiatives were set in motion to improve air quality and monitor pollution levels in Japan (Matanle 2020). Many of these campaigns emerged from the ground, with the effect that non-governmental ‘networks of power and protest’ built on the legacies of anti-pollution campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, to create debates around the environmental costs of economic development (Broadbent 1999).



In 1971, the Environment Agency was established to oversee changes domestically, and would be transformed into the Ministry for the Environment (MoE) in 2001. In 1993, Japan passed the *Basic Environment Law* founded on the three principles of: intergenerational concern; minimising environmentally damaging human activities; and contributing to global conservation through international cooperation' (MoE 1993). Importantly, the law noted that there needs to be environmental consideration in all areas of policy formulation, and that development projects require environmental impact assessments. The *Basic Environment Plan* was created in December 1994, to elaborate the directions of long-term environmental policy; and to promote the improvement of social environmental infrastructure (like sewerage systems), corporate and social responsibilities and education, science and technology, and international cooperation for global conservation.

In addition to incremental policy changes, notable individuals also played an important role in highlighting environmental policy. Most importantly in the period prior to the Kyoto Protocol, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita play a significant role in inserting environmental issues into the (dominant) Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP's) agenda, with the explicit aim of 'enhancing Japan's international role in a post-cold war world' (Schreurs 1997: 152). His leadership also led to the creation of the powerful *Kankyō Zoku*, the environment wing of the LDP (Pajon 2010: 23). Although this influenced the overall direction of policy, inter-ministerial differences of approach to environmental matters were also important. Thus, for example, whilst MoFA sought to enhance Japan's external profile, MITI (which became the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2001) embraced techno-industrial approaches to climate action from early on, and carried the flag for EM, arguing that 'technological innovation is the solution to the problems of pollution and depletion of resources' (Pajon 2010: 29). By the mid-2000s, serious attempts were made to balance inter-bureaucratic interests with regard to climate change and a Mid-Term Target Committee was set up to this end in October 2008, under the supervision of the Cabinet. These initiatives further advanced Japan's capacity for coherent directional leadership.

### ***Energy problems***

Since its rapid industrialisation from the 1950s to 1970s, Japan has been dependent on imported energy resources. The period from the 1970s emphasised energy efficiency, which

also formed the basis for the narrative of the Kyoto Protocol (Kawashima 2001: 174). In reality, however, following the collapse of oil prices in 1985 and a clamour for luxury items and consumerism, such concerns abated and a general consensus emerged about the need to continue to rely on coal in particular to fill any shortfalls (Fukui 2002: 5). If Japan's climate credentials had been waning after 2005, the nuclear disaster at Fukushima in 2011 shook the nation to its core. Immediately, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama postponed his planned carbon tax to fund mitigation initiatives, and initiated a focus on energy needs and the ailing economy. At COP17 in 2011 the Japanese government walked away from the chance to lead the next stage of Kyoto, and instead drew on US and Chinese unwillingness to set meaningful targets as the basis for its own prevarication. In addition, during the tenure of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe from 2012, the promotion of aid took a backseat to the primary goal of reviving the economy through a package of 'Abenomics,' which 'made virtually no mention of environmental issues' (Heng 2014: 186). There was no hesitation on the part of the government to increase the import of fossil fuels once again, and even after the Paris COP21, Japan accepted a continued reliance on coal alongside nuclear energy. Indeed, 'Abenergynomics' prioritised fossil fuels and technical solutions, and in many ways divorced energy from the matter of climate sustainability, and thus Japan 'did not make a meaningful effort to reverse the tide' of a 'deteriorating' climate profile (Incerti and Lipsky 2018: 610, 632). Even when the government later acknowledged the need to reduce fossil fuels, it failed, according to Bakshi, to embrace the economic opportunities presented by green technologies (2021: 238). As the Japanese government continued to espouse the need for energy efficiency and clean technology, and to promote energy conservation in the region, it was increasingly with the aim of marketising green technology and influencing the international energy market, in a way that was delinked from environmental sustainability (Pajon 2010: 62).

