

The relationship between Japan and Africa is a relatively less explored field, but the paucity of attention is not necessarily reflective of the degree of its complexity. Instead, it has to do partly with linguistic barriers, partly with 'psychological' distance, and partly with the low level of interdependence between Japan and Africa.



It is therefore remarkable to see the publication of three books on Japan-Africa relations in the same year, in the English language, by Japanese and non-Japanese (including African) experts. Although the books vary in what they seek to (and do) accomplish, they all single-mindedly grapple with interactions between Africa and Japan, as they presumably are and as they ought to be. Moreover, it is clear from what is said or suggested in the books that the rise of China and its increased activities in Africa provide a foreground for the analyses.

The two major issues examined with varying degrees of emphasis in the books under review, which are of particular interest to this reviewer, are the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) – there have been four such conferences to date – and China's increased activities in Africa, in the context of their potential impact on Japan-Africa relations. I would first share my thoughts on the two issues and then proceed to review each book briefly.

Africa and TICAD

In the literature about TICAD, there is a tendency to conceptualize it as if it were devoid of historical context and to view it as unchanging or unchangeable phenomenon. My argument here is that the study of TICAD diplomacy has lagged behind TICAD diplomacy, and that TICAD diplomacy has indeed run its course, coming to a halt around 2005.

TICAD diplomacy formally began in 1993 when Japan launched the forum to deliberate on how the human condition can be improved in Africa. First proposed by Japan at the UN General Assembly in 1991, TICAD was based on the twin premises that 'Africa needs the partnership of the developed nations' and 'Africa needs to help itself'. But the initiative was also an outcome of Japan's desire for greater legitimacy and leadership in the wider international community.

Japan's aspiration for a permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council and its interest in garnering support of the African voting bloc after the end of the Cold War were also relevant factors for the birth of TICAD. As one Japanese-Africanist put it, Japan was seeking at this time to become 'a political power'. From this perspective, Japan had to take diplomatic initiatives and show a degree of independence from the West. In a short span of time, Japan was therefore transformed from a 'reactive' to a 'post-reactive' state,

Japan-African Relations: Applying the Asian Development Experience to Sub-Saharan Africa

by B. Z. Osei-Hewdie and K. Osei-Hewdie

Institute for African Development (Ithaca, Cornell University), 2010

x, 72 pp. + references

ISBN-13: 978-0-9802223-4-0

Japan-Africa Relations

by Tukumbe Lumumba-Kasongo

Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

xv, 277 pp. + references, index

ISBN: 978-0230-61932-6

Japan and Africa: Globalization and Foreign Aid in the 21st Century

by Howard P. Lehman (ed.)

London & NY: Routledge, 2010

xvii, 157 pp. + references, index

ISBN: 978-0-415-56217-1

at least on some African issues, exhibiting its relative independence from the West. On the occasion of the G8 Okinawa summit in July 2000, for instance, Japan extended invitations to the leaders of South Africa, Algeria, and Nigeria for 'outreach dialogue' with industrialized nations. Never before had African leaders been given such an opportunity to consult with the leading industrialized nations at a G8 summit. The TICAD phase of Africa-Japan relations also coincided with the first ever Africa visit by a Japanese prime minister. Yoshiro Mori went to South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria in 2001. Prime Minister Mori's successor, Junichiro Koizumi, visited Ghana and Ethiopia four years later. In short, TICAD diplomacy ushered in a period of fairly reinvigorated diplomatic activities of Japan vis-à-vis Africa.

As an initiative born out of a self-confident Japan, TICAD diplomacy reflected Japan's international status as well as its aspirations at a particular time. Japan held the prestigious position of top Official Development Assistance (ODA) donor from 1991 to 2000, and saw itself (and was seen by others) as the undisputed 'aid power' in the world.

The post-TICAD diplomacy of Japan began around 2006, and is still under way. It is to be recalled that TICAD IV was itself inaugurated in Yokohama (Japan) in May 2008. Notwithstanding the high-profile nature of the 2008 conference, Japan's diplomacy in Africa since 2006 was much less vigorous than in the previous years. But this change, too, had its own causes. By 2006, the conditions that gave rise to TICAD diplomacy at the beginning of the 1990s

had for the most part dissipated or were nonexistent. Among other things, Japan had ceased to be the top ODA donor in dollar terms. In 2006, Japan ranked fifth among the world's 22 major ODA donors, its lowest ranking since 1972; and as Japan's position changed, so did its international aspirations.

