

Specialist is Needed in Analysing Policy-Making

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Abstract

Policy analysts tend to have chosen their approach for analysing policy-making before starting their study because they often consider their chosen approach must be ‘always best’ or ‘universal’. However, every policy approach indeed has both strengths and deficiencies and they can play an effective role in a certain circumstance. Policy approaches are namely not ‘Superman’ who can help researchers anytime and anywhere but ‘Specialist’ who can help researchers in a certain time and in a certain place. This paper seeks to justify this proposition by examining currently most dominating approaches for policy analysis and policy-making process of emission standards for automobiles in Japan as a case study.

Keywords: Public policy; Policy-making analysis; Network approach; Policy-making in emission standards for automobiles in Japan.



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1. Introduction

Examining policy-making requires an analytical tool and it may be one way to review all available frameworks that can be used to examine policy change, in order to choose it. However, as there are a number of available frameworks for the examination of policy-making, considering limited time and space for researchers, such task seems almost impossible. Rather, it may be better to categorise them into several approaches according to their main characteristics, then to choose one approach that is appropriate for a certain study and finally to select one framework within the category for the study.

According to [John \(1999\)](#), most of the existing frameworks that are utilized for analysing policy-making can be categorized into five main approaches, including institutional approaches, ideas-based approaches, socio-economic approaches, rational choice approaches and network approaches. His categorization seems valuable because the past research works on policy-making normally tend to find that policy-making was influenced by one of or combinations of, these five factors such as socio-economic factors, institutional factors, ideas of policy actors, rational choice of policy actors and relationship between policy actors ([John, 1999](#); [Sabatier, 2007](#)). Although there may be other factors such as psychological, it may be reasonable to review these five main factors first, based on the discoveries of the predecessors, and then other missed factors where these five factors seem irrelevant for a focused policy-making. In choosing one, researchers however tend to have chosen their approach before starting their study, considering that their chosen approach must be ‘always best’ or ‘universal’. This seems quite risky because none of them can always effectively enable researchers to understand policy-making. Indeed, these approaches are not ‘Superman’ who can help researchers anytime and anywhere but ‘Specialist’ who can help researchers in a certain time and in a certain place. Therefore, in analysing policy-making, researchers should choose their approach after discovering main characteristics of policy-making in a focused area so that their chosen approach can enable them to understand policy-making. This paper seeks to justify this proposition.

For this purpose, the first part of this paper looks at main characteristics and, strengths and weaknesses of each approach. It pays a particular attention to main characteristics and strengths of each approach. There are two reasons for this. First, it is considered that each approach has both merits and demerits and that there is no ‘always best’ or ‘universal’ approach. Second, it can be consequently suggested that, when researchers choose an approach, they need to choose an approach which can most strongly deal with main features of a certain issue despite its weaknesses. Thus, one of the main purposes of the first part is to describe that each approach has distinctive characteristics and strengths and weaknesses and no approach is thus always best in analysing policy-making. After examining the five approaches, the next part of this paper seeks to justify that each approach plays a role most effectively in understanding policy-making where it can deal with main characteristics of policy-making in a focused area. Through literature review, this part examines policy-making in emission standards for automobiles in Japan as a case study. It then discovers that policy-making in emission standards can be characterised as close relationship between the state actors and the auto industry and demonstrates that policy-making in emission standards in Japan can be most effectively analysed by network approaches whose strengths can be shown when relationship between policy actors strongly matters.

2. Five Approaches for Policy-Making Analysis

2.1. Institutional Approaches

Institutionalists argue that, in order to understand policy-making process and policy outcomes, it is necessary to examine institutions because ‘the organisation of political life makes a difference’ ([March and Olsen, 1984](#)).

They emphasize the importance of institutions because:

Political democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions. The bureaucratic agency, the legislative committee, and the appellate court are areas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend interests. They are political actors in their own right (March and Olsen, 1984).