Most notably, in order to reduce its energy vulnerability, the Japanese state has focused on the creation of an indigenous nuclear power supply (Ohta 2021). By 1990, nuclear power provided 9.4% of Japan's energy supply, compared to 0.6% in 1973 (World Nuclear News 2021). However, even prior to the Great Tōhoku Earthquake and Fukushima disaster of 2011, accidents at nuclear power plants, most notably at Monju in 1995, had started to worry the public about the safety of this form of energy. In the wake of Fukushima, by 2019, nuclear energy supplied only 7.5% of Japan's electricity (Green 2016), and by 2021 only ten of Japan's 33 commercial reactors were back in operation (Tsukimori 2021). Notwithstanding these setbacks, throughout the 2010s the Japanese followed the aims of the 2014 *Strategic*

*Energy Plan*, which emphasised the importance of nuclear power, and of aligning energy security with greater economic efficiency and harmony with the environment (Bakshi 2021). In 2018, Japan's *Basic Energy Plan* stated that by 2030 it aimed to get 20-22 per cent of its electricity from nuclear power, 22-24 per cent from renewables, and 56 per cent from fossil fuels (EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation 2018). The 2021 version of this *Plan* saw a radical overhaul of those targets, in view of Japan's dramatic pledge to cut its GHG emissions by 46 per cent (from 2013 levels) by 2030. Its new target sees a 60 per cent non-fossil fuel energy supply by 2030, with nuclear kept as before, but renewables up to a target of 36-38 per cent of total power. The reality of the current situation, however, makes those targets aspirational: in 2019, renewables accounted for 18 per cent and nuclear for six per cent of power supply. And despite the fact that solar power has become the cheapest source of domestic power, Japan's total installed solar power is already the third highest in the world, and its capacity for further increase is minimal. Meanwhile, ocean conditions off Japan require the construction of expensive floating wind turbines and make wind power here less economically viable than in Europe where fixed-bottom turbines are generally used (Tsukimori 2021).

To be presented at COP26, this pledge is almost impossible to realise. Estimates suggest that Japan would need to be operating about 27 of its reactors by 2030, and critics also draw attention to the now high costs of safety measures and disaster prevention (*Mainichi* Editorial 2021). These examples illustrate an important distinction within Japan's environmental policies between energy efficiency and energy supply. In its techno-industrial approach to climate action, and its aid-oriented support for developing states, the Japanese government has focused on efficiency gains and target setting. In terms of energy sources, however, the story does not support these ambitions. Thus, for example, as Bakshi illustrates, plans to deactivate one hundred domestic coal-fired power plants by 2030 are matched by a pledge to construct 22 new coal-fired plants by 2025 in Japan, as well as to support Japanese firms building plants overseas (2021: 238).

## **NGOs**

Non-state actors have come to play an increasingly vocal role in environment and energy policy-making in Japan. From the 1970s, Japanese business was quick to see ways to marketise the green economy; polluters were heavily penalised; and environmental

initiatives came to be associated with economic growth (Fukui 2002: 3). As a result, by the early 2000s, for example, Japanese car makers led the development of hybrid and fuel-cell [powered by hydrogen] vehicles (Dunn 2002: 37). In terms of regulation, local government also has significant autonomy and resource when it comes to environmental laws, as it is able to initiate and monitor, and to set standards, and there are many voluntary agreements between local government and business (Fukui 2002).

