‘Grasping at Plastic Straws and Working with Frames’

Perspectives and Prospects of Advocacy NPOs and NGOs Promoting Zero Waste and Plastic Reduction Initiatives in Japan

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Summary

What are Japanese environmental organizations doing in order to address plastic and single-use waste issues? And more importantly, are they able to offer solutions to these issues, and have them fully resonate with and be adopted by individuals, businesses and the government? These are the main questions examined in this thesis. I position this thesis within the field of environmental sociology, and draw inspiration from some of its theories and approaches, such as *political opportunity structure*, *resource mobilization* and *cultural framing.* Concretely, this entails considering external factors, such as whether structural conditions have been and currently are in place, allowing for NPOs and NGOs to be able to function as advocacy groups, and to promote change on a business and governmental level. I thus consider their abilities to acquire legal status, procure funding, act independently, and influence policy-making. In addition, I examine internal factors, such as in what way the NPO and NGO members that I interviewed for this thesis seek to appeal to various parties, what they believe needs to be done, and how this objective is to be achieved. I employ the concept of frames to categorize and analyze their responses.

My research sheds light on the difficulty of growing and exerting influence as an environmental NPO in Japan. This includes their difficulties in attaining legal status, as a result of the subjective criteria determined by relevant government ministries, and a perceived or real lack of donation culture, which has led to the NPOs being dependent on funding from foundations, businesses, and/or governments. However, these constraints have changed recently. Primarily with the advent of new NPO laws, seemingly increasing positive attitudes toward donating, the viability of using the internet to promote organizations and their causes, and in this way increase access to donations.

The challenge remains, however, that the primary mechanism for appealing to businesses and the government is through an emphasis on prospects of economic gain or growth. Environmental initiatives are thus conditioned and circumscribed by capitalist profit motive. I demonstrate this point through selected environmental challenges – the 1990's dioxin crisis, and the events leading up to and following China's National Sword policy – and discuss the Japanese government's responses, and the consequences thereof.

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This has been a challenging and tumultuous year for everyone, which is why it is so important to acknowledge all the support and feedback that has helped make this thesis a reality.

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I would also like to thank Dr. Chiaki Nishijima, for taking over as my supervisor for this last semester, and providing encouragement and guidance during the challenging writing process. In addition, I would like to thank her for encouraging me to do online interviews, when the prospects for collecting first-hand data had seemed bleak, as conducting fieldwork in Japan during the Spring 2020 became unviable. She even helped me get a foot in the door by introducing me to one of my interviewees, and looking over and providing feedback on my Japanese interview questions and letters of consent before I sent them to my interviewees. In this way, her efforts helped tremendously in making this thesis possible.

In the same vein, I would like to thank my interviewees who gracefully allowed me to interview them, and provided me with immensely interesting perspectives and information. In alphabetical order, I would like to thank 350.org Japan's Arao-san, 530week's Arai-san, Ogaki-san, and Ōyama-san, Greenpeace Japan's Ōdachi-san, WWF Japan's Asai-san, and Zero Waste Japan's Okuno-san, and Sakano-san. This thesis was hugely shaped by the insights – no matter how big or small – that I gleaned from our interviews.

Further, I would like to thank my friends and family for providing moral support and company, and providing encouragement and advice. I would like to extend a special thanks to those who agreed to read through my drafts, providing reassurance and helpful feedback along the way.

Lastly, I would like to thank my lecturers and peers at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages' Japanese Studies program, for enriching my time here at the University of Oslo with their knowledge, perspectives, encouragement, and friendship.

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1.1 Introduction

Plastic. It is light, durable, and keeps food fresh for longer. However, this convenience comes at a cost, with it having the capacity to stay intact for hundreds of years – which would perhaps normally be a lauded feature, but has since become a damning aspect. Further yet, when it finally begins disintegrating, it breaks apart into potentially harmful microplastics.

This reflects poorly on developed countries such as Japan – the world's second-biggest producer of plastic waste per capita, second only to the U.S. – as although they have the capacity, resources and/or know-how to figure out how to take care of their own waste, they have increasingly been exporting their waste to developing countries, in order to save the money and effort required for recycling (McCurry 2019). The problem with this approach, is that as these developing countries have not had the necessary infrastructure to properly recycle or dispose of it, a lot of plastic waste has ended up in oceans, rivers, landfills, and nature in general. This headache culminated in China – which had thus far been the biggest recipient of waste exports and was being blamed for the waste ending up in the ocean – implementing their National Sword policy in 2018. This policy dictates that they would no longer receive certain types of waste exports, such as polluted waste and plastics that are difficult to recycle. This left countries that had been relying on exporting portions of their waste, such as Japan, scrambling to find a different solution. In the beginning, this solution was to redirect their exports to China's neighboring countries, such as Malaysia, who then were quickly overwhelmed, and followed China's example in rejecting said waste exports. Alongside these developments, in 2019 the Basel Convention[1] was amended to include certain types of plastic waste (as defined in the appendices to the convention), and, effective from January 1. 2021, will require prior informed consent from the governments of the countries to which the signatory is planning to ship these specified types of plastic (UN EP 2019). And so, countries such as Japan are left with the issue of what to do with the plastic waste that they had increasingly been exporting the last two decades.

This then leads us to the main question of this thesis: what are Japanese environmental organizations doing in order to address plastic and single-use waste issues? And more importantly,

[1] The Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, known as the Basel Convention, came to be in 1989, due to global debate on surging waste trade (Okubo et al. 2016: 134). Effective since 1992, and ratified by developed countries & many Asian developing countries, one of the most important aims of the Basel Convention is the regulation of trans-boundary waste shipments (Okubo et al. 2016: 134; Ichinose et al. 2013: 774).

are they able to offer solutions to these issues, and have them fully resonate with and be adopted by individuals, businesses and the government?

Governments around the world are to varying degrees implementing bans and policies regarding the use and disposal of plastic. As mentioned by one of the Japanese interviewees for this thesis, France implemented a ban on some of the most common polluting single-use products, such as plastic plates, cups, cutlery, and drinking straws, that went into effect at the beginning of 2020 (Woods 2020). Meanwhile, the Japanese government seems to be slow to move. Only recently – as of July 2020 – they mandated that plastic bags must be paid for, although there are exceptions to this regulation, such as reusable plastic shopping bags, bags that are decomposed by microorganisms in the sea, and those containing at least 25 percent biomass materials not being required to charge for (Japan Times 2020). In addition to being a very small step, this hints towards a governmental focus on replacing plastic with different materials, such as bioplastics, rather than focusing on reduction. As such, thus far, the government's considerations for economically beneficial solutions have been a prominent feature in their handling of environmental matters, as will be elucidated in this thesis. The same goes for the business sector.

Although businesses may be making efforts in 'going green' to a rising degree, these efforts may not be the most efficient solutions, or perhaps not the most thorough, as the premise of being a business is that you must sell your product, in order to make a profit, and be able to continue operations. As governments also enjoy benefits from having businesses do well, employing people, and making the countries' economy run, they are perhaps not inclined to be very strict in regulating businesses.

Who, then, can take on the role of pursuing sustainable solutions, when the government and the businesses may be inclined to prioritize economic growth, which may not be compatible with such environmental pursuits? In addition to these two sectors, there is a third one – the civil sector. Within this sector reside the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) trying to tackle social and environmental issues that are not being, or have not been sufficiently addressed by the government.

One of the functions of environmental movements, according to Hasegawa Kōichi[2], is to publicly disclose environmental issues as social problems, exposing the nature, site, and source of problems

[2] Hasegawa Kōichi is a Japanese sociologist and Professor in the Graduate School of Arts and Letters, Tohoku University. He obtained a PhD in Sociology from the University of Tokyo in 2004. He has published many articles on environmental sociology, civil society, social movements and social change.

for the public to see (2012: 85). They identify perpetrator-victim – or causal – relationships, responsible parties, and assess the urgency of responding (ibid). In this way, environmental movements socially construct environmental issues, making them real and possible to react to, for the general public (ibid). By framing something as a societal problem, these movements put responsible parties such as enterprises and governments under pressure to respond, leading to a kind of resolution to the issue, and preventing and reducing future harm (ibid).

In other words, environmental movements often provide the impetus required to reform existing societal systems and norms, as has been demonstrated with their influence on issues such as the massive postwar industrial pollution (Hasegawa 2004: 85). Thus, in order to attempt to answer the main questions of what Japanese environmental organizations are doing regarding the plastic and single-use waste issue, and whether they are able to offer solutions to these issues, and have them fully resonate with individuals, businesses and the government, I examine external and internal factors. In chapter 2 I delve into external factors, such as looking at elements pertaining to political opportunity and resource mobilization. This is done by examining NPOs and NGOs opportunities for and challenges in gaining legal status and receiving funding, and how this may affect their prospects for autonomy and advocacy. In addition, I examine some internal factors in chapter 3, using the concept of frames in order to categorize and analyze the way in which the NPO and NGO members that I was able to interview for this thesis attempt to or suggest appealing to various parties. I take note of what they believe needs to be done, and in what way this objective is to be achieved. In chapter 4 a mix of these external and internal factors are considered, as I discuss the Japanese Government's stance and approach to plastic waste issues, and the NPO and NGO's criticism and response to these.

1.1.1. Disclaimer

I have included parts from other papers that I have written during my time on the Japanese Studies program here at the University of Oslo. This includes information on recycling in Japan, and the China's National Sword policy, which I wrote about in the paper "Japan's Plastic Issue – Prior to and in the Wake of China's Waste Ban" for the class JAP4515 in Spring 2019, which was the paper that inspired this thesis. In addition, parts of my theory and methodology sections, along with some parts on Hasegawa spread out in the thesis, were written for the class JAP4020, and are featured in the papers titled "The Reserved Interviewer at the Mercy of the Unpredictable Interviewees" and "The Root of the Problem – A Look at Some Plastic Reduction & Zero-Waste NPOs & NGOs in

Japan: Background information and looking at the approach of the NPO 530week" that I produced for said class, in Autumn 2019.

On another note, in this thesis, Japanese names will be presented surnames first, and given names second, as they would be in Japanese. As an example, this means that former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, will be written as former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, as Abe is his surname.

1.2 Theory and concepts

1.2.1 Positioning this thesis within existing research and environmental sociology

With this thesis, I hope to contribute to the research on Japanese environmental movements and NPOs, in addition to contributing a case study to the field of environmental sociology, specifically building upon Hasegawa Kōichi's research, in the form of the book *Constructing civil society in Japan: voices of environmental movements* (2004). The field of Japanese civil society and NPOs in general is inhabited by scholars such as Robert J. Pekkanen, a political scientist who has written on NPO laws in Japan, and the legal, political and practical attributes, backgrounds, and implications of these. One such work is his journal article "Japan's New Politics: The Case of the NPO Law" from 2000, which is often cited in various works on Japanese civil society. Ogawa Akihiro, one of these authors citing Pekkanen, is himself also an oft cited author in sources on Japanese civil society, having written the ethnographic book called *The Failure of Civil Society? The Third Sector and the State in Contemporary Japan* in 2009. As the title indicates, it details the challenges NPOs face, and the government's role in matters concerning the third sector, and is based on his field research, from his time with a Japanese NPO occupied with lifelong learning. As for literature in the field of environmental movements, there are works such as the field-based books *Environmental politics in Japan: networks of power and protest* (1998) by sociologist Jeffrey Broadbent – whose academic focus also includes environmental sociology, among others – and the abovementioned book by environmental sociology scholar Hasegawa, detailing conditions surrounding environmental movements, these environmental advocates' prospects for influencing policy-making, and the mechanisms behind environmental initiatives and projects from the government's side.

In this thesis, I borrow from these authors' works, both in the form of using them as sources, and in the form of borrowing their approaches and theories, by my choosing to position this thesis in the field of environmental sociology and using some of its theories, and conducting interviews, which is an aspect of fieldwork, which in turn is a very present proponent in these existing works. With this thesis, I hope to provide a contemporary look at the field of environmental movements in Japan, by treating recent developments in environmental issues, such as that of plastic waste. I intend to provide some information on in what direction plastic waste-related environmental policies are headed, and a look at some environmental NPOs and NGOs as they are today, through hearing their stances, opinions, and suggested approaches to tackling plastic waste issues, as described by a

handful of interviewees who are members of environmental NPOs and NGOs based in Tokyo, Japan. As for the field of environmental sociology, with me writing on the environmental issue of plastic waste in Japan, using some of the theories and approaches from the field, I humbly offer this thesis as a case study contribution to the field.

1.2.2 Environmental sociology

As mentioned, in my mission to gain insight into the above matters, I look to the discipline of environmental sociology, mainly informed by the book *Constructing civil society in Japan: voices of environmental movements* (2004) by environmental sociology scholar Hasegawa Kōichi. Hasegawa views environmental sociology as a field where sociological methods and analysis are used in the study of the mutual interaction between environment and society, where he emphasizes the field and field surveys (2004: 12, 16-17). A clear distinction he makes, is that while environmental sociology is a discipline that uses sociological methods, it focuses on 'downstream issues', such as pollution, and other 'environmental bads' that result from 'upstream' processes (ibid: 23, 29). On the other hand, sociology mainly focuses on these 'upstream' issues, such as production processes and social activities.

Showing a similar view, according to an article called "What is environmental sociology?" from the journal *Environmental Sociology*, an environmental sociologist's activities generally include investigating the social causes of environmental problems, unpacking the political economic interests at play in environmental conflicts, highlighting inequitable exposures to pollution and natural resource decline, and evaluating the impacts of environmental policy (Lockie 2015: 140). However, in the same breath, the author attempting to define the field acknowledges that this definition based on what a practitioner generally does is potentially conservative and exclusionary, and may close one off from potentially useful perspectives (ibid). Additionally, it may lead to vital new research problems, disciplinary innovations and transformational opportunities being missed (Lockie 2015: 140).

The practitioners appear to agree on the idea that the discipline, and its methods and theories, in its essence are meant to be adaptable to different environmental contexts and situations. It encourages the use of whatever theory or methodology that is the most effective in understanding the ins and outs of an issue, and perhaps locating areas that could be improved or looked into. This leaves the choice of how to approach the issue in this thesis rather open, for better or for worse.

In addition, the assessment by Lockie that there is a tendency to have very set frames and perspectives as to how an issue should be viewed may serve as a reminder for me to keep my eyes open regarding the Japanese interviewees' and different actors' reasonings and contexts, while examining my own preconceptions on how the issues should be handled or thought about.

1.2.3 Hasegawa's triad of social movement analyses

In his book, Hasegawa analyzes factors affecting movements, by for example looking at the case studies of a small city and a town, and how they respectively were able or unable to avoid the allocation of a nuclear facility in their city or town. In it, Hasegawa emphasizes the important contribution and distinct identity the use of social movement theory can provide his field, and employs what he calls 'the triad of social movement analyses' – 1) political opportunity structure, 2) resource mobilization and 3) cultural framing – on the case studies (2004: 255.) From the perspective of the triad of social movement analyses, social movements are activated and strengthened by opening the structures of political opportunity, such as the institutional structures facilitating opportunities for changing or influencing policy; enhancing the ability for mobilizing resources, such as human resources, economic and material resources, information, and connections; and cultural framing, which implies an appealing narrative in line with cultural values (ibid: 61, 257). He uses this approach to try to identify the barriers and conductive agents to, essentially, getting closer to achieving the ideal of a sustainable society in order to solve environmental issues. This is what I hope to emulate in this thesis, by using his triad of social movement analysis, and by placing a foot in the field, through video-interviews with members of Japan-based environmental NPOs and NGOs, and another in secondary literature, news articles, and other written accounts.

An example of how Hasegawa has used the concept of frames, which he calls cultural framing, is when he notes that the often highly educated women leading the post-Chernobyl (1987) anti-nuclear movements wielded the cultural framework of being a 'mother/parent' for their protests on food contamination worries (ibid: 136-137, 141). Hasegawa's definition of frames is that they are commonly shared definitions of a situation, a worldview, or the self-image of an individual, a community, a populace, or a social movement, and points to Snow et al.'s (1986) definition, that the conscious and strategic formulation of self-images, is what is called the process of framing (Hasegawa 2004: 161). This is exactly what the protestors appeared to be doing when defining themselves as mothers. This theory also dictates that there must be some correspondence between an individual's cultural frames and the frames of the movement, if the former is to be motivated to

join in the latter's collective action (ibid). This could perhaps be people identifying with the plight of mothers worried about the safety of the food that they prepare for their family (ibid).

In this thesis, frames are viewed as a set of preferences, goals or a world-view that the target has, that a nonprofit organization may attempt to appeal to. I find that using the concept of frames may aid in organizing information in themes, and facilitate writing about the various parties' motivations and actions. I have thus found some frames based on the material I have surveyed and gathered for this thesis, which will be constructed and introduced along the way. As an example, I interpret the government's and businesses' focus on economic growth as a frame, to which the NPOs and NGOs may seek to appeal to.

I find Hasegawa's triad of social movement analyses useful in examining the NPO and NGO's contexts, and approaches to trying to promote environmental considerations among the various actors: citizens, businesses and the government. This framework has also directly informed the contents of this thesis, with factors pertaining to political opportunity and resource mobilization being explored in chapter 2, frames being used in chapter 3, and a mix of these factors being considered in chapter 4 and 5. With the three components of the social movement analyses being rather broad in what types of structures, resources, and frames can be used, I feel that it may be widely applicable as a framework. The only aspect that I avoid in this thesis, is using the term 'cultural frames' for my analysis, as I find it restrictive to do so, as the frames that I point out in this thesis may not be tied to any specific country's culture, and by using the term 'cultural frames', it may perhaps indicate that the frames in question are unique to Japan, which is not something that I wish to do.

1.2.4 What are NPOs and NGOs?

Hasegawa points out two types of NPOs, with one type being grassroots organizations with a non-specialized character – which I will thus refer to as 'the grassroots-type' – that are locally based, and operate within a prefecture, city, town, village, or other geographical area (2004: 62-63). They are extensions of citizens' movements, and easily accessible by local volunteers (ibid: 63).

The other type is metropolitan based and with a much more specialist nature – which I will refer to as 'the specialist-type' – that often operates at a national level, but may go international or global (Hasegawa 2004: 63). They may act as an alternative think tank that remains independent of – and often in opposition to – government and private sector think tanks, or provide a kind of consultancy

service for critical citizens against government and private sector organizations on environmental issues (ibid).

I find that the NPOs and NGOs featured in this thesis possess traits from both of these categorizations, with some having very strong grassroots characteristics, in terms of having a strong local focus and/or being easy to access for volunteers, but also having specialist staff, operating as an alternative think tank, and/or offering consultancy services. This perhaps comes with the territory, as waste issues are visible at a household and municipal level, making it eligible for local initiatives, while simultaneously being tied to international issues, such as global warming, which then requires a certain degree of expertise to discuss and work with.

As for the distinction between these NPOs and NGOs, at least in the Japanese context, in general, the term NGO often refers to international organizations that work to resolve global issues, such as conflict, human rights, and poverty, while the term NPO often refers to domestic organizations, that work on solving local issues such as homelessness and child-rearing (SVA 2019).

As both NPOs and NGOs have in common that they are non-profit organizations that aim to improve society, there is no big difference in their purpose of establishment, activities, and how they operate (SVA 2019). The biggest difference is that there is no system in Japan that specifically gives an organization a designated NGO legal status (ibid). Therefore, NPOs and NGOs can be registered under the same legal category (ibid). As an example, waste reduction-focused organization 530week, which is based in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward and is partly local community-centric, and the domestic branch of Greenpeace, Greenpeace Japan, are both registered under the same legal category. As such, for the sake of simplicity, I will mostly use the term NPO when referring to these types of organizations in general, but will use the word NGO if the text I cite uses the word, or when talking about a group that is known as such, e.g. Greenpeace Japan.

1.2.5 Zero Waste & Circular Economy

Zero Waste is a concept that entails trying to reduce the waste that one produces, on an individual level and on a system-wide level, to zero. It is defined by Zero Waste International Alliance (2019) as: "[…] a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use. Zero Waste means designing and managing products and processes to systematically avoid and eliminate the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources, and not burn or bury them. Implementing Zero Waste

will eliminate all discharges to land, water or air that are a threat to planetary, human, animal or plant health."