Institutional approaches seek to understand policy-making focusing on both institutions, including not only formal institutions but also ‘informal conventions of political life’, and the impact of these institutions upon individuals and the interaction between these institutions and individuals (Lowndes, 2002). According to John (1999), institutionalists have traditionally argued that paying attention to constitutions, legal systems and government structures is crucial in policy-making analysis because they play a role in division of powers and responsibilities between the state organizations and in determination of rules and norms of behaviour in decision-making so that political life will be manageable (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Hill, 2005). As well as these formal institutions, institutions in the approaches today contain a wide range of ‘institutions’ such as accepted rules, norms, ideologies, culture, routine, conventions which govern trade union behaviour and bank-firm relations (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Kato, 1996). Institutionalists claim that focusing on institutions will discover the aspects of politics which have been under-explored or neglected (Kato, 1996). Similarly, Hall and Taylor (1996) contends that institutional approaches may allow us to more understand political world. Institutional approaches are especially useful when researchers seek to compare policy-making between countries because examining similar policy processes in different institutional contexts can lead to exposure of the distinctive features of formal rules of each country and the values which forms a state tradition (Hill, 2005; John, 1999). Although each school agrees that institutions do matter in policy-making, there have been various kinds of schools within institutionalisms which are mostly different in other parts including the definition of institutions (North, 1990). Each school enables researchers to obtain ‘a different window or insight into how institutions shape the way in which decision-making takes place’ (Parsons, 1995). Further, Kato (1996) contends that each school may be suitable for a different objective. Peters (2000) specifies seven strains of new institutionalisms (Lowndes, 2002) including normative institutionalists, rational choice institutionalists, historical institutionalists, empirical institutionalists, international institutionalists, sociological institutionalists, and network institutionalists. As Hall and Taylor (1996) indicate, each perspective may not be wrong and is likely to give a partial explanation of the forces which work in a certain situation. Though it may be true that each school is not substantially untrue, institutionalisms consequently suffer terminological confusion. ‘What are institutions?’ might be one of the most frequently criticized points of institutionalisms because institutions seem to mean everything (Hill, 2005; Peters, 2000). As Fredericson and Smith (2003) describe, according to institutionalisms, ‘today we are all institutionalists’. Ostrom (1999) then claims that as long as the definition by scholars of institutions means almost anything, the study of institutions would not progress very much. As well as the definition problems, there is a difficulty in identification and measurement of institutions because they are often invisible, existing, for instance, in the participant minds and in the implicit and unwritten forms (Ostrom, 1990; Peters, 2000). In addition, Hill (2005) claims that, because institutional approaches highly emphasize particular configuration of institutional situations and actors, they can only take an account of past events with little possibility for generalization. Thus, it is hard to specify conditions for policy change in institutional approaches. Finally, it seems that institutionalists themselves admit both the limits of ‘original’ institutional approaches and the importance of other factors such as networks and rational choice of policy actors so that institutional approaches today include a wide range of ‘institutions’. Thus, although institutions may matter, even institutionalists would agree that other factors such as the socio-economic factors, rational choice of policy actors, networks and ideas should not be undervalued.

2.2. Ideas-Based Approaches

Ideas-based approaches contend that ideas play a central role in policy-making processes. Those approaches seek to comprehend how ideas influence policy-making (Tannenwald and Wohlforth, 2005). According to Majone (1989), it would be quite difficult to understand policy-making processes only by paying attention to power, influence and bargaining without the consideration of debate and argument. Similarly, King (1973) argues that if we try to understand public policy, we must know much more about the ideas of policy-makers. He further contends that ideas comprise both a necessary condition and a sufficient one to explain the American policy pattern rather than elites, demands, interest groups and institutions (King, 1973). Further, Odell (1982) emphasise the necessity to focus on the circulation of policy ideas through Washington in order to adequately explain or forecast U.S. policy. Ideas necessarily mediate our understanding of real situations while actors in politics in turn seek to create, change and fight over, those ideas (Stone, 1989). According to Parsons (1995) and O'Mahony (2007), advocacy coalitions (see Sabatier (1993)), epistemic communities (Haas, 1992) and multiple streams models (see Kingdon (1995)) are models which try to produce more general explanations of the relationships between ideas and policy utilising new metaphors for the policy process such as networks, sub-systems, streams and coalitions.

