

11. Japan and the G7/G8

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Hello, my name is Saori Katada, I'm a professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California. Today I would like to talk about Japan and the G8.

Let me start with a brief background and history. Japan, along with the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, is one of the original members of the G5, which was later expanded to the G7, to include Italy and Canada, and then the G8, to include Russia. Japan actually participated in the G7/8 process from the first informal get-together in 1973, after the end of the Bretton Woods system. In 1975, when the first summit was held in France, Japan was one of the proud first members. In the past 30 years, Japan has hosted four summits: three times in Tokyo and once Okinawa, recently in 2000.

The bottom line is that G8 and Japan both need each other, and it is a very mutually beneficial relationship. For the G8, it is crucial to include Japan because Japan is the only non-Atlantic country. It is culturally and geographically, so its participation provides the G8 with the crucial credibility to claim that it is an institution of global governance instead of an Atlantic one.

For Japan, there are various reasons that the summit is crucial. Today, I would like to talk about the reason why Japan sees the G8 participation as so extremely important, and then I would like to conclude with the challenges that Japan has into the future.

I would pose five major reasons as to why the G7/8 process and Japan's participation in this process are so crucial.

First of all it is because it is a symbol and showcase of Japanese achievement. Japan has always been very status conscience. Ever since its Meiji emperor took the throne in 1868, modernization and inclusion into the west-

ern world were major goals of the Japanese government and its people. Even after the end of World War II, when Japan was defeated, economic recovery as well as the recovery of legitimacy in the international field was the goal that the Japanese government strived to achieve. So being included in the G5-to-G8 process has been a major achievement for the Japanese government and its people.

Even though in the 1970s, when Japanese leaders first started going to these summits, it was clear that they were very uncomfortable and not very effective in terms of leading the international agenda. There are some very unkind characterizations of Japanese leaders during this period — particularly the “three S's” of the Japanese leaders. One is being silent, the other smiling but not saying much, and the third one is sleeping during these meetings. But now, with the increased leverage and increased prestige, since the 1980s Japan has been quite active at the summit meetings.

On the other hand, Japan has been very sensitive to international pressure because of its late industrialized status, as well as the economic policy it has pursued over the years. That policy ranges from opening up Japan's market by stimulating its economy or the weak yen policy it pursued in the early 1980s. Thus Japan tends to adjust in advance before the summit, so that it can deflect pressures from the international community. In some ways this kind of sensitivity creates the summit process to be the showcase of Japanese government wanting to demonstrate how well Japan is adjusting to the international pressure and the demands from other advanced nations.

The second major reason is that Japan can act in this G8 process as the bridge between Asia and the west, as well as the leaders of the western world. Especially after Japan gained

confidence in the 1980s, it was clear that it tried to serve this role in the G8 context. At the same time, Asia became very important for Japan. In this G8 process, Japan became the advocate of Asian interests and issues. I would give two examples of this account. At the 1986 Tokyo Summit, Japan hosted and pushed to include various important Asian issues ranging from the inclusion and admission of both North and South Korea to the [United Nations](#), and importantly the support for peace process in Cambodia. The second example is after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident in China. Through the G7 process (at that point Russia was not a member of the G7), all the member countries instituted an embargo on China in protest against the human rights abuses that China imposed on the democratic demonstrators. At the 1989 Paris Summit as well as the 1990 Houston Summit, Japan supported this embargo but, behind the scenes, tried not to isolate China and tried to create a momentum enabling China to re-access business and investment from these G7 members. So, this was a very crucial component in Japanese foreign policy in the context of G8.

Similarly, there are other ways that Japan has tried to contribute to non-western countries through its foreign aid policy. In recent years, the late 1990s and into the 2000s, Japan has been a very strong advocate in supporting African development. At the 2000 Okinawa Summit, the Japanese government managed to invite various African leaders in support of the process. This is another reason why it is important for Japan to be active in the G8 summit.

The third reason is that the G8 is the place where Japan can go beyond the newest Japan bilateral board. In some ways the Japanese government can create what is called the counterweight to the European countries as well as Canada. Japan's link to the United States is very fundamental, especially after World War II. The U.S. occupied Japan from 1945 to 1952. Japan-U.S. security relations are very tight — it is Japan's only bilateral security alliance, and Ja-

pan's dependence on the U.S. market is extremely important. So many claim that Japan is very responsive to U.S. demands and that it is very hard for Japan to go beyond these bilateral ties. Often, within the G8, Japan is a clear supporter of the U.S. agenda. But when there is a very crucial disagreement between Japan and the U.S., what would Japan do? That's where the G7 or G8 process is very important to Japan.

