

Negotiating on Rice : “No, No, A Thousand Times, No”

Michael Blaker

Visiting Scholar, University of Southern California

INTRODUCTION

Negotiating skills are one key facet of the multifaceted art of diplomacy. Scholarly studies of Japanese and other national negotiating “styles” rest on three basic arguments: first, that a particular country’s diplomatic representative’s style of negotiating is identifiable; that these identifiable negotiating styles differ; and, third, that these identifiable, country-specific styles significantly affect negotiating outcomes.

While particular bargaining moves are not unique to any country, the mix of moves provides a distinctive composite portrait for any country’s diplomatic behavior. Japan is no exception. Enough has been written by Japanese and other analysts to permit one to offer a portrait of the Japanese style of negotiation. The behavior—what may be labeled “coping”—is consistently evident both at the loftier plateau of diplomacy and down in the trenches at the level of direct negotiations.¹

“Coping” captures the go-with-the-flow essence of the Japanese bargaining approach: cautiously appraising the external situation, methodically weighing and sorting each and every option, deferring action on contentious issues, crafting a domestic consensus on the situation faced, making minimal adjustments or concessions in order to block, circumvent or dissolve criticism, and adapting to a situation with minimum risk. This negotiating style mirrors the vaunted low-key, low-profile, risk-minimizing, defensive, damage-limiting, patterns in Japan’s overall foreign relations conduct.

Ever since Commodore Matthew Perry’s “black ships” sailed into Edo Bay in 1853, piercing the curtain of Japan’s centuries of virtual isolation from the outside world, matters of diplomatic negotiations have divided the nation and

stirred controversy and crisis among its leaders. Japanese newspapers have scrutinized in microscopic detail any topic or official decision relating to the government's handling of negotiations. Japanese leaders have regarded diplomacy and diplomatic negotiations as formidable, face-threatening undertakings. They have trod warily when diplomatic problems lead to the negotiating table. The Japanese themselves dwell upon the hardships and complexities of diplomatic negotiations. Most Japanese today would no doubt still agree with a remark made by Okubo Toshimichi over a century ago. "Dealing with foreigners," the Meiji-era statesman observed, "can be a troublesome and difficult task."

Drawing from the extensive literature on the topic, the following list sets forth the "Top Ten" characteristics of Japanese bargaining behavior.

1. Use of vague, ambiguous, noncommittal language in framing Japanese negotiating proposals ;
2. Heavy stress on process-related elements of negotiation (e. g., person-to-person communication, back-channel contacts) ;
3. Few initiatives, especially an political, security, and controversial economic topics ;
4. Avoidance of front-line, assertive, visible, leadership positions and roles ;
5. Slowness in reaching negotiating positions, after lengthy deliberations among domestic interests affected by subject(s) to be discussed ;
6. Preference for adaptive, short-range, ad-hoc, case-by-case approaches over comprehensive, integrated plans ;
7. Preference for bridging, mediating, go-between role when faced with highly adversarial situations ;
8. Concessions presented slowly, in small increments ;
9. Significant compromises offered only when conditions have become highly politicized and a "crisis" stage has been reached ; and
10. Relatively great weight given to instruments bolstering commitment to Japanese positions as against arguments and techniques to persuade or convince others to change their views or positions.

Based on the sheer consistency of these and other traits over time, Japanese negotiating style has lent itself to a variety of characterizations. "Probe, push, panic, and postpone" is one. "Silence, smiling, and sleeping" is another. "Deny, delay, dare, deadlock, and discontinue" could be yet another. While uncomfortable with the rather mocking tone of such descriptions, few Japanese analysts have disputed their general accuracy in portraying the behavior of Japanese

negotiators.

Factors Shaping "Japanese" Negotiating Style

*Attitudes, psychological and cultural traits.*² Most relevant to Japan's negotiating style is a core of beliefs widely shared among Japanese—notably an uneasiness toward the outside world, an ultra-sensitivity to foreign opinions and criticism, plus a near-obsessive concern, with Japan's weakness and vulnerability.

Such verities are less than eternal and at best have loose connections to observable behavior in international negotiations. Could the much-vaunted, culturally-rooted precept of "*wa*." ("harmony") tell us why Japanese negotiators have stood firmly against compromise on the Northern Islands for nearly half a century? Are not other countries' government officials just as inclined as Tokyo's to keeping their "true feelings" ("*honne*") to themselves when they deliver official statements for public consumption?

Political Institutions and Processes. In addressing government-to-government negotiating behavior, variables relating to domestic Japanese political processes, institutions, and decision-making exert a direct, significant, and demonstrable impact upon visible behavior. Japan is a highly pluralistic society. Reaching public policy decisions is an intensely combative, heavily bureaucratized, consensus-driven process of accommodating diverse interests and viewpoints. Typically, negotiating decisions are reached ("arranged" is the preferred term) from the bottom-up, via informal, give-and-take, consensus-based processes stressing personal relationships and networks.

A Second-Tier Power in a Defensive Position. In addition to the direct and indirect impact of domestic political structures and processes, Japanese negotiating style is heavily conditioned by Japan's position as a secondary or second-tier power in global affairs. Japan's rapid postwar economic growth raised foreign expectations that Japan could, would, and should play an enlarged international role. These expectations turned into demands during the late 1970s and 1980s that Japan act in ways thought commensurate with its economic superpower status.

Beginning in the Occupation era, the pattern of Japanese defensive, reactive, minimalist diplomacy was established, and made sense at the time. After all, what choice did Japanese officials have? When asked to "jump," they would reply, "How far?" When asked "What does Japan want to do?," they would

answer, "What do you want us to do?"

Throughout the postwar era, Japanese representatives have negotiated with foreign counterparts who have asked Japan to do more, to take action, to participate more actively, to compromise, or face the consequences. Faced with such demands, the Japanese side has sought to limit, avoid, circumvent, weaken, blunt, or reduce the level of these demands. Typically, Japan's negotiators have worked from a borrowed or reflected bargaining agenda—an imported wish-list drawn up by other governments. This study emphasizes the impact of Japan's defensive position in negotiations.

The analytical difficulty of rating the effectiveness of the Japanese bargaining approach is highlighted in negotiations to open Japan's domestic market to foreign-grown rice. Over seven long years, the Japanese government resisted foreign demands to sell rice in Japan. Japanese negotiating behavior was quintessentially "Japanese" on rice. Moving from an adamant "not a single grain of foreign rice will enter Japan" position, the Japanese side gradually succumbed to a combination of American and GATT-centered multilateral pressure, finally accepting a "minimum access" or "partial access" formula for step-by-step increases in Japanese rice imports. Was the final outcome a Japanese bargaining victory? Was it a defeat? Objectively, the Japanese government had conceded in principle but had compromised only a little on substance. At bottom, when the dust had settled, the much-maligned Japanese "4 P's" or "5 D's" approach seemed to have worked.

Or had it? If Japan's core concern is averting or containing foreign criticism, then its negotiating "victory" on rice was outweighed by its obvious "defeat" in the ongoing battle to dodge foreign flak. Just as Japan's whopping \$13 billion contribution to the U. S.-led forces in the Persian Gulf was lost in the wave of anti-Japanese criticism of Tokyo's reluctant, "too little, too late" response, Japan's stubbornness to budge on the rice issue invited heavy, and probably lasting, foreign resentment and criticism.