Concerning general criticisms about the ideas-based approaches, Tannenwald and Wohlforth (2005) criticise that the notion of ideas is very much ambiguous, embracing ‘notions of culture, shared belief systems, and worldviews, as well as specific strategies of actions and policy programs.’ Similarly, Philpott (1996) points out that the notion of ideas is rather all-embracing and they mean different kinds of things in different cases. Consequently, John (1999) contends that hypotheses and predictions cannot be produced by ideas-based approaches because they are more like partial ‘explanatory gadgets’ and they cannot become a theory. In addition, because they tend to suppose that elite ideas bring about a policy, their explanations are likely to depend on not causation but association

(Yee, 1996). It is criticized that ideas-based studies do not prove that ideas really influence policy outcomes (John, 1999; Tannenwald and Wohlforth, 2005). As Parsons (1995) points out, ideas may play a role but it may be difficult to locate the decisive point at which policy is shaped by ideas. Finally, it seems that ideas alone cannot explain policy-making process. Indeed, the examples picked up above as the ideas-based approaches are the approaches that combined ‘ideas’ with networks. In addition, political actors cannot always make decision according to their ideas because their decisions may be constrained by social and economic factors and institutions. Moreover, it has been widely recognized that ideas-based approaches can provide a satisfactory explanation for policy-making when combined with rational choice approaches (Garret and Weingast, 1992). In explaining why one particular cooperative solution is chosen when there are a wide range of paths to cooperation which cannot readily be differentiated, for instance, policy analyst may be able to do so by using both approaches because ‘ideas play a role in coordinating the expectations that are necessary to sustain a cooperation among a set of players with divergent preferences’ (Garret and Weingast, 1992).

2.3. Socio-Economic Approaches

Socio-economic approaches tend to consider that socio-economic factors drive policy-making processes and policy is affected and determined by those factors. Unlike the ‘politics does matter’ perspectives, which pay attention to politicians, parties, party competition, political values and so on, namely the policy processes, the ‘socio-economic factors do matter’ perspectives argue that policy outcomes are the result of powerful social and economic forces rather than the policy processes. According to John (1999), the basic idea of the socio-economic approaches is ‘the policy process, far from being a rational weighting up of alternatives, is driven by powerful social-economic forces that set the agenda, structure decision-makers’ choices, constrain implementation and ensure that the interests of the most powerful (or of the system as a whole) determine the outputs and outcomes of the political system.’ Consequently, decisions of policy-makers are either consciously or unconsciously reflecting powerful social and economic forces. In addition, the socio-economic approaches maintain that individuals do not have the capacity to control their own social and political institutions (Hill, 2005). Thus, the socio-economic approaches regard those political factors or policy processes as a basically epiphenomenon (Parsons, 1995). The most important point that the approaches allow political scientists to realise might be that social and economic realities are not ‘out there’ as political scientists tend to separate socio-economic factors from the policy processes and overlook the influence of those factors (McAnulla, 2002). The approaches may as a result provide a powerful set of explanations of policy emergence and implementation (John, 1999). Especially, the approaches can contribute to the question of ‘status quo’ of many policies because they propose that political choices are considered as predetermined by social and economic factors (Hill, 2005). Although there are several kinds of ‘socio-economic factors do matter’ theories, Marxist theory (Marx and Engels, 1948), the ‘funnel of causality’ model (Hofferbert, 1974), the regulation theory (see Aglietta (1979) and globalist theory (Radice, 1999) are important contributors to the socio-economic approaches (Hill, 2005; John, 1999).

There have been a number of criticisms against the socio-economic approaches. For instance, it has been suggested that socio-economic factors might affect individuals but individuals may also affect socio-economic factors (Hill, 2005; McAnulla, 2002). Although their propositions differ in various aspects, Hay (1996) proposes that relationships between socio-economic factors and individuals are not unidirectional but mutual. In addition, John (1999) points out that the socio-economic approaches tend to overlook the importance of political autonomy and they reduce complex policy choices to wider-ranging forces. Although there are social and economic forces surrounding policy-makers, it has been suggested that they have the ability to shape their destiny. For instance, Weiss (1998) has found that government has the ability to sustain differences in fiscal and monetary policies despite the global economic trends. Further, McAnulla (2002) maintains that socio-economic approaches neglect the possibilities that individuals take effective actions out of control of structures. Sharpe and Newton (1984) contend that economic-social factors are only one of ingredients for cooking ‘policy’ and whether those factors can play any part in policy is dependent on a series of human volitions. Moreover, the socio-economic approaches tend to underestimate the importance of other influential factors such as relationships between political actors, institutions and ideas of political actors. The social-economic factors might be important in policy-making process as relationship between political actors, institutions and ideas of political actors could be partly determined by the social-economic factors. However, these various kinds of factors could not be perfectly so and it seems that they can enjoy autonomy from the social-economic factors. For instance, even when facing the economic globalisation process, national political actors might be able to reject it because of their strong ‘anti-globalisation’ ideas. Therefore, although the socio-economic factors are significant and might be more influential than other various kinds of factors in certain situations, the socio-economic factors cannot always provide a satisfactory explanation for policy-making process.

