

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910172218803321
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Titolo	The problem of bureaucratic rationality : tax politics in Japan / / Junko Kato
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Princeton, N.J., : Princeton University Press, c1994
ISBN	9786612752124 9781282752122 128275212X 9781400821556 140082155X 9781400812264 1400812267
Edizione	[Course Book]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (342 pages)
Disciplina	354.520072/4
Soggetti	Bureaucracy - Japan Civil service - Japan Taxation - Japan
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. 287-303) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Tables -- Acknowledgments -- Note on Conventions -- Abbreviations -- Introduction -- CHAPTER ONE. Bureaucratic Rationality and Strategic Behavior: The Framework -- CHAPTER TWO. Bureaucratic Rationality and Strategic Behavior: Japanese Tax Reform -- CHAPTER THREE0. Lessons for Bureaucrats: From the Proposal for a Tax Increase in the Late 1970's to Fiscal Reconstruction without a Tax Increase in the Early 1980's -- CHAPTER FOUR. Reframing the Tax Issue: The Ministry of Finance's Fiscal and Tax Policies in the Early 1980's -- CHAPTER FIVE. The Tax Reform Proposal in the mid-1980's: Uneasy Cooperation between Prime Minister Nakasone and the Ministry of Finance -- CHAPTER SIX. The Third Attempt: Introduction of the Consumption Tax and the Securities Trading Scandal -- CHAPTER SEVEN. Conclusion: Bureaucracy, Party, and the Power of Rationality -- Notes -- Bibliography -- Chronology of the Tax Reform Process from 1975 to 1991 -- Index

Through a detailed account of the political battles over Japanese tax reform during the last two decades, Junko Kato draws an unconventional portrait of bureaucratic motivation, showing how fiscal bureaucrats exploit their unique technical knowledge to influence policymaking. Rejecting the notion that the monopolization of policy expertise leads to bureaucratic domination, Kato contends that bureaucrats seek to increase their influence upon politicians by strategically sharing information. She also explores the reason for the relative strength of the bureaucratic organization in comparison to the governing party, whose interest in reelections and intra-party politics may pose dilemmas for individual politicians. In 1989, the Japanese Diet enacted a broad-based consumption tax after two failed attempts and in the face of widespread public disapproval. Its passage was all the more remarkable for coming just as a series of dramatic financial scandals had begun to undermine popular support for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, fore-shadowing its fall from power four years later. Kato argues that skillful maneuvering by the Ministry of Finance, determined to ensure stable long-term revenues, was decisive in persuading a majority of legislators to oppose their constituents in endorsing an unpopular program of tax reform. Her careful analysis of the Japanese case holds important implications for the study of bureaucratic power and public policy in advanced industrial democracies elsewhere in East Asia and the West.

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