No matter whether one rates Japanese negotiating performance positively or negatively it is interesting that the behavior is capable of such sharply divergent interpretations. Tokyo University political scientist Inoguchi Takashi labels Japanese diplomacy as "iridescent" ("*tamamushi*").³ It is this iridescence which enables observers to see what they choose to see to interpret the behavior in ways they prefer, depending on their mood swings or endorphin level at a given moment.

In assessing Japanese negotiating behavior and performance, this study seeks to define *Japanese* objectives. After all, should not Japanese negotiators be judged on the basis of *Japanese* goals? While this may seem an obvious point, it is not, because Japanese goals are typically opaque and therefore must be inferred from behavior. Moreover, as mentioned above, Japan is typically the defensive side in negotiations and the Japanese side deals with an imported agenda. Also, even though Japanese negotiators often draw criticism for failing to take initiatives, to articulate Japanese positions clearly, to assume political risks, or to respond quickly to changes in the bargaining situation, one may well ask whether or not the Japanese were interested in such matters at all. Identifying Japan's "medium of exchange" is therefore critical to grasping correctly the Japanese style

THE RICE NEGOTIATIONS

The Subject of Rice

For Japan, rice is a near-sacred product. Deeply embedded in Japanese history, culture, economics, politics, and symbolism. For the Japanese, rice is "our Christmas tree," and rice-producing land is reverently called "our holy land." In Japanese eyes, rice—far more than beef, citrus fruit, or textiles—represented the ultimate non-negotiable market-access topic. "Not a single grain of foreign rice shall ever enter Japan," was the solemn vow of Japanese politicians of all stripes, backed by public opinion, the press, the business community, academics, and the bureaucracy. Opposition to imported rice reflected a national consensus.

Small wonder that American demands in 1986 for opening the Japanese rice market were seen as a frontal assault on Japanese culture itself. There is some irony in the Americans criticizing Japan's inefficient rice-farming system. After all, it was the American-led Occupation which had broken up existing large land-holdings into the small tracts that would become the bastions of rice farmers whose votes politicians rewarded with generous subsidies perpetuating these economically inefficient plots.

Preliminary Phase

US pressure on Japan to open its rice market to a foreign rice began with the US complaint in 1986 that Japanese restrictions on imports of 12 agricultural products, including rice, were in violation of GATT rules. The US complaint

stemmed from prodding from a well-organized American lobbying group, the Rice Millers Association (RMA).⁴ Over seven years would pass, and six prime ministers would hold office, before a negotiated settlement was reached in December 1993.

The Japanese goal on the issue of rice imports was simple : keep foreign rice from Japanese mouths. On an opposition-to-liberalization scale of one to ten, with oranges rating a “3” and beef about a “5”, rice would have registered a perfect “10.” Along with the heavy value Japanese attached to the subject was the virtually universal Japanese perception of domestic rice market as sacrosanct. Permitting foreign rice to enter Japan was tantamount to letting foreign firms build condos inside the walls of the Imperial Palace. The Japanese response to American demands for opening the domestic market was akin to “how dare you!”

During the pre-negotiating period on rice, Japan’s basic objective was negative, to block entirely the subject from being placed on the bargaining agenda, at either the bilateral or the multilateral GATT level. Once the RMA’s petition was filed, and USTR Clayton Yeutter had to decide how to deal with the petition, Tokyo unleashed a defensive counterattack with every weapon at its disposal.⁵ Both houses of the Diet voted unanimously in favor of a resolution binding Japan to self-sufficiency in rice production. Politicians, the press, big business, academic experts, and of course farm lobby groups voiced a single message: “no” on rice imports. In order to communicate this resolve to the Americans—to make Washington “understand” the Japanese situation and not to press rice liberalization upon Japan—letters were sent, envoys were dispatched, meetings were arranged, and demonstrations were organized.

“The List”—Japanese Arguments Against Rice Imports

Among the long list of reasons cited in support of the Japanese position in the various pre-bargaining communications to the American side were the following :

- ◆ the historical significance of rice in Japan ;
- ◆ the cultural significance of rice to Japan ;
- ◆ other countries also award preferential treatment to certain economic sectors ;
- ◆ Japan is the world’s top importer of foreign agricultural products ;
- ◆ Japan’s National Food Control Law establishes rice as a “basic food” and self-sufficiency in rice as essential to national security interests ;

- ◆ The Japanese Diet will never accept rice liberalization ;
- ◆ The Japanese public will not accept rice liberalization ;
- ◆ Japan's situation on rice is "unique," "special," and "different" ;
- ◆ If Japan is forced to import rice, Japanese–American relations will suffer ;
- ◆ Rice is a domestic issue of no concern to other countries ;
- ◆ Japan needs more time to consider the subject, so other governments should be "patient" ; and
- ◆ Rice liberalization is not a bilateral but a multilateral subject.

Arguably, presentation of two of the above reasons proved to be a mistake for the Japanese in their preliminary jousting on the issue. When negotiations on the subject subsequently switched the multilateral level, Tokyo rejected the idea of liberalization because, for Japan, rice (unlike steak and oranges, a staple of the Japanese everyday diet) was a basic food. Japan's multilateral-level approach was to seek an exception for Japan's rice producing sector.

In 1988, with a second Rice Millers' petition under consideration at USTR, Ambassador Matsunaga met Yeutter. In that conversation, after urging Yeutter to reject the petition, Matsunaga communicated Japan's willingness to include rice on the Uruguay Round negotiating agenda. Based on the Ambassador's assurance, Yeutter turned down the RMA request,⁶ on the condition that Japan deliver on its stated commitment by addressing the issue multilaterally.

As Yeutter was putting the Japanese commitment on public record, multilateral pressures were beginning to build on Japan. In October, 1988, the "Keynes Group" at the Uruguay Round asked for "minimum access" for imported rice into Japan. In December, Japan assembled a mammoth delegation to the Uruguay Round negotiations in Montreal, including a bloated "*oendan*" of party politicians attending, as is typical for Japanese multilateral delegations, to gain information, to score political points by having been at the scene, to demonstrate commitment to the Japanese cause in the negotiations, and, perhaps, to keep a watchful eye on Japanese bureaucrats in the event they might be inclined to compromise excessively.

By the Montreal meetings, Japan had crossed the line : Tokyo was on record as supporting the liberalization of agricultural products and was irreversibly enmeshed in the negotiating process. There would be no turning back.

Communication Static and Shifting Goal Posts

During the course of the 1988 US–Japan negotiations over renewal of the beef and citrus fruit agreement, Yeutter had told Japanese Minister of Agriculture Sato Takashi that the US would not press Japan bilaterally to liberalize its rice market. Rice, to Japanese the dreaded “r” word, was taken by Tokyo officials as off-limits in at the bilateral level, according to this mutual understanding.

Also important, in Japanese eyes, was Agriculture Secretary Richard E. Lyng’s statement later that year that the US would be willing to accept a percentage-based “partial access” (*bubun kaiho*) arrangement for Japanese rice imports.⁷ Through the summer of 1990, in fact, the heated Japanese domestic political debate over the rice question was based upon this understanding, namely, that the Americans would allow the issue to be addressed at the GATT on the basis of “partial access”—a gradual opening of Japan’s rice market—without tariffication.

Not surprisingly, in light of this belief, Japanese officials were jolted in mid-1990 when Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence R. Eagleburger informed the Japanese that “partial access” would not satisfy Washington but, instead, tariffication of rice imports would be required.⁸ Overnight, the rug had been yanked from under Japanese assumptions as to what type of Japanese compromise on rice would be necessary to meet American desires.

