

1 Introduction: East Asia's Environmental Politics

Once viewed as an environmental hazard to the planet, East Asia is now at the forefront of pro-environmental policymaking. The region's progress has been both remarkable and surprising given the pro-business orientation of its political systems and their ideological diversity. Nationally viable green parties and a strong regional governance system, which were largely responsible for the spread of pro-environmental policies in Europe, are absent in East Asia. Similarly missing is a rich and powerful nonprofit/public interest sector, which advocated for environmental policy change in the United States. In contrast, East Asia is known for its influential business sector, which has traditionally been opposed to pro-environmental policy.

Thus, the core questions of this Element are: How and why did East Asia's ideologically diverse pro-business governments transform their policy orientations from a highly polluting growth-at-any-cost to ones that are much more eco-friendly? This Element argues that East Asia's path toward pro-environmental policy has been led by national government bureaucracies in close collaboration with business, both of which are continually shaped by citizen interests and expectations.

Based on more than ten years of research on environmental politics in East Asia, this Element uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to focus on three policy areas – green business, pollution, and environmental justice – in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. It will argue that public pressure to address pollution that was poisoning communities and destroying their livelihoods was the initial spark that started pro-environmental policy-making in the region. However, it was the business sector's recognition that pro-environmental policy can also be pro-business that allowed piecemeal anti-pollution regulations to be transformed into comprehensive pro-environmental policies.

As the business sector discovered the commercial benefits of cleaner production processes and began to price the risks of climate change into its long-term growth projections, it began to become more vocal about the benefits of pro-environmental policies. Through the combined efforts of connected stakeholders across academia, local and national governments, citizen groups, and business, the political tide favoring the environment shifted in East Asia (Haddad 2021). The specific political configurations were slightly different in each place, but the collective results were very similar: growth-at-any-cost developmental states modified their policies in ways that incorporated environmental considerations into their policymaking and became eco-developmental states (Esarey et al. 2020). Now, East Asia's eco-developmental states are

prioritizing environmental considerations across a wide range of domestic policymaking and are actively working to spread the eco-developmental model abroad.

My focus on these three policy areas is intended to highlight the ways that East Asia's pro-business approach works better in some areas of environmental policy than in others. In particular, when pro-environmental policies can generate profits with relatively little cost, such as green technology, green finance, and clean energy, policymaking in the region has moved the furthest and been the most progressive. When environmental benefits require businesses to incur costs, even if they also reap benefits, such as cleaning up production processes and mitigating pollution, policymaking has been more difficult and the outcomes more mixed. Finally, in environmental issue areas that generate very little profit but require significant investment and political will, such as addressing environmental justice, East Asia's pro-business model of environmental policymaking has often failed.

Therefore, while this Element offers a positive example of East Asia's pro-business path toward a more sustainable future, the example comes with a caveat. All of East Asia's current leaders have made public commitments about transforming their economic systems in ways that prioritize environmental protection and social progress. In his statement at the September 2020 United Nations (UN) Summit on Biodiversity, China's President Xi underscored the importance of "stay[ing] the course for green, inclusive and sustainable development."¹ Japan's Prime Minister Kishida has reiterated his commitment to reshaping Japan's economy, promoting what he called a "new form of capitalism" in which "social challenges become the engine of growth."² In his 2022 keynote address to the UN General Assembly, South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol underscored that "broadening support for the socially disadvantaged groups lays the groundwork for sustainable prosperity."³ Finally, in the inaugural address of her second term, President Tsai committed to making "Taiwan a center of green energy" while enhancing a social safety net that would create a "new era of shared prosperity."⁴

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: http://sl.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwdt/202010/t20201003_5848841.htm.

² "PM Kishida's Speech on the New Form of Capitalism and Why Japan Is a 'Buy'," *Kizuna* (JapanGov), June 23, 2022, www.japan.go.jp/kizuna/2022/06/why_japan_is_a_buy.html.

³ "President Yoon Suk Yeol, Keynote Speech at the 77th UN General Assembly," Ministry of Foreign Affairs News (Republic of Korea), September 21, 2022, www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=320741.