Concretely, for the individual, this may mean that whatever you use must be possible to return to the earth, such as through composting, or must be possible to reuse, either by you or others, as a product or as a material. This may however prove impossible, or at least very challenging, especially in cities where you rely on getting your food and necessities from the store, where these often come in packaging. As my Zero Waste practicing interviewees warned, this may discourage a lot of people from continuing or perhaps even from trying, unless they can accept that they will not be able to do it 'perfectly'. In this sense, there are people who lead a "Zero Waste lifestyle", while still producing waste.

As for what a circular economy entails, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, it means making a move away from the linear, cradle-to-grave model, where a product ends up in landfill or is burned when it is no longer in use, and instead designing waste (such as greenhouse gases and hazardous substances) out of the system, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems (2020a; 2020b). Keeping products and materials in use could entail designing for durability, reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling to keep products, components, and materials circulating in the economy (2020a). This could include making effective use of bio-based materials by encouraging many different uses for them, as they cycle between the economy and natural systems (ibid). Regenerating natural systems points to avoiding the use of non-renewable resources, and preserving or enhancing renewable ones, for instance by returning nutrients to the soil to support regeneration, or using renewable energy rather than fossil fuels (ibid).

As such, there is a lot of overlap between these two concepts, with both of them focusing on redesigning products to eliminate waste – in the linear sense where a product ends up in landfill or being burned – and harmful substances, and making sure that such spent resources can continue to be used for new purposes. The distinguishing points appear to mostly be that Zero Waste can often be applied to individual lifestyles and is seen as a goal, while a circular economy often describes system-wide changes or a way to reach the goal of Zero Waste, to be pursued by businesses and manufacturers (Daigneau 2017). In addition, the circular economy definition also emphasizes regenerative efforts, such as using renewable energy and using renewable resources. However, due to their similar meanings, these terms will be used somewhat interchangeably.

As a side note, it is important to note that when the terms ‘environmentally friendly’, and ‘green’ are employed in describing such instances and entities such as habits and businesses in this thesis, it is a shorthand indicating that these are less environmentally destructive or pollutive, as businesses producing and selling products, and the like, are inherently not environmentally ‘friendly,’ as their *raison d’être* is generally to encourage consumption and sell as much as possible, in order to be able to sustain itself.

1.2.6 Bottom-up and top-down approaches

As there are different definitions of what the concepts of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom up’ approaches entail, depending on the field of study and the topic, I will briefly clarify what these terms imply in this thesis. By ‘top-down’ approach, I refer to government level initiatives, such as laws and regulations, that businesses and individuals in general must comply with. An example would be the plastic bag regulation that came into effect in July 2020. As for the ‘bottom-up’ approach, I refer to change driven by the civil sector and businesses, which may then in turn influence legislation.

1.3 Methodology – Data Collection & Interviewee Overview

For this project, I chose to interview members from environmental NPOs and NGOs, in order to hear about how they see the current situation in Japan – or perhaps mostly in Tokyo, as that is where all of them are based – regarding plastic waste reduction and Zero Waste-related initiatives, along with how viable it is to live a plastic waste reduction or Zero Waste lifestyle. These interviews were conducted through Zoom[3], placing this research within the sphere of remote ethnography, rather than the traditionally more physically present and on-site ethnography. The interviews lasted approximately 45-80 minutes, and five out of the six interviews were conducted in Japanese, with the remaining one being conducted mostly in English.

The interviews were semi-structured, generally taking the form of me asking the questions that I had prepared beforehand (see Figure 1). These questions had slight variations, as I would adjust them according to what I knew about the interviewee or their organization beforehand. I would skip questions if I felt that the interviewee had already ended up answering them. If there was something that I was curious about or wanted them to explain further, I would ask the interviewees follow-up questions. A consistent approach was not important for my research, as the interviews were qualitative and exploratory in nature, with me trying to gauge their views and opinions on various issues, and hearing what they were interested in. Rather, due to them being exploratory, in some cases I decided to not send the questions I had prepared beforehand – if the interviewee had not requested that I send them – on the premise that I might hear more candid and varied responses. As such, only half of the interviewees received the questions that I had for them beforehand, while the other half heard the questions for the first time during the interview. This did not seem to have a big impact on the interviews, except for maybe the responses being less structured for the ones who did not receive the questions beforehand. However, these unstructured responses were perhaps the more preferred responses, due to the interesting side-remarks that were made, which inspired many of the categories and themes within this thesis.

I conducted six interviews, with members from five different organizations, or six, in the sense that the interviewees in one of the interviews were members of two different organizations, and spoke on behalf of both. Two of these six interviews were with two interviewees present in the same

[3]Zoom is an online program allowing for video-calls which has become quite the staple during the Covid-19 pandemic

Interview questions produced and asked for the purpose of this thesis

*Only the Japanese versions of the questions were asked or sent to the interviewees. The English translations were made after the fact.

- What kind of organization is (--)? What is its purpose/goal? How does it go about accomplishing this objective? Does it for example collaborate a lot?
  ○○はどういう団体ですか。団体の目標は何ですか。そして、この目標はどうやって達成しようと思っていますか。よくコラボとかしていますか。

- Why are you a member? What part/aspect of the organization did you find good or interesting?
  何のきっかけでメンバーになりましたか。○○のどこが良いか面白いと思いますか。

- Do you have any plastic reduction or Zero Waste habits or lifestyle choices? If yes, which ones? Why?
  消費削減やゼロ・ウェイストの習慣を持っていらっしゃいますか。持っていらっしゃるなら、どのような習慣ですか。どうしてですか。

- Is it easy to live a plastic reduction or Zero Waste Lifestyle? Are there many support systems in place, such as mainstream stores ingredients without too much packaging, there being a strong community, or changes being implemented through government legislations, or the like?
  消費削減やゼロ・ウェイストの生活を送るのは簡単ですか。つまり、コミュニティがちゃんとあったり、余計なパッケージングなしの材料とかを気軽に店で手に入れられたり、政策がちゃんと実施されているのかとか。

- What do you think of the government's and businesses' efforts to become more 'green'? Are they effective and sufficient?
  ビジネスや政府側の環境にやさしい取り組みをどう思いますか。こういう取り組みは、効果的で満足できるものですか。

- What do you think should be done in order to make Japanese society a plastic reduction or Zero Waste society?
  日本社会をどうやって消費削減やゼロ・ウェイストの社会にすればいいと思いますか。

- Do you think it makes an actual impact by way of solving environmental problems, if individuals try to reduce their use of plastic or have Zero Waste habits?
  個人が消費削減やゼロ・ウェイストの習慣を持つことが環境問題の改善に実質的な効果をもたらせると思いますか。

- What do you think is the best way to try to appeal to people to care about the environment, if they are busy with their daily lives, and may find having to change their lifestyles to be an unwanted burden, or if they are businesses or in the government who have vested interests?
  自分の日常生活で精一杯で、使い捨て消費を減らすなどの環境問題は面倒だと思っている人々、さらには現状維持に既得権益があるビジネスや政府にに対し、どうアピールして地球温暖化の解決に参加を促せば良いのでしょうか。

- Has Covid-19 affected your thoughts and habits surrounding zero waste/plastic reduction/etc?
  新型コロナウィルスの影響でプラスチック消費削減とゼロ・ウェイストの習慣や考え方が変わってきましたか。

Figure 1: Example of questions asked in the interviews for this thesis.

video-interview, where the third party only participated to a certain degree, but was mostly there either to oversee the process, or to learn and see while their supervisor was interviewed by me.

I reached out to the organizations in general by e-mail, asking for an interview with one of their members, along with reaching out to one of the interviewees directly through e-mail, as my supervisor introduced me to them. I received a few responses from my general enquiry sent out to the organizations (two of my five general inquiries received a response agreeing to an interview), while the remaining half of my interviewees were reached through the snowball effect, with my interviewees introducing me to other potential interviewees. This process is laid out in the following NPO and NGO profiles, based on information from the organizations' websites or the interviews.

1.3.1 530 Week

530week (read *gomi zero* week, which means 'Zero Waste week') started in 2018, and is a General Corporation (*Ippan shadan hōjin*; such legal categories and their implications are explained in chapter 2). It is based in Shibuya Ward, Tokyo, and evolved out of a project called CAT, where volunteers would pick up trash on Harajuku's Cat Street (530week 2019b). The impetus for the creation of 530week was, according to one of the co-founders, Genki Nakamura, to make projects such as CAT redundant, by making it so that the products that end up becoming waste after use are not made and used in the first place (530week 2019a). At first glance, 530week seems like a rather humble organization, focused on the local environment of Shibuya. However, if one looks at their 'about' page, they describe 530week as an initiative of Zero Waste activists in their 20s and 30s, whose goal is to create a sustainable society based on the core concept of Zero Waste (530week 2019b). They hope to achieve this by proposing a circular economy where waste is not produced, while incorporating all three actors – companies, consumers, and government, and at the same time enlivening the local community in Shibuya (ibid). They have various workshops on plastic reduction initiatives, which include having a workshop on the prospects of making a PET (polyethylene terephthalate) bottle reduction law, where those for and against discussed pros and cons (530week 2019c). In this sense, they exhibit traits from both grassroots-type and specialist-type organizations.

530week is in a sense a sort of forum, where people from various organizations can contribute, and as such is not a uniform organization. It is due to this composition that they were able to introduce me to my interviewee from Zero Waste Japan, Sakano-san, and my interviewee working as a consultant for corporate waste management, Arai-san, as they had also been involved with

530week. In addition, my Greenpeace Japan interviewee Ōdachi-san has also been associated with 530week, as I have seen a profile with him on their homepage, although this is not how I was introduced to him. I reached the first two 530week interviewees Ōyama-san and Ogaki-san through sending an e-mail to the organization.

1.3.1.1 Fog

My first two interviewees from 530week, Ōyama-san and Ogaki-san, were both also members of the stock company (*kabushiki gaisha*) Fog. Ōyama-san is the CEO and founder of the company, along with being the co-founder of 530week. Ogaki-san joined 530week in around 2018, after meeting some of the other members at an event about composting while she was still a student. As she researches marine plastic pollution, she ended up helping 530week with some events on plastic. Through this, she became a member, and at the start of 2020 also ended up joining Fog, which focuses on circularity and regeneration, and aims at changing people and businesses' mindsets, and designing a circular society (Fog 2020).

1.3.2 350.org Japan

350.org Japan was established in 2015, and is an unincorporated organization (*Nin'i dantai*). It is the Japanese branch of the international organization 350.org, established in 2008 with the goal of building a global climate movement. According to their U.S. website, 350 was named after 350 parts per million – the safe concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (350.org 2020). As such, the work of 350.org Japan center around three activities, where the first is disseminating information and raising awareness, which involves picking up the latest surveys, articles, news and topics related to global warming and climate change from their global network, and disseminating the information through various means such as through social media and blogs (350.org Japan 2020). They also regularly hold training courses, study sessions and seminars to nurture the next generation of climate change leaders (ibid). The second activity is constructing citizen-led movements, in which they emphasize the importance of the participation of the general public, without relying on the government or companies, in order to solve the problem [climate change] (ibid). Their last listed activity is divestment advocacy, which means advocacy targeted at removing investments, in this case from polluting industries and companies. They explain that by choosing a deposit bank or choosing to invest in a company that does not invest in fossil fuels or nuclear power plants, or encouraging an organization to not invest in institutions such companies, it is possible to build an environmentally and socially friendly financial system (ibid). They also contribute to building a responsible flow of money, through exchanging opinions with and engaging with

financial institutions and investors (ibid). In this sense, 350.org Japan also shows grassroots-type and specialist-type traits.

While the organization is not directly focused on plastic waste or waste issues, my interviewee from the organization, Arao-san, practices Zero Waste, and was interviewed on this basis, along with her being a member of an environmental organization. I was introduced to this interviewee through the help of my thesis supervisor.

1.3.3 Zero Waste Japan (ZWJ)

Described by my 530week interviewee Ōyama-san as a key person within Zero Waste in Japan, and having given TED talks and served as the co-chair at the World Economic Forum in 2019, Sakano-san was a very interesting person to be able to interview. With a desire to have a wider influence, the former chair of Zero Waste Academy and former director of 530week, Sakano-san founded Zero Waste Japan (ZWJ) in 2020, and was joined by Okuno-san who had also worked at Zero Waste Academy. Thus, ZWJ is a sort of offshoot from the local organization Zero Waste Academy established in 2005, which is based in Tokushima Prefecture's Kamikatsu, the first Zero Waste municipality in Japan. Situated in Shinjuku, Tokyo, ZWJ is a General Corporation whose objective is to co-create opportunities for Zero Waste practices (ZWJ 2020). The goal is to make the concept of not making products at the end of their lifecycle into 'waste', by making sure that it is recycled, in addition to the aim of making practices that do not produce potential 'waste' – such as promoting a model of circular production (resources continuing to be repurposed, as opposed to a one-way model leading to disposal), distribution, sales and product design – the global standard (ibid). In order to make this happen, they cooperate with stakeholders in the government and the private sector. ZWJ is akin to a specialist-type organization, as they are more expertise-focused and have a broader scope than its locally-oriented counterpart in Kamikatsu.

As mentioned, I was introduced to Sakano-san, who had Okuno-san sit in on our interview, through my 530week interviewees Ōyama-san and Ogaki-san.

1.3.4 World Wildlife Foundation Japan (WWF Japan)

WWF Japan was founded in 1971, is a Public-Interest Corporation (*Kōeki Hōjin*), and is located in Mita, Tokyo. It is a branch of the huge international NGO World Wildlife Fund (WWF), founded in 1961. On their website, their field of activities are listed as the following: conserving biodiversity and reducing humankind's burden on the natural environment, in addition to disseminating research, policy proposals and environmental conservation ideas (WWF Japan 2020e). In addition,

they list cooperating with WWF International, and related organizations, and other activities necessary in order to achieve the organization's objectives (WWF Japan 2020e). WWF Japan perhaps seems a bit more specialist-type, judging from it being such a large and professionalized organization, and being advocacy and research-focused. However, its many members may give it something of a grassroots-type feel.
I was able to secure an interview with Asai-san, likely in his 50s or 60s, who is in charge of ocean plastic in WWF Japan, by sending an e-mail to the organization.

1.3.5 Greenpeace Japan

Greenpeace Japan was founded in 1989, is a General Corporation located in Shinjuku, Tokyo. It is a branch of the huge international NGO Greenpeace, founded in 1971. On Greenpeace Japan's website, they list their field of activities as being global environmental protection, covering matters such as climate change and energy issues, marine ecosystems, forests, food and agriculture, nuclear power, and harmful substances. (Greenpeace Japan 2020a). In the same way, while they have a lot of engaged volunteers, Greenpeace Japan also seems to be more of a specialist-type organization, with their research and advocacy-focus, and perhaps especially with their rejection of funding from government and business, which would indicate that they are a very independent think tank type of organization.

I was introduced to my Greenpeace Japan interviewee Ōdachi-san by my 350.org Japan interviewee Arao-san.

1.3.6 Close-knit network

I had the impression that these organizations were a part of a supportive and collaborative network. Greenpeace Japan seemed to have provided support to various organizations, such as having representatives have presentations on microplastics at a 530week meeting, or simply participating in one, and having helped Zero Waste Academy – from where the national variant ZWJ sprung forth – draft their proposal on making Kamikatsu the first Zero Waste municipality in Japan (530week 2019d; 530week 2019e; interview with Greenpeace Japan member). In addition, he explained that he had worked with 350.org Japan's Arao-san a couple of years ago, as the organizations had initially been connected, and to this day they still meet online, or in matters related to activities, or cooperate on coal matters, which 350.org Japan is well-versed in.

350.org Japan's Arao-san mentioned that collaboration with other organizations is for example achieved through the network called CAN (Climate Action Network) Japan, which is an

international organization. Through CAN Japan they collaborate a lot with Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Kikō Network, Justice, WWF, and Renewable Energy Foundation. In addition, this network also features some different sectors, including corporations such as Patagonia, who my interviewee described as very passionate and active around climate change. So even though Patagonia and such corporations are not NPOs, they work closely with them.

1.3.7 Online interviewing – pros and cons

Due to the current state of the world, as of Spring 2020 when I was to start my field research in Tokyo, up until this moment in the winter of 2020, the world-wide pandemic Covid-19 has continued to rage, and has led to a lot of changes and restrictions for most people. For one, relating to this thesis, it meant that I was unable to conduct these interviews in person, as I had initially planned. As a result, by conducting remote ethnography, I was limited in how much I could get to know my interviewees before conducting the interviews, was unable to see how they work and what their premises look like, and in this way, get a sense of what the environment and feel is, within these organizations. Rather, I was only able to see – or rather, hear – what was presented to me through a handful of video-interviews.

However, on the other hand, this method allowed for very focused interviews, as opposed to phone interviews, where the participants may be distracted by other things, such as reading e-mails or doodling, perhaps as they do not have anything to look at and are not being watched during the interview (Nehls, Smith & Schneider 2015: 152). This would perhaps also be the case for in-person interviews, as it would allow for being distracted by your surroundings, compared to the condition during a video-interview, where your attention is trained to the interviewer on the screen.

In addition, the method allowed for flexibility regarding time and location, as although most of the interviews were conducted during business hours – as my interviewees were members of an organization and were interviewed on this premise – one of the interviews was conducted on a Sunday evening, at the interviewees home, as she had resigned from the organization in preparation of going abroad to study. In this sense, this interview may not have been possible if all of my interviews were to be conducted in-person, as this would make it more complicated to reach out to those who were no longer present at the workplace, and had a packed schedule.

1.3.8 Choosing a setting

In some works on how to conduct ethnographic research, choosing the setting has been mentioned as a tool for the researcher, as a way to control what kind of information they may glean from the interview, and how formal the interview may be considered.

Indeed, Singh & Dickson suggest that informal conversations – over coffee prior to meetings, in a workplace cafeteria, in a local bar or gym after work – may be particularly beneficial, as it is often after work that one will hear personal views (2002: 13). This also feeds into the idea that there are different expectations for formal interviews and informal conversations, and for what one can or should talk about. For some, a formal interview may indicate that they should express their views in a particular way, or deliver a testimony (Skinner 2012: 264). There are also some who experience that the interviewed may want to use the interview as a way to promote their own interests, such as consciously trying to represent themselves in a light they want to be seen in by people outside their sphere, without it necessarily reflecting the reality (Skinner 2012: 245, 253). Due to the scheduled nature of the video-interviews, these may perhaps fall into the category of being a formal interview. However, I believe that me being 'just' a master student in Japanese studies, and not a Ph.D. in environmental science, or something along these lines, may make me less relevant to try to appeal to in any way, and may allow the interviewees to let their guards down (ibid: 250).

Although I was unable to choose the setting for the interview, as the interviews were conducted online through a video-call, I was able to send information about the project beforehand, explaining my interests, and what the interview was to be used for (this thesis). So, rather than through setting, I was able to 'control' or angle the interviews by presenting just enough information through e-mail that the interviewees could read and digest at their own pace.

1.3.9 Entering the field and establishing rapport

Initially I was a bit apprehensive regarding the prospect of conducting an interview. My apprehension was perhaps due to it being a two-way process, as opposed to the process of reading a text. This entails my being dependent on the cooperation and input from the subjects of my study.

In order to successfully achieve a participatory approach, Anne Montgomery notes the importance of establishing rapport, in order to be able to understand the world from the perspective of the people being studied (Skinner 2012: 145). According to her definition, building rapport entails becoming trusted and seen as someone with whom the research participant is comfortable spending time, talking, and sharing their lives with (ibid). In order to ensure this, it is probably a good idea to

deal with issues of anonymity and confidentiality at an early stage of the ethnographic project, as suggested by Singh & Dickson, so that interviewees and their organizations can trust the researcher and be reassured that there will be no negative repercussions from the research intervention and reporting (2002: 12). In this way, by establishing the interviewee's right to anonymity early on it may be possible to ensure that the interviewee feels comfortable sharing things that they would not like to see their name applied to.

For my interviews, I received written consent through a consent form detailing, in Japanese, what the interviews were to be about, and what they would be used for. In this consent form, the interviewees were offered anonymity, in the sense that there were individual checkboxes that had to be checked if the interviewee consented to – respectively – being sound-recorded, video-recorded, and/or that I could potentially use the name of the organization and personal identifiers such as age, gender, and the like, if I felt it was relevant for the thesis. All interviewees checked all the boxes. As a result, I have decided to refer to them by their last names, followed by the Japanese formal honorific suffix "-*san*", in addition to naming their organizations, and describing the interviewees' roles and characteristics, such as an estimated age, in order to provide a fuller impression.