Throughout the rice negotiations, but especially after this shift in US expectations, Japanese bargaining behavior was finely attuned to, and directly shaped by, American policies, American officials’ statements, as well as by Japanese interpretations of the meaning behind explicit and implicit American positions taken on the rice issue.⁹

One element in Japan’s defensive bargaining strategy was active involvement in negotiations on the issue at the multilateral level. Tokyo’s multilateralization of the rice import question no doubt stemmed from a conviction that action could be thereby avoided, given the GATT’s impoverished past record in reining in protection-minded governments. As they conducted a holding pattern at the Uruguay Round, Japanese officials concentrated their focus on the real target, the United States government. Consistently, the Japanese goal was to ferret out by whatever means at their disposal what the Americans meant by their proposals, what they expected, and what minimum

level of Japanese rice-related concessions they would accept.

Middle Phase: To the Brink of Compromise and Back

Miyazawa Kiichi became prime minister in November 1991. He quickly assigned top priority to working toward successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round. His personal commitment to that process, however, did not imply that he supported rice imports based on a tariffication formula. The most likely explanation was that his Liberal Democratic Party had lost its majority in the upper house of the Japanese Diet in mid-year elections. Tariffication of rice imports would mean revising the Food Control Law. Upper house approval would be required for revising the Law. Thus, as the prime minister told Secretary of State James Baker in Tokyo that month, "it's impossible to accept tariffication-based rice imports, because that would require revising the Food Control Law."¹⁰

Japan's negotiating stance thus shifted ("kome shifuto") with Miyazawa's assuming office. Now it was focused on locating areas of possible Japanese compromise without changing the Food Control Law. Miyazawa, anticipating release of the GATT Secretary General's draft proposal (the "Dunkel Paper") on December 20, sent former Ambassador to the US Matsunaga Nobuo to sound out the American side. Among others, Matsunaga met Brent Snowcroft, who expressed firmly to the envoy the American hard-line "no exceptions on tariffication" position on the issue.¹¹

As it happened, the Dunkel proposal fell short of gaining enough support to succeed in Geneva. But the presentation of the 450-page Dunkel "take it or leave it" proposal—with its "no exceptions" prohibition against special treatment for any nation's domestic agricultural sector—forced the Japanese government to confront the issue of liberalization. With Tokyo now prepared to deal seriously with the rice import issue, the presentation of Dunkel's document marked the beginning of the middle-phase of the process of bargaining on the subject.

The Dunkel proposal also hardened the American side's "no exceptions" position and shaped the approach it would adopt in discussions on the issue during the ensuing year. American officials began what would later become a chorus of criticism aimed at Japanese "intransigence" that threatened to derail the Uruguay Round process.

Japan's early-1992 response to the Dunkel draft had raised the hackles of

American negotiators, for the document excluded rice tariffication entirely. In light of the hostile US reception to the Japanese proposal, Miyazawa directed Gaimusho and Agriculture Ministry officials to work out a policy plan that would be acceptable to the US and would not require changing the Food Control Law. Operating under these two general guidelines, Foreign Ministry bureaucrats prepared several drafts but Agriculture Ministry officials defiantly planted their feet against any compromise. One impassioned agriculture bureaucrat even invoked the fighting spirit of those stalwart defenders of Edo against a rebel forces over a century before: "We are the white tiger battalion. We'll fight to the death. It's the only way we can survive."¹²

A frustrated Miyazawa then summoned Owada Hisashi and Hamaguchi Yoshiharu, respectively the top-ranking career officials in the foreign and agriculture ministries "to talk" about the rice problem. Owada was willing to discuss the topic during the meeting, but Hamaguchi was not, because he considered management of the Food Control Law to be the Agriculture Ministry's responsibility.¹³

The Agriculture Ministry Softens its Stance

Ministry of Agriculture intransigence softened in July 1992, with the appointment of Kyotani Akio as administrative vice-minister. Four years before, Kyotani, as Livestock Production Bureau Chief, had participated in the beef and citrus negotiations with the United States. He favored liberalization. A highly influential official, Kyotani was revered by his bureaucratic brethren in the Ministry. Why? Kyotani had a particular gift, a personal quality much prized in Japanese officialdom, the ability "to respond to the situation correctly" (*jokyo ni tekikaku ni taio dekiru*).¹⁴

In the fall of 1992, Kyotani warned a group of Liberal Democratic party agriculture group members that negotiations with the United States would "go nowhere" unless Japan was prepared to "set forth specific numbers." According to a later newspaper account of the meeting, Kyotani asked the politicians to "give me the responsibility to handle this."¹⁵ Reading between the lines, the Japanese side, and even Agriculture Ministry officials, were now willing to use the "t" word (tariffication) as well as the dreaded "r" word in policy planning for the negotiations. From the Ministry of Agriculture's perspective the shift was extraordinary. After all, until just a few years before, no official interested in long-term employment at the Ministry would have dared utter the "r" word, much less discuss the idea of tariffication. Thus, Japan's one-dimensional "we won't accept tariffication" approach had now changed.

Shortly thereafter, Agriculture officials started sounding out the American side on possible tariffication of wheat and dairy products. Apparently, the idea was that by accepting tariff-based arrangements on these two lesser items, the Japanese side could then pull their wagons in a circle to protect the main issue—rice imports.

Moreover, several influential Liberal Democratic Party agriculture-issue group (*zoku*) members had been working behind the scenes to orchestrate a way for Miyazawa to be able to reach a politically viable decision on rice imports. This trio of conservative politicians—Okawara Taichiro, Kato Koichi, and Yamamoto Tomio—had enough clout, earned by years of experience dealing with farm-related problems, for them to risk the wrath of farmers' groups and Agriculture Ministry bureaucrats by raising the possibility of opening Japan's rice market.

In December 1992, at a press conference after his cabinet was reshuffled, Miyazawa hinted at the softening of Japan's negotiating stance: "we don't want to ruin the [Uruguay Round] negotiations and yet we don't want to ruin rice farming in Japan, how can we satisfy both goals?"¹⁶ Miyazawa's impromptu remarks (not included in the press conference briefing materials aides had prepared) were taken to mean the Japanese side was on the brink of compromise on rice. According to insiders' accounts published in the press,¹⁷ Miyazawa had reached the conclusion that tariffication was "unavoidable" (*yamu o ezu*).

Behind Miyazawa's significant statement was that Japan had found itself in an untenable position in the multilateral negotiations. As long as the EC and the US remained at loggerheads on agricultural imports, Japanese leaders seemed quite content merely to watch from the sidelines, to let others take the heat for continued deadlock and the blame if the Uruguay Round talks collapsed. But the United States and the EC had announced an agreement on November 24. Miyazawa evidently was amazed that the French, who "disliked" the Americans, could have buckled under to Washington on the agricultural issue.¹⁸

In addition, Washington was pressuring Tokyo strongly to open its rice market by the end of 1992. Japan's Agriculture and Fisheries Minister, Tanabu Makoto, had visited Washington to meet USTR Carla Hills and others to probe how firmly American trade officials were committed to the "no exceptions" stance. Finding the US to be quite firmly committed, Tanabu returned to Tokyo where he reported his assessment to Miyazawa. At about the same time, Miyazawa received a report on the multilateral situation from two of his party's

leading agricultural affairs politicians, Okawara Taichiro and Horii Kosuke, who had just arrived back in Tokyo from Geneva. In addition, Miyazawa heard from his close friend Matsunaga that a settlement was imminent in Geneva.¹⁹

Based on information from these sources, Miyazawa was now prepared to take decisive action on the rice problem, Anticipating a US-EC accommodation in December 1992, which would have isolated Japan as the lone holdout on agricultural imports, the Miyazawa government, backed by ranking agricultural Diet members in his party and top Agriculture Ministry bureaucrats—was ready—however reluctantly—to compromise on the rice issue.