⁴ "Inaugural Address of ROC 15th-Term President Tsai Ing-wen," Office of the President, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6004#:~:text=So%20over%20the%20next%20four,our%20country%20into%20the%20future.&text=I%20know%20that%20the%20Taiwanese,our%20indus>

In sum, this Element argues that the East Asian experience demonstrates that very different types of governments have been able to shift their policies in pro-environmental ways even as they have retained their pro-growth and pro-business orientation. Their experience may inspire hope for countries struggling to achieve economic development without killing the planet. They also provide a cautionary tale about the costs that such a pro-business path might entail.

1.1 Why Study Environmental Politics in East Asia?

There are two compelling reasons to examine East Asia when studying environmental politics. The first is that the region is so large in terms of population, economy, and carbon emissions that efforts to combat global climate change cannot succeed without it. East Asia contains 22 percent of the total world population,⁵ 30 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP),⁶ and 34 percent of global carbon emissions.⁷ Therefore, if East Asia can successfully modify its economy to one that is sustainable, the world has a chance of averting the impending climate disaster. If East Asia fails, the world will fail.

The second reason why the region is useful to study is because it offers an unusual combination of commonalities and variation, making it possible to examine how a number of different factors affecting environmental politics actually influence outcomes. China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan all share a somewhat related cultural background rooted in Confucianism. All four places experienced a period of “high-growth” rapid industrial development that relied heavily on export-oriented industrial structures supported by pro-business governments. All four legal systems significantly restrict political advocacy, with the predictable result that none of them have nationally viable green parties or large advocacy sectors. Residents in all four places have experienced significant, intense levels of pollution. All four have seen citizens and their organizations demand that their governments address pollution problems, and governments and businesses in all four places have responded with stronger environmental policies. These commonalities mean that some of the most widely accepted factors that the literature expects to influence environmental politics can be considered as roughly equivalent across the region.

trial%20and%20economic%20development.: *The China Post* website, <https://chinapost.nownews.com/20200520-1266619>.

⁵ Eastern Asia Worldometer data, www.worldometers.info/world-population/eastern-asia-population/#:~:text=The%20current%20population%20of%20Eastern,among%20subregions%20ranked%20by%20Population.

⁶ World Bank data 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=Z4-1W>.

⁷ Calculated from International Energy Agency (IEA) 2018 data, www.iea.org/data-and-statistics?country=WORLD&fuel=CO2%20emissions&indicator=TotCO2.

While they share many commonalities, China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan also vary in some very important ways. The most obvious difference is size. China is the most populous country (1.4 billion people) and has the second largest GDP (\$18 trillion) in the world. In contrast, Taiwan is comparatively tiny, with only 24 million people and a GDP of \$791 billion.⁸ Japan (population of 126 million, GDP of \$5.2 trillion) and South Korea (population of 52 million, GDP of \$2.4 trillion) sit between those two extremes.⁹

Another critical way the four differ is their political regimes. Japan is the oldest democracy in the region. Its 1947 democratic constitution guaranteed its citizens equality under the law, due process, and freedom of expression, assembly, and religion. South Korea and Taiwan are newer democracies. They both experienced lengthy and sometimes brutal occupations by Japan (South Korea from 1910 to 1945 and Taiwan from 1895 to 1945). Postwar, they suffered destructive civil wars that split their prewar territories in two, with one part controlled by communists and the other by nationalists. Both South Korea and Taiwan democratized in largely peaceful revolutions in the late 1980s, developed robust two-party political systems, and have experienced several peaceful alternations in power.

Finally, mainland China is not democratic. Its constitution uses the phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat” to describe its political system. While China’s constitution grants its citizens equality under the law, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly, religion, and so on, those individual rights are subordinate to the rights of the state (Article 51). Similarly, although local elections are frequently competitive, candidates have been preselected to limit voter choices to those acceptable to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and citizens do not have the right to elect their national leaders directly (Manion 2000). The traditional press is highly restricted, and while significant freedom is allowed on the Internet, it too is frequently censored (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013; Xiao 2019). Finally, after a period of political opening in the 2000s, in which civil society and the private business sector grew and flourished, over the last decade the government has greatly increased its authority and oversight over social, political, and economic life, constraining the capacity of non-CCP actors to influence policy (Naughton 2017; Snape 2021).

