



THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

# **THE ETHICS OF JAPAN'S GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines several Japanese government policies that impact on the environment in order to determine whether they incorporate a sufficient ethical substance. Japan built its domestic environmental policy on the experiences of combating its catastrophic post war pollution crises; these crises were created as the result of the country's relentless drive towards becoming a world economic super-power. As with many other countries, global environmental issues are an important agenda in governments' policies and from the late 1980s the Japanese government incorporated global initiatives into its domestic environmental directives. Since that time climate change issues have become a focal point of Japan's environmental policies, and by the 1990s the country had by means of regulations moved from being one of the world's most polluted countries, to one that had become one of the world's most environmentally responsible. However, Japan's economic success from the 1980s led to mounting criticism over its overseas business practices, practices that discounted the value of the ecosystems of its trading partners.

In the enquiry into the ethics of the policies, this thesis explores how Western philosophers combined their theories to develop a 'Western environmental ethics code'; the thesis also reveals the existence of a unique 'Japanese environmental ethics code' built on Japan's cultural traditions, religious practices, and empirical experiences. The discovery of the distinctive Japanese code is not only important for what it discloses as a new philosophy, but most importantly how it can be used to analyse the ethical framework of the Japanese policies. In spite of the positive contributions that Japan has shown towards the global environment, the government has failed to show a corresponding moral obligation to the world ecology in its global environmental policy. The policies examined in the three case studies comprising whaling, nuclear energy, and forestry, have also been found wanting in ecological ethical considerations, both from a Western and Japanese perspective. The main reason for this is that the integrity of the policies has been compromised by Japanese vested interest groups; business and political interests ensure that the policies are primarily focused on maintaining sustainable economic growth. Whilst Japan's global environmental policy initiatives are the key to its economic survival into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and these initiatives may achieve their aim, they do however fail the Japanese code of environmental ethics.



# DECLARATION

NAME: Midori Kagawa-Fox PROGRAM: Doctor of Philosophy

The work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

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## **Work related to this thesis**

### **Publications (peer review):**

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Kagawa-Fox, Midori, “Environmental ethics from Japanese perspectives”, *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 2010 (Accepted for forthcoming publication).

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2008 - Asia Pacific Futures Network Signature Event, the Globalizing Religions and Culture in the Asia-Pacific, at the University of Adelaide. Presented a paper on the comparative aspect of Japanese and Western environmental ethics.

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## NOTES ON STYLE

In this thesis, Japanese names are written in Western order, given name followed by family name. Japanese words are rendered in the style of Hepburn romanization and italicised, with macrons indicating long vowels, for example ‘*ō*’ as in *Kōgai*, except in cases of personal and place names, and other words easily recognized.

The thesis has used a number of Japanese books, journal and newspapers; where the sources are in Japanese the translations into English are rendered by the author.