As it happened, however, and fortunately for the Japanese side, the EC-US confrontation had not ended but continued to persist, giving Tokyo a respite, at least until the new Clinton Administration took office in January. Miyazawa's earlier readiness to compromise on rice imports, albeit at the final hour, as well as his subsequent readiness to postpone taking action on the issue, underline the extent to which the Japanese side's position varied according to fluctuations in US policy and in circumstances at Geneva.

Japanese leaders were troubled by several future repercussions if Japan maintained its uncompromising posture on rice imports: the possibility Japan would "become isolated" (*"koritsuka"*) at the Uruguay Round; the likelihood that Japan would become the scapegoat if the negotiations were to fail; and the chance that the US might retaliate in some fashion, threatening other Japanese economic sectors and even the stability of the Japanese American relationship itself. These were not far-fetched concerns; they seemed based on an accurate assessment of actual conditions at the multilateral level and of repeatedly expressed American expectations of Japan.

These factors gradually increased in significance during the middle-phase of negotiations on rice, raising the pressure on Japan's negotiators to compromise. These same factors, over time, helped to splinter the once-unanimous Japanese domestic consensus against rice imports.

By 1992, the once impregnable dike against imported rice was about to give way. Only the party politicians from rural districts and Agriculture Ministry bureaucrats still had fingers in the dike. As happened during the earlier orange negotiations, the bureaucrats at Agriculture proved themselves ahead of the politicians in accepting the need for compromise. Ministry officials thus turned

willing, even eager, to have the ministry negotiate the best deal possible under the circumstances. Once the ministerial fingers were pulled from the dike, the vote-conscious politicians surrendered, permitting Agriculture bureaucrats negotiating authority. By this point, the rice-import issue no longer was "whether or not" but "when" and "how much."

Final-Phase of the Negotiations

The Bush years ended with a standoff with the Japanese side on the subject of rice imports, with Washington standing firmly behind its "no exceptions" position and Tokyo doggedly continuing to seek preferential treatment on rice. The new Clinton Administration trade team, working against the backdrop of the looming deadline for wrapping up the Uruguay Round multilateral negotiations, moved aggressively—both in style and substance—to resolve the issue. When he met Clinton at a bilateral summit session on April 16, Miyazawa recited the standard Japanese script, that tariffication of rice would require changing the Food Control Law, which would be impossible. Instead of responding with the American "no exceptions" argument, as Bush had done repeatedly, Clinton chose to avoid a harsh response.

The multilateral negotiations revived in May when a quadrilateral (US, Canada, Japan, EC) Trade Ministers' meeting agreed to open comprehensive negotiations in the fall, a decision which intensified pressure on Japan to face and force resolution of the rice problem.

The O'Mara—Shiwaku Connection

An American initiative provided the catalyst for advancing the rice negotiations to the final stage. In June 1993, Charles J. O'Mara, Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the Department of Agriculture, arranged a meeting with his counterpart in the Ministry of Agriculture, Shiwaku Jiro, who held the post of *shingikan*.²⁰ Shiwaku and others in the Agriculture Ministry believed that with tariffication and free competition in the domestic Japanese rice market, US-grown rice would be at a serious disadvantage to rice grown in Thailand where labor costs were significantly lower. Shiwaku thought, as had proved to be the case with wheat, nation-based set amounts of imports would be more advantageous to the US than an open market approach. Agriculture Ministry officials also thought that the Clinton Administration, being more interested in results-oriented, managed-trade than devotion to free trade ideology, would be receptive to applying the wheat precedent to resolution of the rice issue on a non-tariffication basis. Shiwaku ran this argument by the US side, which listened.

After all, thanks to a decade of preferential import treatment, compliments of the Ministry of Agriculture, half the wheat sold in Japan was American-grown.

The US side did more than listen. In June 1993, O'Mara submitted a compromise draft proposal to Shiwaku which suggested deferring tariffication on rice for six years, during which period rice would be imported into Japan according to a "minimum access" formula. In a personal interview,²¹ O'Mara confirmed the accuracy of reports published in the Japanese press regarding his private meetings with Shiwaku, including the fact that the overture was an American initiative. According to the formula which O'Mara submitted, tariffication of rice would only begin in the year 2,000, after the six-year "minimum access" period.

Joe O'Mara's plan, which allowed Japan to avoid immediate tariffication of rice, was a welcome surprise to the Japanese team. "It was more than we expected," was the reaction of one delighted Japanese negotiator.²²

In July, Agriculture Ministry officials assembled to review the O'Mara draft. The bureaucratic lineup and relatively receptive thinking of officials in the ministry continued even through the domestic political chaos of mid-1993, the end of the 38-year reign of the Liberal Democrats, and the beginning of a series of multiparty coalition governments. Despite the tumble of domestic political events in Japan, these were the officials whose views mattered most in determining the Japanese side's negotiating position. These officials promptly decided to accept the American draft.

On the other hand, the Liberal Democratic Party politicians ready to accept rice liberalization a year before, when their party was in power, had become members of the "opposition." Now they were unfettered by concerns about shouldering the burden, and the blame, associated with making a decision to open the rice market.

The American side was closely monitoring the dramatically changing internal political environment, with an eye to the implications these changes, particularly the Liberal Democrats' fall from power, would have on Japanese negotiating policy. Had the Liberal Democrats altered their earlier stance? Accordingly, in early August, American trade officials invited Iwakura Guzo, a savvy agricultural affairs specialist and long-rims party staff official, to Washington to learn the "opposition" party's thinking on the subject of rice. In the meeting, O'Mara asked Iwakura how the Liberal Democrats would respond to

the draft proposal. (note telephone interview with O'Mara, May 1996) "Even though we're the opposition party now, we'll respond by putting national interests first," was Iwakura's reassuring reply—which O'Mara and the Americans interpreted to mean the party would support, or at least not oppose, the compromise plan.²³

In August, as Japan commenced emergency imports of foreign rice, Ministry of Agriculture officials secretly approached the Rice Millers Association. That meeting brought yet another surprise to the Japanese side, as RMA officers expressed their willingness to go along with the deferred-tariffication approach. In fact, following their discussion with the Agriculture Ministry representatives, the RMA sought Department of Agriculture guarantees on rice imports to Japan.

Thus, by the beginning of September the two sides had crafted the basis for an agreement on rice, a compromise arrangement which seemed acceptable to the most vociferous American lobbying protagonist and to the principal antagonists in the Japanese ministries and political parties. Meanwhile, the indefatigable Shiwaku continued to toil in the trenches on the details of an accord, for the most part side-by-side with his American counterpart O'Mara. From September on, Shiwaku—who reportedly had "virtually complete" negotiating authority over the rice issue,²⁴ was abroad, engaged in discussions in Washington and Europe. He met secretly at a small hotel in France with O'Mara, used a rental car, but did not use a pager or cellular phone. No record of these meetings appear in the Gaimusho records; only a small number of Agriculture Ministry officials were aware the meetings were in progress.²⁵

The Shiwaku-O'Mara meetings focused on several specific issues, including coming up with an acceptable translation for the key word "yuuyo"—which means "postponement" or "delay." Shiwaku balked at this English translation, favoring more ambiguous language. In the end the problem was averted through a circumlocution. The two officials also dealt with details on handling the period after the "minimum access" framework terminated following six years; and the exact percentage amounts of imported rice to be set for the six-year "minimum access" period. The Dunkel draft had set forth a staggered percentage increase of 3 percent (year one) to 5 percent (year six). Japan pushed for the Dunkel figures, the US countered with percentages twice as high (6–10 percent over six years). In the end, the sides landed squarely in the middle, agreeing on a 4–8 percent formulation.²⁶

His task virtually completed, Shiwaku returned to Tokyo on October 10. He

and O'Mara had worked out a mutually satisfactory arrangement which achieved Washington's goal of accessing the Japanese rice market and met Tokyo's desire to avert immediate tariffication. The final deal : in exchange for raising the amount of rice imported under the "minimum access" formulation (beyond the original Dunkel percentages), Japan won postponement of tariffication until the year 2000. Thus, the US initiative of mid-1993 (the O'Mara plan) proved to be the breakthrough in the negotiations on rice, providing the Japanese side with a face-saving path of retreat.

