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Constructing Climate Governance

Regulatory Convergence of Fuel Economy Standards for
Passenger Cars in Europe, Japan and the US

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Constructing Climate Governance: Regulatory Convergence of Fuel Economy
Standards for Passenger Cars in Europe, Japan and the US
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Outline

There is no doubt that the issue of the climate change has been the most contested environmental issue internationally over the last decades. The reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂) gained many attentions from the government, civil society and businesses. The main reason is that climate change issue is not only an environmental issue, but also reduction of CO₂ emissions deeply affects countries' energy policies as well as the structure of economic activities.

In particular, the role of business actors in international environmental politics has been gaining scholarly attentions in the discipline of International Relations (IR) in recent years. Business actors attracts such scholarly attentions because business interests are directly affected by environmental regulations, and their activities contribute the global environment both *negatively* and *positively*. That is to say, while they affect the global environment negatively as their economic activities inevitably pollute the environment and spending huge resources to block any improvement in environmental regulations through lobbying activities; at the same time, they are likely to promote the adoption of higher environmental standards in home country in order to create a global or regional level playing field.

Automobile industry displays an interesting case for our journey to explore business involvements in international climate politics due to following reasons. Firstly, the road transport sector is responsible for a large proportion of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions, accounts for about 17% of total global CO₂ emissions, which are likely to rise with growing automobile production. Secondly, they create state's economic development and employment, thus, it is commonly argued that enhancing the international competitiveness of the automobile industry is essential to the prosperity of a state. Thirdly, enhancements of competitiveness of automobile industry require stringent fuel economy regulations to foster sustainable technologies that could potentially contribute to the solution to environmental degradations. Finally, we are witnessing converging trends of stringent fuel economy regulations between major automobile manufacturing regions of Europe, Japan and the United States in recent years.

This thesis studies fuel economy regulations in Europe, Japan and the United States. It aims to research 1) *How automobile industry can transform from the position of 'dragger' to 'pusher' towards solution of climate change issue and what are driving*

forces behind of such transformation? and 2) *Despite the fact that fuel economy regulations have been developed differently in Europe, Japan and the US, why are fuel economy standards for 2020–2025 in these countries converging? What are the political dynamics behind this trend?*

Hence, the objective of this thesis is twofold. The first is to explain why fuel economy standards for 2020-2025 in Europe, Japan, and the US are converging. Specifically, it aims to answer how and why has the EU introduced the highest fuel economy regulations? (*Chapter 2*) How and why Japan adopted one of the highest fuel economy standards in the world, along with the EU? (*Chapter 3*) Finally, why, despite the US being the world's first country to introduce fuel economy regulations, has been stagnant for more than 20 years? Why are recent US fuel economy regulations now converging with the Japanese and European standards? (*Chapter 4*).

The second research objective relates to the core questions of business actor approach in the discipline of international environmental politics, namely, to reveal how automobile industry can transform from the position of 'dragger' to 'pusher' towards solution of climate change issue and to address driving forces behind of such transformation.

In order to explain these two research objectives, this thesis focuses on following variables that *cause* regulatory convergence of fuel economy standards and factors that transforms business position to the pusher: the 'Motive' of the enhancement of fuel economy regulations; the 'Competitiveness issues' that how enhancing industry competitiveness affect the regulations; the 'Decision-making process' of each regulation that backed up to materialize stringent targets; the 'Business positions' towards the stringent standards; 'NGOs role' that change behaviors of government and business to support for the stringent targets; and 'Critical juncture' that directed towards stringent fuel economy regulations.

By addressing these two aims, this thesis advances the study of fuel economy regulation for passenger automobiles in the discipline of international relations by following three fronts.

1. The first contribution is to bridge the enduring gap between the disciplines of IR and environmental studies by challenging the existing studies in this field. It adds new insight to the role of non-state actors in international environmental

politics by showing how the automobile industry which operates globally but its strategy is strongly attached to national governments, can be Agency to bring about changes towards low-carbon society. Agency here refers to an actor who possesses the ability to prescribe behavior and to obtain the consent of the governed (Biermann et al. 2009b, pp.37-43). This strand of research is labeled as 'Agency beyond the State' in the recent academic discourse. The key focus is placed on the need of the further investigations on whether nation-states can fulfill their core functions under the pressure of various environmental degradations, and to what extent non-state actors are filling new governance demands. More importantly, the approach enables us not only to look at the activities of non-state actors in earth system governance confined to "lobbying and advising national governments in the creation and implementation of rules", but also their roles as agency where they "substantially participate in/or set their own rules related to the interactions between humans and their natural environment" (Biermann et al. 2009b, pp.37-43). Much of the climate policies relating to the automobile industry have been made at either a national (Japan and the US) or regional level (the EU), and making their approach one of 'Agency *with, but beyond* the States' rather than just 'Agency *beyond* the States'. Therefore, first challenge is to present how the industry with large CO₂ emissions that operates globally but very much engaged with their national governments, is operating a role as 'Agency' in international environmental politics.

2. Second, by revealing the logic of regulatory convergence on car fuel economy among developed countries, this thesis adds new insights to the discussion of 'race to the bottom or to the top' over regulatory competition and convergence (Drezner, 2001; Holzinger & Knill, 2004; Janicke & Jacob, 2004; Prakash & Potoski, 2006; Saikawa, 2013; Scharpf, 1997). Conventionally, the 'race to the bottom' of the regulatory convergence suggests that such convergence is based on the lowest common denominator because states are more likely to gravitate toward policies of the most laissez-fair country (Drezner 2001, p.59). On contrary, the 'race to the top' of the regulatory convergence suggests countries compete over the stringent environmental standards for the sake of enhancing

industry competitiveness. I argue that the regulatory convergence associating with fuel economy regulation among major automobile manufacturing nations are based on the race to the top. Moreover, I emphasize that what guides such regulatory competition is based on the normative consideration to stay competitive in the international automobile market.

3. Third, the findings of this thesis would make practical contributions towards the solution of climate change issue. It demonstrates how regulatory convergence that are born out of competition among major automobile manufacturing nations, can be the 'de-facto standard' in order to reduce CO₂ from the road transport sector. I argue regulatory convergence among Europe, Japan and the US becomes the 'de-facto standard' and place its influence over newly emerging countries such as China and India. Altogether, Japanese, European and the US automobile manufacturers dominate global vehicle production, with the total numbers of passenger automobile market sales in these three regions totaling more than 20 million throughout 2007 to 2010, out of 60 million passenger automobiles produced globally. If China and India export their automobile products to those countries, they would have to satisfy the regulatory standards among those major automobile manufacturing countries and the region. In other words, the regularity convergence among major automobile manufacturing markets work as the de-facto standard that influences the behavior of all states that produce automobiles, regardless of the divisions of North and South, developed or developing countries. These findings would have a great impact on the study of global climate governance.