1.3.10 The unpredictable nature of the interview

Being able to review the interview at a later time through recordings was very useful for me, as I was also a bit apprehensive regarding the prospect of conducting an interview in Japanese. As Skinner reminds the reader of his book on the ethnographic interview, the qualitative interview is very unpredictable, and one therefore cannot necessarily predict what one will glean from an interview, along with there being many opportunities for misunderstandings (2012: 265). Although I have many years of experience with studying the language, there were still certain parts that I was not able to pick up on during the interview. Without the speaking and listening comprehension of a native Japanese speaker, the added possibility of the conversation steering in an unexpected direction did not bode well. However, this aspect was ameliorated by being able to record the interviews, with the interviewees' express written permission, allowing me to go over the interviews afterwards, and look up any words I was unfamiliar with. It did not help me much in the situation, but it allowed me a second chance at receiving the information that was put forth during the interviews.

In addition, including identifiers in the thesis is possibly more engaging for the reader, but perhaps being recorded and the possibility of being featured in my thesis in an identifiable manner could

have led to the interviewee holding back during the interview. However, due to the topic of the interview not being particularly controversial or taboo, it may not be much of a worry, especially as they were informed that the interviews were just to be used for this master's thesis, at a university on the other side of the world. Also, if I was asked, I reassured then that no one except I and perhaps my supervisor would see the recordings from the interviews. One of my interviewees mentioned being a bit frazzled due to being recorded at one point, while he was trying to find his words, but it did not seem to prevent him from speaking his mind. All in all, I felt that I received rather candid answers for my interviews, with some personal anecdotes, and was told about various struggles that my interviewees had with the lifestyle and trying to promote their causes. However, this issue of anonymity, of whether the interviewee should have a choice, or just be granted anonymity by default, may be important to consider if I am to conduct interviews for a publication, or a higher-stakes project, that more people may have access to and an interest in reading, as this might then have a bigger effect on what the interviewees are willing to share.

1.3.11 On communication routines, not putting off interviewees, and reflexivity

Further, as noted by Singh & Dickson, the researcher must make every effort to maximize sensitivity within the field, allow sufficient time for in-depth reflection during the fieldwork, and when writing up the study (2002:6). Briggs chimes in, that in order to ensure that the interviewee understands the referential frame of the question, the interviewer needs to be more aware of the interview as a communicative event, and that it is best to be familiar with native communication routines when in an interview situation (Skinner 2012: 31).

I was unable to spend time in the 'field', however, in order to make sure that I asked questions that hopefully made sense for the interviewees, I attempted to research the NPOs and NGOs beforehand, and to consider what challenges there realistically may be within the field, such as whether it is possible to find groceries and products without too much packaging, and so on. However, the interviews were conducted early on in the research process, so had I conducted the interviews now, I would have asked different questions, such as questions about sources of income, and issues surrounding this. However, as this may be a somewhat controversial or sensitive topic, perhaps such questions would have made it more difficult to find interviewees, or receive candid responses.

1.3.11.1 Reflexivity: The Interviews

Singh & Dickson emphasize that the critical use of reflexivity is one of the best tools in the ethnographer's toolkit, as it exposes hidden assumptions and tacit knowledge both within the researcher, and in the way the researcher gains understanding of the respondents' ideas, values and

motivations, as well as assumptions which they may be making in expressing to you their culture (ibid: 10-11).

I attempted to go about the process of requesting the interviews, receiving consent, and organizing the time for the interview in a proper and familiar way. I did this by writing the e-mails and consent forms in *keigo* (respectful Japanese, used when you want to raise the other person or subject of the conversation over yourself) and *kenjougo* (humble Japanese used when referring to oneself, in order to lower yourself before the other person) to the best of my abilities. After struggling, googling how to say things, and receiving help from my supervisor and friends in order to keep the written correspondence very formal, I then let my guard down during the interviews, and spoke using the more regular respectful language *teineigo*. I felt that this was acceptable, as I am under the impression that such e-mails are usually written in very formal language as a formality, while it is more acceptable to speak in *teineigo,* perhaps especially after establishing rapport through e-mail – and perhaps this was also the most appropriate approach for me, regarding my limited skills in using *keigo* and *kenjougo* on the fly.

I am not a hundred percent certain whether it could have been a problem that I spoke in the less formal *teineigo* during the interviews, but the interviewees did not appear to be put off, as they all sat through the interviews until the end, and there was generally a rather relaxed and open tone. In addition, in order to not put off the interviewees, I prefaced any questions that I deemed could be considered offensive, by acknowledging that it may come across this way. As an example, I acknowledged that it may be a bit rude to ask the question of whether they felt individual action was effective in solving environmental issues. Especially as this question came after having asked them about their individual efforts/habits on this front, and asking what they saw as being a solution in making the Japanese society a plastic reduction or Zero Waste society, to which some had emphasized a bottom-up approach, such as educating the general population on environmental issues and actions. In a sense, it could come across as questioning the validity or whether they had thought things through, regarding their own habits and their bottom-up views. Nevertheless, I felt it was relevant to ask, in order to receive an answer on precisely this question.

However, as the interviewees almost without exception either offered to connect me with other potential interviewees either during or after the interviews, or offered or accepted that I could contact them again if I had any follow-up or clarifying questions, I would deem that they found the interviews to be inoffensive, or at least that their willingness to share and help overshadowed any

such feelings. Especially this willingness to introduce me to other interviewees may indicate a level of trust or goodwill, as them serving as the middle-man between me and the person they are introducing me to, puts them in a position as a sort of 'guarantor' or in a sense makes them 'responsible' for the interview, as it is their introduction that made it possible.

1.3.12 Reflexivity: The interviewer

In addition, before conducting the interviews, I considered what effect I may have on the interview and what kind of responses I might receive. I imagined that me being a rather reserved young woman may not work in my favor, as this perhaps could lead to me being dismissed, or not being assertive enough to ask clarifying questions about issues that I was curious about, especially the more difficult or challenging questions. However, I concluded that my gender and profile as a (master's) student could serve to render my presence relatively un-threatening, perhaps prompting people to let their guards down, allowing me to get away with perhaps asking more cheeky or challenging questions. As such, I felt that these factors could even end up working in my favor, at least my gender – seeing as there appears to be a good amount of female representation in these NPOs and NGOs – as Lisette Josephides suggests that interviewees may find it easier to find rapport with a particular interviewer because of shared gender, ethnic background, or for other personal reasons (Skinner 2012: 111).

However, I am not certain whether my gender had any effect regarding whether the interviewees were willing to cooperate in being interviewed or not, as this may not have come across in the e-mails. The only possible indication was my name, but it is not certain whether they correctly guessed my gender based on it, if they were unfamiliar with it. As an example, an interviewee that I was yet to interview introduced me to another potential interviewee as "Mr. Harriet (from Sweden)." This indicates that at least my gender may not have been a big factor, at least not in the sense that being female would improve my odds of securing an interview.

1.4 Methodology – Data analysis

As for the analysis, I seek to understand the 'why' behind social phenomena as well as individual perceptions. Thus, I look closely at the contents of a text or statement, and examine their contexts. In doing so, I have tried to provide an 'audit trail' to give a clear account of how I reached my conclusions – so that readers can judge the quality of my findings and analyses (Singh and Dickson 2002: 21). I also heed Singh and Dickson's emphasis on the importance of challenging one's data and conclusions, by questioning their underlying logic and assumptions (ibid). This could be such things as examining the links between data and theory, how valid the presented evidence is, the quality of the data and the findings, and what biases have been acknowledged and minimized (ibid: 21-22).

I have selected my data based on what I found particularly interesting and revealing, such as documents expressing plans for how to tackle the current issues surrounding plastic and single-use waste in general. Armed with this analytical attentiveness, along with a critical reflexivity regarding my own influence on the interviews as discussed earlier, I can hopefully provide meaningful insights based on the interviews and consulted written materials on environmental matters.

2 Challenges for Advocacy Nonprofit Organizations

This chapter provides a brief history of NPOs in Japan, and presents some challenges regarding the prospects for these to gain access to or influence policy-making, and function as advocacy groups. These will then be assessed by examining the political opportunity structure and the resource mobilization possibilities, two out of the three aspects of Hasegawa's triad of social movement analyses, which has informed the structure and focus of this thesis (2004).

2.1 A century-long red tape entanglement

"Ask the person in the American street to name three Japanese companies and odds are that you will get answers. Ask even a reader of this journal [The Journal of Japanese Studies] to name three Japanese nongovernmental organizations and you may not get an answer at all." – (Pekkanen 2000: 112)

With this anecdote, Robert J. Pekkanen[4] encapsulates the essence of the last couple of decades in Japan: a strong focus on the economy and growth that businesses can bring, and a civil society that has struggled to have its voice heard, fighting tooth and nail against pollution issues and environmental degradation.

For a little over a century, until the turning point in 1998, there has only been one way to gain official status as a nonprofit organization in Japan: Being incorporated as a Public-Interest Corporation (in Japanese "Kōeki Hōjin", hereafter PIC), under article 34 of the Civil Code promulgated in 1896 (Pekkanen 2000: 116).

However, the criteria for becoming a PIC is, as the name suggests, that the organization and its activities are in the 'public interest', which was something that was to be determined by the 'competent ministry'. In other words, the incorporation of the PIC was done at the – subjective – discretion of the ministry under whose jurisdiction the organization fell, until this law was revised in 2008 (Pekkanen 2000: 117). So, if the NPO in question was a welfare organization, it would be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Welfare, and so on. This however posed an additional difficulty for organizations that cut across ministries, such as environmental organizations, to gain

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legal status (ibid). According to Simon Avenell[5], this meant that the officials in effect have been able to handpick the groups that conform to their needs and preferences, and in this way pick and choose what organizations they want to allow to gain legal status (2017: 18).

Pekkanen explains how even if an organization were able to become a PIC, this meant that it had reporting duties to the competent ministry, that had the power to investigate the group or even to revoke its legal status – to which Pekkanen adds that despite being the most heavily regulated among industrialized democracies, the tax benefits that came along with the status were not as generous as those in other countries (2000: 118).

He also details how organizations would be forced to comply with bureaucrats' preferences, due to their bureaucratic "administrative guidance," backed by sanctioning power, thus impairing the independence of the civil-society sector (Pekkanen 2000: 118-119). Accordingly, these factors have made it difficult for civil society organizations to influence policy outcomes in Japan (Pekkanen 2004: 369). Indeed, this mechanism has been employed in such a heavy-handed way that, according to Pekkanen, many observers regard incorporated social welfare organizations, for example, as little more than cheap subcontractors for the government, without the independence necessary to qualify them as true NGOs (2000: 119).

As a result, until 1998, a lot of groups did not apply for legal status, for fear of losing the ability to pursue their missions (Pekkanen 2000: 116-119). In a nationwide survey of Japanese NPOs conducted by the Economic Planning Agency, the most common reason for not applying for legal status was that accounting and finance reporting requirements were too onerous, with 61 percent of groups listing this reason (Pekkanen 2000: 119). The third most common reason was the fear that the objective of the NPO, or the content of its activities, could be controlled by bureaucrats, with 45 percent of the surveyed groups listing this reason (ibid).

2.1.1 Consequences for the civil society sectors

Quoting Salamon (1992), Hasegawa explains that being considered an NPO entails satisfying the following six conditions: being a formal organization, non-governmental, non-profit, autonomous, voluntary, and having a mission that is publicly oriented (2004: 61). As such, the only condition that unincorporated citizens' movements and residents' movements have not been able to fulfil is

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the requirement of being formal organizations, in the legal sense (ibid). And if they were able to fulfil that requirement, this might have been at the cost of their autonomy (ibid). However, aside from not simultaneously fulfilling these criteria, this lack of legal status meant that these NPOs were very limited, as they could not sign contracts in the name of the group (Pekkanen 2000: 113). This meant they could not open bank accounts, hire staff, own property, sign lease agreements for office space, undertake joint projects with domestic government bodies, or even lease a photocopy machine (ibid).

This lack of legal status and accompanying legitimacy meant, as an example, that the director of the welfare organization Wonderful Aging Club experienced that the officials at the Ministry of Welfare would not even give him their business cards, and that he could not get past the reception at companies until the group became a Public-Interest Corporation in 1988 (Pekkanen 2000: 119).

All of these factors, in combination with bureaucratic practices such as *amakudari* (which is the practice of employing retired bureaucrats in new posts, typically in areas they once regulated), made it hard for independent groups to grow large in Japan, and just as hard for large groups to remain independent (Pekkanen 2004: 369).

As such, Pekkanen notes that Japan's civil society sector cannot be thought of simply as weak, but rather that there is a dual structure, as a result of these limitations, with Japan having a plethora of small, local groups and a small amount of large, professionalized groups (2004: 366). As an example, there are a lot of smaller Neighborhood associations (NHAs) in Japan, while large – in the sense of having many employees – advocacy groups are especially scarce (ibid).

Indeed, the total workforce that is employed by civil society organizations in Japan has been very low[6], at least prior to the new NPO laws and amendments from 1998 and onwards, with this small proportion of employees serving as an indication of the low degree of professionalization of civil society organizations (Pekkanen 2004: 368).

2.2 The dual structure in action

In the post-war period, after democratization and liberalization led to the removal of limits to freedom of speech and assembly, movements have been a constant and ubiquitous feature in Japan, with there being full-fledged residents' movements since the late 1950's or early 1960's to now.

[6] Pekkanen notes how, proportionally, Japan's 73,500 civil society professionals were fewer than half the number of the next lowest developed nation at the time (Germany) and less than a third of the average for the developed nations, based on data from 1995 (2004: 368).

(Hasegawa 2004: 43). The reason for the growth and proliferation of movements in the post-war period was the environmental pollution that resulted from the rapid development of heavy industrialization, that in turn came about due to the introduction of policies to promote high levels of economic growth (Hasegawa 2004: 43).

The characteristics of environmental movements have changed throughout the decades, with the 1960's seeing a preference for protesting against large-scale development projects, while the 1970's saw protests against everyday pollution, such as noise pollution from bullet train lines (Hasegawa 2004: 45, 48-49). These latter protests came in the form of class-action lawsuits – following the precedent of lawsuits being used in the four infamous cases of pollution; Minamata disease, Yokkaichi asthma, Itai-itai disease, and Niigata Minamata disease (ibid: 48-49). These four cases of pollution also provided the impetus for new environmental laws being enacted in 1970, and the Japanese Environmental Agency being established in 1971 (ibid: 87).

However, using lawsuits as a means to solve environmental issues related to construction projects and industrial pollution proved to have its limits, as judges were hesitant to rule in favor of environmental pollution cases, as doing so would set legal precedence, which may infringe upon political decisions and thus violate the principle of the separation of powers between executive, legislative and judicial branches of government (Hasegawa 2004: 122). In addition, such rulings may not end up making a big difference either way, with results from rulings not always being fully met by the guilty corporation (ibid: 100-101). Furthermore, as trials are costly and time-consuming, they could lead to the stagnation of a movements' other activities, and cause non-plaintiff members to leave, as the movement basically becomes a 'plaintiff group' rather than a residents' organization (ibid: 123-125).

Then there were the aforementioned post-Chernobyl (1987) anti-nuclear movements led by women, protesting on the grounds of food contamination worries, who wielded the cultural frame of being a 'mother/parent', perhaps hoping to appeal to people's image of mothers as devoted, self-sacrificing and altruistic (2004: 136-137, 141, 161).

However, the characteristics of movements changed again, in the 1990's, with the emerging awareness of global warming. As the scale of global warming is so big and widespread, and since carbon dioxide is invisible, it is hard to 'feel' that it has an effect, and makes it hard to identify who is cooperating in reducing emissions, and who is not (Hasegawa 2004: 54). And, in turn, it was hard to identify any specific organization as the perpetrator (ibid: 54). Further, as the time of 'crisis' was

predicted to occur in about a century, there may have been – and may still be – a belief among many, that issues such as industrial and radioactive waste disposal, and global warming, can be solved through technological developments (ibid).

The 1990's also witnessed a significant event in the history of Japanese civil society: a new NPO law, a century after the promulgation of the last one. 1998 saw the emergence of the "Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities" (hereafter called the "1998 NPO Law"), in the wake of natural disaster, media pressure, changes in the electoral system, and political ploys.

2.3 The 1998 NPO Law – not intended for advocacy

The advent of the 1998 NPO Law, establishing a new legal category for nonprofit organizations – called Specified Nonprofit Corporations (*Tokutei Hieiri Katsudō Hōjin*, SNPC from hereon) but often referred to as simply an NPO Corporation – took place a little over a century after the establishment of the Public-Interest Corporation in 1896. The background for its creation was a mix of different factors, one being the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, also known as the Kobe Earthquake, that struck Kobe in 1995. This disaster revealed the inefficiencies of the Japanese bureaucracy with various ministries jealously guarding their jurisdictions, slowing governmental aid efforts (Pekkanen 2000: 114). In contrast, volunteers streamed to the area, recording 1.2 million within two months, which captured the heart of the media (Pekkanen 2000: 114-115). Marveling at the selfless efforts of these volunteers who had no legal backing, and thus were not covered by any work insurance in the event of being hurt or killed during their relief efforts, the media started demanding legislative assistance for these volunteer groups, ending in calls for a volunteer or NPO law (Pekkanen 2000: 115-116).

According to Pekkanen, the pressure exerted by the media was effective due to the locus of power moving from the ruling party Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and their bureaucrats, to the LDP and its smaller coalition parties in the Diet, as the result of a 1994 revamp of the electoral system in Japan (2000: 142). This new system essentially meant that the LDP felt the need to cater to its coalition parties in order to be able to keep the coalition, in order to stay in power, while the smaller coalition parties catered to NPOs in a bid to secure their votes (ibid: 132, 139-140). The locus of power shifting led to the vote-sensitive members of the Diet to draft the NPO Law, and resulted in there being more room for civil society and media to have a say (ibid: 142). However, this did not mean that the wishes of the civil sector and media were selflessly accommodated, and as such, any accommodations made at the behest of the civil sector and media may not end up as these parties

had envisioned. Indeed, Pekkanen pointed to LDP Diet members expressing ill will towards NPOs, when the Diet members criticized an early draft of the 1998 NPO Law, which was more lax than they would have liked, saying that "your law would even let Greenpeace form in Japan! What kind of law is that? Greenpeace is an anti-governmental group!" (Pekkanen 2000: 128). Thus, the NPO Law ended up taking a more conservative turn again, making it less beneficial for the NPOs (ibid).

Elaborating on the ulterior motives casting a shadow over the new law, Avenell brings forth the research of Ogawa (2004, 2009) who argues that the 1998 NPO Law has partially become a tool for the state to pursue a policy of welfare service retrenchment, by empowering the nonprofit sector, and in this way nurturing volunteer subjectivity as part of its neoliberal agenda (2017: 19). In this way, the government seems to be taking advantage of the recent popularity of volunteering in order to streamline the framework of public administration (ibid). Pekkanen also mentions that the LDP was motivated to pass the new NPO law in order to increase the number of low-cost welfare volunteers, in order to meet the growing demands on state resources, as a result of the Aged Care Law (Pekkanen 2000: 131-132). He states that the LDP was accustomed to viewing welfare-related corporations as cheap subcontractors for welfare services (ibid: 132).

The reluctance to encourage advocacy in the civil sector can also be seen with a draft of the 1998 NPO Law initially being written in a way that prohibited any political criticism against public officers and suggestions about policies, according to Yamaoka Yoshinori, The first Executive Director of the Japan NPO Center – an organization aimed at supporting civil society and the nonprofit sector (Yamaoka 1998). The 1998 NPO Law was however revised to allow people to support or criticize public officers, provided it is not the main purpose of the organization (ibid).

Thus, with the 1998 NPO Law in place, residents' and citizens' movements were able to formally become legal organizations. This gave access to being recognized as legal entities, retain full-time staff, a permanent board of management, and establish a stable and well-resourced office, from which to proactively and routinely address a range of environmental problems (Hasegawa 2004: 61-62, 259). This means that they can focus on tackling environmental problems on a continuous basis, and that they are more likely to transform from being a reactive movement to a proactive movement. This, in turn, means that they can be expected to become policy-oriented movements that can develop and propose alternative environmental policies, whether it be on a local, national or an international level (ibid: 62).