The negotiated deal had several pluses : it met the minimum acceptable to the central player (the US); it seemed to meet the expectations of Japan at the Uruguay Round ; it would, for a time, postpone resolution of the still politically iffy matter of rice tariffication ; it committed Japan to a rice import structure which other rice importing countries would follow ; it entailed a politically and economically manageable process of step-by-step increases in imports ; and it only required Japan to import comparatively modest amounts of rice.

The final compromise solution made sense, but would it survive the formidable political obstacles in Japan? Of the many obstacles to rice liberalization that Japanese officials and politicians had listed repeatedly before and during negotiations (see "The List" above, pp. 5-6), several were rooted in hard political reality. One was the Diet resolution on self-sufficiency in rice, which remained in effect and which was taken seriously as a commitment. Another constraint stemmed from the long-term and unchanged public statements of many politicians and political parties opposing the importation of a single grain of rice, much less tariffication. The chief barrier to winning acceptance of the compromise draft, one which caused the premier to be "tied up in a rope" (*ganjigarama*),²⁷ was disagreement within his governing coalition serious enough to threaten its continuation in power. Hosokawa's whopping 70 percent public support rating obscured his government's inner frailty ; his popularity did not translate into the political clout to force opponents in his multi-party government, especially on a subject as touchy as rice. The coalition was not unified on rice liberalization. Hosokawa himself supported liberalization and had told associates he would open the rice market.²⁸ At the same time, in a conversation with a top policy advisor a month earlier, he expressed the opinion that Japan should not liberalize rice without getting something in return. "if Japan can get conditions attached to liberalization, we should do so."²⁹

After his meeting with Clinton in New York in September he stated Japan's

commitment to the December Uruguay Round deadline. Ozawa Ichiro, a Nakasone-esque political weathervane, former Liberal Democrat of the Tanaka-Takeshita factional line, from a major rice-producing prefecture of Iwate in northeastern Japan, was a born-again reformist willing to accept rice liberalization. His party, the Japan New Party, consisted mostly of breakaway Liberal Democrats. Komeito, another coalition member party whose support centers on urban constituencies, accepted liberalization. To persuade the New Party Sakigake to join the coalition, Hosokawa had promised its leader Takemura Masayoshi (also a former Liberal Democrat), that the coalition would oppose tariffication of rice.³⁰ Because the compromise plan offered deferred tariffication, some analysts reasoned, there was technically no breach of Hosokawa's pledge to Takemura. Some hard-liners in Ozawa's New Life Party (*Shinseito*) also staunchly opposed tariffs, but Ozawa seemed able to contain his troops and kept them in the party and the coalition.

In his late-stage efforts to hammer out a consensus in his coalition on the compromise rice-imports plan, Hosokawa's most daunting challenge came from the socialist. Although political reform was the pivotal issue to the Socialist party—as it was to all parties during 1993, the rice issue was highly volatile as well. Socialist party leaders had stated repeatedly their willingness to bolt Hosokawa's coalition rather than accede to a decision allowing rice imports. One illustration of the extreme reaction the inflammable rice problem elicited in Japanese politics, was that the same Socialist leaders even spoke of forging an alliance with conservative Liberal Democrats after their party had left the coalition.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the socialists were as dependent on rural district support as the Liberal Democrats, a support base which party leaders desperately wished to maintain. As late as the first week of December, the socialist leadership clung to an anti-liberalization line and even called for additional debate on the topic in the Diet. The Socialist, known for nearly four decades as a party in perpetual opposition, were still playing that adversarial role—to the point of posing hostile queries about the state of the rice liberalization negotiations directly to the prime minister on the Diet floor. In the end, the negativistic politics of the Socialists left them out of the loop, the odd men out in contributing to the resolution on the rice-imports issue.

However irrelevant the Socialists may have been to the negotiating process on rice, they remained a major—albeit the weakest—part of Hosokawa's jerry-built coalition.

Multilateral Pressure

In mid-October GATT Director General Peter Sutherland trekked to Tokyo where he spent two exhausting days trying to convey to Japan's leaders the urgency of the imminent deadline for finishing up the Uruguay Round. During his stay he conferred with bureaucrats, Liberal Democrats and Socialist party leaders who, to a surprised and exasperated Sutherland, seemed determined just to state Japan's unrelenting commitment against rice imports and to recite from "The List" (e. g., "Japan's cultural heritage," "Japan's food security imperatives"). Perhaps because he was less used to Japanese-style arguments on the issue than were the Americans, Sutherland reacted with surprise, and even astonishment. The Japanese leaders he met seemed indifferent to the fact that agriculture was but one of 15 other major negotiating group topics at the Uruguay Round, and that the Round included other topics such as trade-in-services and intellectual property rights that he expected would have been of concern to his Japanese hosts. Aside from leaders of *Keidanren*, who were "the only people I could talk to," he noted in a sarcasm-laced statement to the press, "the only thing anyone seems interested in talking about is rice." "They seem to think rice imports mean the end of the world," he went on, "but it are not."³¹

Sutherland's comments had repercussions. For instance, once the outspoken Sutherland had left town, Hosokawa felt compelled to reassure the press that, "I told him [Sutherland] Japan would not accept tariffication."³²

"Final" Final-Stage Events

The prime minister's defensive and evasive public statements stemmed from the tightrope he was walking in domestic politics. Caught between his own preferences and stated commitments and his die-hard political opponents, Hosokawa was frustrated and cautious. He also was pessimistic about the usefulness of continued Japanese stonewalling. He told one coalition party leader that Japan's merely saying "we oppose, we oppose" ("*hantai, hantai*") will "not work."³³

The hostile political and press backlash to reports of his remarks led Hosokawa to avoid comment on the subject. He fended off a barrage of questions on the Diet floor concerning rumored Japanese compromises with such comments as "such reports haven't reached me," or "you can't believe every story you hear," or "diplomatic negotiations should be handled secretly."³⁴ His disclaimers aside, former GATT Secretary General Dunkel in Tokyo for a conference, commented that there were no major differences between the secrecy-shrouded compromise plan and the overall draft plan, a statement

which substantiated the rumors being circulated.³⁵

Another Sutherland remark while in Tokyo had later repercussions and may have affected Japanese handling of negotiations during the final month of the process. In November, Minister of Agriculture Hata Eishiro decided to travel to Europe for a week of meetings with Sutherland and EC trade officials. His last-minute trip apparently was inspired by an ambiguous remark Sutherland had made during his eventful stay in Japan the month before. While in Tokyo, Sutherland had confessed, "What I want is an agreement. As long as the involved countries agree, even if they want to say white is black, that's all right by me."³⁶

Thus, even as the terms of the final agreement seemed settled upon, the Japanese side still was grasping at straws that might somehow improve rice-related provisions of the accord. Sutherland's remark was such a straw, one which Japanese leaders seized upon as a possible opening to be exploited.