It was also instructive that none of Japan's prime ministers who succeeded Junichiro Koizumi after 2005 visited Africa. Not even Prime Minister Taro Aso, the first prime minister of Japan to have briefly lived and worked in Africa, found the time to travel to Africa. Japan's Africa diplomacy in the post-TICAD phase has been devoid of much dynamism and vitality.

But post-TICAD diplomacy refers more to a historical period in Japan-Africa relations, as indicated above, than to a specific condition of the relationship. In other words, when we say TICAD, what it is and what it is not is generally clear, with a shared understanding about the general patterns and level of intensity of Japan's diplomacy in Africa. The same cannot be said about post-TICAD diplomacy. As a terminology, therefore, post-TICAD diplomacy is to some extent an admission of ignorance. The term is devoid of content and does not refer to a defining issue or set of issues. It does not even necessarily suggest that Japan would, in this period, be involved in Africa more or less deeply. Post-TICAD diplomacy merely denotes that it comes after and is different from TICAD diplomacy.

And yet, it is clear that the post-TICAD diplomacy of Japan in Africa is taking place against a background of stepped-up Chinese activities in the continent. In 2005, China replaced Japan as the second major importer of African oil. In 2007, China's trade with Africa was almost three times that of Japan,

and the gap has widened rapidly. From Angola to Burundi, from Cameroon to the Central African Republic and Chad, China has become one of the principal trading partners for several countries in Africa. We can therefore say that China's activities in Africa certainly provide the context for Japan's post-TICAD diplomacy in the continent. But how does China in Africa influence Japan's post-TICAD diplomacy?

China and Japan in Africa

China and Japan have followed divergent and sometimes contradictory approaches in their relations with Africa, with the growing power of China and its ambition for global hegemony sharpening the contrast in recent years. The divergent patterns of external behavior of the two countries indeed emanate from a fundamental difference in the long-standing principles of their political classes. Related to this is also the discordant perception of 'self' and the 'other'. Japan is part of the Global North geo-politically; China considers itself part of the 'Third World'. Continuity has nevertheless marked the behaviors of Japan and China in Africa, even as each strove to make adjustments to the changing structures of the international system while, at the same time, trying to change the system itself in desirable ways.

Recently, China has overtaken Japan in the level of economic interactions with Africa. China has also bolstered its growing economic presence in Africa with an equally formidable soft power. China has replaced not only Japan but even some former colonial powers as major trading partner as well as source of aid and investment for many African countries.

Historically, Japan has not only been the first non-European country to successfully industrialize but it was also the only non-European economic powerhouse. Primarily for ideological reasons, however, Japan's policies toward Africa in the past had dovetailed that of the West. The rise of China now only adds to the ranks of successfully industrialized nations of non-European stock, but more importantly, China emerges as a major power whose ideology, too, is different.

A large number of Africa's rulers now view China as a model of development. The reasoning involved here is, first, that the socio-economic conditions and the historical experiences of China are broadly similar to those in many African countries. The second and related reason has more to do with China's continued success in modernizing its economy in a relatively short period of time. Additionally, China is viewed as a model because the neo-liberal approach to development has been presumably tried and failed in Africa. Many leaders in Africa warmly embrace China because of its non-interventionist inclinations as well. Of course, China's



approach has sometimes provoked criticism from the West, especially with regard to the former's economic dealings with Africa's undemocratic regimes. But this type of criticism is ironic, since the Western critics seem to expect China to demand a higher democratic standard than what is practiced by the West itself. Moreover, many of these critics make generally no issue about the economic engagement of the West with (the same) China.

The discourse about China in Africa also pits those who see China as an exploitative and neo-colonial power, on the one hand, and those who view it as a force for good in the continent on the other. Without prejudice to either of these positions, however, one can definitely say that the return of China to Africa since the 1990s has significantly reduced the steady marginalization of the continent in world affairs.