2.4 The Japanese NPOs professionalize

As touched upon, with the growing awareness of complicated issues such as global warming, Japan entered an age of highly specialized and policy-oriented environmental NGOs, as investigating and creating awareness around such issues requires the expertise of specialists and organizations (ibid: 54-55, 57). Hasegawa notes the importance of having specialist staff in movements and organizations, in the sense that they can be environmental ambassadors if they move into the government or private sectors, and can help with navigating laws, and making policy proposals, and the like (Hasegawa 2004: 256).

As a result, Hasegawa notes that in Japan and elsewhere, environmental movements and organizations have increasingly moved from zero-sum conservation strategies of criticizing and demonizing the industry and authorities, to more collaborative strategies that lead to a greater direct participation in shaping policy, by working with authorities and businesses while still maintaining a critical position (Hasegawa 2004: 88, 194). Hasegawa ascribes the fact that environmental movements and environmental policy-makers have long been seen as opposing camps to the historically closed nature of policy-making processes in Japan, and now that the movements appear to increasingly be able to participate in this process, they will do so, leading to new collaborative strategies (2004: 88). However, Hasegawa emphasizes the importance of environmental organizations not being too focused on cooperation and collaborating with the government, as it could effectively reduce them to government contractors (2004: 244-245).

Alas, even with the new opportunities for incorporation, there were still challenges related to the nonprofits' prospects for securing financial and human resources, and retaining autonomy.

2.5 A vicious cycle; lack of resources begets fewer resources

Pekkanen illustrates that advocacy groups are particularly small in Japan, with them having on average only 3.4 employees and expenditures of 36.12 million yen (361,200 USD) a year, which is only 22.7 percent of the average for all nonprofits in Japan (2004: 370). As a result, Japan's civil society has had a constrained voice in policy formation, since there is a strong correlation between the number of permanent employees in organizations and their ability to attract media coverage (Pekkanen 2004: 370-371).

As such, it seems that it may be important for an advocacy group to have a solid amount of full-time employees in order to be able to have their voices heard, which in turn requires funding for paying wages and conducting research and carrying out activities and campaigns.

Noting the importance of funding, Ōnishi[7] looked into the fundraising techniques used by 62 people in charge of fundraising for Japanese nonprofits in 2004 (2007: 211). Ōnishi surveyed mostly SNPC (and unincorporated civic groups), as they must undertake fundraising in order to sustain operations (2007: 206). She explains that the PIC are not necessarily relevant to study in this regard, as they do not have incentives for fundraising, in exchange for the government exercising strict and ongoing control, especially in the areas of budget and operations (ibid: 206). She also compared the effects of having a fundraiser in the organization, and compared the prevalence of various fundraising techniques in the Japanese NPOs, with those used by U.S.-based Japanese-American and non-Japanese American fundraisers (ibid: 211, 216, 219). Similarly, as a majority of SNPC were struggling financially – according to a 2012 Cabinet Office pamphlet – and due to there existing few studies on how Japanese NPOs are managed, Ito Hiroshi[8] and Cecile Pilot[9] decided to interview 80 individuals from 50 nonprofit organizations about their activities, management, and marketing in Nagoya, Japan (2015: 1). In analyzing these semi-structured interviews with management-level officials from Japanese NPOs that took place in 2014, they focused on marketing channels in both financial and human resources; fundraising channels for organizational management; challenges that organizations face, and how they are addressed; marketing strategies for the future; and opinions about the term "marketing" (ibid: 2-3).

There are a lot of similarities in the findings of Ōnishi (2007) and Ito & Pilot (2015), despite the ten years between these surveys. Both parties note a heavy reliance on proposal writing for funding from foundations/corporations or government funding (2007: 213-214; 2015: 4). Ito & Pilot note the danger of relying too much on government funding, as some interviewees reported spending too much time on the administration costs related to receiving and managing funding from the local

[7] Ōnishi Tamaki is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and teaches courses in the Master of Public Affairs (MPA) Program including Nonprofit Management and Leadership and Philanthropy and Resource Development. She received her Ph.D. from Indiana University. Her current research involves entrepreneurial and institutional theories on social entrepreneurship and investment.

[8] Ito Hiroshi is a Professor at the Graduate School of Management at the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and MBA from Universite Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne. His research interests lie in Pedagogy, Educational Assessment, Environmental Policy, and NPO Marketing Strategy.

[9] Cecile Pilot is a Project & Capacity-Building Officer at the Defence for Children International. She received her first MA in project management from KEDGE Business School, and her second MA in International Human Rights Law from Strasbourg Law and Political Science University, France. She was at the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business in 2013 as a part of a Global Leader program.

government, ending up paying less attention to their social activities, while some expressed a worry about being used by the government as a cheap outsourcing tool (2015: 4-5).

2.5.1 Lacking donation culture?

They also note issues surrounding a lack of donation culture, while also pointing out that this may be reinforcing itself with organizations not bothering to ask for donations, due to the assumption that it will not be effective (Ōnishi 2007: 207, 209; Ito & Pilot 2015: 5). Indeed, Ōnishi indicates that some potential donors following the Kobe Earthquake had wanted to donate to relief efforts, but were not able to as they were not asked, and those who did donate wanted to continue donating, indicating an improvement in giving attitudes (2007: 208). However, as such, Ito & Pilot note that in Japan, companies doing their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) duties make more contributions than individuals (Ito & Pilot 2015: 2). They compare data from 2013, showing that 42.7 percent of the donations to NPOs in Japan are from individuals, while the remaining 57.3 percent are from companies, while these percentages are at 94.3 and 5.7 percent for the U.S., and 96.3 and 3.7 percent in the UK, respectively (ibid). According to Ito & Pilot, this has partially been attributed to NPOs in Japan not having communicated their presence and activities to wider society to a satisfactory degree, which leads to the public not knowing or understanding the value of their activities (2015: 2). This in turn has been attributed to financial constraints, which makes it difficult for NPOs to invest in marketing (ibid).

2.5.2 Lacking full-time fundraisers

In addition, Ōnishi found that the Japanese NPOs she surveyed used less fundraising techniques, or used them more sparingly than their Japanese-American or non-Japanese American counterparts in the U.S. (2007: 214). She attributed this to many of them not having full-time fundraisers, noting that only 35 of the 62 surveyed Japanese organizations used fundraisers (45.7 percent of the 26 unincorporated civic groups and 48.6 percent of the 34 SNPC) (2007: 212-213). The fundraisers' employment status and positions included in-house/full-time (40 percent), part-time board (28.6 percent), and full-time board (25.7 percent) (ibid: 213). Meanwhile, the majority of the U.S.-based fundraisers were in-house staff members, accounting for 96 percent of the non-Japanese Americans and 85.7 percent of the Japanese Americans (ibid). This is again, in turn, attributed to a lack of funding, manpower, and low wages, preventing them from hiring qualified, full-time staff to conduct effective fundraising, and perform stewardship, through activities such as maintaining an online presence, informing current and potential donors of their activities and how the donations are used (Ōnishi 2007: 212-213; Ito & Pilot 2015: 4, 6).

This is significant, with Ōnishi noting that according to a survey from the year 2000 by the Economic Planning Agency, one of the reasons why the Japanese did not contribute was due to there being very little information available about how their donations were used (2007: 219). In this sense, she finds that stewardship informing donors about the usage of their contributions would urge more individual giving in Japan (ibid). In the same vein, Ito & Pilot cite a 2013 study from the UK suggesting that NPOs that post the content of their activities about how they contribute to the society on SNS (e.g., Facebook in his example) instead of merely setting up a donation section, raised five times more funds on average (2015: 6). In addition, the study found that the Facebook page with videos about activities raised on average eighteen times more funds than the one with a simple link to the donation system (ibid).

Another aspect is that some of Ito & Pilot's interviewees mentioned the issue of aging staff, as they had trouble attracting young staff, due to the organizations' lack of manpower, and low wages (2015: 4). As an example, an official from an Environmental Protection NPO mentioned how there were staff members in their forties in the organization that earned less than 150,000 yen (1,500 USD) a month (ibid).

2.5.3 Indirect approaches preferred

In addition to these mostly external factors, another barrier may be internal factors, such as some nonprofits not wanting to conduct themselves as a business (Ito & Pilot 2015: 5). Ōnishi also notes an aversion to 'direct asks' in fundraising, such as using major gift techniques, aimed at attracting donors who donate large amounts, due to a fear of 'losing face' if they were to be rejected (2007: 215-216). She notes that both the NPOs and the potential donors seem to prefer more indirect methods, such as through the internet (Ōnishi 2017: 214-215). This has interesting implications for the future, or present, with the ubiquity of the internet, which can be used as an effective tool for fundraising, stewardship, reaching potential employees, volunteers, and donors. The NPOs just need expertise and someone who can devote significant amounts of time to maintaining a social media and online presence. As indicated by Ōnishi and Ito & Pilot, the solution may lie in hiring a full-time fundraiser, and offering higher wages, which could attract employees with expertise, although these solutions again require funding, requiring a bit of a balancing act.

Although these interviews were conducted in 2004 on a geographically representative sample, representing NPOs from different parts of Japan, and in 2014 in Nagano respectively, the same issues are reflected in a geographically representative study conducted on certified and uncertified

SNPC by the Cabinet Office in 2017. When asked what their challenges were, most organizations indicated that it was the securing and training of human resources, and diversification of income (Cabinet Office 2018: 10).

2.6 What now?

2.6.1 New and updated legal categories – The General Corporation and PIC 2.0

With the advent of the internet, the 2008 reform, and the rise in social businesses, it seems that there could be a light at the end of the tunnel for environmental advocacy groups.

In 2008, the 1896 PIC law was reformed, making the assessment criteria more objective, and the tax incentives attached to this status were made more attractive. In addition, another category was created, the General Corporation (*Ippan shadan hōjin,* GC from hereon), which is even less restrictive than the SNPC, and can be 'upgraded' into a PIC (JNPOC 2020b). This new category was meant to bridge the gap between non-profit organizations and for-profit businesses, and as long as they fulfil the criteria of corporate law a group can attain this status simply through registering themselves, without having to be authenticated (ibid).

Although it is a lot easier to become a SNPC than becoming a PIC, it still requires several "authentication" hurdles (JNPOC 2020b). According to an overview in a blog comparing different aspects of SNPC and GC – provided by a stock company (*kabushiki gaisha*) which offers support in digital marketing and guidance for organizations – it can take about 6 months to become incorporated as a SNPC, while becoming a GC can take around two weeks (One Team 2017). Also, while a SNPC requires that you have at least ten people, three or more directors unrelated to each other, and one or more auditors, it is possible to establish a GC with only two members, and one director, along with there being no kinship restrictions (ibid).

In addition, while the SNPC organization's activities have to stay within a defined category of activities – hence the 'Specified' – and you are mandated to report to the competent authorities and obligated to disclose information as a SNPC, this is not the case for the GC (ibid). However, the noted drawback with becoming a GC, is that you must pay about 110,000 yen (about 1,000 USD) for various processes required for the registration of the corporation, while there are no costs involved in establishing a SNPC (ibid). In addition, a GC may not have that much access to support programs and subsidies (*Hojokin*), and will not receive any tax incentives, unless specifically registered as a nonprofit GC (One Team 2017). However, due to the ease of incorporation, the

Japan NPO Center (JNPOC) notes how following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, many relief activity groups registered themselves as GCs, rather than becoming SNPCs (2020b).

As of early 2020, there are a lot more SNPC organizations and General Corporations, than their more restrictive 'approved' equivalents, the Approved Specified Nonprofit Corporation, and the PIC. However, despite only having been around for half as long, the General Corporation overtakes the SNPC, as can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of legal status and number of organizations, as of early 2020. Edited and highlighted by me, based on a table by the Japanese NPO Center (JNPO)

Status of Legal Entities	Number of existing entities	AS of
Specified Nonprofit Corporation	51,269	March 2020
*Approved Specified Nonprofit Corporation (among Specified Nonprofit Corporation)	1,152	March 2020
Public Interest Corporation	9,718	January 2020
General Corporation	59,901	January 2020

2.6.2 Collaboration

A challenge that NPOs have faced in Japan, is that they in a sense have had to choose between the freedom to pursue their objectives and missions, or receiving funding through essentially becoming a (cheap) governmental subcontractor. This mutual exclusivity, along with a feeling that they lose credibility and political influence if they receive financial support from companies, has led to NPOs being referred to as "poor but pure" (Yamakoshi 1994).

Yamakoshi Atsushi, at the time a U.S. Representative of the economic organization Keidanren, mentioned in a Japan Economic Institute Report in 1994, that although the hostilities between industry and NGOs seemed to have started to subside, scars of distrust still ran deep. The hostile and emotional image of NGOs formed during the pollution battles led to most companies refusing to make financial contributions to NGO activities (ibid). On the other hand, although U.S. companies often had similar complaints, many have sought to adopt "green" standards and have given financial support to some of the biggest American environmental NGOs (ibid). Yamakoshi suggested that the divide between NGOs and companies in Japan may have remained deep because

of a lack of sophisticated public relations know-how by NGOs and the government's tendency to look out for industry rather than consumers (1994).

However, there appears to have been a shift, with JNPOC describing that while welfare and health-oriented NPOs tend to collaborate with the government, collaboration with businesses may be more of an arena for advocacy-oriented NPOs, with such collaborations often taking place in environmental and artistic fields (JNPOC 2020a). They explain that in Japan this has mainly taken the form of corporate philanthropy, or donations and goods provided to nonprofits, but as the idea of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) has spread in recent years, it has started shifting from a one-sided relationship to a mutual one, in which nonprofits use their know-how on behalf of corporate activities (ibid).

Hasegawa states that as there are business opportunities in finding sustainable solutions, such as more efficient uses of energy, it makes sense to create environmental businesses through collaborations between environmentalists and businesspeople (Hasegawa 2004: 196). And in this sense, businesses, environmental NGOs, consumers, and governments can share in the common interest of nurturing environmental businesses (ibid).

However, Kagawa-Fox's[10] findings imply that such a method can only work until a certain point, due to government and businesses' vested interests meaning that they will tend to focus on technological solutions, rather than economic instruments (2012: 62). Such a prioritization is reflected in the government tending to focus on, as an example, carbon reducing technologies, rather than implementing a carbon tax, as the latter would be a hindrance to businesses (ibid).

Building upon this point, Broadbent[11] notes that politicians are split between the interests of big businesses, their source of campaign funding and the like, and the general population who are their voters. Due to having to balance these different interests, attempting to appeal to the government for policies that may go against business interests, may simply result in weak, symbolic politics & non-

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[11] Jeffrey Broadbent is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. He received his Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University. His academic focus includes comparative sociology; culture and structure; environmental sociology; Japanese society; networks and identity; political sociology; qualitative methods; social movements; and East Asian society.

decisions - a manipulated political deal that placates local concerns by seeming to serve them, thereby reducing the debate on the issue (Broadbent 1998: 86-88).

In this sense, it seems that cooperation could work, as long as it is to businesses' advantage – which of course makes sense, due to the nature of a business. Given such circumstances, what approaches do NPOs and NGOs take? Do they collaborate on these terms, or do they attempt to walk off the beaten path?

3 Interviews with Environmental NPOs and NGOs

Before conducting the interviews that will be the focus of this chapter, I had a rather clear image in my head regarding what ideally should be done in order to solve environmental issues. Having repeatedly mulled over how it would be possible to bring about environmentally friendly change on a societal, national, or even global level – and having experienced how difficult it can be to try to consciously make environmentally friendly choices in a setting and a system not adapted to making such choices easy nor obvious – I had reached a conclusion: that the ideal way to bring about effective change would be to use a top-down approach and pressuring businesses to comply with environmental regulations. In addition, the government should implement initiatives encouraging environmental behavior among citizens and businesses, and banning unsustainable products and production processes among businesses. As such, since these interviews were conducted very early in the research process, at a point where I was not aware of the challenges and restrictions that advocacy-oriented groups in Japan have continuously faced, I was somewhat confused at the lack of suggestions for government-oriented initiatives by the interviewees, as I had been certain that this was the way to go.

As such, I did not have much faith in the bottom-up approach of trying to address individuals among the general public, encouraging them to adopt environmentally friendly habits, and trying to appeal to businesses to make a change, as I feared, and still do, that these will be mostly cosmetic. Taking it a step further, changes made by businesses in order to appease these calls may in some cases simply amount to being greenwashing – which I consider to be the practice of consciously, or from a place of blissful ignorance, making something appear sustainable or non-polluting, in order to appeal to consumers' desire for environmentally friendly products or alternatives, when it actually is nowhere near these reported qualities[12].

This skepticism is also reflected in the questions (Figure 1), where I asked questions regarding whether they themselves had Zero Waste or plastic reduction habits or lifestyles; how easy or difficult this was to keep up with; how they felt about the businesses' and government's efforts to become more 'green'; and whether they believed individual actions really made a difference. Behind these questions lay curiosity, but perhaps also a looming mischief, wondering whether anyone would actually say that they were content with the government's and businesses' efforts, or

[12] This is reminiscent of the definition in the Cambridge Dictionary: "to make people believe that your company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is".

whether they perhaps would reveal that they felt the same way: that individual efforts should not be a focus.

However, despite these biases, I gleaned a lot of interesting facts, perspectives and inspiration from the interviews. There were the more 'hard' facts, such as there finally being a regulation on plastic bags, requiring that they be paid for; and that ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) investing was gaining popularity. Then there were the 'softer' perspectives, such as the members having their own struggles with trying to lead less wasteful lifestyles. This included being called 'stingy' by their family members when trying to use items for as long as possible before throwing them away; that as it is so difficult to reconcile living in a city and living an environmentally friendly lifestyle, that some people that my Greenpeace Japan interviewee knew had moved out to the countryside; and that it was difficult to buy ecological, pesticide free produce, and such types of foods, as the said interviewee mentioned that staff do not receive much pay when working in such organizations. In addition, my Greenpeace Japan interviewee touching upon NGOs sources of funding, and the low wages that come with working in an NGO, served as a great source of inspiration for what was described in chapter 2.

As may be clear by now, a lot of the information and views gathered through the interviews laid the foundation for this thesis. With this chapter, I hope to lay out some themes and points from the interviews, in order to provide insights into the mindset and foci of the interviewees, both as practitioners of a Zero Waste or plastic waste reduction lifestyle, and as members of a nonprofit organization.

3.1 The NPOs and NGOs

3.1.1 Fulfilling Hasegawa's notion of specialized staff

Most of my interviewees seemed very educated or specialized, along with being relatively young, which can be gauged from Table 2, placed at the end of this section, wherein I provide a brief overview of the interviews, interviewees, and their organizations.

530week and Fog's Ōyama-san who is in her early thirties has established or helped to establish both these organizations, and the same organizations' Ogaki-san who is in her early- or mid-twenties is a researcher knowledgeable about ocean plastics. Arai-san from 530week is in her mid-twenties, and worked with corporate waste management, making her knowledgeable about waste issues, which was also what initially led her to becoming interested in waste reduction issues and joining 530week.

ZWJ's Sakano-san is in her early thirties, and has had experience with working at Zero Waste Academy in Kamikatsu, and being a speaker on Zero Waste on TED talks and a co-chair at the World Economic Forum in 2019, making her an important voice on Japanese Zero Waste issues. Okuno-san who was in his twenties also had experience working at Zero Waste Academy before joining Sakano-san at ZWJ, where the two of them are currently the only full-time employees, with two part-time employees beside them.

350.org Japan's Arao-san is in her late thirties and a strong advocate for Zero Waste. She posts Zero Waste tips on her social media, and has appeared as an interviewee on podcasts, talking about Zero Waste, in addition to working as a field organizer for 350.org Japan.

Greenpeace Japan's Ōdachi-san is in his late twenties to early thirties. He has an MA in International Affairs from the Australian National University, where he also studied pollution and environmental issues. Ōdachi-san has authored or co-authored several research-based briefing papers or articles on plastic waste for Greenpeace Japan. He is a/the project leader of Greenpeace Japan's plastic campaign. He emphasized citizen-led initiatives, and having a science-based approach, which he finds to be the core of Greenpeace Japan.