Whether or not Sutherland's ambiguous remark had actually prompted Hata's final-hour foray to the other side of the world, the Agriculture Minister's goal was clear enough. His approach: "Having already swallowed the stick, we'll try to make it less painful."³⁷ By "less painful," Hata seemed to have in mind an improved deal for Japan, one which would postpone rice tariffication to some unspecified future time instead of beginning the process in the seventh year, as the then existing compromise plan required.

In Tokyo, Hosokawa's launched a preemptive strike against opponents of the compromise plan. Aware that a domestic backlash might jeopardize chances of an agreement, Hosokawa turned to two veteran Foreign Ministry officials, Sate Yukio and Owada Hisashi, who then dealt with Agriculture Ministry bureaucrats. Agriculture officials virtually never met with the prime minister himself at his residence over this period.³⁸

Hosokawa's near-obsession with secrecy and worries that the rice problem might spill over to affect the US-Japan relationship itself spurred him to ask the Americans (through Ambassador Walter Mondale) not to make the rice import topic an issue at the upcoming APEC meeting in Seattle. Apparently, the US side appreciated Hosokawa's precarious position and agreed to downplay the subject at the November summit.³⁹ The APEC meeting went as expected, with the rice issue given the low-key treatment arranged beforehand.

Hosokawa returned to Tokyo where he began arrangements for a final round of consultations among his party allies in the coalition. His personal choice for undertaking this delicate task was Ogura Kazuo, Economic Bureau Chief in the Foreign Ministry. Perhaps Ogura had instructions to be especially tight-lipped in his comments and especially narrow in his circle of briefing contacts. Perhaps not. In any case, he did not touch base with farm lobbying organizations. Moreover, his briefings to the politicians and officials he did meet covered only information already published in the newspapers.

Hosokawa was certainly using his best spin-doctoring skills to obscure what had really been happening in the final stage of the negotiations on rice imports. Just a week before the Uruguay Round ended, Japanese government officials not only were denying reports of a compromise settlement but were asserting, in fact, that Tokyo was still engaged in final-hour attempts at somehow might improve rice-import-related terms in the document. As late as December 9, days before conclusion of the Uruguay Round was announced, Hosokawa himself publicly rejected reports of a final agreement.

The Japanese leader's claim strained credulity. One person who responded publicly about Hosokawa's statement was the ever-quotable GATT Director, Peter Sutherland. Sutherland, who was obviously quite aware of the facts, seemed unable to resist likening Hosokawa's remark to "calling 'white' 'black'."⁴⁰

Nor did the prime minister's claims do anything to reassure skittish Japanese politicians. From that point until the December settlement, the frantic maneuverings of Japanese politicians from that time until the December agreement did not stem from their concern with a foreign audience or with influencing the negotiations. Their target was domestic, namely, their electoral constituents and party rivals. At the same time, no politician seemed willing to go up against the international "system" (*taisei*) with Japan isolated in opposing a standard set by the international community.⁴¹

The vast majority of Diet members of all parties were on record as having deemed rice liberalization to be "inevitable." A sizable minority had declared rice tariffication to be "unavoidable." These same politicians were now frantically scurrying about, seeking refuge from being held accountable for the reported Japanese concessions on rice. Most politicians blamed the bureaucrats. Liberal Democratic politicians blamed the Hosokawa coalition. Ironically, it was the liberal Democrats that Iwakura had assured O'Mara and other American negotiators some months earlier would put the national interest first. In the

crunch, it seemed, his party colleagues were less interested in acting on that belief by lending their support to a beleaguered prime minister and the negotiated compromise plan than they were in political jockeying for political advantage in advance of possible elections and pledging unaltered loyalty to the "no foreign rice" slogan.

Politicians hoped to demonstrate that they had exerted sufficiently "great efforts" and had tried their best, albeit in a losing cause. By the same token, government leaders' *ex post facto* statements are properly viewed as merely damage-control tactics to minimize the potential political impact or what were—to Japanese minds—wholly unsatisfactory final terms. A mere handful of politicians stood behind Hosokawa (and the vaunted "national interest"), willing to shoulder the risks and responsibilities associated with supporting the final agreement.

Events between December 1992 and December 1993 merely furthered previous trends toward Japanese acceptance of the inevitability of compromise on rice imports. Apart from the factors discussed above, one should mention the 1992 shortfall in Japan's domestic rice crop and subsequent decision to import rice from several countries on an emergency basis.

Of course, the Japanese government's decision to settle the rice problem stemmed from other reasons and incentives. At the same time, the emergency rice imports undermined yet further whatever credibility remained in the Japanese side's adherence to the principle of national self-sufficiency in rice. Japanese representatives' attempts to rationalize these as "one-time only" purchases were ineffectual.⁴² Some Japanese leaders feared that, in the wake of the emergency rice imports, the Japanese side would be criticized for hypocrisy and opportunism if were to continue to stonewall an the compromise agreement. The emergency importing of rice was merely one more factor leading the Japanese government to realize the hopelessness of its defensive, watch-and-wait negotiating approach.

Only after seven years of haggling had Tokyo relented, grudgingly, incrementally, minimally, to a strings-attached settlement. Japan's behavior during the rice negotiations was consistently self-centered, narrow-minded, and parochial. In light of that dismal bargaining record, it seems ironic, indeed, that when announcing their decision to accept the final agreement, Japanese leaders explained the decision as motivated by Japanese devotion to free trade

principles, dedication to the GATT process, and commitment to fulfilling their nation's responsibilities as a global economic power.

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

What does the rice case suggest about "Japanese style" of conducting international negotiations?

Negotiating Structure and Process

Centrality of the Bilateral Process. The heart of the negotiating process in both cases was bilateral. Bargaining over rice imports (quota-based and tariffication-based) began at the bilateral US-Japan level. Subsequently, even while farm product issues were addressed multilaterally at the Uruguay Round trade negotiations, the process axis on rice continued to be the US-Japan connection. Final resolution of the rice issue was achieved via negotiations between the two governments within the structural umbrella of the Uruguay Round.

Japanese diplomacy buffs refer to such bilateral-in-a-multilateral-framework interactions as "*maruchi-bi*." In the rice example, the critical process level was clearly "*bi*" with not much "*maruchi*"—type impact until an impending global trade accord provided isolation-conscious Japanese leaders with a final-hour incentive to accept the previously arranged US-Japan compromise formula.

US side plays "Offense." The American side played the "offensive" role: Washington established the bargaining agenda, issued direct and indirect threats, undertook the significant initiatives, set the deadlines and, at the multi-lateral lever, acted to mobilize other governments to buttress its negotiating stance vis-a-vis Japan.

Japan Plays "Defense." In sharp contrast, the Japanese played a "defensive" role: Japanese negotiators did not frame the initial bargaining agenda, but reacted within the framework of a US-dominated bargaining agenda and process. Its proposals were counter-proposals. Its conditions were attached as strings to accepting American demands. Its bargaining game plan was executed upon an American playing field—with an American rule book, American referees, an American scorekeeper, and an American crew adjusting the height of the goal posts. No matter at which level negotiations took place—bilateral, multi-lateral, or bilateral within multilateral—the policies, approach, and behavior of Japanese negotiators were conditioned by Japan's defensive position.