In 1993, in recognition of the growing role of NGOs, but notably as a means of finding ‘internationally acceptable ways of contributing to international society,’ MoFA established the Japan Fund for Global Environment, to reflect the norms of Rio and to provide financial assistance to NGO programmes aimed at conservation in Japan and in developing states (Reimann 2001: 311). In 1996 the *Kiko* (climate) *Forum* was established to raise awareness about climate change and to act as a channel for ensuring that the interests of NGOs were conveyed to the government (Pajon 2010: 39). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Japanese NGOs sought to become engaged in energy policy (Kameyama 2017: 82), and they came to be included in the apparatus of state environmental decision-making (Schreurs 1997: 154). Nevertheless, despite these notable campaigns and policy changes, it was clear by the 1990s that there was in fact a dearth of significant civil society platforms with regard to environmental matters (Fisher 2002: 200). Kawashima points to the ‘limited influence’ of NGOs (2000: 55); whilst Schreurs notes that the small size of the Japanese NGO community ensured that economic concerns remained paramount (1997: 156).

More vocal expressions of citizen concern were voiced in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in 2011, which was seen by Cassegård as both revitalising and creating tensions within the environmental movement (2014: 245). Saito illustrates the importance of the pro-civil society Democratic Party of Japan, in power between 2009 and 2012, which fostered government interaction with NGOs under Prime Minister Hatoyama. However, once the LDP returned to power under Prime Minister Abe, he notes, not only were public views discounted, but so was the very participation of civil society actors (2020: 156). It was clear that the power of pro-nuclear industry and labour unions dominated discussion around the creation of the *Basic Plan*. As a result, opportunities for instrumental and directional leadership were prevented by a lack of national coherence.

### ***Instrumentalising aid***

It was through its official development assistance (ODA) programmes that Japan sought to instrumentalise its actions and to 'spread its own model of climate change prevention' (Pajon 2010: 57). Indeed, from 1992 the Japanese government began to link its environmental strategy with its development aid, introducing its ODA Charter, which sought to redress criticisms of Japan's and set out for the first time a new approach to aid (Gardner 1992: 9). This included a focus on democratisation and human rights, and combined MITI's focus on economic development with MoFA's emphasis on reform and socio-political concerns (see Hook and Zhang 1998: 1052). Exemplifying MITI's 1992 *Green Aid Plan*, Pajon shows how this programme was aimed at initiatives in developing states to encourage the use of energy-saving technologies and cleaner coal usage (2010).

From the start of its preparations for Kyoto, the Japanese government sought to highlight its own energy efficiency credentials and to take the stance that the best way to serve the international effort was to support energy efficiency and CO<sup>2</sup> emissions reduction in those developing states not yet up to that bar. Such a policy orientation could be instrumentalised through Japan's pre-existing aid programmes. This focus on the responsibility of developed states vis-à-vis developing states was written into the Protocol, which was only intended to focus on the actions of the former. By Paris COP 2015, however, this approach had been replaced with an all-encompassing focus for all states to do their part.

The Kyoto Protocol initiated a number of channels for funding and disbursing aid, based on distinctions between the responsibilities of the Annex I (developed) and non-Annex I (developing) state parties. ODA, often in the form of loans or grants, is used to alleviate poverty in developing states and is not formally associated with climate targets. At Kyoto, however, Article 12 of the Protocol ensured the alignment of ODA with environmental targets, when it established the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The CDM is a market-based scheme to mitigate the costs of reducing GHG emissions in developed countries by allowing them to fund clean development projects in developing (Non-Annex I) countries and to count such actions as GHG reductions. Despite concerns that the CDM was focused on too few countries and that its contribution to sustainable development is in question, it created a new form of environmental support for capacity building which strongly involves the private sector, and in this way demonstrated an element of instrumental leadership on the part of the Japanese government (Mele *et al.* 2021). Nevertheless, there has been some debate as to whether allocating funds specifically to climate alleviation detracts from the need to focus aid on poverty alleviation, particularly as climate-directed aid funds

act as a means for developed states to achieve their own targets, as ‘mitigation activities in developing countries provide politicians in industrialized countries with a welcome strategy to divert the attention of their constituencies from the lack of success in reducing greenhouse gas emissions domestically’ (Michaelowa and Michaelowa 2007: 6).