⁸ China World Bank GDP data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>; China World Bank population data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=CN>. Taiwan GDP data: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/TWN>; Taiwan population data: <https://statisticstimes.com/demographics/country/taiwan-population.php>.

⁹ “Economy of Japan,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Japan; “Economy of South Korea,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_South_Korea.

Therefore, studying East Asia allows us to control for many of the factors that the environmental politics literature has posited should influence environmental politics, such as green parties (O'Neill 1997), nongovernmental organization (NGO) strength (Bosso 2005), and economic growth and trade patterns (Dasgupta et al. 2002; Prakash and Potoski 2007), while allowing us to explore the ways that regime type and size might influence the evolution of environmental politics in the region.

2 Eco-developmental States

This Element argues that East Asia's environmental politics is governed by its eco-developmental states. The concept of an eco-developmental state was introduced in Esarey and colleagues' (2020), *Greening East Asia: The Rise of the Eco-developmental State*. The term is meant to capture a governance structure in which states are active in developing international competitive advantage, collaborate closely with business in making policy, enjoy the broad support of their societies, and have prioritized the environment as a top policy goal. This section will describe how the concept evolved as well as its key features.

2.1 Evolution of a Concept

The concept of the developmental state emerged with the publication of Chalmers Johnson's (1982) now classic book *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, which argued that the key to Japan's extraordinary economic growth lay in its governance structure. Johnson argued that Japan's developmental state followed neither a market-rational model, as exemplified by the United States, in which prices and production levels were determined by markets, nor a planned-economy model, as exemplified by the Soviet Union, in which businesses were state-owned and prices and production levels were generally set by the central government (Johnson 1982). Instead, in Japan's developmental state, business remained private, and prices and production levels were determined by market forces, as they were in the United States, but also an elite government bureaucracy was active in identifying strategic industries and guiding business toward expanding those industries (Johnson 1982).

As Japan's industrial policy became better understood and its model came to be adopted by other countries in the region and elsewhere, the developmental state model came to be called a number of different names, including a "coordinated market economy" (Hall and Soskice 2001), "strategic capitalism" (Calder 1995), and "welfare capitalism" (Dore 2000), to name a few. Whatever it is named, from a policymaking standpoint, the key features of the

model are institutional structures that allowed the bureaucrats and counterparts outside the government (usually business, sometimes NGOs) to coordinate with one another when making policy. As Stephan Haggard explains in his *Elemental Developmental States*, “‘deliberation councils’ linking business and government played an important role in resolving credibility problems associated with authoritarian rule and building trust between the public and private sectors” (Haggard 2018: 54).

From an economic standpoint, the developmental state was exceptionally successful, generating very high growth rates over several decades, which lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, raised life expectancies, expanded access to health and education, and dramatically improved the living standards of nearly everyone in the entire region. However, rapid growth based on industrial output had a significant environmental cost. Within about twenty years of launching their rapid industrialization, developmental states would all face significant social, political, and social crises as a direct result of industrial pollution.

As discussed in more detail in Section 3, growth-at-any-cost developmental states were no longer viable ecologically, politically, or economically. Ecologically, soil, water, and air became toxic, poisoning both workers and customers. Politically, citizens demanded that their governments prioritize residents’ health and welfare along with corporate profits. Economically, the agricultural industry was decimated by pollution and global manufacturers faced markets in the United States and Europe that were restricting the imports of hazardous products and goods manufactured using polluting processes. As a result, developmental states were forced to begin including environmental considerations into their industrial policy and economic growth plans (Esarey et al. 2020).¹⁰

Scholars discussed the early accommodations of anti-pollution activists’ concerns as regular policy adjustments were made in responses to domestic political pressure. While some reforms were significant – such as the creation of new agencies (e.g., in 1971, Japan created an Environment Agency and Taiwan formed its Environmental Protection Administration; South Korea’s Environment Administration was formed in 1980; and China’s State Environmental Protection Administration formed in 1998) and laws (e.g., South Korea’s Environmental Pollution Prevention Act of 1963, Japan’s 1967 Basic Law for Environmental Pollution Control, Taiwan’s Water Pollution Control Act of 1974, and China’s Air Pollution Control Act of 1987) – they

¹⁰ Recently, Schaede and Shimizu (2022) have attributed the same set of observed shifts in the developmental states’ policymaking process and policies to technological and demographic pressures/opportunities.

were not viewed as fundamentally changing the nature of East Asia's developmental states. Scholars studied domestic environmental protests and movements and examined them as analogous to interest groups and political movements elsewhere that pressured governments to include environmental priorities in legislation and policy implementation (Broadbent 1998; Ku 1996; Mertha 2008; Reardon-Anderson 1997).