This is not to say the Japanese were passive, for they were actively engaged in the bargaining process. Their active involvement in the process, however, took place in an externally-defined context. Their initiatives were not designed to replace or fundamentally alter the existing, made-in-America negotiating agenda. Throughout negotiations on rice, the Japanese negotiating team was in the position of reacting and adapting to other governments notably the American government's—initiatives, proposals, statements, demands, pressures, and expectations.

Strategies and Tactics

In interviews with the author, several Gaimusho officials have described Japanese bargaining strategy as "a strategy of no strategy." While few in number, perhaps, compared to other countries, there were Japanese bargaining strategies and tactics—shaped in form and nuance by the Japanese defensive orientation described above.

For analytical purposes, the strategies and tactics that were adopted and pursued by the Japanese side during the rice negotiations can be arranged into two general types: "issue-avoidance" and "issue-minimization."

"Issue Avoidance" Behavior. The Japanese government's fundamental goal in the rice case was not to enter into negotiations on the issues in the first place. Accordingly, a variety of "issue-avoidance" techniques were used, to block or defer consideration of what to the Japanese side were off-limits subjects from the bilateral and/or multilateral agendas. A sampling of the behavior drawn from the rice example:

- Gaining prior understandings or promises (through personal meetings with American officials) that the topic would be off-limits or that Japan will receive exceptional, special, or preferential treatment;
- Seeking to "multilateralize" negotiations, thus sidestepping the US and averting action;
- Adopting a watch-and-wait posture at the multilateral level;
- Blocking and/or delaying multilateral-level action in GATT panels based on unanimity rule;
- Using available tools to demonstrate Japanese side's commitment to its basic stance (as against stressing techniques to persuade others to change their positions); and
- Repeatedly maintaining subject(s) as "off-limits" (tariffication-based imports).

"Issue Minimization" Behavior. Once "avoidance" efforts had failed, the Japanese side turned to ways to reduce the scope and content of compromises

required to resolve the issues involved. These are a few illustrations from the rice negotiations:

- Conceding less significant items (e. g., wheal and dairy products, tomato paste and the like in these cases) to minimize concessions on more important items;
- Offering minor concessions and postponing further compromise until American response received and assessed;
- Avoiding explicit pledges; and
- Expressing Japanese proposals in ambiguous language (notably during preliminary and early-phase).

Domestic Institutions and Politics

Decision-making in Japan's political culture requires the expenditure of enormous energy and time in consensus-building tasks. Only by a politically-correct process extensive discussions, behind-the-scenes consultations, formal and formal conferences—can a viable decision be arranged. According to Japanese norms of politics, all relevant opinions must be heard and be taken into consideration when reaching policy decisions. Japan's fractious, fragmented political processes extend to international negotiations and shape Japanese bargaining style in direct ways.

Non-governmental actors. The extensive involvement of non-official actors on both sides reflects the diversity, complexity, and intensely interrelated quality of relationships between the two societies. In the rice case the Japanese negotiators' *nemawashi* efforts included a visit to Rice Millers Association offices to test the waters on the final compromise plan.

Similarly, the many missions, delegations, and personal envoys dispatched to the US were *nemawashi*-type tactics employed for domestic political reasons. These visits facilitated the softening of the Japanese stance and thus were a critical part of the process of reaching final agreements.

Manipulating "Outside Pressure." In the rice case, various Japanese official and non-official actors used external pressure—real, imagined, expected, and typically American—to provide added support for policies they personally espoused but might not have been able to accomplish without a dash of *gaiatsu*.

Time-consuming policy making process. In the rice case, the Japanese side typically took two to three months to prepare and present its positions at the negotiating table. The lengthy response time did not stem from intentional delaying or stalling tactics by the Japanese side but from the snail-like pace of consensus-building toward lowest-common-denominator decisions among all parties having a stake in the issues being considered.

Japanese news media and negotiating secrecy. The Japanese newspapers' relentless pursuit of "scoops" and information make bargaining secrecy difficult. Newspaper and magazine reporting on the Uruguay Round focused almost exclusively on rice, prospects for rice, problems with rice, foreign demands on rice, foreign leaders' statements on rice.

If details of private discussions (e. g., the Shiwaku-O'Mara rice-related conversations during 1993), can be kept from the press the domestic decision-making process is smoothed considerably, which, in turn, may help produce a politically sustainable final agreement. Given the fiercely combative political environment and a scoop-driven army of Japanese journalists, Hosokawa (like any Japanese leader) performed a balancing act. On the one hand, his secretive approach seems to have allowed the O'Mara-Shiwaku talks to achieve results that publicity might have nullified. On the other hand, keeping details of the final compromise plan from the public (and some domestic parties) even after the deal had been negotiated left him vulnerable to political attack when terms of the final agreement became known.

Attitudes and Perceptions

One Issue-ism. Japanese negotiating behavior on the rice issue, and particularly its role in the Uruguay Round bargaining process, was molded consistently and heavily by the extraordinary weight of the topic of rice liberalization in the Japanese mind. It is no exaggeration to say that the Japanese viewed the Uruguay Round process through a rice-clouded lens. In Japanese eyes, concluding the Uruguay Round meant an avalanche of foreign rice into Japan. The Japanese newspapers freeze-dried their reporting on Uruguay Round happenings to a simple question: what about rice?

This preoccupation with the single and, to Japanese, non-negotiable subject of rice had repercussions on Japanese negotiating conduct. For one thing, the mindset virtually ruled out objective policy debate on the topic. Rice liberalization was a taboo topic, even at the highest levels of the Japanese government, until negotiations neared completion.

Only by appreciating this Japanese outlook on the topic can one explain the otherwise baffling intensity of the Japanese side's efforts—at each stage and at both the bilateral and multilateral levels—to explain Japan's situation, gain special treatment for Japan's rice sector, and escape compromise, on a matter of peripheral consequence to all but a few other governments. Many foreign critics and government officials were both bewildered and unconvinced by Japan's one-dimensional negotiating performance at the Uruguay Round.

Japanese Compromise Behavior

Beyond a rock-hard commitment to its minimum position, what was acceptable to the Japanese side turned on what was acceptable to the Americans. Japanese concessions were seen as giving up less of what the Americans were asking, rather than winning more from the Americans.

What prompted Japanese concessions in these two cases? Significant Japanese compromises (final-stage) were offered only when circumstances surrounding negotiations had become heavily politicized, a "crisis" stage had been reached, and the Japanese side had come to see itself to be in a "no-choice" position.

A significant, final-stage, source of pressure to concede was multilateral. If there was unanimous agreement, the possibility of being isolated, criticized, and blamed for the collapse of the Uruguay Round was very real. Japanese fears of American retaliation for non-compliance with its proposals (and consequent threat to other, relatively more, significant sectors of the Japanese economy) constituted another major, final-stage, reason for Japanese compromise.

The apparent Japanese sense of relief when Washington dropped its more ambitious demands (e. g., its demand for immediate tariffication of rice imports in mid-1993) seemed to make the Japanese side more willing to accept earlier American proposals it had rejected. In what must be a uniquely Japanese way of rationalizing compromise, Japanese final concessions in both cases were justified because they permitted a final agreement with better terms than those Washington had been demanding earlier!

In light of the actual, as against stated or indirect, reasons why the Japanese side accepted the minimum-access-cum-deferred-tariffication formula, it therefore made little, if any, difference which single party or coalition of parties happened to be heading the Japanese government when the final-stage decisions were reached in the fall of 1993.