2.4. Rational Choice Approaches

Rational choice approaches seek to explain policy-making process by utilizing ideas of economics or economic rationality (Hill, 2005). According to (Hall and Taylor, 1996; John, 1999), there are distinctive five kinds of assumptions in rational choice approaches; individuals have preferences that are prior to the social and political world; individuals behave to maximise their own utility rather than act for the interests of others; individuals articulate their preferences as clear goals; individuals possess information about the preferences; and in examination of the information available to them, individuals are able to choose the course of action that fulfil their preferences and are able to alter their courses of action when the benefits and costs of choices change. Thelen and Steinmo

(1992) contend that rational choice approaches are ‘a universal tool kit’ that researchers can apply to any political setting. In addition, Becker (1962) points out that rational choice approaches (or economic approaches) are useful because it is possible to consider all human behaviour contain participants who seek to maximize their utility from a fixed set of preferences and accumulate an optimal amount of information and other inputs in a wide range of markets. Ward (2002) specifies seven distinctive strengths of the rational choice method:

1. It forces you to be explicit about assumptions that are often left implicit in verbal arguments.
2. It provides a ‘positive heuristic’-a set of categories that help in constructing explanations, a set of exemplary examples of good explanation to emulate, and suggestions about fruitful lines of research.
3. Because models are by definition simplified representations of reality constructed with a view to improving our understanding, it forces us to attend to what we want to explain, what is central to explaining the phenomena we are interested in and what can be left out of the model as peripheral or unimportant.
4. If correctly applied it ensures that propositions actually follow logically; so the method can be used to see if a logically coherent basis for widely believed conclusions can be constructed.
5. It goes beyond inductively derived correlations to provide a mechanism linking independent and dependent variables, running through the actions individuals take.
6. It provides a unified framework of explanation across different fields of the social sciences and across sub-disciplines, allowing cross-fertilisation of ideas and a view point from which common patterns can be seen across diverse phenomena.
7. Even in circumstances in which action is irrational, it provides a standard against which action can be judged and indicates variables that might lead to departures from rationality.

Economic theory of bureaucracy (Downs, 1957; Dunleavy, 1986; Niskanen, 1971) and game theory (Robinson and Goforth, 2005; Scharpf, 1997) are well-known rational choice approaches. Rational choice approaches have a number of advantages and ideas of economic rationality and maximization of self-interest, have been widely utilized in policy-making analysis. However, rational choice approaches have been suffering a wide range of criticisms. In terms of psychology, it has been suggested that rational choice approaches are misleading because individuals might not always act rationally and their behaviours might often be influenced by envy, revenge, guild, greed, altruism and so on (Kirschner, 1996; Lewin, 1991; Quattrone and Tversky, 1988; Ward, 2002). Further, Simon (1957) contends that the rational assumption of individuals is unrealistic and human rationality is limited, which is called ‘bounded rationality’, because ‘the number of alternatives he must explore is so great, the information he would need to evaluate them so vast that even an approximation to objective rationality is hard to conceive.’ In addition, it has been claimed that rational choice approaches underrate social structure (e.g. social class, gender and religion), norms, ideas and ideologies, all of which determine and constrain individual behaviours (Durkheim, 1915; Edelman, 1964; Harrop and Miller, 1987; Hill, 2005; Hindess, 1988; Ward, 2002). In other words, rational choice approaches fail to consider the social-economic factors, institutions and ideas of political actors. For example, self-interests of political actors might come from certain ideas of political actors. In addition, their behaviour cannot enjoy freedom from institutional constraints and political actors may, either consciously or unconsciously, act within the institutional constraints. Moreover, policy preferences may be shaped by institutionalised relationship between political actors, namely policy networks, which are structures forming the preferences of actors. This may be another important factor that rational choice approaches tend to fail to pay attention to.