Empirical evidence, logic and common sense thus suggest that the rise of China would have a dampening effect on Japan-Africa relations. But that should not be necessarily the case. The relations between Japan and Africa could be enhanced because of China's greater involvement in Africa, not in spite of it, with greater mutual benefit for China, for Japan and for Africa. The reasons for this include both demonstration effect and economic imperatives.

There are indications that Japanese leaders are already closely observing what China is doing in Africa and are making necessary adjustments. The quest for critical raw materials and the need for diversifying sources would also motivate Japan to forge closer ties with Africa. China is not only consuming more of its own raw materials, some of which it used to export to Japan, but its appetite for critical raw materials in Africa has been growing over the last several years. What this also means is that Africa could become an arena of cooperation and competition between the two Asian powers.

It should be noted that Japan and China also share more than we sometimes realize. Japan, too, had been subject to Western encroachment on its sovereignty but it was never colonized. And Japan, too, had been less predisposed after the Second World War to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries even though the restraint was less rooted in the principle of non-intervention. Japan had no appetite for intervention because of its political culture that has historically tended to discourage diplomatic activism in general and its postwar constitution that has imposed considerable constraint on the foreign activities of the nation.

Another area of convergence between Japan and China in Africa is the focus on infrastructure. A lot has been said about the fact that China pays significant attention to Africa's infrastructure in its aid and investment. What is equally true is that more than 40 per cent of Japan's official economic aid to Africa, at least in the last two decades, was invested in the infrastructure sector.

Further, preliminary evidence suggests that there is a connection between Japan's aid diplomacy in China and China's aid diplomacy in Africa. In its economic activities in Africa, China has been practicing what it had learned from Japan over the years as an aid recipient. If Japan is indeed the genesis of China's aid diplomacy in Africa, the implications are significant. For one thing, this would also mean that the Chinese approach to development aid is less radical than it is widely believed. In any case, further investigation of Chinese and Japanese development assistance would be useful for understanding how the engagement between Africa and Asia's two major powers could have a more positive and durable impact in Africa.

The Books under Review

The monograph by B. Z. Osei-Hewdie and K. Osei-Hewdie deals with the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). The authors examine TICAD and assess its achievements. They also address major issues about the relevance of the East Asian model for Africa's development. Their articulation of what the East Asian model is and whether or not it is relevant is, however, logically untenable. The major strength of the monograph is that it raises fundamental questions about the matter under consideration even if it falls short of satisfactorily answering them. The discussion also deepens our understanding of TICAD without, however, adequately clarifying the philosophy and politics underlying it.

A product of several visits to Japan, Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo's *Japan-Africa Relations* is a significant book for at least two reasons. It is the first book after Jun Morikawa's *Japan and Africa: Big Business and Diplomacy* (1997) to come out as a major, single-authored book written in the English language about the relationship between Japan and Africa. It is also arguably the first of its kind to integrate firmly Japan-Africa relations into the broader political economy of North-South relations by drawing upon theories of international relations. A densely-written treatise with invaluable theoretical insights, the book has the objective of studying the complexity of the relationship between Japan and Africa, examining the trends and analysing the policy implications.

Lumumba-Kasongo's book is a supermarket of ideas about several themes ranging from the Bandung Conference to the nature of African and Japanese states and from 'Pax-Nipponica' to 'Pax-Africana'. The book also asks questions which it does not pretend to answer, paving the way for future researchers. Even if one may have reservations about aspects of the theoretical interpretations, especially in chapter two, no serious Africanist would dispute the potential utility of the concepts and theories deployed in the book by political scientist Lumumba-Kasongo. The significance, too, of the various themes of the book's chapters cannot be lost to a serious reader, but the author does not take even that for

granted; in each chapter, he helpfully explains how that particular theme is pertinent to Japan-Africa relations, whether the theme is Japan's economic model or the nature of its party politics, its pacific political culture or its international cooperation in the field of education. Those who expect a historical and descriptive analysis of Africa-Japan relations would probably find this book less relevant to their interest but those who are theoretically inclined would find it most useful. Reading the thick book with a series of loosely linked chapters can also be exhausting at times, but it is nonetheless rewarding.