In the cases of Japan and China, the ruling parties (the Liberal Democratic Party [LDP] in Japan and the CCP in China) made policy adjustments to accommodate some public concerns about pollution, but they did not really include opposition political actors at the heart of policymaking. In both countries, environmental advocates made policy gains by accessing the government through administrative and legal processes. Laws and regulations at both the national and the local level were generally developed by policy advisory committees that included pro-environment academics serving as technical experts who advocated for more stringent pollution controls (Jing 2003; Schreurs 2002). Both countries also used (in the case of Japan) and created (in the case of China) legal channels that enabled pollution victims to seek redress through the state-controlled venue of the courts (Upham 1987; Wang 2013). For the most part, environmental advocates from the 1980s onwards in both countries found ways to work within the system, making allies with policymakers in the government. They treated environmental protection as a policy issue with technical and administrative solutions, and they avoided making it a partisan issue (Hildebrandt and Turner 2009; Imura and Schreurs 2005).

The story in South Korea and Taiwan was quite different. In those two countries, anti-pollution movements merged with pro-democracy movements in the 1980s, seeking an end to the nationalist, pro-military governments that dominated politics. Relatively peaceful democratic transitions followed – South Korea adopted a new constitution in 1987 and Taiwan ended martial law the same year. In the context of the democratic transition, environmental activists joined liberal parties to advocate for change through the political process. In the years that followed, both places saw the emergence of a two-party system where liberal party-led governments tended to include pro-environmental activists in key political posts and conservative party governments tended to exclude them. Thus, even after democratization, while South Korea and Taiwan's conservative governments made some policy accommodations to address the public's pollution concerns, the basic growth-first policymaking structures of their developmental states did not change very much (Haddad 2015; Ho 2010; Ku 2011).

The evolution from developmental state to eco-developmental state in East Asia happened over the course of two decades and had two somewhat distinct

phases – the first was led by the NGO sector and the second was led by business. The early years of the 2000s saw a slow but dramatic shift across the region (and the world) in the ways that environmental concerns were incorporated into policy and pro-environmental actors were included in decision-making. Environmental NGO professionals were more regularly incorporated into decision-making at the highest levels in all countries. International relations scholars attributed the change to the rise of global civil society, the professionalization of NGOs, and the dramatic improvement in communications technologies. Together, these factors significantly empowered networks of pro-environmental actors in academia, civil society, and governments around the world to collaborate in pushing pro-environmental policy change in their respective countries and localities (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Rodrigues 2003).

These broader global trends were both facilitated by East Asian actors and felt within East Asian governments. The 1997 summit of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which resulted in the Kyoto Protocol, served as a focal point for global environmental organizing as well as an opportunity for the Japanese government to begin giving NGO professionals a seat at the policymaking table (Reimann 2003) and highlighting sustainable development as a foreign policy priority (Schreurs 2005). China was increasing its role in international organizations (it joined the World Trade Organization [WTO] in 2001) and found global environmental NGO professionals helpful partners as it sought to navigate international politics and develop domestic regulations that would attract foreign aid and investors (Economy 2004; Hildebrandt and Turner 2009; Yang 2005).

The second evolutionary phase in East Asia's eco-developmental states can be marked by the 2008–9 global financial crisis and, more importantly, the recovery that came afterwards. Prior to the crisis, global NGOs had increased their size, capacity, and political clout and were demanding more transparency from multinational corporations, calling for consumer boycotts, and rewarding firms with greener records. As a result, businesses around the world, including East Asia's multinational corporations, were discovering that offering "green" products could be more than just good public relations; they could enhance a company's bottom line. In 1996, the International Standards Organization began publishing the ISO 14000 series of standards that enabled companies anywhere in the world to demonstrate that their products and/or processes met internationally recognized standards. Gradually, companies found that voluntarily participating in environmental programs could increase sales and investors (Prakash and Potoski 2007).