Last, but not least, WWF Japan's Asai-san, who is in his fifties or sixties, had experience working at an advertising agency before joining the organization, bringing this expertise with him when he entered his current position where he is in charge of ocean plastic issues. As his hobby is to surf, he would go to the ocean a lot, and he would see that there was a lot of plastic litter in the ocean and on the coast following a typhoon. He explained how his hands would get caught in a bunch of vinyl bags as he paddled on his surfboard. This led him to participate in volunteer activities, such as beach cleaning. But no matter how much he picked up, in the end, he found that they would never be able to catch up if they did not stop the waste from the source.

He mentioned how what led to him joining WWF Japan, is that he likes that they make analyses and predictions based on science, and as much as possible propose concrete solutions, and rather than advocating by themselves, they collaborate with businesses on changing their procurement behaviors and so on, and logically solving things with non-complacent businesses. He likes these points, which are neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic, but rather suggests that it is a very realistic organization.

Table 2: Information on the interviews conducted for this thesis, and the interviewees and their organizations.

Organization /affiliation	Surname + *san* suffix	Approx. age	Interview date and duration	Role/expertise	Extra information
530week (General Corporation) and the stock company Fog	Ogaki-san	Early-/mid-twenties	July 21. 2020 (48 min. 25 minutes on the interview, 23 minutes talking to Ōyama-san in English)	Researcher (researcher and community builder in Fog)	She most likely has the most expertise in plastic issues in 530week. This is also judging from the fact that she was nominated to participate in the interview, after they received my general inquiry for a Zero Waste and plastic reduction interview.
530week, and the stock company Fog	Ōyama-san	Early thirties	Same interview as above	Co-founder and director (CEO and founder of Fog)	She was not asked the questions, as she was there to observe. She told me about Fog's activities, and introduced me to other potential interviewees.
530week, also worked at a waste management company	Arai-san	Mid-twenties	July 26. 2020 (80 min. 53 min. Japanese interview, 27 min. of more unstructured talk in English)	Corporate waste management	She explained that the waste management job entailed providing consultation for businesses on how to dispose of waste, and the cost of waste disposal. She also consulted on how to cut waste-related costs by becoming more sustainable.
Zero Waste Japan (ZWJ) (General Corporation)	Sakano-san	Early thirties	Aug. 3. 2020 (59 min.)	Co-founder and board member	She is one of ZWJ's two full-time staff, along with Okuno-san.
Zero Waste Japan (ZWJ)	Okuno-san	Twenties	Same interview as above	Board member	He was mostly not asked, as he was there to observe. He had also worked at Zero Waste Academy, before coming to work at ZWJ.
Greenpeace Japan (General Corporation)	Ōdachi-san	Late twenties /early thirties	Aug. 4. 2020 (67 min.) [technical issues at the start not included]	Plastic campaign project leader	He emphasized using scientific methods and research, which is reflected in the various documents that he and others in Greenpeace produce, citing research.
WWF Japan (Public-Interest Corporation)	Asai-san	Fifties or sixties	Aug. 7. 2020 (49 min.) [technical issues at the start not included]	In charge of ocean plastic issues	He had previously worked at an advertising agency, which showed in the interview, where he used a marketing model to explain what he saw as a current issue with consumption, and what he saw as a potential way forward.
350.Org Japan (not incorporated)	Arao-san	Late thirties	Aug. 14. 2020 (55 min.)	Field organizer	In her own time, she posts advice and tips on having a Zero Waste lifestyle on her social media and is interviewed on these aspects for venues such as podcasts.

3.1.2 Cooperation with businesses and the government

350.org Japan and Greenpeace Japan seemed to express more criticism and discontentment with the government and businesses – although they still emphasized the importance of working with these parties in order to promote their environmental goals – which is perhaps reflected in their legal status. Indeed, 350.org Japan is unincorporated, while the somewhat comparable 530week is a General Corporation, and Greenpeace Japan is a General Corporation, while the somewhat comparable organization WWF Japan is a Public-Interest Corporation. Arao-san from 350.org Japan focused a lot on the importance of bringing about change with the use of 'people power', and working from the bottom-up, but definitely also found top-down approaches, such as the plastic bag regulation, to be very effective – when the government decides to take such an approach. In addition, Ōdachi-san from Greenpeace Japan explained how, although it may sound a bit idealistic, he had always been interested in and pursued the idea of the citizens changing society, and bringing change to the big players, such as businesses, and having the government change laws and regulations. He saw it as being very important to convince businesses of the importance of going in an environmental direction, as he found their cooperation indispensable in finding a solution. Ōdachi-san also emphasized the importance of the organizations receiving their funding from individual donations, rather than from governments and businesses, stating that this was a major reason he chose to join Greenpeace Japan, rather than another environmental organization.

As touched upon, it can be difficult to attempt to lead an environmentally conscious lifestyle within a system not conducive to such a way of life. When I asked whether it is easy to maintain a Zero Waste lifestyle in Japan, 530week's Arai-san answered that as she is used to leading such a lifestyle, she is therefore able to 'endure' a lot in order to reduce the amount of waste produced by her lifestyle. However, she did not feel that it is easy to try to avoid producing waste, for people who are not very invested in the idea of needing to reduce the amount of waste they produce through their lifestyle.

As such, it would perhaps be intuitive to suggest that businesses should be obliged to offer more sustainable alternatives for products and services, and make it easy to choose such options. However, this may not be such a straight-forward matter.

3.2 Lack of expressed interest or awareness

Sakano-san mentioned that ZWJ had collaborated with Nestlé Japan in plastic reduction measures in the form of replacing the outer plastic bags of small KitKat chocolates with paper by September

2020. And further, by September 2021, the smaller individual packaging are to also be replaced with a non-plastic material, such as perhaps paper. However, she reckoned that even if a big company such as Nestlé has made such a commitment, other companies will not follow. She did not find that other chocolate makers in Japan or the market in general would move in this direction, and that there was no way that the consumers would go "wow, that's so cool, I'll switch to Nestlé." She explained that this was not Nestlé's fault, but that the consumers do not really have a strong push for these matters, which meant that there would not really be any direct effect on sales in Japan.

I mentioned that I had heard about a student that made a petition to decrease packaging, aimed at a big chocolate producer in Japan, and that this student seemed to be criticized by various people, such as those saying that if there is no tray in the packaging, then the snacks will be damaged. Sakano-san found that this was perhaps more a reflection of the harsh tone on the internet in Japan. However, she felt that manufacturers would be pleased with such incentives, such as with Nestlé, where she indicated that receiving such a comment, stating that it is okay for them to change, probably makes it easier for the business to take that step. Indeed, switching over to using paper or other materials will increase costs, making it difficult for the manufacturer to make the switch. So it is beneficial for businesses to have someone say that there is such a need. In this sense, Sakano-san seemed to find that it is due to a lack of awareness or will among the general population, along with the cost of switching to different materials, that may serve as a barrier for businesses to make such a switch.

Similarly, when I asked 530week's Arai-san about what aspects should be changed in Japanese society in order to move it in the direction of becoming a Zero Waste society, she mentioned that a big portion of plastic waste comes from packaging, and that she thought it would be a good idea if this excessive packaging could stop. As an example, she mentioned bags of candy, with every candy inside being individually wrapped. This was originally done as a way to make it easy to eat and to give out to other people, so without thinking of the environmental burden, it was thought of as doing a good thing. Now it has become a given that things are packaged in this way, so, if a company does not do it, people are perplexed.

She mentioned that corporations are unable to change the packaging if the consumers like it and find it convenient the way it is. So, it is important for the consumers to question this over-packaging, and conclude that it is superfluous and only leads to an increase in waste. As such, even if there are people in the businesses who would like to remove excess packaging or alter it in some

way, if they do not hear feedback from their consumers, they cannot really move forward with such initiatives. So she found that it would be good if these two parties could see eye to eye on the issue, and remove the excess. She noted that it is also important that people become more aware of environmental issues, although this may take some time. She found that there is a need for more education on the field, not just for children, but also for adults and businesses, who need to become more aware, and change their actions.

3.3 Bottom-up change through education and raising awareness

530week's Arai-san indicated the importance of education again, when I asked her whether businesses being motivated by profits may just lead to greenwashing, in response to her touting the importance of collaborating with businesses, and motivating them to 'go green' by arguing that there is a market for more environmentally conscious products and services. She agreed that this may happen, but found that it is easy to recognize if something is greenwashing if you are studied up on environmental issues. She proffered that it is therefore also important to increase the awareness among the public, through organizations such as 530week, so they can recognize when something is greenwashing, and act accordingly by making businesses who do so lose value, and then perhaps be prompted to step up their efforts. In this sense, she seems to address Broadbent's statement about government's symbolic, placating efforts, which according to him is the result of the government being stuck between trying to cater to businesses' and citizens' interests (1998: 86-88). Indeed, with an educated and aware public, such placating efforts may not be a possibility, as they would be able to see through it.

530week's Ōyama-san also emphasized the importance of making people really sympathize and care about environmental matters through education. She felt that this would ensure that people would wholly adopt environmental behaviors, rather than being forced into complying with environmental initiatives at their workplace, but then buy their pre-packaged, take-out food from a convenience store in their private time. This could then in turn make sure that environmental practices would find fertile earth, and not simply be removed at a later time, when the opportunity presents itself.

She told me about the objectives of her stock company Fog, which are to provide basic education, via workshops and consulting for local organizations, local governments, and companies, in order to change their behavior and mindsets towards circularity – that resources can be used again and again through reuse and recycling – and regenerative efforts. At the time of the interview, they were

working with the local government in Kagoshima, Satsuma-sendai, who were at the level of making a sort of circular laboratory. The aim of such a laboratory is to serve as a sort of bridge between industry and citizens, allowing citizens to have a say in such matters, or acquire some basic knowledge about what a circular economy is. They were at the stage in the process where they were preparing to arrange a lot of small workshops. These would shed light on what local resources there are, through visiting nature and checking the water, researching what kind of moss they have on the shrine, and as such getting a fundamental idea of what they need, and why we need to recognize our local natures. In turn, she expressed a hope that they could then become sustainability-minded citizens, and later connect such knowledge or thoughts to the industrial part of the circular economy.

So in this way, she explained, the focus within Fog is not to provide data on environmental issues, but rather to promote sustainable mindsets in people, so that they can serve as community leaders or innovators in their organizations or in society itself.

I suggested that this approach may be reminiscent of a bottom-up approach, to which she agreed, and went on to say that she finds the bottom-up approach more important than the top-down approach. She mentioned how the Japanese government has been implementing top-down policies for such matters, such as the plastic bag regulation. This, she said, caught a lot of people off guard, leading some to complain that they had been using the plastic bags as garbage bags, but would now have to buy garbage bags instead. Following the implementation of the plastic bag regulation, this effect was reflected in the news, where it was reported that rather than leading to a decrease, it led to people buying plastic bags in bulk instead, in order to deal with food waste and such things that may not hold very well until next waste collection day (Japan Today 2020). In this same report they state that this had led many to point their fingers at the government for both inconveniencing them, as they did not feel that they had any alternatives, and failing to save the environment (ibid).

3.4 Top-down approach – necessary, but unlikely

530week's Arai-san had been working as a waste consulting manager and worked with 530week until recently, and was preparing to go to the Netherlands to take a sustainability-related master's degree when I interviewed her. When I prompted her on what could be done to appeal to those people who are too busy with their daily lives to care about environmental issues, or the government and businesses who may have vested interests in keeping things the way they are, she stated that she felt there was a limit to how much one can increase the awareness of people. As an

example, as she ended up in a job related to waste disposal, she can sympathize a lot with issues related to this, and it gave her a lot of awareness and interest regarding these issues. However, she does not have that much knowledge or interest towards other issues, so in that sense, it is difficult to have everyone have the same level of interest for different issues. As such, she found it important to try to spread the word and have a lot of people become interested in the issue, while on the other hand be aware that it is impossible to have everyone be interested in the same issue. So, for those who are busy with their own lives, and may not have too much interest in waste issues, it is important that products are designed so that they do not have excessive amounts of things that will become waste (such as plastic waste). In that way, consumers can live their usual lives, without producing too much waste. In order for this to become a reality, it is important that not only businesses strive to do so, but also that the government create regulations clearly dictating how products should be made. By this, people may understand what they should do, and follow the regulations.

In this sense, she found that such a top-down approach is necessary, as it takes a long time if we have to wait for the people's voices through a bottom-up approach, as people and consumers are busy with their own things and do not have a lot of awareness.

However, she also found that awareness around environmental problems, single-use plastic reduction and waste in general was increasing, so the Japanese government could not ignore it. She believed that the government and the top corporations were aware of this trend, and thus may wish to respond to these calls for environmentally friendly initiatives. She however did not feel that this could solve everything, and thought that perhaps international pressure may prompt the government and big corporations to act more.

Indeed, she had indicated earlier, when I asked how she felt about the businesses' and government's environmentally friendly initiatives, that the government is set in their ways. She found there to be a trend in Japan, where although people are aware of environmental issues, they still do not try to go in a different direction. As such, she felt that laws did not seem to get passed. She suggested that this may be due to the government having vested interests in the manufacturing industry, and as they have stakes in these big companies, they will not pass laws that are disadvantageous for them. As an example, if they were to say that PET bottles would be outlawed by 2030, these big corporations would definitely have a hard time. So, she suggested that perhaps policies are not coming along due to such a collusion between big companies and the government. She said that this

may be her imagination, as she is not very well versed in policies, but it is something she hears about often. However, as established, she is not the only one with this impression, with Kagawa-Fox and Broadbent supporting this view of the government having a proclivity for catering to businesses and solutions beneficial for the economy (2012: 62; 1998: 86-88).

Arai-san contrasted Japan's slowness with France, where food waste has become illegal, where for example a supermarket is fined if they throw out food. She found it admirable how quick the French government moves, compared to the Japanese government. Whether this law/regulation is being upheld is another issue, but she found that Europe is quick at top-down regulations of these issues.

As such, if the government is catering to businesses, which is their vessel for economic growth, and businesses are catering to their consumers, which is their source of income, and these consumers in turn may be too preoccupied with their own everyday lives and issues, what then?

This is where the function of framing comes into the picture.

3.5 A change of frame

3.5.1 Working within the current framework

When I asked ZWJ's Sakano-san about how one should appeal to those busy with their everyday lives, or businesses and governments with vested interests, to partake in solving environmental issues, she acknowledged that there are people who are busy with their everyday lives, and that Zero Waste cuts down on and changes different parts of your lifestyle. She explained that she is often called stingy by her family, and how people often talk about how difficult and tedious Zero Waste is, as it entails using things conscientiously, and doing and making things by hand. However, she put forth the possibility of promoting habits that prevent food waste and overconsumption as being a way to save money, rather than emphasizing the environmental aspects of them. This could for example be recommending buying foods that are close to their expiration date, and therefore sold at a reduced cost, or buying clothes or furniture second-hand, and to not be wasteful, but to use the things you own in a way so they may last. She suggests that if such initiatives are angled in this manner, it is easier to adapt it to your lifestyle, and does not require much effort. So, it is good if you can angle something as being easy or difficult, for the people who are busy. In this sense, she suggests appealing to individuals' frames of cost saving and convenience, and in this way reach those without a frame relating to environmental consciousness, and perhaps influence them to change their consumption patterns

This same approach is used when the NPOs describe collaborating with businesses, and encouraging them to introduce more environmentally friendly processes or products. Here they appeal to a frame of economic growth, by emphasizing potential profits made from ESG investing, and stressing that there is a market for environmentally friendly products, or potentially telling them how the business may be negatively affected if they do not make any environmentally minded changes.

3.5.2 Mottainai ("what a waste!")

In addition to describing approaches appealing to the businesses' existing economic growth frame, Ogaki-san also mentioned the importance of changing mindsets. When I asked if there was one thing about Japanese society that should be changed in order to have a more Zero Waste-like society, she answered that among the three factors; people's actions, changing how businesses work, and changing how the government works, she found that the most important was changing people's mindsets, as without doing so, they could not change anything. I attempted to proffer her – indirectly alluding to essentialist notions – by suggesting that perhaps Japanese people already were rather worried about nature, and taking good care of their belongings. But maybe they were not environmentally conscious enough? This prompted her to mention the concept of *mottainai* – which roughly translates to "what a waste!" and is a concept discouraging wasteful behavior – where people in the past would take good care of their belongings, and use them for a long time[13]. She found that nowadays people's mindsets are more focused on efficiency, rather than on the *mottainai* spirit of taking good care of things, especially in the city. She explained that she thinks that it is due to people seeking efficiencies in their busy daily lives, and the economy being more prioritized, that the concept of *mottainai* has been watered out. As such, in terms of framing, the frame of convenience (economizing time) has eroded such past habits preventing wastefulness.

The concept of *mottainai* was also mentioned in my interview with WWF Japan's Asai-san, unprompted. When I asked him about whether he himself had Zero Waste or plastic reduction habits, he explained how he found Zero Waste to be very difficult, as he saw it as being very extensive, but that he endeavored to not have many things, such as not buying things he does not need. He tried his best to buy things that he really likes, and thus will take care of and use for a long

[13] The concept of *mottainai* has been adopted by various parties since the turn of the century, being used in the names of local waste consciousness movements, and as a brand for environmentalism promoted by the Japanese government, businesses, and media (Siniawer 2018: 256-259). It was even embraced and promoted as a keyword for the global environmental movement by Kenyan activist, government minister, and Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai in early 2005, catapulting it to national and global attention (ibid).

time. He showed me a cup, and stated how he had already used it for 10 years. If he buys something that he likes, he feels that it will lead him to take care of it and use it for a long time, and thus lead to a gradual reduction in waste. He then segued into an explanation of how in the past, Japanese people would buy furniture that could be passed on to the next generation, such as their children and grandchildren. He admitted that this may be related to Japan not originally being a very wealthy country, but rather quite poor, so this explains why they would use things carefully. He related this practice of using things carefully and well to the aforementioned word that was popular a while ago: *mottainai*. He explains that if you buy something, and then immediately throw it away, that is of course "*mottainai*". Using things carefully and well will lead to less waste, which he states may be a good 'hint' going forward.

3.5.3 Decision-making model – from functional to emotional

In order to elucidate his point about the importance of buying things you feel a strong affection for, he used a decision-making model, revealing his background in advertising. This is a model that shows what people's decision-making process is when buying a product or service. He started by drawing a small illustration, a cross with four axes. First, on the horizontal line, there is "Think", which he explains as considerations regarding the functional value of a product, placed opposite of "Feel", which is the emotional value. In addition, there is "High Involvement", which indicates whether a product is something you are very involved with, whether it be in the decision-making process or while using it (see Figure 2). He explained that clothing may be emotional and high involvement, and that cars often are high involvement and have functional value, while tissue paper may be a functional and low involvement product. He also explains how something may initially be high involvement, but gradually become low involvement, such as cold medication perhaps being high involvement when you first buy it, but if you buy the same one every time, it becomes low involvement.