2.5. Network Approaches

Network approaches focus on both formal and informal relationships between actors, which, it is expected, determine policy outputs and outcomes. Network approaches emphasise the fragmented and complicated nature of the modern policy-making. According to Campbell *et al.* (1989), modern policy-making can be characterized as fragmented and specialized because the scope of governmental responsibility has expanded and complexity of public affairs has increased. Likewise, Richardson and Jordan (1979) identify the segmented nature of policy-making and suggest that policy is made between a number of interconnecting and interpenetrating organizations. Similarly, Parsons (1995) indicates complexity of modern policy-making and points out that, as both government and policy-making activity has been growing, the range of participants has grown both wider and more complex. Because of fragmentation and specialization, a range of group/government relationships may exist in different policy arenas (Smith M. J., 1993). Network approaches suppose that there are complex interactions between actors in the policy process (Hanf and O’toole, 1992; Kassim, 1993; Smith A., 1997) and policy output is ‘the result of interactions among a plurality of separate actors with separate interests, goals and strategies’ rather than the result of ‘the choice process of any single unified actor’ (Scharpf, 1978). In addition, they tend to consider that relationships between actors differ both in different policy sectors and in the same policy sector over time (Atkinson and Coleman, 1992; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992a; Rhodes, 1986). Network approaches are attractive because they enable policy analysts to carry out realistic analysis of policy-making in which policy comes from complex interactions of participants, and it allows the analysts to focus on a more informal picture of real policy-making processes (John, 1999; Parsons, 1995). According to John (1999), within network approaches, there are two kinds of influential frameworks: formal network framework (Laumann and Knoke, 1987) and the Marsh and Rhodes model or the so-called British policy network framework (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992a). Like other approaches, network approaches also suffer from criticisms. For instance, network approaches have a boundary problem as it is difficult to specify both where network begins and ends and who is in network (Kassim, 1993). In addition, Dowding (1995) criticizes that network characteristics cannot explain the nature of the network and the nature of the policy process because characteristics of components within networks are the driving force of their explanation. By re-examining some of Marsh and

Rhodes' case studies ([Marsh and Rhodes, 1992b](#)), he discovered that the resources and the strategies in bargaining, rather than network characteristics, mattered. In a similar vein, network approaches have been criticized because they tend to neglect institutions and the state by focusing on relationships ([John, 1999](#)). Moreover, it seems that network approaches fail to address 'who rules? why do they rule? how do they rule? in whose interest do they rule?' ([Daugbjerg and Marsh, 1998](#)). Namely, network approaches tend to pay little attention to the social and economic contexts within which networks operate. In addition, institutional settings of public decision-making may determine members of policy networks with excluding other actors from policy networks, affecting formation of policy networks ([Konig and Brauninger, 1998](#)).

2.6. Choosing an Approach

The previous section discussed five kinds of approaches to analyse policy-making. As described above, all the approaches have both strengths and weaknesses and none of them may be the 'anytime, anywhere best' approach ([John, 1999](#)). Clearly, policy-making can be more or less affected by all of those five factors. However, the degree of influence among them may differ from one policy issue to another. For instance, policies for art and music may be more influenced by ideas than economic interests of actors. Thus, within a nation, characteristics of policy-making in one policy issue may be different from another, and all policy-making in one nation cannot be then best explained only by one approach. Therefore, it may be appropriate to choose one approach which can capture prominent characteristics of a certain policy issue of interest ([John, 1999](#)). Then, in order to demonstrate validity of this proposition, the following part discusses policy-making in emission standards for automobiles in Japan and seeks to discover its main characteristics.