The main aim of the Japanese government’s environmental application of ODA in the follow-up to Kyoto was to promote EM through techno-industrial, market-led approaches to environmental solutions and mitigation, and to promote increased energy efficiency in developing states, in particular through infrastructure programmes using Japanese technology and knowledge (Pajon 2010). Japan also used the East Asia Summit meeting in 2007 to pledge US\$2 billion in aid to address regional energy poverty, and used its self-proclaimed energy leadership through its ODA ‘to influence the international market and other countries’ energy policies in order to improve global energy efficiency by 30% by 2020’ (Pajon 2010: 62).

One key example of Japan’s model for using aid to pursue climate mitigation, and a flagship for its climate leadership, has been its ‘Cool Earth’ programmes. Prime Minister Abe’s 2007 Cool Earth 50, aiming to halve global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, was followed in 2008 by the ‘Cool Earth Partnership,’ which, with a budget of US\$10 billion, had as its aim to support developing states to reduce their emissions and improve their energy efficiency (Heng 2014: 176-7). Climate Change ODA loans, also known as ‘Earth loans,’ were introduced to disburse these funds, and were used, for example, to prevent deforestation and improve water management systems.

One important vehicle for dispensing aid has been through the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in which Japan is a lead shareholder. Between 2011 and 2018, Japan helped to raise around US\$30 billion for financing ‘innovative technologies and projects supporting green growth,’ and, aligned with the ADB’s *Strategy 2030*, supported the Bank’s additional commitment of US\$80 billion over twelve years for disaster prevention and climate mitigation (Silverberg and Smith 2019). Alongside the ADB, the government-affiliated Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) and JICA have also been important distributors of Japanese aid and produced reports to feed into international negotiations (Silverberg and Smith 2019). These agencies also work with the UN Development Programme on specific projects, and, for example, at the Paris COP meeting in 2015, Japan pledged US\$13 billion to the developing world and announced the development of a national *Energy and Environment*

*Innovation Strategy* (Heng 2014: 176-7). Through its instrumental leadership in linking aid to climate alleviation, the Japanese government has used it as an additional tool for marketing further Japan's green credentials.

### ***Japan in the 2020s***

Following the arrival of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in 2020, there was a move away from instrumental leadership in climate mitigation, and an intensifying focus on those opportunities to be found at home around 'green growth' and techno-industrial initiatives linked to climate change. This trend is illustrated in Suga's goal for Japan of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 through a *Green Growth Strategy* dispensed via a Green Innovation Fund of (US\$19 billion), designed to fund research and development in the private sector. He told the Diet that: 'We will lead the green industry globally and realise a virtuous cycle of the economy and the environment' (Japanese Cabinet 2020).

Continuing the theme of industry-led solutions, his government nevertheless engaged in higher profile pledges of environmental leadership in the run-up to COP26 in 2021. Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, the young and popular son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, and contender for future prime minister himself, emphasised the importance of the 2018 *Climate Change Adaptation Act*, to establish national and local plans for addressing climate change. He also welcomed the Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Information Platform, which aims to support the Asia Pacific region in science-based adaptation actions. In the Japan Pavilion set up at COP25, Japan used its 'ACTION. ACTION. ACTION' pledge to showcase its strengths, *inter alia*, in hydrogen technologies, space and ocean observation, measures against fluorocarbons, and wind power generation technologies, which cover aspects of mitigation as well as adaptation. At the G7 meeting in 2021, Koizumi underlined Japan's planned transition to a 'decarbonised society,' a 'circular economy' and a 'decentralised society,' and re-emphasised the government's national and local government approach to achieving net-zero outcomes. Koizumi may have undermined his authority with one or two unfortunate gaffes – notably, that climate mitigation should be 'fun' and 'sexy' and with so-far empty pledges to get rid of the unpopular nuclear reactors - but he has built on Japan's EM strategy to set out plans for Japan to become a technology-led green trouble-shooter (MoE 2021a; Lies 2019).