Recent books written on Japan-Africa relations either deal with multiple issues or focus on limited number of African states. But Howard Lehman's book, *Japan and Africa: Globalization and Foreign Aid in the 21st Century*, overcomes these limitations as it is concerned almost exclusively with a single issue (Japan's economic aid) and is focused on the entire continent (Africa). Unified by the notion that 'self help' is the pillar of Japan's aid policy to Africa, the edited book is an amalgamation of six or seven fine essays by some of the leading thinkers about Japan's economic aid.

Makoto Sato's ambitious chapter revolves around Kent Calder's 'theory' of 'Japan as a reactive state'. The theory does not apply to Japan-Africa relations, Sato claims, because Japan's actions, reactions and inactions vis-à-vis Africa are shaped more by the actions of third parties. Calder formulated his theory more than twenty years ago in an article entitled, 'Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the Reactive State'. Sato's claim, which is also a pillar of the major thesis of the chapter, unfortunately stands on shaky ground for two reasons. One is, as Sato himself points out, that Calder did not intend his 'theory' to be applied specifically to Japan-Africa relations. If that is the case, could we legitimately critique a theory for not serving a purpose for which it was not designed in the first place? If we still insist on applying Calder's theory to Japan-Africa relations, we are bound to face another challenge. Calder himself had changed his original position in an article published in 2003, entitled 'Japan as a post-Reactive State', an article which is curiously missing in Sato's list of references. If Calder himself was saying that Japan is no longer a reactive state, then on what ground would we invoke his theory?

Sato's own original observation that Japan reacted primarily to events elsewhere rather than to those in Africa in its policy toward the continent is nevertheless valid, though it is also true that Japan was neither the first nor the only major power to do so. Africa could not, quite simply, dictate how a major power should behave towards it. The chapter also provides important insights into the motives of Japan's foreign aid to Africa. The periodization of Japan's Africa policy may be regarded as another significant contribution of the chapter by Makoto Sato.

Howard Lehman's chapter gives full weight to the factors which militate against the applicability of the East Asian model to African development; it also makes an effectively reasoned argument for what should take place in Africa for a fruitful adaptation of this model in the continent. Lehman is more realistic in his approach; but his analysis is also more abstract.

'The Ambiguous Japan' by Motoki Takahashi is perhaps the most substantive chapter in the book. It begins with a tale of the transmutations of Japan's identity in the last one hundred years: Japan as victor, Japan as villain, and Japan as victim. The author analyses the key concepts, the history and philosophy of Japan's foreign economic aid and its unique features. We learn, in this chapter, several basic facts, such as that Japan's aid to Asia, unlike Japan's aid to Africa, was provided for historically specific reasons, with no strings attached, especially with respect to policy issues, that it was much larger and that it was vastly different in quality. Takahashi examines in detail the genesis of the idea of 'self-help' which is said to anchor Japan's foreign economic aid in general, but he also challenges the notion that the philosophy of Japan's aid to Africa is broadly similar to that of Japan's aid to Asia.

Junichi Hasegawa's chapter, which is concerned with international debt as it relates to Africa, analyses a technical subject. The first section of the chapter describes how growth collapses as a result of debt. Using his apparent mastery of the skill of explaining a complex subject more accessibly, Hasegawa also gives account of why Japan was first hesitant to cancel the debt of Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC's). Nobuyuki Hashimoto deals with policy and aid coordination among donors. The last chapter by Motoko Takahashi is another well-thought out analysis of both the politics and economics of development aid.

In a nutshell, Howard Lehman's book provides rich analyses and original insights about Japan's aid policy toward Africa. The authors of the different chapters go to great length to help the reader grasp more fully what 'self-help' means, sometimes by linking it up with Japan's own historical experiences. In closing, it can be safely said that the conceptual interpretations provided in the book are bound to be contested, which is, of course, not a bad thing as it would only vitalize the debate and inspire further investigations.

The publication of the books under review is welcome news. That the major themes therein are closely inter-related, with each theme highlighting different dimensions of the relationship, and that the books were all suitably published in the same year, make them a uniquely valuable set of resources for understanding Japan-Africa relations.

