

A Comparative Study of Japan and China's African Diplomacy in Contemporary Historical Context

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Abstract

Japan and China¹, at various times and for different reasons, have been seen by a good number of African countries as 'models' or 'partners' primarily because of their non-prescriptive diplomatic approach (and perhaps their non-western background). This study juxtaposes Japan and China's relations with Africa by using evidence from the economic and politico-diplomatic spheres. It finds that China's relatively 'active' African diplomacy contrasts with Japan's generally 'low-profile' approach in African affairs. The central argument is that their respective patterns of African diplomacy derives *not* simply from an act of design but a product of the complex interplay of factors which include the different modes of historical contacts with Africa, the inherent variations in their respective domestic structures, role of actors in decision making and political economy. These combined set of factors provide a number of explanatory models to the patterns of Japan and China's African diplomacy within the framework of comparative foreign policy.

Keywords: Diplomacy, asymmetric relations, comparative foreign policy, development assistance, Japan, China and Africa.

Introduction

The existing body of literature on Japan's African policy, though relatively modest, skews largely towards her relationship with South Africa. This is quite understandable because for close to a century South Africa has been the most robust trade and investment partner for Japan on the African continent (Alden and Hirano 2003; Alden 2002; Osada 2002). On the other hand, contemporary writings on China's relationship with Africa focus on its resource diplomacy, surging trade and rising influence in Africa. This, to a certain extent, is equally justifiable because of the sudden astronomic growth in trade figures as well as the high-level diplomatic exchanges that flow with it (Taylor 2006; Klare and Volman 2006; Alden 2005). So far, scant attention (if any at all) has been paid to how Japan and China's pattern of relationship with Africa converge and

¹ In this paper, China refers to the People's Republic of China but data did not include Hong Kong and Macau. With respect to Africa in Japan's foreign policy, it comprises of 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Sudan are classified under the First Middle East Division in MOFA's organizational chart. See Diplomatic Bluebook 1998, Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

diverge as well as what factors explain their respective approaches. This study is an attempt to explore the similarities and differences in the patterns of Japan and China's African diplomacy and identify the factors that possibly explain their respective behavioral trajectories.

It is important to note that comparative approach to understanding Afro-Asian relations is not new. Indeed, an impressive body of literature abound which chronicles the political, socio-cultural and most especially, the developmental experiences of the two regions at the micro and macro levels (Nissanke and Aryeteey 2003; Adem 2006; Masaki 2005). However, probing Afro-Asian relations by analytically juxtaposing foreign policies across the divide has been a neglected and under-explored theme. With particular respect to explaining the pattern of Japan and China's African diplomacy in comparative context, Cornelissen and Taylor (2000) could be said to have blazed a trail to a certain extent and provide a useful point of departure. While they offered valuable (if not pioneering) insights to the subject by identifying some of the convergent and divergent issues in Japan and China's African policy, they ignored the underlying structural and systemic differences within both states and how these might have influenced their respective policy orientation and pattern of engagement with African states. Hence, the study ended up essentially probing *how* rather than addressing the equally pertinent question of *why* both states exhibit certain similar yet different behavioral patterns vis-à-vis the region that is comprised of the largest number of the world's developing countries. In this paper, an attempt is made to capture not only the dynamics of both states' relationships with Africa, but more importantly how the domestic political economy of the two Asian giants could have shaped their respective approaches to Africa affairs.

A Brief Historical Overview of China and Japan's Policy toward Africa

Although it is difficult to establish the period that the relationship actually began, available records suggest that China probably had some early contacts with Africa. There are different schools of thought on the nature and form of the early contacts (Jinyuan 1984: 241-250) but opinions converge that Sino-African exchanges date back thousands of years. Archaeological evidence such as the Chinese porcelain pieces, stone wares and coins of the Tang Dynasty excavated in Egypt, Kenya and Zanzibar as well as a clay figurine with the features akin to that of a black African found in a Tang tomb located in a Sian suburb in China lend credence to that assertion (Jinyuan 1984; Snow 1988). Besides, there are similar discoveries that point to early exchanges between China and Africa during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). There are other historical records which indicate that African envoys at various times offered Chinese emperors traditional African goods such as ivory, rhinoceros horns and animals such as zebra, ostrich and giraffe. Above all, Admiral Zheng Ho's several voyages to the African coast, according to some historical accounts, 'were the climax of China's efforts to develop relations with Africa' (Jinyuan 1984; Hull 1972; Ogusanwo 1974). Two sets of factors arrested this development. First, there was the change of policy by the Ming rulers who forbade maritime activities and second, the advent of European colonial incursion into Asia and Africa.

