

My own country the USA bears a large responsibility for whatever may be wrong with Japan today. As recently as 1958-60 the CIA were channeling millions of dollars into LDP coffers in order to insure that conservative, pro-capitalist regimes were nurtured to rule US client states. According to one scholar, "...the concern for Japanese capitalism was a major cause for the initial US involvement in the Vietnam War." That war and other political skullduggery was carried out over the past half century to fight communism and every other model of independent economic development around the world. Who knows what kind of environmentally sustainable world could have been created had we not all been railroaded down the capitalist track.

Today, the United States, whose military alone is the world's single most polluting entity, and Japan, as major economic and military allies, threaten the stable continuation of the biosphere. The Japanese government and its major corporations operate what I call an environmental rogue state. While Japan is by no means alone in committing environmental crimes, it is fairly unique in that it is a relatively small country claiming an inordinate amount of natural resources. Countries like Japan and Holland are small countries that leave large ecological footprints on the world.

Japan routinely circumvents international environmental treaties with impunity. The collapse of the recent global warming treaty was due in part to Japan, a major greenhouse gas producer. Environmental treaties dealing with the illegal shipment of highly toxic substances such as plutonium; illegal wildlife; timber trade and treaties which attempt to limit ocean fish catch are just a few that Japan regards merely to be problems of public perception rather than life-threatening practices. Here is a small sampling of the details.

in the area of TIMBER

Japan accounts for about 35% of the world trade in tropical timber. China now accounts for about the same amount. Timber is used in the furniture, construction and paper pulp industries. Already some 88 percent of Asia's forests are gone so the big logging companies from Japan and Malaysia are roaming the globe in search of trees to consume or sell.

According to Greenpeace, "logging companies are spearheading forest destruction" in the Brazilian Amazon with 80% of the logging there deemed illegal.

In 1996, Eidai do Brasil Co., (then a subsidiary of Mitsubishi corporation) became "the Amazon's largest exporter of processed wood." Greenpeace recently found evidence that Eidai was exporting illegal timber from the Amazon to Japan via Mitsubishi.

Eidai was recently fined 1.8 million USD for illegal logging while an employee of theirs was caught trying to pay a 300,000 dollar bribe to a Brazilian official. (Maybe the employee got the idea about how things are really done in Japan from watching the NHK news.)

How about FISHING and WHALING?

The immediate ocean fisheries surrounding Japan were considered as of 1993 by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization to be overfished and exceeding maximum sustainable yield. Much of Japan's own coral reefs that provide habitat for fish along its shores are seriously degraded.

In 1992 Japan ranked 2nd in the world after China in ocean fish catch and today consumes approximately 30% of the world's marine catch.

As of 1998, Japan, along with many other major fishing nations had yet to ratify important treaties to preserve global fisheries. Even when Japanese fishers have signed a treaty they implement so-called experimental quotas in order to take more fish than they are supposed to.

A quarter of the world's fish catch now comes from pirate boats in blatant violation of international law. Highly valued species such as the endangered Southern bluefin tuna can fetch up to as much as 45,000 USD per fish in Japan.

Of course, overfishing undermines protection of wildlife as well. For example, Japanese, Korean and US fishing of pollock and Pacific cod is directly contributing to the decline of the magnificent Steller sea lion. Groundfish are used in the U.S. and foreign markets for fast food sandwiches, and are also used to make a protein paste called surimi, which is in high demand in Japan and Korea and sold at artificially low prices.

For a century Japan and other nations contributed to the destruction of the world's largest whales. Species such as the blue, fin, humpback and right whales will probably never recover healthy populations again. Yet, Japan continues to carry out "scientific" whaling every year without convincing evidence to the world community that these hunts are necessary. The large factory trawlers that sperm whale hunting requires (which took place in the hunt this last summer by Japan) are a violation of the rules of the International Whaling Commission which allow for small scale scientific hunting but not commercial hunting.

And then there is the appalling WILDLIFE and IVORY trade to note.

Japan itself is ranked 10th in the world among countries with threatened birds with 6% of its native bird species threatened with extinction. Almost half of Japan's 174 species of mammals face severe risk.

While species dwindle at home in an heavily degraded environment, Japan has one of the highest per capita rates of wildlife importation and consumption in the world.

In 1996, Japan imported 54% of the world trade total in tortoises, 42% of birds and 21% of apes. Since 1993, Japanese have illegally imported more than 8,000 animals. Wildlife such as birds suffer heavy mortality rates en route from their places of origin to final destination due to inhumane shipping methods.

Despite joining the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, CITES, in 1973, Japan has a reputation for lack of enforcement of its regulations. For example, punishment for dealers violating the rules of ivory trade are pathetically weak. Recently, when the board member of one of the top ivory industry associations in Japan was caught smuggling 500 kilos of high quality ivory from Singapore, he was fined only 300,000 yen and received no jail time.

From 1960 to 1989 Japan consumed no less than six thousand tons of ivory which cost the lives of between 200,000 to half a million elephants. Ivory signature seals (hanko) which are the main consumer item in Japan are small and easily smuggled into the country. There is ample evidence provided by the Environmental Investigation Agency, a British ngo, that Japan has long been involved in illegal shipments of ivory from Africa and India to Asia and Japan. Not too mention tourists from Europe and Asia who are now bringing home ivory carvings illegally across borders as souvenirs from their African vacations.

Well, what is there to do?

There needs to be better laws, and those laws have to be written so that they may be easily followed and enforced. The fact that the Ministry of International Trade and Industry is in charge of administering CITES is a blatant contradiction. Japan's Environment Agency, which some say is anti-whaling for example, would do a better job but is under the thumb of MITI. The only way that government and business will get the message is when people organize and agitate these egregious practices, as we are attempting to do here today, and force the big shots to address these issues.

Thanks.