2.7. Characteristics of Policy-Making in Emission Standards

Although emission standards for automobiles in Japan have been one of the strictest in the world and passenger automobiles in Japan have been one of the most environmentally friendly in the word, there has been interestingly little literature on political analysis of the evolution of emission standards in Japan. In addition, even political analysis of policy-making in emission standards has been done only by one article in the Journal of Japanese Public Policy, according to the researcher's literature review. The article was written by the author ([Sagara, 2002](#)), which examined a new innovative automobile air pollution policy by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) and its impacts on the national emission standards. Sagara discovered that policy-making in emission standards at the national level mainly involved the Ministry of Transport (MoT), the Environmental Agency (EA) and the auto industry and they formed very close relationship, although the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the ruling party, are closely involved in the policy-making processes of emission standards. He found that all of them frequently interacted with each other and they were dependent on each other for resources because all of them had distinctive resources that were necessary for other actors; for instance, MoT had resources such as giving protection for the auto industry, the authority for road administration and expertise and knowledge; resources of the auto industry included economic resources, ability to influence results in implementation, interpersonal relationships with MITI and technical information; EA had resources such as authority for environmental administration, granting access to policy-making processes, strong public support, strong LDP's support, support from local governments and expertise and knowledge. Further, he found that the cooperative relationship among them and especially the strong cooperative relationship between MoT and the auto industry determined decision-making and policy outputs in emission standards. Although it seems that there has been no other literature on the political analysis of policy-making in emission standards, a few memoirs and documentary books mentioned the importance of close relationships between the state actors and the auto industry in emission standards in the 1970s. For instance, [Nishimura \(1976\)](#), a former Professor of Tokyo University, specified close relationships between the state actors and the auto industry in policy-making processes of emission standards. As a member of the research team of seven major cities including Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Yokohama city and Kawasaki city of Kanagawa, Nagoya city of Aichi and Kobe city of Hyogo, which examined the feasibility of the 1976 emission standards (0.25g/km for nitrogen oxides for passenger automobiles), Nishimura narrated what he experienced in the postponement of the 1976 emission standards. According to Nishimura, the auto industry was strongly incorporated into the policy-making processes of emission standards because the auto industry had influential economic resources and technical information. In addition, he pointed out that MoT, EA and the auto industry formed the network, which strongly influenced policy-making processes of emission standards and policy outputs. [Kawana \(1988\)](#), who was a journalist of Mainichi Shinbun (newspaper), similarly indicated the deterministic network between the state actors and the auto industry in policy-making processes of emission standards, in the second volume of his serial documentary books on pollution. In this volume, he described what happened in the establishment of the 1975/1976 emission standards, the enforcement of the 1975 emission standards (2.1g/km for carbon monoxide, 0.25g/km for hydrocarbon, 1.2g/km for nitrogen oxides for passenger automobiles) and the postponement of the 1976 emission standards. Kawana found the close relationships between MoT, MITI, EA, LDP and the auto industry in the policy-making processes of emission standards, which primarily influenced the policy-making processes and the policy outputs. In addition, he indicated the informal policy-making processes in emission standards, in which MoT, EA and the auto industry discussed emission standards so that the interests of the auto industry were strongly reflected into the policy outputs. According to Kawana, the auto industry was a very powerful actor because it had influential economic resources and technical information. Although there are a limited number of evidences, all of them pointed out that the relationships between the state actors and the auto industry might be the deterministic factor in policy-making of emission standards. Indeed, it has been often claimed that

relationships both between public actors and private actors must be the key to understand Japanese politics ([Tsujinaka, 1988](#)). According to Tsujinaka, this is especially true where the state actors and a certain industry has the ‘Amakudari’ relationship, in which private and public corporations, which are linked to or under the jurisdiction of their ministries or agencies, accept the retired senior bureaucrats in high-profile positions ([Colignon and Usui, 2003](#)). In terms of the Amakudari relationship between the state actors and private actors, such a relationship is normally formed between ministries and the large companies or the strong industry association, which has influential resources, often economic resources, and whose cooperation is significant for ministries in both the establishment and implementation of policy. Some of the prominent examples of the Amakudari relationships are the connections between banks and Ministry of Finance (MoF) ([Suzuki, 2001](#)), the connections between MITI and MoT and the auto industry ([Boyd, 1987](#)), the connections between the pharmaceutical industry and Ministry of Health (MoH) (DPJ News, 14 July 1998; Mainichi Shinbun, 01 September 2006). Although the linkages between bureaucracy and private actors themselves are not remarkable and many similar linkages can be observed in other industrial nations, what is distinctive is:

‘the extensive use made of them. This is a consequence of the insulation of the industrial policy-making and implementation process from public debate. The government and industry relation is private, and considerable benefits accrue to the principal parties to the relationship because of that privacy which it is in their interests to protect. Effectively, they are constrained to use the channels that exist to come to agreement, lest the open expression of disagreement publicize the process and invite the involvement of otherwise excluded parties with conflicting interests to prevent (namely, the labour unions, environmental groups, opposition parties, women, small and medium enterprise associations)’ ([Boyd, 1989](#)).