American Bargaining Style as a Factor

Japanese Complaints. At various times during the years of negotiating agreements on rice, Japanese negotiators and officials complained about Washington's negotiating conduct. Among these alleged American shortcomings were the following :

- (1) unannounced shifts in position ;
- (2) unexplained, sudden escalation of demands ;
- (3) discrepancies between American positions expressed at multilateral level and those taken in bilateral meetings ;
- (4) violation of previous Japanese-US "understandings" or "promises" ;

- (5) excessive use of pressure and threats ; and
- (6) repeated submission of demands known to the American side as "off limits," clearly beyond Japan's maximum concession range.

Impact on the Negotiations. The escalation of American demands in both cases clearly imposed added hardships on the consensus-driven Japanese domestic decision-making process, making the process even more time-consuming. American shifts in position during negotiations had similar effects.

Such American behavior had a particularly striking impact on the Japanese side's conduct of the negotiations, precisely because Japan's bargaining "menu" was provided by the US. When the American side changed or added items to that agenda, the existing Japanese internal consensus disintegrated. Tokyo then had to arrange a fresh consensus, more or less from scratch, on the basis of the latest US plan.

Aside from these domestic political effects, what impact did such American behavior have upon the Japanese side? One example: in the case of mixed-signals sent to the Japanese from different officials on the US side, Japanese negotiators, always on the alert for any sign of softness on the Americans' part, would seize upon the most conciliatory among the statements received (e. g., Ambassador Mansfield's remark that he "understood" Japan's refusal to import rice⁴³) and use them in subsequent talks with US negotiators as supporting evidence for the Japanese position.

While Japan was not able to effectively exploit these conflicting messages from the American side to its advantage, the frequently different and occasionally contradictory messages added static to the communication process. Whether the US demands were artificially inflated (i. e., "phony") or not, their later withdrawal affected the bargaining process (by hastening settlement between the sides) and the final outcome (by improving final terms an favor of the US side). However loudly and often Japanese officials cried foul over this violation of bargaining norms by the Americans, from the US perspective the tactic (if it was, in fact, intentional of submitting and then retracting especially harsh conditions was an effective tool. Why the American "ploy" worked so well is explained, again, by Japan's place in a fundamentally defensive bargaining structure and by the Japanese side's view of its position within that framework as weak, vulnerable, and necessarily reactive. (see above "reasons for Japanese compromise")

Japanese bargaining style in the rice case is "classic." The "style" mirrored the "coping" or "go-with-the-flow" approach described earlier. Japanese negotiators sought, to the greatest extent possible, to avoid losses, to limit damage, and to avoid mistakes. Their bargaining behavior in these instances fits one American observer's apt likening of Japan's diplomatic style to that of "an interested bridge partner, waiting to follow the first goad bid from the American side." 44

NOTES

1. Michael Blaker, "Evaluating Japanese Diplomatic Performance," in Gerald Curtis, ed., *Japanese Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (New York : M. E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 1-42.
2. For a perceptive recent critique of the cultural connection, see Peter Berton, "Psychological Aspects of Japanese International Negotiating Behavior" (Draft paper prepared for the Kyoto Conference on International Comparative Studies on Negotiating Behavior, 1994).
3. Takashi Inoguchi, *Japan's Foreign Policy in an Era of Global Change* (London : Pinter Publishers, Ltd., 1993), p. 117.
4. *Rafu shimpo*, 17 November 1988.
5. The Japanese side seemed to be reading from the script used a decade earlier, during the pas-bargaining phase of the negotiations with the US over textiles. Among Tokyo's preliminary moves in the textile case were : personal appeals to American officials ; passage of a unanimous Diet resolution rejecting the negotiation of export controls on textiles ; and presentation of arguments that the subject—restricting textile exports—should be resolved through multi-lateral GATT procedures, not through bilateral Japanese-American negotiations. See Inaba Hidezo and Ikuta Toyooki, *Nichi-Bei sen'i kosho* (Tokyo : Kinzoku zaisei jiho kenkyukai, 1970), pp. 119-147.
6. David Sanger, "Japan's Sensitivity on Rice Issue," *The New York Times*, 28 October 1988 ; Damon Darlin, "Japan Firmly Resists US Pressure on Rice," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 November 1988 ; *Yomiuri shimbun*, 30 October 1988. As Yeutter was quoted in *Yomiuri shimbun*, 5 December 1988 : "If Japan does not demonstrate its commitment by early December at the Montreal Uruguay Round meetings, we shall reconsider [the decision]."
7. *Yomiuri shimbun*, 24 October 1991, "Kanzeika no nami" series, No. 3. Also *Yomiuri ahimbun*, 16 May 1990.
8. *Yomiuri shimbun*, 24 October 1991, "Kanzeika no nami" #3.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.* In another account, the Agriculture Ministry's stiff resistance was likened to the Imperial Army's readiness to fight to the last bullet and the last man or, after the fall of Okinawa, waiting for the A-bomb to drop on Hiroshima. Noguchi Hitoshi, "kome sakokuron : seijika to chihoshi," *Shokun!* (January 1994), p. 138.

13. *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.* On the softening of MAFF's Position, see also *Asahi shimbun*, 21 May 1990. On the Leading Liberal Democratic Party power brokers on agriculture, an excellent English-language treatment is Aurelia George, *Rice Politics in Japan* (Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies, May 1988), Pacific Economic Papers No. 159, pp. 18-31.
16. *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Asahi shimbun*, 27 November 1993.
20. Interview with O'Mara, 16 May 1996; *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
21. Interview with O'Mara, 16 May 1996; *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
22. *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. Interview with O'Mara, 16 May 1996; *Asahi shimbun*, 14 December 1993.
27. *Asahi shimbun*, 23 October, 7 November 1993.
28. *Asahi shimbun*, 7 November 1993.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Asahi shimbun*, 23 October 1993.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Asahi shimbun*, 1 November 1993.
34. *Asahi shimbun*, 27 October 1993,
35. *Asahi shimbun*, 28 October 1993,
36. *Asahi shimbun*, 1 November 1993.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Asahi sbimbun*, 14 December 1993.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Asahi shimbun*, 21 December 1993.
42. Partly because of the emergency importation of rice, there was a surge of anti-Japanese sentiment in Geneva. Japan was labeled "katte na Nihon," according to one report (*Asahi shimbun* 3 November 1993). Earlier in 1993, in a speech in Brussels, Mickey Kantor remarked that "Japan has not made a meaningful contribution to the Uruguay pound in three years"—a comment which prompted this ad hominem retort from Kobayashi Michihiko: "Kantor is a new boy who doesn't know the details of the negotiations." (*Asahi shinbun*, 30 March, 31 March 1993). Dunkel's assessment, as reported in *Asahi shimbun*, 1 November 1993, was "as a major trading country, Japan should have done better [in the Uruguay Round]."
43. *The Washtngton Post*, 22 October 1988; *Yomiuri shimbun*, 28 September 1988. Treasury

Secretary Baker was another US official who voiced understanding of Japanese "culture" as an impediment (*Rafu shimpo*, 11 February 1988).

44. Frank Gibney, "The View from Japan," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (October 1971), p. 101.



Prime Minister Takeshita and Agriculture Minister Sato find Mike Tyson at Japan's door in a Trade Sanctions Act T-Shirt delivering "beef on rice," with oranges on the side. *Yomiuri shimbun*, March 17, 1998. Cartoon by Yutenji Saburo.