Let me give you an example. After the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Japan strongly disagreed with the Washington consensus, led by the United States and the [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF). The Japanese government felt that providing some control or limits over the free mobility of massive foreign capital was crucial for a stable international financial architecture. Obviously, the U.S. government did not agree. But with the support of the Europeans, especially in 1998 after the Russian financial crisis, the Japanese government managed to have a limit, or at least increased regulation, on capital mobility as a crucial component of the new international financial architecture. In some ways, it would have been very difficult for the Japanese government to convince the U.S. to change its position, but because the western European countries and its own interests obviously, who supported the Japanese agenda in 1998/1999, that they managed to have this agenda put on the table. So, in sum on the third reason because there is a very strong limit on the Japanese diplomatic strategy that it can employ and because of the limited link that Japan has with the Europeans or the Canadians, G8 summit became a very important forum through which Japan can manage its relationship beyond U.S. -Japan bilateralism.

The fourth reason is that the G8 process can produce a positive result in Japan's domestic politics. Domestic political needs tend to drive various Japanese agendas for what it would like to put on the G8 summit table. At G8 summits, the Japanese media's coverage of the G8 is very extensive. A significant part of the press

corps follows the G8 leaders. This is because the Japanese public evaluates the performance of its prime minister as well as the minister of foreign affairs in the context of how much of Japan's agenda they can put out into the G8 forum. This interesting phenomenon can be observed at 2003 Evian summit: obviously, the North Korea issue was very important, but when most people hear the "North Korea issue" they think of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the nuclear development being promoted in North Korea. But for Japan this is not the issue. For the Japanese, it is the abduction issue, which is the issue of a dozen or so abductees who were captured by North Korean spies, or the government. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, this issue became very crucial; it came out of the Koizumi-Kim summit in 2002, when the North Korea leader actually admitted that North Korea had abducted these Japanese nationals. By now, half of them have allegedly died and the other half have been returned to Japan. But clarifying this issue and making North Korea acknowledge and declassify everything it knew became the obsession of the Japanese public in 2003. At the Evian Summit, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi pushed very hard for this abduction issue to be part of the G8 agreement. The fact that it was included in the final summit declaration created a major domestic political victory for Koizumi. When he went back to Japan from the Evian Summit, it was clear that the media and the public hailed him on this achievement.

Another example is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This ministry has been disgraced in the eyes of Japanese public for past ten years or so, due to corruption charges and various political meddling. In order to score big in the Japanese public eye, the ministry's success at each summit is crucial. This is one of the strong reasons behind the support of the ministry of foreign affairs to the African development process in the context of the [New Partnership for Africa's Development](#) (NEPAD). Because

the Japanese public is very altruistic in many ways, in terms of foreign aid helping Africans is a good public relations tool for the ministry of foreign affairs.

Finally, let me briefly talk about the fifth reason, which is a very practical one. The G8 summit is very important because it provides a very clear deadline for when the ministries have to co-ordinate their positions on various issues to achieve a unified Japan position. Because of the very high tension among the ministries and departments, as well as all the inter-ministry politics, various contentions have to be overcome. Having a very clear timeline as provided by the summit is very important for Japanese politics and Japanese foreign policy.

So these five reasons have led Japan to place the G8 process and the G8 summit at the centre of its foreign policy and global governance.

Let me conclude with two challenges that Japan has faced and will face into the future. The first challenge — which is also an opportunity — is the way in which Japan could or would be able to place some of the non-western or Asian agenda and create some common values in the context of global governance, be it foreign aid to Africa, the environment, or the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. Japan has a unique experience as a country having been devastated and then recovering under occupation. It has the track record of a non-western, underdeveloped country becoming a developed country. All these experiences put Japan in a very good position to promote very universalistic agenda of reconstruction, recovery, development and various issues related to world stability. But because this issue of domestic politics, which leads the agenda of many of Japanese leaders in the context of G8, this has become quite difficult. This is a challenge that the Japanese government and its people have to face into the future.

The second challenge is in the context of Japan being the leader of Asia. When the Chinese government was invited to the 2003 Evian

Summit, the Japanese government took a very ambivalent position. It was clear that the Japanese government wants more of an Asian presence on the agenda and that Asian issues or issues of a non-western nature are on the G8 table, but at the same time — and with the rivalry between Japan and China — Japan feels

threatened by the notion of including the Chinese government in the G8, making it a G9 process. That challenge will continue, and it has a major implication on Japan's role as the leader of Asia or the leader of the non-western world.

I would like to conclude with this note. Thank you.●

References and Recommended Reading
To come

Discussion Questions
To come.

Quiz
To come.