Thanks to the strong linkages, industrial policy-making processes can be depoliticised because economic growth is beyond question and means for economic growth are considered as a set of technical choices best left to the elite bureaucratic cadre, which may be beneficial for both bureaucracy and industry (*ibid*). In addition, the Amakudari relationship is useful for the private actors because former bureaucrats with their connections to the government are a ‘valuable asset’ for them because they may avoid regulatory inspections, exchange information with ministries and secure preferential treatment from ministries ([Dominici, 2003](#)). The Amakudari relationship is beneficial for bureaucrats too because retired bureaucrats can normally be employed as a higher-rank manager, unbelievably very well paid (Gendai, 10 June 2006). Further, as mentioned above, the strong connections with industry constitute the key to the success of bureaucracy to carry out and implement policy. Day-to-day efforts over many years to maintain close and extensive relationships with industry can induce company to accept policy even where company considers that it appears costly and unfair. Thus, the relationship between them in Japan is ‘one of dependency’ ([Boyd, 1989](#)). Based on the discussion above, although the Amakudari relationship has been almost daily criticized in the public debate, it might be called ‘the necessary evil’ and indeed the belief that the strong connections between bureaucracy and industry have saved Japan from a crippling economic and political dependence upon the Industrial Western countries and created the conditions for a phenomenal economic success, contributes to the legitimisation of the strong government-industry connections in the management of the economy ([Boyd, 1989](#)). Political scientists such as [van Wolferen \(1989\)](#) have specified the Amakudari relationship as central features of political and economic structure of Japan, which strongly connect private and public sector together and prevent political and economic change. In addition, where the state actors and the private actors have very close relationship, especially the strong Amakudari relationship, political scientists have often found that the relationship determines policy-making processes and policy outputs ([Boyd, 1987](#)). As described above, although there are a few evidences, they all specified the strong connection between state actors and the auto industry, especially strong connection between MoT and the auto industry, in the policy-making processes of emission standards. The strong connection between MoT and the auto industry is one of the famous examples of the Amakudari relationship. MoT or the technology and safety department of the automobile transport bureau of MoT has played a central role in emission standards. Although EA determines emission standards, MoT or its technology and safety department implements them and decides a variety of things for the implementation such as grace periods. Moreover, because the success of emission standards depends much on MoT, EA needs to discuss emission standards with MoT when they are determined. Therefore, MoT, especially its technology and safety department, is highly influential in making emission standards. The Japanese Automobile Manufacturers Association (JAMA), which is the main association of all major automakers, has recruited ex-officials of the technology and safety department of MoT. Thus, MoT and the auto industry clearly have the Amakudari relationship. Further, Sagara and Kawana found that the connection between the state actors and the auto industry in making emission standards included the connection between MITI and the auto industry, which is also one of the well-known examples of the Amakudari relationship. Ex-officials who are recruited by automakers often once belonged to the automotive section or were a chief of the section. The automotive section deals with a wide range of automotive issues including the production of automobiles, the promotion of research and development of low emission automobiles, fuel efficiency standards and recycling of automobiles. Regarding the recent Amakudari situation, several automakers recruited ex-officials of MITI, including Michio Onishi (Executive Officer, Mitsubishi Motors) and Katsuhiro Nakagawa (Vice-President, Toyota). Thus, the Amakudari relationship between MITI and the auto industry can be easily observed. Unlike MoT and MITI, it seems that EA does not have the Amakudari relationship with the auto industry. However, as mentioned above, [Sagara \(2002\)](#) discovered the close resource-dependency relationship between EA and the auto industry in the policy-making processes of emission standards. The best option for EA is surely making emission standards ‘zero’. It is indeed possible for EA to choose that option but EA would not do so because no automaker would achieve the standards concerning the current level of technology of the automakers and no automobile could run on road in