When the 2008–9 global economic crisis hit, governments across the region (and the world) rolled out gigantic financial stimulus packages, and East Asia's

governments all turned to a variety of “green growth” strategies to revive their sagging economies in the wake of the crisis. South Korea’s plan was the first and most ambitious (Zelenovskaya 2012), but all the countries in the region made significant investments in renewable energy, electric vehicles, intensive and organic agriculture, and similar industries to spur competitive development in important future industries while reviving the economic prospects of sagging rural and industrial areas (Barbier 2010; Fardoust, Lin, and Luo 2012; Ladislav and Goldberger 2010). These trends were only enhanced toward the end of the decade with the dramatic expansion of green finance (more on green finance in Section 4).

By the end of the 2010s, East Asia’s states had undergone sufficient political transformation that scholars began to question whether it was still appropriate to call them “developmental states” (Pirie 2018; Williams 2014). Others, noting the enhanced attention to environmental priorities alongside a continuation of many developmental state decision-making structures and methods, developed terms like “developmental environmentalism” (Kim and Thurbon 2015) and “eco-developmental state” (Esarey et al. 2020) to capture the use of developmental state industrial policy methods to target pro-environmental policy priorities.

2.2 Defining Features

This Element further develops the eco-developmental state concept presented in *Greening East Asia* (Esarey et al. 2020). In his overview of important developmental state literature, Ziya Öniş suggests that there are three key features of East Asia’s developmental states that made them economically successful: (1) “single-minded adherence to growth and competitiveness,” (2) high level of bureaucratic autonomy and capacity, and (3) high level of public–private cooperation (Öniş 1991: 120). These features enabled developmental states to engage in a variety of strategic state interventions in the markets, generally by supporting key industries that would enhance national global competitive advantage (Amsden 1992; Vogel 1996; Wade 1990).

In their evolution from “pure” developmental states to eco-developmental states, East Asian governments softened their “single-minded” pursuit of rapid economic growth to one that includes environmental concerns alongside more moderate economic growth goals. As discussed in Section 2.1 and as will be elaborated more in Section 3, this shift came about not because of a moral awakening; rather, it emerged directly from the political pressure exerted by pollution victims and the economic reality that toxic products and processes hurt the long-term profitability of firms. By the end of the 2010s, East Asian

governments had adjusted their earlier developmental state structures to accommodate the new reality that (1) they were leading rather than following global economic development, (2) markets had become complex and supply chains were global, and (3) long-term profits required industrial policies that were sensitive to the environmental, social, and political concerns of local populations.

Rather than declare East Asian developmental states “dead,” this Element argues that they evolved into eco-developmental states. These newer versions retain several key characteristics of developmental states but have added some new goals and new players to their policymaking systems. These modifications are significant enough that they constitute a new evolutionary form of the developmental state.

Perhaps the primary defining feature of developmental states is their focus on “competitive” rather than “comparative” advantage when building their industrial policy. Popularized by Michael Porter in *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, the idea of national competitive advantage is that the factors that help countries succeed the most in international trade are created by governments and businesses and not simply inherited (Porter 1990). Countries that invest heavily in human capital and foster clusters of competitive firms in industries with global markets can grow their national economies through trade irrespective of what assets they may have at the start. Countries building international competitive advantage will take full advantage of their “natural” endowments (e.g., natural resources, cheap labor, access to shipping lanes, etc.), but these will not be the most important components of their industrial growth strategy.

Initially, developmental states were countries that sought to “catch up” with advanced industrial economies. Thus, they were in the advantageous position of being able to learn what the most important growth-generating industries were from the experience of others and target those industries for government support. Furthermore, crafting competitive advantage was not seen as a task for only the trade and finance ministries but was a whole-government effort. Education, labor, welfare, health, transportation policies and more were all coordinated to support the government’s industrial development goals (Esping-Andersen 1990; Hall and Soskice 2001).

A second defining feature of developmental states is the close collaboration between government and business when developing policies and designing policy systems to support them. Peter Evans used the term “embedded autonomy” to describe the relationship that developmental states’ bureaucracies had with their societies, especially the business sectors. These bureaucracies had high administrative capacity and the power to make decisions that were not unduly influenced by special interests while at the same time being highly