

Japan's Refugee Policy and Practice:

How has Refugees' Agency Challenged Japan's Refugee Protection Structure?

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It is often perceived that the immigration and asylum policy of Japan is so tightly governed and controlled in a completely state-driven manner that it has allowed little room for refugees' agency to influence it. My research challenges this perception, based upon five empirical case studies, in which refugees' agency has greatly influenced the historical evolution of Japan's refugee protection policy over the past 40 years. It locates the case studies and my analyses within the 'agent-structure' theoretical debate, understanding refugees and asylum seekers as political agents and the Japanese refugee protection policy as a structure. The overall analytical method is process-tracing. Empirical evidence was collected by a combination of semi-structured interviews with policy makers and refugees; archive research of mainly public documents; grey literature review (e.g. unpublished memoirs of previous decision-makers); and participant observation (as I used to work as a national and international civil servant).

Naoko Hashimoto is Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Social Sciences, Hitotsubashi University. She holds PhD in Politics from University of Sussex (as a Nippon Foundation International Fellow), LLM in International Human Rights Law from University of London, and Master of Studies in Forced Migration from the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford (as a John Swire Scholar). Prior to her PhD studies, she worked as a national and international civil servant for nearly 15 years for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Ministry of Justice among other institutions in New York, Geneva, northern Sri Lanka, and Tokyo. While teaching at the Global Leaders Program in Hitotsubashi, she supervises master's students dissertations as Research Associate at the Refugee Law Initiative, University of London, as well.

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