Using this model, he explained that single-use products that you throw away after one use are not emotional products. It is something you buy because you need such a container, and then you immediately dispose of it, making single-use products a low involvement and functional value item. Meanwhile, using an item that you like for a long time means that it is a high involvement and emotional value item, as you are pleased with it and like it. Among various products, a single-use product such as a PET bottle that people currently use and throw away, is a product you do not really feel any type of way about, and is functional, so it is functional and low involvement, while on the other hand, a "my bottle" (your own bottle) is emotional and high involvement (see Figure

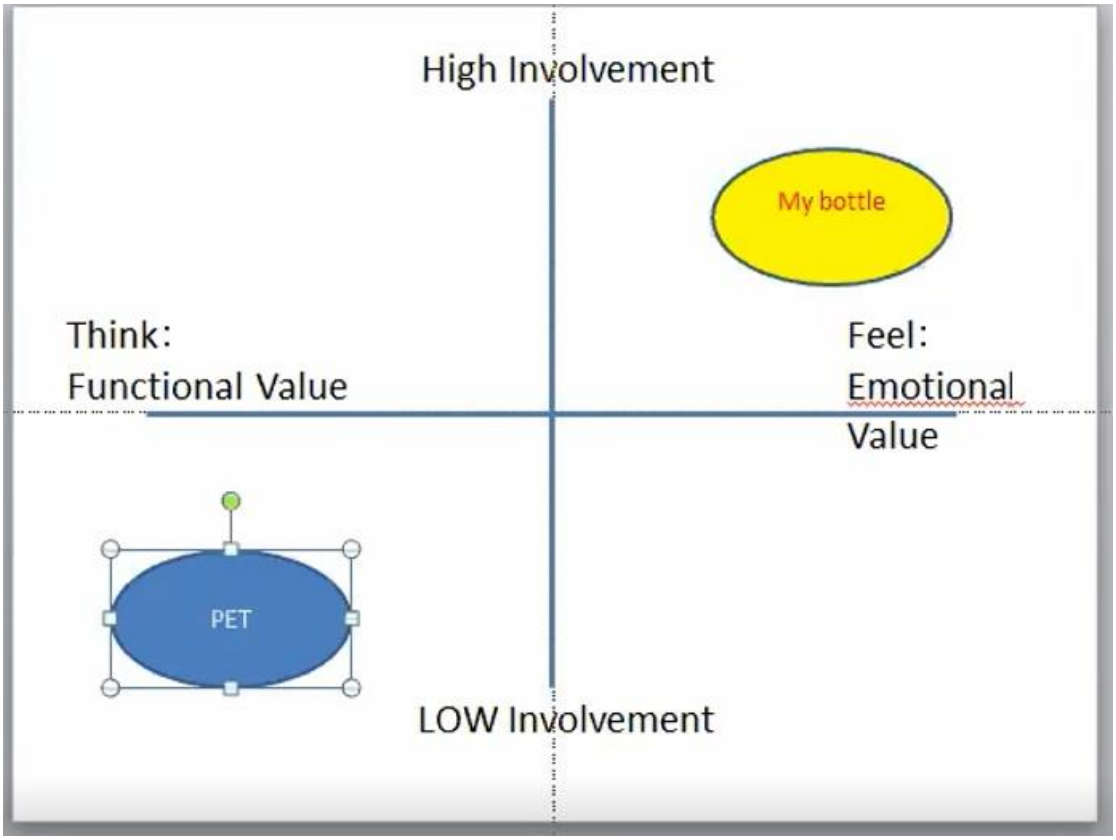

Figure 2: A screenshot of the decision-making model drawn by Asai-san during our Zoom interview. Shows that a reusable, personal bottle is often high involvement and has emotional value, while a single-use PET bottle is low involvement and has functional value.

2). He suggested that perhaps the people who feel that single-use products are convenient, and that a sustainable lifestyle is inconvenient, may be able to change from a single-use lifestyle, to a non-single-use lifestyle, if you can apply a more emotional benefit to the product. As such, in terms of frames, Asai-san found that a shift from a frame of convenience, to a frame of emotional attachment – emphasizing how a product makes you feel, rather than how convenient or inconvenient it is – could be an effective means of reducing over-consumption and the use of single-use products. He also suggested that a way to have businesses promote such a trend, could be by emphasizing the possible profits or benefits of doing so. In this sense, leveraging the existing frame of economic growth, to move away from the existing frame of convenience.

As such a change of frame has not been entirely realized – at least not yet – along with focusing on education and creating awareness, the interviewees generally described approaches that entailed appealing to individuals' and businesses' existing frames.

However, such a shift can already be glimpsed, at least in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the challenges it has brought with it.

2.5.4 The rise of smart consumers?

Along with seeing the ESG model as being rather influential in having businesses proactively strive towards Environmental and Social initiatives, WWF Japan's Asai-san saw that consumers also seem to be more preoccupied with choosing what companies to buy from. In other words; being smart consumers. This could be a response to some trying to take advantage of the prices of masks and disinfectants going up, and trying to use it as a way to make a profit, as these were in high demand when concerns about Covid-19 started ramping up. As a result, he explained that consumers started to want to buy from businesses who seem to care not only about the environment, but also people's lifestyles, rather than from those who are trying to take advantage of this time of crisis. So, perhaps as a result of Covid-19, consumer behavior has changed, although it has also led to an increase in the use of single-use products. He noted that although it is just in the beginning stages, the environmental initiatives from the businesses' and consumers' side seem to be advancing quite a bit, while the government seems to be quite slow. That is how he saw the current situation in Japan.

530week's Arai-san echoed this assessment, where she felt that it would be better to try to appeal to businesses, as the government is very slow to act. She believed that it may still take businesses a few years to do things, but that they are more flexible. Businesses are for profit, so if sustainability or reduction of plastic is something the consumers want, it can be seen as a new business opportunity – which then appeals to their economic growth frames – rather than being seen as something costly and bothersome.

This leads us back to 530week's Arai-san's concerns, regarding whether the government is too tied up with industries.

Indeed, there is a very clear focus on economic growth in the Japanese government's handling of environmental issues. This is indicated in WWF Japan's criticism of the former, Abe-led administration for treating the environment as an economic restraint – despite advocating a 'virtuous cycle of the economy and the environment' (2020d). This criticism came in the form of an open letter available on WWF Japan's website, addressed to the new Prime Minister, Suga Yoshihide, two days before he took office on September 16. 2020, asking him to have a bigger focus on the environment (WWF Japan 2020d). Even more directly still, this focus was emphasized when after only a month of being in office, as of October 26. 2020, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide

pledged that Japan will become carbon neutral by 2050, as “dealing with climate change is no longer a constraint on growth” (McCurry 2020).

As such, this may signal a greater commitment to environmental measures. However, considering that growth is still the priority, this may end up hindering effective environmental initiatives.

4 NPOs' criticism of the government's solution to plastic waste

In order to show what the NPOs and NGOs are up against, and set their critiques in context, this chapter explores the Japanese government's foci regarding the creation of a circular economy, and what to do with plastic in this regard. This entails describing how the Government of Japan will support the domestic capacity for handling waste, and how China's National Sword policy has provided an impetus to invest in the domestic recycling facilities, and increase the quality of the recycled plastic, making it a usable raw material for domestic production. For this purpose, a document produced from a series of meetings (referred to as the 'Joint Meeting(s)' henceforth) between committee members from the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) on how to achieve a circular economy, is used to represent the Government's plans and stance. In addition, I will examine examples of how some similar or related environmental issues from the last 30 years have been handled by the government. These include the dioxin crisis in the 1990s, and the situation prior to and following China's National Sword Policy. The approaches and priorities of the government are contrasted vis-à-vis those of the NPOs and NGOs through comparing these historical contexts and government directions and statements with the criticism and viewpoints expressed in my interviews, and in statements made by NPOs and NGOs on various platforms. This includes policy recommendations and statements made by WWF Japan and Greenpeace Japan.

In this chapter I show that the incentives and approaches suggested by the environmental NPOs and NGOs reflect those of environmentally conscious countries, which is why their presence in Japan is crucial to setting a progressive agenda. I address the existing limitations and barriers of NPOs and NGOs in influencing policies and setting norms to date.

4.1 Affinity for thermal recycling

According to some sources, Japan's plastic recycling rate is quite high, with the overall plastic recycling rate having improved from 46% in 2000 to 83% in 2015 (Hornyak 2017). However, this number includes processed waste that is then exported, and methods such as thermal recycling, which covers the practices of burning waste, also plastics, for energy and heat (Plastic Waste Management Institute 2018: 2-3). This method does not fit with the perception of "recycling", where it leads to the production of a new, tangible product, and is not considered environmentally tenable, compared to focusing on reusing, recycling, energy conservation measures, and developing renewable energy sources (Kirby 2011: 197-198).

At the moment, the Japanese plastic recycling system consists of a lot of thermal recycling[14]. This may – ironically – have been a result of the dioxin scare in the 1990's in Japan, where a lot of dioxins were released into the atmosphere due to the widespread and unregulated use of incinerators to burn waste[15]. This matter was elucidated in Peter Wrynn Kirby's[16] anthropological book, *Troubled Natures: Waste, Environment, Japan* (2011), on real or perceived toxic threats in the two Tokyo neighborhoods that were observed and analyzed. This dioxin scare prompted international pressure in the form of the UN Environment Programme (1999) releasing the finding that Japan was responsible for 40% of the developed world's air emissions of dioxins (Kirby 2011: 155-156). And so, following the dioxin scare, strict waste separation was launched, along with small and polluting incinerators being replaced with increased capacity incinerators (Kirby 2011: 189). However, these initiatives turned out to be rather incompatible, as this new strict waste separation led to the incinerators not having enough waste to burn, making them unable to generate energy to offset capital investment and operation costs, and generate funds (ibid). Also, the resultant lack of waste designated for burning led the furnaces to cool down due to running on below ideal capacity, allowing for the release of toxins (ibid). This led to the Tokyo government deciding to also start burning waste that initially belonged to the 'incombustible' category, such as plastics, after deeming it safe to burn at high temperatures, with a filtration system (ibid: 87, 189) This example indicates that a focus on developing technology is not always necessarily the most effective and sustainable solution. This scenario revealed that the apparent priority of the government is energy production and economic growth, rather than recycling and preserving natural resources, unless it was just the result of poor planning and execution (ibid: 183, 190).

4.1.1 Out of sight, out of mind

In addition, the dioxin scare seemed to prompt an increase in waste exports to other countries, such as China, as revealed in a graph based on statistics from the Trade Statistics of Japan, Ministry of Finance, Government of Japan, showing that there has been a rapid increase in exports of plastic waste from Japan to China since 1999 (Meng & Yoshida 2012: 242). It shows that there was an

[14] Energy recovery. Producing cement material/fuel, and refuse-derived solid fuel (RPF, RDF), and/or energy or heat through incineration (PWMI 2019a: 7, 23).

[15] Dioxin is formed from burning waste at low to middle temperatures, and with restricted oxygen supply. To exclude dioxin formation the temperature during the burning must be at 850°C or higher, and the air supply and residence time in the oven must be sufficient, which requires well-constructed ovens with steady operation (Liu et al. 2012: 662)

[16] Peter Wynn Kirby is a health/environmental specialist and ethnographer at the University of Oxford, where he is a Senior Member of Saint Antony's College, Oxford. He is also a High-End Overseas Visiting Fellow at Shanghai University. He holds a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge.

around 130% annual increase rate in plastic waste exported in 1999, around 140% in 2000, around 80% in 2001, and around 100% in 2002, whereafter it shows continuous increases, although not as drastic (ibid).

It is hard to say whether this increase would have happened regardless, due to economic factors, but it may be safe to assume that the dioxin scare served as further impetus to export more waste for mechanical recycling – which means it is used to make products again, which is usually what people think of when they think of 'recycling' – while still continuing to procure energy through thermal recycling. However, this continuous reliance on sending the increasingly complex and mixed plastic waste to China was not sustainable, as they did not have the infrastructure and capacity to recycle these complex materials. This led to these complicated mixed plastics from around the world ending up in landfill after landfill, and ending up in the ocean, which China then received the blame for. This became too much. What had once been a valuable resource for production now brought with it too many hazards and difficulties, finally culminating in China's National Sword policy[17].

As such, with the implementation of China's National Sword policy, this trend of exporting waste has started to reverse. In August 2019 the amount of plastic waste exported to China was 1/43 of what it was in August 2017 (Plastics Smart 2020b: 5). Meanwhile, there has been an increase in exports to other Asian countries, such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, going from 29,000 tons in August 2017, to 55,000 tons in August 2018 (with this even being the month with the lowest amount of plastic waste exported in 2018), and finally 64,000 tons in August 2019 (ibid). This means that the export of plastic waste to these countries has doubled (ibid). However, the total export amount has decreased, from 128,000 tons in August 2017, to 66,000 tons in August 2018, and finally 69,000 tons in August 2019, showing a halving in the amount of waste exports from Japan (ibid).

A graph on the plastic material flow in Japan in 2018 from the PWMI (Plastic Waste Management Institute), which is referred to in the Joint Meeting PowerPoint, shows that 56% of the plastic waste is thermally recycled, with 19% of these 56% being used for things such as cement, 30% is burned for electricity, and 7% burned for heat and 16% is unused, with 8% being incinerated, and 8% being sent to landfill (Plastics Smart 2020b: 3; PWMI 2019b: 3). The remaining 23% is materially

[17] For extra information on the lead up to China's National Sword policy, see Appendix 1.

recycled; 4% is chemically recycled[18] into a raw material or a monomer through gasification, liquefication, or with a blast furnace, which can then be used for new plastic production (PWMI 2019b: 3).

These percentages have not changed much the last couple of years, staying relatively consistent. However, from 2017 to 2018, a significant change can be seen in the percentage of material recycling being conducted domestically versus abroad, with this percentage respectively being 38.9% and 61.1% in 2017, and 56.6% and 43.4% in 2018 (PWMI 2018: 5; 2019b: 5).

ZWJ's Sakano-san and 530week's Arai-san were not content with the tendency to burn waste, as it is not conducive to a circular economy to easily resort to burning potential resources, rather than having them go towards becoming a new physical product. However, as 530week's Arai-san also witnessed, since China's National Sword policy went into effect, a lot of Japanese recycling facilities have been struggling to deal with the increased amount of waste, which prompted Arai-san to speak of the need for government support for the recycling industry and recycled plastics market. Further, according to another representative of Greenpeace Japan, making a statement in the context of China's National Sword policy being implemented, there is no reason for Japanese companies to not reuse, recycle or reduce the amount of plastic that they use (Ryall 2018). This representative points out that drinks giant Suntory Holdings became the first in Britain to introduce 100% recycled plastic for its Ribena brand soft drinks back in 2007, showing that they have the technologic know-how to do so (ibid). However, the problem is one of economics, as the company has insisted on only using fresh plastic for each bottle in Japan, as it is cheaper for them to use virgin plastic on each bottle rather than recycled materials (ibid). This matches what ZWJ's Sakano-san and 530week's Arai-san expressed in their interviews, regarding costs related to pursuing more sustainable solutions being a big barrier for businesses.

4.1.2 The government will subsidize the transition

However, this may not be the case for long. There have been a series of meetings (henceforth the 'Joint Meeting(s)') conducted by the Working Group on Strategies for Plastic as a Circular Resource[19], where they have interpreted the contents and goals of the Plastic Resource Circulation

[18] Also called 'feedstock recycling'

[19] *Purasuchikku shigen junkan senryaku wākingugurūpu*. This Working Group consists of committee members from the Plastic as a Circular Resource Subcommittee under the Central Environment Council's Circular Economy Division of the Ministry of the Environment (*Chūō kankyō shingikai junkangatashakai bukai purasuchikku shigen junkan ko iinkai*), and the Waste and Recycling Subcommittee under the Industrial Structure Council's Industrial Technology Environment Division of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) (*Sangyō kōzō shingikai sangyō gijutsu*

Strategy that was formulated May 31st 2019 (Joint Meeting 2020: 1). In the notes from the Joint Meeting, they acknowledge the need for government intervention, such as in the form of supporting a market for recycled plastic, the development of recycling related technology and infrastructure, and financially supporting the procurement of recycling equipment (Joint Meeting 2020: 5-6).

Additionally, in a PowerPoint from one of these meetings, it is expressed – in more detail – that the government aims for low emissions and integrated resource circulation, through plastic recycling equipment with reduced emissions, and backing recycling equipment running on renewable energy and producing products with low emissions (Plastics Smart 2020b: 6). This includes equipment such as plastic waste sorting equipment, pelletization equipment, solar panel-powered recycling equipment, carbon fiber-reinforced plastic recycling equipment (ibid). Their stated budget for 2020 is 4.32 billion yen, corresponding to about $41 million, which is an astronomical amount, considering that the budget for this was $4 million in fiscal year 2017 and $15 million in fiscal year 2018 (ibid; Inoue 2018: 10). The plan's implementation period is from 2018 to 2020, and it involves subsidizing a third or half of the cost it takes for private organizations and the like to acquire these types of equipment (Plastics Smart 2020b: 6). In addition, in the Joint Meeting paper, they express the intent to support Environmental, Sustainable and Governance (ESG) financial efforts, which was one aspect touted by my interviewees (Joint Meeting 2020: 6).

4.1.2 Awakening dormant recycling skills

As for the recycling system, the Government plans to move away from the current model of conducting mixed collection (Plastics Smart 2020b: 6). This approach entails the waste not being sorted by consumers, whereafter it is roughly sorted at a waste facility and then pressed (ibid). Until recently, the following step was to send this pressed waste to China, with them previously having sent about 1.5 million tons of this plastic waste to China per year (Plastics Smart 2020b: 6). Instead, now the plan is to move towards a recycling system formulated in the May 2019 Plastic Resource Recycling Strategy (ibid). This strategy involves separate collection, followed by advanced sorting and washing, and is in this sense turned into potential raw material that may be recycled domestically (ibid). They state that these initiatives are a response to the ban on plastic waste spreading throughout Asia, the amendment of the Basel Convention adopted in May 2019, and the domestic May 2019 Plastic Resource Recycling Strategy (ibid).

kankyō bunka-kai haikibutsu risaikuru ko iinkai), and is for the Plastics Smart campaign. The Plastics Smart campaign is a campaign operated by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan as a part of the PACE (Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy) Japan hub activities (Plastics Smart 2020a).

This demonstrates that Japan has the capability to take care of its own waste, and that China's National Sword policy provided an impetus to invest in the domestic recycling facilities, and increase the quality of the plastic for recycling since it is now to be used for domestic production.

And so, following the China's National Sword policy, and most likely due to the financial incentives now offered by the government, Japanese companies are now pouring investment into plastic recycling facilities to handle the rise in bottles and used home electronics remaining in the country, with even established businesses such as Suntory Holdings joining the field (Shibata 2019). Suntory Holdings helped develop a technology that reduces carbon emissions from the production of containers by 25% and is working with Kyoei Sangyo, a plastic-bottle recycler north of Tokyo, to use it in recycling (ibid). Furthermore, Kyoei Sangyo has invested 2 billion yen with Suntory in a group facility to supply 300 million recycled plastic bottles each year (ibid). On the supply side, trading house Sojitz aims to invest in or buy a company as early as spring that produces pellets from the processed material (ibid).

Although reduction and redesigning products to become less wasteful with the goal of moving towards a circular economy is also mentioned in the notes and PowerPoint from the Joint Meeting, there seems to be a big focus on technological solutions – such as high tech recycling equipment, recycling infrastructure, and alternative materials such as bioplastics[20] – and the economic benefits that these can bring, along with social and environmental benefits (Joint Meeting 2020: 1-2). With the approaches put forth in the Joint Meeting paper, they hope to address and make improvements in three areas; the environment, the economy, and in the society (ibid: 2). The environmental benefit is the reduction of resource use and waste production, solving the marine microplastics and global warming problem (ibid). The economic benefit is to secure mid- to long-term competitiveness in the global market by contributing to the field of plastic resource recycling, leading to the growth of a new market and growth engine in Japan (ibid). This can then be seen as an investment in a sphere where all businesses, including small- and medium-sized enterprises, can see growth (ibid). The social benefit is that they are responding to the problem of a declining birthrate and aging population, by encouraging a change in consumer lifestyles (ibid).

A similar focus on economic solutions is also very present in the document "The Basic Direction of Future Plastic Resource Circulation Measures (*Kongo no purasuchikku shigen junkan shisaku no*

[20] See Appendix 2 for a more in-depth discussion on what bioplastics are, and what its properties and challenges are.

kihon-teki hōkō-sei)" produced from a Joint Meeting that was held September 1st 2020. In said document, they interpret the contents and goals of the Plastic Resource Circulation Strategy that was formulated May 31st 2019 (Joint Meeting 2020: 1).

In this document, they express wanting to promote a Japanese model consisting of Japanese technology, innovation and infrastructure contributions to the world (Joint Meeting 2020: 1). At the same time, they hope to contribute to the problems set on the agenda by the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as reducing resource use and waste production, solving the marine microplastics and global warming problem (ibid). Along with this, they hope to create a new source of growth, such as economic growth and job creation, through the development of resource recycling related industries (ibid). One of the proponents that they put forth in terms of achieving these objectives, is utilizing what they see as Japan's strengths, such as the cooperation of citizens in sorting recyclables, and excellent environmental and recycling technologies (ibid). There thus appears to be a rather big focus on having citizens expand efforts.

