

Japan's Domestic Politics on FTA Policy: An Analysis of the JSEPA Negotiation Process

KIM, Jemma

Despite the diffusion of the FTA, “the third wave” in the 1990's, Japan has benefited from the WTO and held a negative attitude toward bilateral FTA. However, the Japanese government is actively and strategically pursuing bilateral FTA with its trade partners such as Singapore, Mexico, Malaysia and other Asian countries. Why and how did these policies change?

Drawing on the JSEPA negotiation process as a case study, this article looks at the reason for the changes in Japan's domestic policy thinking, the process that led to these outcomes and to the particular pattern of policy shift development. Using interviews, from Japan's government FTA policymakers (MOFA, METI, MAFF), and interest groups, such as Keidanren, JA-Zenchu, I empirically explore the factors by which Japan is moving toward FTA. As an analysis framework I first classified the period into the preliminary period, the first half period, the latter half period, and the convergence period. Secondly, I presented the composition of each actor, their preferences and examined the dynamism of patterns between conflict and cooperation among the actors as observed through the JSEPA policymaking process.

In conclusion, I found that Yoshio Yatsu, former Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries played a key role in persuading agriculture-related groups (MAFF, JA-Zenchu, Zoku-giin) to come to a consensus on FTA. This means that the influence and pressure between ministries were not the factors causing the trade shift as understood by previous research. Rather the “inner adjustment among the agriculture-related groups” was the main factor in Japan's trade policy shift. JSEPA is in the initial stage of Japan's trade policy shift taking a role in the mitigation of the so called FTA taboo.