## **Normative challenges in Japan's climate leadership**

Against this structural background, the normative dimension of Japan's climate leadership is critical, as it has proven to be an important strand of Japan's attempt to show its 'soft power,' and, more recently, to enhance its EM credentials.

### ***Soft power***

In light of the post-1945 constraints Japan has had limited room for manoeuvre as an international power and has repeatedly sought ways in which to project its own image as an international player. Academics have explained Japan's response to this position in terms of 'soft power' (see for example, Akaha 2005). As a policy approach, from the 1980s Japan sought to convey its soft power credentials, notably through efforts to define a 'comprehensive security' approach (Sudo 2001), and by the 1990s, the prevailing 'soft' discourse had turned to the concept of 'human security' (Gilson and Purvis 2003). In particular, when Sadako Ogata, former chair of the Commission on Human Security, became the president of JICA, there was the unsurprising follow-through of the concept (Shinoda 2009).

COP3 represented an expression of Japan's soft power in a number of ways. First, it demonstrated how Japan was contributing to 'international society' by engaging in negotiations designed to corral the developed world into taking greater collective responsibility (Kawashima 2001: 171). Indeed, Kolmas goes as far as to suggest that 'the fact that Kyoto Protocol was accepted under Japan's leadership allowed the government to present itself as a leader in the issue area and thus reconstructed Japan's international image as a diplomatically "proactive" country' (2017). By creating this new 'diplomatic niche' (Pajon 2010) the Japanese government carved out an opportunity to play a proactive front-runner role (Heng 2014: 171).

Second, the demonstration of 'green' credentials sits neatly within the narrative context of an historical relationship of Japanese people to the nature they inhabit. Beyond the scope of this article, it is nevertheless important to note that nature plays an important part in Japanese culture and can be traced back in modern times to the Japan-centred *Nihonjinron* literature, which identified unique or exceptional cultural characteristics of contemporary Japanese society and people, and which contains within it the concept of harmony with nature



(Moon 1997: 228). This version of harmony is often contrasted with a view of human domination of nature in Western anthropocentric accounts, which prioritise dominion over nature for the sake of the human species; and with Indian concepts of subjugation to nature, embodying a Buddhist philosophy of oneness. Thus, Japan can be situated as a ‘middle’ state vis-à-vis nature. Kolmas observes how Greenery Day, Mountain Day and Marine Day are all part of Japanese celebrations of existing within nature (2016: 462-3), and demonstrate a philosophy combining both utilitarian and conservationist approaches linked to a strong aesthetic (Pajon 2010: 17). Terms like *shizen no onkei* mean ‘by the grace of nature,’ and nature is often seen as a source and locus of rehabilitation, whilst the Confucian term *ten* means that humans should not oppose nature. Indeed, Japan’s most famous poet, Basho, who writes of the integral relationship of humans with the rest of nature, epitomises human existence in his expression of cherry blossom (1985). And the idea of *furusato* (crudely, ‘hometown’) similarly encapsulates the concept of place ‘uncontaminated by Western, industrial, capitalistic influences’ (Moon 1997: 229). In a similar vein, Tokyo 2020 (held in 2021) was heralded as the ‘green Olympics’ (see Silverberg and Smith 2019), despite that fact that most of the sustainability gains were made as a result of the absence of crowds (Reuters 2021; see also Brasor 2021).

Third, building on Japan’s use of aid to inform its soft power credentials and to be seen to play an international role, ODA represented the vehicle for many of Japan’s initiatives at Kyoto. Heng observes the use of aid as a vehicle for Japan’s soft power as an attempt to ‘position itself as a leader in the world’s urgent quest to live greener’ and to lead by example. More fundamentally, aid is also used as a means for projecting Japanese values, particularly in the face of competing value systems proposed in particular by China (Heng 2010: 289-90). Japan’s attempts to portray itself as a ‘green’ state in the 1990s can be seen in this light (see Yeng 2014). If the discourse and practice of overseas aid embodied Japan’s expression of soft power, it also neatly fits the narrative of EM, which has become dominant in climate negotiations.