4.1.3 Onus on consumers?

In the Joint Meeting report, another objective that they wish to achieve, is to improve material- and chemical recycling, in order to be able to produce recycled materials on par with virgin materials (Joint Meeting 2020: 4). In addition, they express that they want to support the development of thermal recycling, and the development of infrastructure necessary for implementation of all these initiatives (ibid). In order to achieve these goals, they state that plastic containers, packaging, and products discharged from households are to be required to be separated and collected as plastic resources (Joint Meeting 2020: 3-4). In addition, they will encourage consumer participation, through having households charge for the waste they put out (ibid). This could perhaps be in the shape of having households charge for the waste bags, or raising the prices on these. In addition, they mention establishing a separate collection system nationwide through incentivizing municipalities for such separation efforts (Joint Meeting 2020: 3-4). On the other hand, they mention that they would like to create conditions that encourage businesses to voluntarily recall plastic waste (Joint Meeting 2020: 4). In this way, they seem to be putting the onus on the consumers, in order to encourage businesses to recall the waste (Joint Meeting 2020: 4).

This difference between the demands on the consumers versus that of the industry is seen in the formulation in the Joint Meeting paper, where wordings like 'creating an environment conducive to…' (…*kankyō o seibi suru*) are used in matters regarding recycling by and for businesses and

manufacturers (Joint Meeting 2020: 4). However, when there is talk of consumers and local municipalities, there is talk of incentivizing consumers to sort their waste, to encourage voluntary recalls by businesses (*jishu kaishū no kakudai ni mukete, shōhisha ni taisuru bunbetsu kyōryoku no insentibu o hajime jigyō-sha ga jisshi suru samazamana kaishū-ryō kōjō-saku o sokushin suru tame, hitsuyōna shien o okonau.*) (ibid). In addition, they mention enforcing fees that the consumers must pay for household waste (*katei gomi no yūryō-ka tettei-tō o tsūjite shōhisha no shigen bunbetsu o unagashi,...*) (ibid: 3), and incentivizing the local municipalities (*shichōson ni taisuru insentibu-tō o tsūjite, funbetsushūshū taisei o zenkoku-teki ni seibi suru.*) (ibid: 4).

Further, the goal of economic growth seems to feature almost as prominently as the aspects surrounding the environment, which is perhaps not too surprising, as the document is the product of subcommittees under the Ministry of the Environment and METI.

4.1.4 Hesitation in pressuring businesses

While subsidies and incentives are promoted in governmental initiatives, such as the May 2019 Law, and the Joint Meeting, there seems to be a hesitation in implementing regulations that could be burdensome for businesses. An example of this, is not introducing a more comprehensive EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility), as has been done in the EU with the "Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment", formulated on June 5th 2019. This directive, which is mentioned in the Joint Meeting PowerPoint for the sake of looking at what other countries are doing regarding plastic waste issues, dictates that member states must require producers to be responsible for their products (Plastics Smart 2020b: 17). It dictates that by the end of 2024, member countries must have introduced extended producer responsibility regarding certain products, such as food containers and packaging, meaning that manufacturers of these products must cover the cost of collecting and processing these (ibid). In addition, the directive includes a ban on single-use plastic tableware, cutlery, straws, cotton swabs, etc., and products made of oxo-degradable plastics, banning these from the EU market by 2021 (ibid).

While they do encourage reduction of plastic used for manufacturing and for distribution and the service industry in the Joint Meeting paper, there does not appear to be any strict formulations regarding reduction (Joint Meeting 2020: 2). Instead of taking such a drastic step, they express the need for *encouraging* manufacturers, brand owners and other such people in charge of packaging

design, to design products in a way that makes them easy to recycle or reuse, and to use recycled materials and bioplastics (ibid: 2-3).

4.1.4.1 The Minister of the Environment on the benefits of the Government's approach

While the interviewees for this paper wanted EPR and such laws to be implemented, in an interview with the Financial Times in July 2020, Koizumi Shinjiro, Japan's Minister of the Environment, seemed to defend or express a preference for this 'Japanese way', where the approach is to communicate as much as possible, whereafter the manufacturers and the industry make voluntary efforts, rather than just banning something like in Europe (Harding 2020). He expresses that although policy action is slow in Japan, it is effective (Harding 2020).

He explains that the reason behind the plastic bag regulation requiring stores to charge for plastic bags is meant as a means to have Japan recognize the problem with plastic (Harding 2020). He also mentions that Japan has a very high recycling rate for PET bottles, at 85 percent, compared to the U.S.' 20 percent, and Europe's 40 percent (ibid). He goes on to show how bottles have been made more recyclable in Japan, from old bottles with resin bases and metal caps to the latest examples, with branding stamped into the plastic itself so there is no need for a wrapper (ibid). He also explains how colored PET bottles are not sold in Japan, as the industry has voluntarily agreed to produce only clear PET bottles, making them easy to recycle, which is offered as a model for how the country works on environmental issues (ibid). In this sense, he expresses this same focus on effective recycling and encouraging voluntary efforts in making products easier to recycle, as is stated in the Joint Meeting paper.

This shows that changes may be coming, slowly but surely, with the method of having the different parties do their parts, and encouraging businesses to conduct voluntary efforts, which seems to have been effective regarding PET bottles.

This matches some of the interviewees approach to appealing to businesses, as the interviewees also found that economic incentives are an effective means to get businesses onboard with environmental efforts, and may therefore be the best shot at fostering effective compliance. In addition, they found that businesses were more quick to respond to criticism. Indeed, according to ZWJ's Sakano-san, businesses/manufacturers are being pressured worldwide to do their best at recycling, and become more sustainable, which has led these businesses to look for recycling businesses to partner up with, so that they can recycle their products. So, if this movement speeds up, these businesses may recycle on their own. So, it is the legislators that may have to try to catch

up and make laws in order to mock-up or support the businesses. Thus, she found that it may be faster if the businesses try to set things in action.

However, when I prompted Sakano-san, asking what aspect of Japanese society she felt could be changed in order to make it closer to a Zero Waste or plastic reduction society, she mentioned that she would like to see EPR be implemented, although she had spoken about businesses needing a market to pursue in order to change. She explained how there is a law on recycling packaging in Japan, but that she would like this to be expanded upon. She pointed to the EU's EPR, which entails that the manufacturer retains the responsibility for the product even after it is bought, such as being responsible for making sure that the product is recycled.

She explained that the current scope of the Japanese companies' responsibility is that they have to pay for the packaging to be taken care of. However, Sakano-san found that only paying to have it done may not guarantee that it is all really being recycled into a new product, or whether the products that are being recycled are just being burned for energy, in other words, thermally recycled. So, she found that it would be more effective having them be able to guarantee that it is being recycled, and perhaps creating a route where the manufacturers can use the recycled materials to make their products, rather than just paying a fee and having that be it. At that point, this could then lead to materials that are the easiest to recycle to be prioritized, be that paper or plastic or a third material, which would lead to a more circular system, with less loss, and perhaps less single-use products as well, if these were required to be dealt with by the producer.

She also found that Japan's current rate of waste incineration is very big, where they end up burning almost everything, so, if there were enough facilities and enough capacity to recycle, it could lead to people saying that the incineration should stop as it is outdated. She would like to see the plastic that is currently not being recycled, be recycled. As an example, while plastic packaging and containers are being recycled [as dictated by a packaging and containers law], plastic *products* are not, so these are generally being incinerated. So, she wanted to have these kinds of things to start to be recycled, and be regulated, in addition to having the conditions surrounding recycling be improved, such as having more recycling industries become authorized.

However, with a new Prime Minister in place, perhaps change may come bounding. After all, after only a month of being in office, as of October 26th 2020, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide has pledged that Japan will become carbon neutral by 2050, as "dealing with climate change is no longer a constraint on growth" (McCurry 2020). There are as of yet no concrete plans for how to

achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, although Prime Minister Suga indicated that efforts would be made in promoting renewable energy and prioritizing safety while seeking a bigger role for nuclear power (ibid). In addition, Suga said that he would speed up research and development on key technologies such as next-generation solar batteries and carbon recycling, and promised to fundamentally change Japan's long-term reliance on coal for energy (ibid).

However, how do the NPOs and NGOs featured in this paper feel about these various government initiatives and announcements?

4.2 NPOs finding there to be an insufficient focus on reduction and reuse

On November 2. 2020, WWF Japan addressed Prime Minister Suga's declaration that Japan is to be carbon neutral by 2050, in a statement where they also made a detailed suggestion that he should also raise the reduction target for 2030 in order to be able to achieve this (WWF Japan 2020f). In another, they support the Climate Emergency Declaration that was released October 26th, and again strongly urge the government to strengthen its 2030 goals and concrete policies, so that it can respond appropriately to the crisis (WWF Japan 2020b).

Such call-outs and policy-suggestions may indicate that WWF Japan's status as a Public-Interest Corporation since 2011 does not serve as a barrier, indicating that the 2008 reform may have loosened some of the previously felt limitations. This freedom may however also be due to them having various sources of funding, with their main source of funding being from individuals, according to their 2020 financial report (WWF Japan 2020a). According to this report, 37 percent of their total revenue of 1.31 billion yen was from individual's membership fees, 18 percent from corporate donations, 11 percent from business revenue, 10 percent from inheritance donations (*Isan kifu-kin*), 9 percent from personal donations, 6 percent from fundraising income, 4 percent from subsidies, and 3 percent from corporate membership fees (ibid). As touched upon in chapter 2 on structural challenges faced by NPOs, a more varied source of income may lead to more autonomy.

This same outspokenness is seen with Greenpeace Japan, with their briefing report in the context of the G20 Summit in Osaka in 2019, where they evaluated and made recommendations on Japan's plastic policies (Greenpeace Japan 2019). This report was aimed at "helping journalists covering the G20 Summit to contextualize Japan's role in the international plastic politics by offering an overview of Japan's positions and actual performance in plastics pollution prevention, with a

particular emphasis on its continued dependence on exports/recycling and polluting and wasteful disposal such as incineration" (ibid).

In the report, they criticize that, judging from recent news at the time, Japanese government's action plan for handling plastic pollution is solely focused on recycling and development of biodegradable plastic materials, with an insufficient focus on reduction and reuse, except for small scale initiatives such as mandating stores to charge for plastic bags (Greenpeace Japan 2019: 1). They emphasized the importance of companies reducing the production of single-use plastics, and that governments need to hold them accountable for the plastics they put into the market (ibid: 3). They also emphasized the need to clearly prioritize prevention and reduction – such as having manufacturers set up reuse and refill systems – over resource-wasteful disposal methods such as incineration, or simply shifting the problem to other materials (ibid). They state that in order to show real leadership, Japan and the G20 must recognize that the "linear, throwaway destructive business model" must end, and that we cannot simply recycle nor incinerate our way out of the plastics pollution crisis, or substitute one problematic disposable material with another material with other problems (ibid). They also mention the EU having already adopted a Single-Use Plastics Directive requiring EU countries to achieve an ambitious and sustained reduction in the consumption of some single-use plastics by 2026 compared to 2022, supported by an accompanying list of product phase outs and EPR (ibid: 4). They asked that the G20 countries commit at a minimum to establishing equivalent regulations, for example timelines for reduction in consumption of single-use plastics, product phase outs and strong EPR, by 2020 (ibid).

However, whether these policy suggestions reach the government and whether they end up having a say, is unclear. But recently, on October 13. 2020, such efforts were scaled up, with Greenpeace Japan, WWF Japan – and 18 other organizations part of or supporting the network that can roughly be translated as the 'NGO network to realize a reduced plastic society'[21] – releasing a policy suggestion. This policy suggestion is called the "Joint Proposal for 'The Basic Direction of Future Plastic Resource Circulation Measures' – 'Overall Reduction/ Reuse' rather than Substitution and Heat Recovery –"[22] (Greenpeace Japan 2020b). It is addressed to the Minister of the Environment Koizumi Shinjiro and the State Minister of the Environment Sasagawa Hiroyoshi, and was handed to the State Minister of the Environment Sasagawa Hiroyoshi on the same day, as depicted in

[21] *Gen purasuchikku shakai o jitsugen suru ngo nettowāku*

[22] *Kongo no purasuchikku shigen junkan shisaku no kihon-teki hōkō-sei' e no kyōdō teigen — daigaehin ya netsu kaishū yori 'sōryō sakugen riyūsu' o —*

Figure 3: A representative from Greenpeace Japan (on the left) handing over the Joint Proposal to the State Minister of the Environment Sasagawa Hiroyoshi (on the right), on October 13. 2020. The number shows the amount of signatures.

Figure 3 (2020b; 2020c). This policy suggestion is a response to the government's abovementioned proposed policy directions regarding the environment, "The Basic Direction of Future Plastic Resource Circulation Measures" released September 1. 2020, which, although it mentioned 'thorough reduction', was criticized by Greenpeace Japan and others for displaying too big of a focus on recycling, mostly thermal recycling, and replacing plastic with other materials, such as bioplastics (2020b). The Joint Proposal stresses the importance of focusing on reduction, reuse, and refill initiatives, and puts forth the request that the government should fully introduce the Extended Producer Responsibility System, which will obligate businesses to take responsibility for the entire life cycle of products, and to ensure that all processes from collection to reuse and recycling are carried out (2020b: 2-3). Alongside the proposal they also submitted 15,633 signatures, gathered in

the name of shifting from a disposable society to a reuse society (2020c). In it, they ask to be able to cooperate in making the proposal for the basic direction for the environmental laws (ibid).

The Joint Proposal suggests alternative courses of action for the government. For example, they propose that rather than leading and securing international competitiveness in the field of bioplastics, Japan could lead and become competitive within the field of reusables, which they suggest is a growing and profitable market (Greenpeace Japan 2020b: 3). They point to research from the Ellen McArthur Foundation, a think tank working to promote a circular economy, suggesting that there is a business opportunity of over 1 trillion yen just from switching 20% of disposable plastic containers and packaging in the world to reusable ones (ibid).

In this sense, the Joint Proposal appeals to the Government's economic growth and world leader frames, perhaps increasing the chance of their suggestion being considered.

These efforts toward technological advancement have their place in the pursuit of a circular economy, as there are perhaps items that we could not do without that may need to be made from a plastic-like material, and the things that already are and will come to be in circulation need to be recycled and reused as efficiently as possible. As an example, plastic can be useful in preventing food loss, an example being that cucumbers can last 14 days longer if wrapped in plastic (Harrabin 2020). However, focusing too much on the last two parts of the 3R+Renewable – Recycle and Renewable[23] – may not be as sustainable regarding waste pollution and emissions, as reduction and reusing would be, as emphasized by NPOs/NGOs, such as those who brought forward the Joint Proposal, and researchers (e.g. Jambeck et al. 2015: 770; Fuhr & Patton 2019; Liu, Adams & Walker 2018: 22). In addition, as touched upon with the Dioxin crisis, there are examples of a focus on technological solutions and economic growth back-firing, and derailing other efforts.

4.3 NGOs' role, according to policy direction

In the Joint Meeting paper, they mention the importance of the consumers' understanding and cooperation for the sake of facilitating reduction, reuse, segregated recycling, and using alternative materials (Joint Meeting 2020: 5). In order to promote lifestyle changes for consumers, such as

[23] In "The Basic Direction of Future Plastic Resource Circulation Measures" produced at a Joint Meeting, they discuss initiatives based on the principles of the 3R's – reduce, reuse, and recycle – which they have added an extra element to, making the new slogan "3R + Renewable" (Joint Meeting 2020: 1). This addition is explained as making up for the plastics that cannot be reduced or avoided, which is especially important now with Covid-19 reaffirming the important role plastic plays regarding hygiene purposes (ibid). As such, after reducing the avoidable plastics, they will substitute those that cannot be reduced with recycled materials and renewable resources, such as bioplastic (ibid)

ethical consumption, they will work together with NGOs and the like in providing environmental education and doing public relations work aimed at creating awareness regarding recycling (ibid). They will also disseminate information on the current state of Japan's recycling system and efforts made by different actors to the consumers and the international community with the help of NGOs (ibid). With this, they seem to acknowledge the NPOs and NGOs power in spreading awareness and implementing change on the ground level. However, it seems that this may be as far as this recognition goes, as the role of NPOs and NGOs in this matter seems to simply entail disseminating information, but not working together to shape the direction and the initiatives that they are tasked with making known to the public.

Further indicating this perceived or real lack of cooperative will, on October 13. 2020 WWF Japan released a statement protesting against the Prime Minister refusing to appoint six scholars as new members of the Science Council of Japan, which is a representative organization of the Japanese scientist community that makes policy recommendations independent from the government (WWF Japan 2020c). In the statement signed by The Nature Conservation Society of Japan, The Wild Bird Society of Japan, and WWF Japan themselves, they state that this intervention is a hindrance to free debate, and threatens academic freedom. So they asked that the government guarantee academic freedom, clarify their reasons for refusing the appointment, and withdraw their refusal (WWF Japan 2020c).

And so, although they are trusted to educate and disseminate information to the public, there is still some way to go from being a bridge between the government and the public, to being invited to sit at the table with government officials and policy-makers.

5 Conclusion

The NPOs of the Japanese civil sector have faced various obstacles throughout the last century, which have prevented them from growing big and powerful, retaining momentum, and influencing policy-making without backbreaking efforts and protests. These barriers include having had difficulties in being incorporated as an NPO, due to subjective criteria and strict reporting duties relating to being a Public-Interest Corporation, and difficulties in receiving funding or retaining independence. The latter is particularly an issue if the nonprofits receive most of their funding from a single source, such as the government.

However, with the advent of the 1998 NPO Law, and the 2008 reform of the Public-Interest Corporation and establishment of the General Corporation, becoming incorporated has become increasingly easy. Also, with the ubiquity of the internet, activities like networking, attaining information, and making the public aware of an organization and its mission, in addition to securing funding, has become more and more feasible.

This bodes well for advocacy groups, such as those interviewed for this paper. The interviewees gave an impression of being deeply intertwined and networking with each other, and the most of the interviewees were relatively young, being in their twenties and thirties. This is a positive sign, seeing as Ito & Pilot's research suggested that NPOs had trouble attracting younger staff due to the low wages. The low wages, however, seem to still be a problem, as indicated by my Greenpeace Japan interviewee. As for their profiles, the interviewees spanned from having expertise in waste-handling systems, waste reduction, advertising, and so forth. In addition, they all exhibited a certain penchant for using science and research to promote their causes, which Hasegawa finds to be a hallmark of post-1990s environmental movements focused on matters related to global warming. Furthermore, most of their approaches were more realistic, rather than idealistic, which they found helped them see actual change.

However, having a realistic approach meant acknowledging that there were some people who did not share the interviewees' environmental frames, and therefore could not be persuaded by environmental arguments, but rather by arguments of convenience and cost saving. In the same vein, the interviewees without fail mentioned appealing to the government and businesses' economic growth frames. In addition, the NGOs and NPOs behind the Joint Proposal touched upon a world leader frame, by mentioning the prospect of Japan serving as a world leader in the pursuit of innovative solutions – as the government and businesses too were not receptive to an

environmental frame on its own. This is rather understandable, given the nature of businesses, in that their usual purpose is to chase profits, and that the government must ensure that the economy and businesses may function. As is, the NPOs found that businesses were more responsive to making environmental changes, while the government was very slow, when compared to the EU and certain European countries, such as France. This is perhaps due to environmental pursuits being potentially profitable for businesses, while environmental pursuits on a governmental level mostly entail restrictions and regulations, which may not be conducive to economic growth. While the government's approach of opting to encourage businesses to do voluntary initiatives instead may be slow but effective – as expressed by Japan's Minister of the Environment, Koizumi Shinjiro – according to assessments by various scientists, we may not have time on our side.

Through analyzing the interviews conducted for this thesis, I have demonstrated how the NPOs and NGOs were apt to angling suggestions in a way as to appeal to individuals' frames of convenience and cost saving, and to the businesses' and government's economic growth frame. However, it remains to be seen whether the government will respond to the Joint Proposal suggested by Greenpeace Japan, WWF Japan and 18 other environmental organizations striving for a reduced plastic society, which included a section appealing to their economic growth frame, by touting potential profits of opting to pursue a reduce and reuse society, rather than focusing on recycling and replacing plastic with other types of materials.