The next phase of the Sino-African contact would be in 20th century and that was marked by the recruitment of Chinese indentured labourers and coolies by white

colonialists in South Africa who shared in the pain and grief of discrimination with other native Africans. Meanwhile, after the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China and the growing quest for decolonization in Africa in the mid-20th century, China's relationship with Africa entered yet another phase. The Bandung Afro-Asian Conference of 1955 provided a unique forum for the Peoples' Republic of China to define its relationship with Africa on the basis of the Five Principles, and offer its support for the 'progressive' elements in Africa's 'legitimate struggle' to end colonialism. From that period up until the official publication of China's *African Policy Paper* in January 2006, Sino-African relations could be said to have passed through at least four major phases with each defined and influenced by a different set of factors.

The first phase was the era of Africa's liberation struggles that was marked by diplomatic containment of Taiwan, ideological competition with the Soviet Union (after the Sino-Soviet rift) and an anti-imperialist campaign against the capitalist West. The period witnessed intense Chinese support for liberation movements through provision of arms and training in guerrilla warfare and provision of infrastructure for the post-independence regimes that crested with the construction of TanZam railways. It is instructive to note that the first African state to extend diplomatic recognition to the PRC was Egypt in 1956. The second phase was characterized by a relative lull in China's engagement and provision of assistance to Africa (in the 1980s) having been preoccupied with its own domestic economic reform (Taylor 1998; Yu 1988; Sagal 1992) and the logic of channeling its limited resources to huge internal requirements. The third phase began with the Tiananmen crisis and Beijing's desire to win friends and sympathy (Yu 1991; Cornelissen and Taylor 2000) from African leaders, many of whom in their respective domestic polities faced internal dissent of one nature or another. Hence, the revival of aid diplomacy was symbolized by the rhetoric of a cultural relativist human rights that appealed to the sensibility of many African rulers in China's African diplomacy. The fourth phase (in the 2000s) could be seen in the light of the surging Chinese resource diplomacy in Africa and a general re-invigoration of China-Africa relations as shown in the publication of the China's African Policy in January 2006 and the subsequent hosting of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing. One common theme that consistently ran through all the phases was Beijing's unflinching commitment to the diplomatic ostracization of Taiwan which had seen the number of African countries that recognized it decline steadily to only five tiny states.² Hence, unlike the 'key-country' approach that seems to characterize Japan's African diplomacy, there is inherent logic in China's broad based 'all-weather' diplomacy towards African states.

On the other hand, determining when and how (or whether at all) early contacts were made between Japan and Africa is yet an unfinished business. As observed by one author, '[r]ecords of Japan's contact with, or knowledge of Africa during the pre-Meiji era are rather scanty and fragmentary' (Agbi 1992: 1-2). Although evidence points to the fact that the Japanese probably knew about Africa as far back as 16th century, the knowledge was 'poor, vague, uncoordinated, and at times, unreliable' (Agbi 1992). This is because the Portuguese, through whom the Japanese knew about Africa in the first place, discovered Japan by accident when in 1543 a group of Portuguese sailors had been carried in a storm to South Kyushu. The Portuguese, according to Agbi, presented

² The countries are Burkina Faso, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe, The Gambia and Swaziland.

to the Japanese Imperial Court the picture of Africa as a 'dark continent' whose uncivilized Negroes were only fit as labourers and servants in European plantations and homes. Therefore, if this account was valid, one can plausibly contend that early contact with Africans by the Japanese was unedifying and could have left unpleasant memories in its trail. The extent to which these memories have endured, and whether or not (and to what degree) they impact on contemporary perception of Africa in Japan is difficult to establish. The limited contact was nonetheless cut short with the subsequent adoption of the *sakoku* (closed door) policy by the Tokugawa Shogunate. For over two centuries afterwards, Japanese contact with the outside world was limited only to some Dutch and Chinese trading activities.

After the Imperial Restoration of 1876, Japan became preoccupied with the determination to get rid of the unequal treaties of 1858 imposed by Commodore Perry. The challenge of creating *fukoku kyohei* (rich nation, strong army) was the major concern among Japanese leaders and since Africa had nothing to offer in that regard while still reeling under colonial yoke, it follows that Afro-Japanese contact was almost non-existent, or at most, conducted via the European colonial lords. However, this does not translate to a lack of interest in Africa, as it is often assumed. To be sure, Japan had some form of colonial ambitions in Africa as discussions by some Japanese intellectuals in the pre-Russo-Japanese war era indicate. Among them, as noted by Agbi, was Dr Tomizu Hirono who in a published piece in 1897 entitled *Afurika no Zento* (Future of Africa) espoused the idea of Japanese imperialism in Africa. As he noted:

The theatres of interest in the twentieth century would be China and Africa. Recent reports indicate further European penetration of Africa...it would facilitate the acquisition of the wealth of Africa by the whites...In the next generation, the whites would refer to Africa not as the death continent, but 'golden continent.' But it is whites, not the yellow race, who will share the benefits. (Cited in Agbi, 1992)

Meanwhile, Japan, for some reasons, especially its preoccupation with Asia and the lack of the wherewithal to extend its reach and compete with the more entrenched European colonial powers in Africa, could not heed the implied academic advice by Tomizu-*sensei*. Contact with Africa in the colonial era was therefore conducted mainly through the European colonizers (Ampiah 1990; Schraeder 1995).