### ***Ecological Modernisation (EM)***

One interesting normative shift in the run-up to Kyoto was the change of mindset in Japan (as elsewhere) to what would become the dominant paradigm of climate negotiations; namely, ecological modernisation (see Revell 2003 for a comprehensive

account of this term). As a policy approach, as noted above, EM proposes that pro-environmental initiatives can have economic gains, placing the emphasis on techno-industrial solutions (Christoff 1996; Revell 2003: 24). Whilst it offers a solution-based set of initiatives emanating from scientific and business innovation, it also reifies the anthropocentric basis of neoliberal discourse and thus fails to problematise those very neoliberal causes of climate change. Critics of EM also note that as a movement it ‘offers storylines in which economic and environmental goals are no longer pitted against each other, but rather are neatly reconcilable’ (Machin 2019: 208). For Christoff, this approach can ‘legitimise the continuing instrumental domination and destruction of the environment’ and place at centre-stage ‘modernity’s industrial and technocratic discourses over its more recent, resistant and critical ecological components’ (1996: 497). This change is important in relation to Japanese people, who embodied in the very city of Kyoto their symbolic relationship with nature, and in many ways it cuts against the grain of the soft power narrative of Japanese international engagement. Nevertheless, since the 1990s EM has offered a dominant narrative against which state climate leadership has been developed and measured, enabling leaders to assert that environmental decay offers a ‘catalyst for change’ (Machin 2019: 211).

By the mid to late 2000s, the Japanese state had engaged fully in this new narrative of EM, and sought an alternative vision to replace the Kyoto regime, not least to match the wishes of industry. *Cool Earth 50* set out Japan’s post-2012 project in this light, focusing as it did on combining economic growth and environmental protection, through multiple stakeholder involvement of state and non-state actors. By the mid-2010s, the foundation stone of EM was fully set, and, for example at COP24 in 2018, one of Japan’s principal objectives was to adopt the Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP), through which Japan representatives pledged to deliver the further promotion of the ‘virtuous cycle between the environment and growth through innovations’ (MoE 2021b; MoFA 2019). Moreover, a collective focus on the need for decarbonisation through innovation further ensures that the original elements of soft power projection have increasingly been replaced with a pledge of EM, bringing to the fore the emerging characteristics identified in the implementation phase of Kyoto during the early 2000s (Revell 2003). These characteristics were most potently combined in the period of ‘Abenergynomics.’

## Conclusion

COP3 in 1997 created in Japan a discourse of environmental leadership, both through ‘greater environmental awareness at the domestic level and a strengthened willingness to take international action,’ by expressing Japan’s normative commitment to sustainability (aligned to its ‘soft’ power) and through its gradual show of directional leadership. Thus, COP3 was regarded by some commentators as the moment in which Japan embraced the concept of global sustainable development and the moment in which the idea of Japan as a climate leader emerged. The Japanese government was able to draw on its extensive domestic experience in combating pollution; on its mythical historical narrative of a ‘oneness’ with nature, as embodied in the ancient city of Kyoto; on its growing participation in international climate regimes; and on its enhanced domestic structures for environmental decision-making. Indeed, building on a growing international profile, non-state participation, and a desire to find a means of expressing its own version of soft power, the leaders of Japan’s LDP made a conscious decision to use climate action to demonstrate Japanese leadership and to ‘build the Kyoto Protocol into a symbol of Japan’s new policy identity’ (Tiberghien and Schreurs 2007: 71).

Structurally, the impact of growing international agreement and a recognition – driven by scientific knowledge – of a growing climate crisis, Japan took the opportunity to position itself as a mediator among the two most significant climate powers; namely, the US and the EU. In the event, Japan’s room for manoeuvre was only made possible by the participation and strong tactics of the US and the EU. Without EU intervention, for example, it is unlikely that Russia would have ratified the Protocol. Added to the structural challenges of managing international relations among the competing positions of the US and the EU, moreover, many of the promises of Kyoto were mired in bureaucratic difficulties.