However, with the goal of reduction in order to create a circular society, appealing to these existing frames may not be enough. As such, it is important to try to change the frames – perhaps through leveraging the existing frame of economic growth – and shift from a frame of convenience, to one of emotional attachment, as implied by my WWF Japan interviewee. In this way, perhaps moving away from a focus on economic growth, and instead finding some other measure of success or goal would be conducive to creating such a society.

This is not to say that the government is not doing anything. However, as witnessed with the 1990's dioxin crisis, 1998 NPO Law, and policies following China's National Sword Policy coming into effect in 2018 – such as the plastic bag regulation and the government's basic environmental policy direction – such efforts have often been marred or marked by inefficiencies due to competing priorities. Although the policy direction of the government touched upon some of the aspects that the interviewees for this paper requested, there were still many lacking aspects to it. This is reflected by the fact that the policy proposal appeared to mostly address ways to keep the same

level of consumption, through improving recycling and switching to alternatives such as biodegradable and biomass plastic instead of fossil fuel-based plastic. In this way, it is made more and more clear that there is a focus on economic growth on the governmental level. This focus was alluded to by WWF Japan in their open letter to the new Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide, and as indicated by the new Prime Minister himself, when he stated that Japan would be carbon neutral by 2050, as it was no longer an obstacle to economic growth. While Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide's carbon neutral commitment is a step in the right direction, only time will tell whether they follow through with this commitment in earnest, for example by also setting a 2030 goal, as requested by organizations such as WWF Japan.

As such, the efforts made by nonprofits and civil society in pushing for change are still important in dealing with environmental issues, as there are still ways to go regarding how to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. In addition, what if societal and economic changes that impede economic growth must be implemented, in order to address global warming and plastic waste issues? In such a case, a strong civil sector capable of advocacy, that can influence the direction and content of environmental policies and initiatives, may be crucial. As is shown in this thesis, the biggest international environmental NGOs, such as Greenpeace Japan and WWF Japan, are not afraid to speak up, even putting forth a joint policy proposal. As such, it is interesting to see what role nonprofits and the civil society will play, and whether the government will take heed and accept the offer to cooperate with organizations such as Greenpeace Japan – an organization that members of the LDP have historically showed ill will towards – on making the "Basic Direction of Future Plastic Resource Recycling Measures" more focused on reduction, reuse and refill measures, and less on replacement and thermal recycling.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

China's National Sword policy – no more polluted plastic waste imports

The established order of waste exports has recently been challenged and changed, due to marine plastic pollution becoming a topic of discussion, and China – starting prior to 2010 – having increasingly implemented more rigid waste import policies, and in 2013 introducing a temporary restriction on waste imports, requiring the waste to be significantly less contaminated (Brooks, Wang & Jambeck 2018: 1). This can be seen as a sort of precursor to what would become China's National Sword policy, which was implemented at the start of 2018. This temporary ban that later became the National Sword policy was most likely a result of the Chinese government having started to worry about all the waste being imported, as a lot of it was contaminated with things that made it difficult to recycle, such as food waste, and non-recyclable plastic wrap (Joyce 2019). The reason this became an issue now, is probably due to many recycling programs having transitioned from requiring consumers to separate paper, plastics, cans, and bottles, to a "single stream" process, where it all goes into the same blue bin. As a result of this single stream process, contamination from food and waste rose, leaving significant amounts of recycled plastics unusable.

Furthermore, China is still developing its solid waste management infrastructure, and plastic packaging has become increasingly complex, with colors, additives, and multilayer, mixed compositions making it ever more difficult to recycle (Brooks, Wang & Jambeck 2018: 3; Katz 2019). Another problem is that there were a lot of illegal plastic imports, which was dumped if it was too difficult to recycle, leading to pollution on land and in waterways (Joyce 2019). And this is not a small amount, as according to Brooks, Wang & Jambeck (2018: 3), an estimated 1.3 million to 3.5 million MT of plastic entered the oceans annually from China's coastline.

However, China's National Sword policy also seems to coincide with economic factors. According to a video produced by the Financial Times, wages are rising, due to the flow of workers migrating from the countryside drying up, with migrants returning to their villages, and the productive percentage of the population decreasing due to an aging population (Financial Times 2016: 0:12-1:36). As average hourly wages hit $3.60 in 2016, spiking 64% from 2011, the wages have become more than five times the hourly manufacturing rates in India (Yan 2017). The low wages, along with the favorable shipping rates with the otherwise empty containers had been an important aspect of the waste import business, as it had made the practice profitable (Katz 2019). Also, the resulting competitive pricing of exporting waste to China, along with their contamination standard being low,

had been what drove waste exports, as firms could raise their profits by reducing the costs of disposal through exporting (Katz 2019; Okubo et al. 2016: 136). Thus, there had been a 'win-win' situation, where China received material for manufacturing goods for sale or export, while exporting countries could avoid the relatively high domestic management costs for waste (Brooks, Wang & Jambeck 2018: 1-2). In this sense, what has since been deemed to basically be waste pollution transfer rather than a contribution to a circular economy with plastics – due to the lacking infrastructure in the recipient countries and not including environmental costs in the equation – has been driven by this same drive for economic growth which can be seen in the various environmental initiatives from the Japanese government's side (Liu, Adams & Walker 2018: 23; Dell 2019).

Waste pollution transfer, not part of the circular economy

The thing is, countries contributing the most to China's waste imports are mainly high-income countries, with more robust waste management infrastructure, who then end up sending plastic waste to countries that are still developing economically with less-developed waste management infrastructure (Brooks, Wang & Jambeck 2018: 2). This problematizes the fact that until now, exported waste has been counted by the exporting countries (e.g. Japan) as "recycled", although it is untraceable, and there is no guarantee that it is actually recycled (Dell 2019). Although trade in recyclable waste may help preserve natural resources and provide recycling and employment opportunities in many low-income countries, these benefits are apparently limited, and conversely, recycling activities can cause serious environmental damage and health problems as waste often includes contaminated and hazardous materials (Okubo et al. 2016: 135).

Thus, mostly being attributed to being due to environmental concerns, but possibly also due to becoming a richer country with higher wages, the China's National Sword policy was announced in July 2017, enacted in January 2018, and went into full effect March 2018 (Higgs 2019; Katz 2019). As The China's National Sword policy imposed a 99.5% purity standard, it essentially bans eight types of plastic waste from consumer goods from being imported into China, only conditionally accepting some industrial plastic waste if it meets Chinese control standards (Brooks, Wang & Jambeck 2018: 6; Katz 2019).

Appendix 2

Bioplastics – Magical solution to environmental and economic woes?

Bioplastics seem to be a contentious issue, with it being promoted as a part of a solution in the Joint Meeting paper, while it is regarded as a material that may just bring about its own set of challenges by environmental organizations such as Greenpeace Japan. But, what are bioplastics?

What are bioplastics?

Bioplastics is a general term for "biodegradable plastics (*seibunkaisei purasuchikku*)" that can be biodegraded by microorganisms, and "biomass plastics (*baiomasu purasuchikku*)" which are made from biomass, such as plants (JBPA 2018: 4). These bioplastics and their aspects, and a managed recycling system, seem to be presented as a solution for various issues that petroleum-based plastics have caused (ibid). Such issues include the '3R issue with plastic', in the sense that switching to biological treatments of the bioplastics, rather than incinerating it, could lead to a more circular use of the material (ibid). Further, they mention that it could solve the problem of resources depleting, as biomass is a renewable resource, as opposed to fossil fuels (ibid). The JBPA also suggests that it could mitigate global warming by reducing CO2 emissions, in the sense that biomass plastics are deemed carbon-neutral, and that it could reduce the impact of plastic waste on the marine environment (ibid).

The Japanese Bioplastics Association (JBPA), the association touting these positive aspects of bioplastics, is an NGO (*minkan dantai*) established for 'the purpose of promoting the spread of biodegradable plastics and biomass plastics which play important roles in the realization of a recycling-oriented society in harmony with the environment, and solving technical problems' (JBPA 2018: 2). Their activities include managing a 'green plastic' and 'biomass plastic' identification and labeling system, Standardizing the standards for biodegradable plastics and biomass plastics, activities towards making a JIS (Japanese Industry Standard) for biodegradable plastics and biomass plastics, and cooperating with related domestic and overseas organizations (ibid).

JBPA was established in 1989 as the *Seibunkaiseipurasuchikku kenkyūkai* (English name: Biodegradable Plastics Society) (JBPA 2018: 2). Their establishment was on the behest of the "Biodegradable Plastic Practical Use Review Committee", an advisory body to the Director of the Basic Industry Bureau of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), in order to promote the establishment of standards to distinguish between general plastic products and biodegradable plastic products (ibid). They changed their name to JBPA in 2007 (ibid).

As well as the association's beginnings being related to METI, its membership also seems to be comprised of people belonging to the business world. As an example, its chairman is an advisor for Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation, and CEO for Mitsubishi Plastics, inc. (JBPA 2018: 2; Tremblay 2012)

As such, METI is involved in some way with both JBPA and the Joint Meetings on the current domestic and overseas situation regarding plastic. METI being an industry concerned with economic matters, it makes sense that the focus seems to be on finding a solution that could lead to economic growth, such as promoting an alternative to plastic, and focusing on high tech solutions, rather than pouring more efforts into reduction. JBPA calls biomass-based plastics and biodegradable plastics 'environmentally-friendly' new materials which are 'expected to play a key role in establishment of the recycling-based society' on their English 'about us' page, although the part about it being environmentally friendly is excluded in the Japanese version (JBPA 2020a; JBPA 2020b). This could be a coincidence, but it may tie in with the desire to look good in the eyes of other countries, and becoming a 'world leader' in the field, which appears to be a common occurrence in governmental texts on environmental technology and economic matters, judging from those featured in this chapter. Hence, there being a 'world leader' frame for the NGO Network to appeal to in their Joint Proposal.

However, as mentioned before, simply removing all plastic could lead to other issues, such as food loss, so it makes sense to try to find alternative solutions, even when excluding economic reasons.

However, in the PowerPoints prepared for the joint meetings, there were also graphs showing estimations on the global production capacity of bioplastics (Plastics Smart 2020b: 7). These graphs were retrieved from the site European Bioplastics, and upon inspection, the page where these graphs were found also contains a graph on the estimated land use related to making bioplastics in 2019 versus 2024 (European Bioplastics 2019). The maker(s) of the PowerPoint may have simply felt that this graph was not as relevant for the joint meetings, but the agricultural and land use aspect of bioplastics is something that has been criticized, and something that may be harmful to the environment, only in a different manner than petroleum-based plastics.

Properties and differences within bioplastics

According to a pamphlet (in the form of a PowerPoint) by the JBPA, biodegradable plastics can be used in the same way as ordinary plastics, and after use, they can be decomposed into water and carbon dioxide by microorganisms that exist in nature, and in this way return to nature (JBPA 2018:

6). In this way, this material is well suited to be used for bags to be used for food waste and for food containers and packaging, as it can be degraded along with the food waste (ibid).

In the same pamphlet, biomass plastic *(Baiomasu purasuchikku)* is described as a plastic obtained through the chemical or biological treatment of renewable biomass resources, such as plants (JBPA 2018: 6). And so, even if it is incinerated, it does not increase the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere, due to the carbon neutrality of biomass (ibid). As a result, they state that this material is expected to contribute to the prevention of global warming, along with reducing the dependence on fossil resources (ibid). According to the pamphlet, this material is suited for various products, ranging from food containers, non-food packaging, clothing fiber, electrical and IT equipment, and even cars (ibid).

Misleading connotations and misunderstandings

However, these stated benefits are not so straight-forward as they may sound. As is, in order to be certified as being 'biodegradable', materials must be able to degrade in a controlled environment, within a certain period of time, within a certain temperature range. However, these temperatures and conditions do not seem to reflect naturally occurring conditions, meaning the products will most likely not fare any differently than non-biodegradable petroleum-based plastics, if they were to end up in nature (Oakes 2019).

And so, regardless of if Japanese businesses intend to switch from using petroleum-based plastic bags to a different material, promoting the use of bags with 25% or more biomass plastics, or those made from paper – as is done with the plastic bag regulation – may not solve the problem, or may even be more polluting, depending on what aspect is being considered. As an example, paper bags tend to have higher carbon emissions than plastic bags, and are more difficult to re-use, as stated by Roger Harrabin, BBC's Energy and Environment Analyst, and one of their senior journalists on the environment and energy, when addressing concerns regarding what issues there may be if the UK were to implement a ban on plastic packaging (Harrabin 2020).

The same concern goes for switching over to bioplastics, as some may also release a lot of microplastics upon degrading in nature, such as oxo-degradable plastic that are commonly promoted as biodegradable, but are in reality conventional plastics containing additives that accelerate the oxidation process (Kubowicz & Booth 2017: 12058).

Problems with bioplastics

However, due to such a confusion and lack of information, bioplastics have come to be seen as a solution to many of the problems with petroleum-based plastics, as seen with JBPA's stance on it, and a general assumption among people in many places, such in the UK, that it is environmentally friendly (Harrabin 2020). This is noted in a BBC article on potential issues with banning plastics in the UK, where they mention that 80% of the customers who were surveyed think that something being 'biodegradable' or 'bio-based' or 'compostable' means that it is environmentally friendly (ibid). However, at the same time, these consumers were confused about what these terms mean, and how these types of products should be disposed of (ibid).

This corresponds with what Iwata Tadahisa, a professor at Tokyo Universities graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences / Faculty of Agriculture, wrote in JBPA's journal, *BioPla Journal,* about problems regarding bioplastics. He laments the lack of overview of what research regarding bioplastics has been done until now, and it being a difficult subject for anyone not in the field to understand, due to there being no standard way of describing the various types of bioplastics, and there not being much information about them that is accessible for people who are not educated within the field (Iwata 2019: 3). He notes that even corporate researchers, government policymakers, foundation officials, and newspaper, magazine and TV reporters are shocked to hear that most biomass plastics do not degrade in nature, that the material known as PLA (polylactic acid) will not decompose if buried in soil, and that also some plastics made from petroleum can decompose in the environment (ibid). He blames this misinformation or lack of information dissemination on industry-academic researchers and experts who have been involved in the research and development of these materials, such as himself. He also blames organizations such as JBPA, who have been involved in spreading the word about these materials, and the ministries involved in the policies, such as METI, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of the Environment.

In order to change this status quo of confusion and misinformation, he comes with four suggestions (Iwata 2019: 3). He proposes that past findings should be reviewed, organized, and that efforts should be made to convey these findings accurately, in a language that is easy to understand, as there has already been conducted research and trials regarding bioplastics, but that the results of these are unknown to the world. He also suggests that the definitions should be unified, and put in a way that anyone can easily understand. Then he suggests that there should be a common regulation and goals regarding how these materials should function, their efficiency, cost and environmental

degradability. Lastly, he suggests that they should make proposals showing what would be the best choices for every individual country, and disseminate these around the world (ibid).

Even here we see this frame of becoming a world leader within the field, by way of figuring out what materials should be used around the world, and Iwata stating that Japan has thus far been a world leader in the field of bioplastics, both regarding the theoretical and practical applications (Iwata 2019: 3). However, despite this, and tireless efforts of all the companies involved, they are lacking in their ability to communicate the results to the world, due to the lack of clear direction and guidelines within Japan as a whole. And so, he declares that now is the time to gather all the wisdom in Japan, and disseminate short- and long-term strategies to the world. He calls for getting rid of the walls between ministries, associations, and businesses, and the barrier presented by competition within academia, and that they should all brainstorm together about how bioplastics should be, in a post-heisei (post- early 2019) society (ibid).

So, there is a lot of promise and expectations for bioplastics, although there are still aspects of it that are not widely understood, and that require cooperation and communication within and across ministries, businesses, associations, academia, and the public, in order to explore, understand, and build upon the existing knowledge and technology.

However, it may not be as easy as simply compiling and organizing past findings, as there appears to be rather significant variations in how potentially harmful the different types of plastics/plastic polymers are deemed to be, in various Life Cycle Assessment studies (Walker & Rothman: 15). A review was made, comparing the results from 25 published Life Cycle Assessment studies of 50 bio-based polymers and 39 fossil-based polymers, which the authors concluded were not comparable, as there was no standard framework for these studies (ibid: 10, 13-15). This study even excluded an additional 26 studies, as they did not meet the set criteria for the study, or were not possible to extract accurate data from (ibid: 10)

‘Wasting’ food to prevent wasting food

While thin compostable plastics like carrier bags might break down in the ocean, the thicker and more robust PLA used to line coffee cups and make cup lids, clear plastic tumblers, straws, and other food packaging is expected to act like traditional plastic in seawater, in the sense that they will not break down at all (Oakes 2019). However, although these plastics may not be the solution to the marine plastic pollution problem, they may be useful in tackling food waste (ibid). In an ideal world, if containers for different types of consumables – such as coffee cups, sandwich packaging,

and takeaway containers – were to be made of compostable plastics, the plastic and whatever food waste still stuck to it could simply be composted together (ibid). This would then reduce the amount of plastic sent to landfills, prevent recycling from being contaminated with food, and would mean that food waste could be returned to the soil, rather than being left to rot and release methane in a landfill (ibid).

Ramani Narayan, a chemical engineer from Michigan State University who researches bioplastic, also saw positive aspects of using bioplastics, in the sense that it may lead to less emissions than petroleum-based plastics, due to it simply releasing the carbon it sucked up while growing, as opposed to carbon that otherwise had been trapped underground in the form of oil (Gibbens 2018). He also noted that biomass bioplastics are renewable and grown all over the world, which supports a rural, agrarian economy, while oil is concentrated in regions (ibid). However, according to a 2011 study from the University of Pittsburgh, growing plants for the purpose of using it for bioplastic can bring about environmental harm in the form of pollution from fertilizers, and leads to land being diverted from food production (ibid). Using corn for plastic instead of food can be seen as problematic in the context of the debate on how resources should be allocated in an increasingly food-scarce world (ibid).

And so, environmental engineer and National Geographic explorer Jenna Jambeck from the University of Georgia states that bio-based plastics have benefits, but only when taking a host of factors into consideration: such as where it is grown, how much land it takes up, how much water is needed, and so on (Gibbens 2018). As such, the question of whether bio-based plastics are ultimately better for the environment than oil-derived ones depends on a lot of factors, and so there is currently no clear answer (ibid).

In this sense, it is difficult to say what is the ‘best’ material to use, due to the lack of a set framework for how studies are to be conducted. This lack makes it difficult to check and compare results, and to potentially try to add to the body of research by checking emergent types of materials. So just switching over to using biodegradable plastics and other plastic considered ‘environmentally friendly’ is not a perfect solution, at least not yet.

Recycling issues with bioplastics

Bioplastics may also not be possible to recycle, due to missing waste structures, or confusion regarding how things are to be recycled, in order to achieve this stated more environmentally friendly aspect (Oakes 2019). If the compostable sorts are thrown in with the plastic waste, in a

home composter, or in general waste, and just end up in an incinerator or landfill, they will not necessarily bring about any desired results (ibid). The European standard for compostable packaging – called EN 13432 – requires that the packaging break down under industrial-scale composting conditions within 12 weeks, leaving no more than 10% of the original material in pieces bigger than 2mm, and doing no harm to the soil itself through heavy metals or worsening its structure (ibid). And so, even if a product says that it is 'compostable', it will not necessarily break down out in the wild, or in a home composter, as these may not be as effective and controlled as an industrial-scale composting facility (ibid). Moreover, unless collection systems and composting facilities are available to consumers, biodegradable plastics are likely to end up in conventional waste streams (e.g., incineration, landfill) (Kubowicz & Booth 2017: 12059).

So, in order for these materials to have the desired effect of contributing to a more circular economy, the compostable packaging needs to end up in the right place, which would require a clearer labelling system, similar to the way recyclability is marked on food packaging, according to David Newman, who is the managing director at the Bio-based and Biodegradable Industries Association (ibid). And so, the simultaneous focus on improving the recycling system plays an important part in trying to achieve a more circular economy, by allowing these renewable materials to be used in a renewable manner.

However, will not following the road touted by the NPOs, that of focusing more on reduction and reuse, lead to another example of a misguided attempt at solving an environmental challenge? Will they perhaps pursue more reuse-based initiatives at the mention of it being a potential business opportunity? It will be interesting to see in which direction these recent developments – China's National Sword policy, and a new prime minister who appears to be more onboard with environmental initiatives – may lead.