

[Nancy Odeh](#)

Nancy's Reaction

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Transnational Environmental Networks and Diffusion

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Reimann's (2001) paper is structured as a case study about the mobilization of Japanese NGOs in the context of the Third Conference of the Parties (CoP-3) of the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was held in Kyoto, Japan in 1997. Reimann questions the origins, or more specifically, the drivers behind the, then, recent emergence of international environmental NGOs in Japan given the historical domestic barriers to organizing advocacy groups. Reimann offers what she refers to as, an "international factors model" to help explain the flurry of NGO activity in Japan around the time of CoP-3. Reimann's model comprises three international processes: international political opportunities, transnational diffusion, and socialization of state actors. Reimann concludes that there are limitations to the "international factors model": first, it is unclear how pervasive external international factors have been with respect to all NGOs; and second, this model might apply less to contexts in which governments are less involved in global policy. Reimann also claims that, in some respects, Japanese activists face similar challenges to their Southern counterparts. I did not know what to make of this statement – it strikes me that the political and socio-economic obstacles to NGO activity in the South would be tremendously different to those in an industrialized, wealthy, democratic nation like Japan.

In my view, Keck and Sikkink's chapters (1998) is both very well written and quite comprehensive. The authors provide a discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of transnational advocacy networks in addition to analyzing a number of case studies of environmental advocacy networks around the world. In terms of the theory – or conceptual frameworks – that Keck and Sikkink draw from, both constructivist theory and social movement theory inform their views of transnational advocacy networks. It is also noteworthy that the authors reject the separation between international relations and comparative politics, in addition, to liberal institutionalist theory.

Rodrigues, examines transnational environmental advocacy from the angle of the engagement of local NGOs. Rodrigues focuses on the role of local groups and NGOs and she identifies a number of challenges that these local entities face when operating within a transnational network. These challenges include: creating a working consensus among members about the objectives of their activism; formulating a unique local approach to the environmental issue at hand; garnering support from other organizations that operate internationally; and adopting endogenous strategies despite the fact that international groups tend to adopt advocacy efforts that focus on the international arena.