In normative terms, the Japanese approach to climate negotiations may have been driven by a self-portrayal as a ‘soft’ power in the period of COP3, but by the mid-1990s the discourse of EM had taken root and a strongly techno-industrial approach to environmental management and mitigation had begun to dominate the discourse of implementing Kyoto. What is clear from this analysis of Japan’s participation in international climate negotiations is that the normative dimensions of climate leadership represented an important strand of Japanese policy making. On the one hand, this approach has the benefit of empowering the industrial sector to take a proactive, and government-sponsored, lead in developing mitigation

strategies in the face of worsening planetary conditions. On the other, and in contrast, it moves the Japanese approach to climate leadership further and further away from a fundamentally important and almost symbiotic relationship with nature.

Against this background, the Japanese government at times has demonstrated directional leadership, by setting examples through the domestic implementation of mitigations and changes, and through the application of ODA strategies in developing states. Thus, for example, the shift in policy by a number of key prime ministers (including Prime Minister Hashimoto, and Prime Minister Suga most recently) and Japan's promotion of the Green Climate Fund and the role of JICA, demonstrated a Japan prepared to take a lead by implementing changes at home. However, Japan's ability to show this direction weakened significantly in the ratification phase of the Kyoto Protocol, and overall Japan has taken a back seat in subsequent COP meetings. Finally, Japan's instrumental leadership has been consistently lacking, as could be seen especially in its inability to bring states together to ratify Kyoto. Its limited success in this domain has been in linking aid to environmental actions and bringing in the private sector in initiatives like the Clean Development Mechanism and its EM projects, but in the main these activities lack a central coherent commitment to climate action itself. Broadly, then, as *Figure 1* illustrates, there have been small changes in Japan's climate leadership potential since COP3. The strong normative self-presentation at Kyoto gave way to the forces of structural change in the 2010s, particularly with the impact of the Fukushima disaster and changing climate roles of the US and China. Entering COP26, Japan has found a new normative (EM) voice, but one resting firmly on strong domestic economic ambition. In all of these periods, including COP3, Japan has been unable to grasp instrumental opportunities for leadership and to show a climate leadership ability to bring competing states together.

In November 2020, a symbolic vote was held in the lower chamber of the Diet to declare a climate emergency, setting Japan's position at the table alongside other G7 states like the UK, Canada and France. In his first speech to the Japanese Diet in October 2020, Prime Minister Suga surprised his colleagues and country with a pledge to make Japan carbon neutral by 2050. Later he would add a pledge to cut its emissions by 46 per cent by 2030 from 2013 levels. These statements marked a departure from the Abe Administration and an 'end to the paralysis in Japanese energy policy (Harding 2021). As Japan takes its position at COP26, it is worth noting two features. First, the idea of responsibility for domestic change is taking shape. Whilst the Japan of COP3 portrayed itself as a climate leader offering to help

developing states with their own carbon mitigations and reductions, since COP21 in particular, a focus on national contributions redirects Japan to examine its own practices (Bakshi 2021: 240). In order for this to take root, however, the Japanese public will need to see climate action as a domestic, and not just a global, issue (Sofer 2016). Second, Japan's attempt to portray 'solutions' through EM strategies signals the need to include all state and non-state actors, and particularly to incentivise industry towards genuinely greener behaviours, but it would also do well to reinsert some of Japan's original soft power credentials. The little time left will reveal whether or not this re-evaluation is possible, and whether Japan can enact new directional and instrumental climate leadership, drawing on its normative historical credentials and taking a stronger structural position. Whether we are genuinely seeing the opportunity for a 'makeover' of Japan's climate profile remains to be seen (Heng 2014: 186).

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