Japan. Even, it is almost impossible for EA to establish so strict emission standards that entail excessive costs for the automakers because it would lead to a great increase in price of automobiles and the consequent confusion of the Japanese economy and the Japanese life. Thus, it can be said that emission standards need to be established based on Best Available Technique not at Excessive Cost (BATNEC). Namely, emission standards need to be as strict as technically and economically possible. In order to establish emission standards which satisfy such condition, technical information and cooperation of the auto industry are necessary. Consequently, EA needs to highly depend on the auto industry for its resources, especially technical information and cooperation, in order to carry out emission standards effectively. On the other hand, in order to make emission standards reasonable and acceptable for the auto industry, the industry needs to depend on EA for its resources, especially its authority both to grant access to policy-making processes of emission standards and to determine emission standards. Thus, they need to depend on each other for resources in policy-making processes of emission standards and the close relationship exists between them. In addition, because of the same reasons, MoT needs to depend on the auto industry for resources such as technical information and cooperation in implementation. If MoT fails to obtain technical information and cooperation in implementation, it would be highly difficult to implement effectively emission standards. In turn, the auto industry needs to be dependent on MoT for its resources such as the ability to determine grace periods. Moreover, although the Petrol Association of Japan (PAJ) recently became involved in the policy-making processes of emission standards because reducing sulphur components in gas oil was necessary to reduce emissions from diesel automobiles, as [Sagara \(2002\)](#) argues, no private actor but the auto industry was almost exclusively involved in the policy-making processes of emission standards because the technological level of the automakers was the one of the most important aspects for judgement to determine emission standards. As a result of exclusion of other industries or private actors, the connection both between MoT and the auto industry and between EA and the auto industry could be more strengthened, which could, it is supposed, make the connection between them more influential in the policy-making processes of emission standards. In summary, the policy-making processes of emission standards involve two kinds of strong connection or the Amakudari relationship both between MoT and the auto industry and between MITI and the auto industry. Further, the main nature of policy-making processes of emission standards is the close resource dependency both between EA and the auto industry and between MoT and the auto industry. Further, because only the auto industry is almost exclusively involved in the policy-making processes of emission standards, the connection both between EA and the auto industry and between MoT and the auto industry can be more powerful and then influential in the policy-making processes. Because of the Amakudari relationship, close resource dependent relationship and the exclusive position of the auto industry in the policy-making processes of emission standards, it might be reasonable to conclude that understanding the policy-making processes of emission standards and the evolution of emission standards would require examination of the relationship between the state actors and the auto industry. Therefore, it can be justified that studies of policy-making processes on emission standards in Japan should utilize network approaches whose strengths are shown when relationship between policy actors more significantly matter in policy-making processes. Surely, other factors, including institutions, socio-economic factors, ideas of policy actors and rational choice of policy actors, may be relevant to the policy-making processes of emission standards, and they may provide another insight into the policy-making processes of emission standards when they are utilized in analysing the evolution of emission standards in Japan. However, considering the limited time and resources that researchers usually have, they had better utilize network approaches as an analytical tool for understanding the evolution of emission standards.

3. Conclusions

This paper sought to demonstrate it would be a wiser idea to choose an approach for analysing policy-making process after examining main characteristics of policy-making in a focused policy area than before so doing.

In order to validate this proposition, this paper first discussed pros and cons of the most widely used four approaches. Then, it was confirmed that all of them are never, "anytime, anywhere best" approach. After this confirmation, this paper examined policy making process of emission standards for automobiles in Japan as a case study. In this case study, it was found that relationships matte most in policy making of emission standards for automobiles in Japan, and the paper strongly expects that network approaches can most effectively explain its policy making. Surely, other components, especially ideas and rational choice, seem relevant to the policy making of emission standards in Japan. Therefore, it may not be inappropriate to complement network approaches by jointly using these components. However, even in that case, the main approach should be still networks approach as the main feature of policy making of emission standards is relationships.

It is no use disputing over which approach must be superior because all of the approaches have specific conditions in which they can perform better than others. Rather, researchers should focus on which one most effectively capture the main characteristics of policy making in a focused area.

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