Another major point in early Japanese contact with Africa that is worth noting was during the Anglo-Boer War in 1899. Japan's interest was stimulated more by a desire to draw some military lessons from the war rather than in Africa affairs *per se* (Terutaro 1970; Agbi 1992). Not long before then, Furuya Komahei with his wife, Kiyoko, had arrived in Cape Town in 1898 as the first Japanese businessman to settle in South Africa (Osada 2002: 30). He was said to have opened a shop, *Mikado Shoten* (Emperor Shop) which lasted long after Furuya had returned to Japan in 1915 until it was shut down in 1942 when South African authorities expelled all Japanese residents from the Union and confiscated their assets (Osada 2002: 30). It is also documented that Japanese immigrant ships to South America made Cape Town an important supply base and that probably generated a desire by the Japanese government to have a representative in South Africa especially in the context of the stern anti-Asian

immigration laws in the Union. The subsequent establishment of a consulate in Cape Town in August 1918 marked the beginning of the diplomatic and economic relationship with South Africa, and later the rest of Africa as shown in the following table.

Table 1 Early Japanese Diplomatic Missions in Africa

Date	Diplomatic Missions Established	Trade Representatives
Aug. 1918	Consulate at Cape Town (South Africa)	
Dec. 1919	Consulate at Port Said (Egypt)	
Mar. 1926	Consulate at Alexandria (Egypt)	
Feb. 1932	Consulate at Mombasa (Kenya)	
Dec. 1933	--	Trade Bureau Correspondent at Nairobi (Kenya)
May 1934	--	Trade Bureau Correspondent at Casablanca (Morocco)
1936	Legation at Cairo	
Dec. 1936	Consulate at Casablanca	Trade Office at Nairobi
Oct. 1936	Legation at Cape Town	Trade Office at Casablanca
Feb. 1938	--	Trade Office at Lagos (Nigeria)

Source: MOFA, *'Kakkoku-Chuzai-teikoku-ryoji ninmen Zakken'* (Miscellaneous files concerning the appointment and termination of appointment of imperial consuls in various countries) cited in Agb (1992: 47).

Japan's economic relationship with The Union of South Africa grew rapidly and this generated some opprobrium in the OAU, in the Afro-Asian bloc and the United Nations General Assembly where Tokyo was perceived as not intensely pro-sanctions against the racist Pretoria government (Payne 1987; Ampiah 1997; Morikawa 1997). Meanwhile, the quest for strategic minerals in South Africa, commitment to the containment of communist expansion into Southern Africa as a member of the capitalist Western bloc and a desire to maintain the productive trade relationship with South Africa logically outweighed the resolutions of the other African and some Asian countries and therefore precluded Japan from providing support for anti-Apartheid forces that often were identified with or labeled as 'communists'.

The end of apartheid as well as the end of the cold war marked a turning point in Japan's African policy as it indicated the end of what Morikawa termed, *nigen kozo* (double preoccupation) that required placating other African countries on the one hand while engaging with the Apartheid regime on the other (Morikawa 1997). Hence, the re-invigoration of Japan's African diplomacy began with the inauguration of the Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD) which has been held consistently every five years since its maiden edition in 1993 (Horiuchi 2005). The visit to three African states (Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa) by Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori in 2001, the first by a serving Japanese Premier, followed later in 2006 by Prime

Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi's visit to Ethiopia and Ghana elevated Japan-African relations to a higher pedestal as far as top-level leadership exchanges are concerned. It would be recalled that the first time African leaders would be granted consultative status at a G8 Summit was in the Okinawa summit at the invitation of the then rotating Chair of the world's most industrialized countries, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori.

From the foregoing, the nature of early contacts and the historical evolution of Japan's and China's relationship with Africa followed different patterns. Early Chinese contact with Africa was somehow deliberate, direct and to a certain extent reciprocal. In the case of Japan, early contact was 'accidental', indirect and generally 'fragmentary'. While China provided support for some liberation movements and anti-Apartheid forces because of its own similar historical experience of foreign domination, Japan's membership of the Western bloc especially its alliance with the United States not only precluded it from doing so, but necessitated the propping of the Apartheid regime, together with other Western nations as bulwark against the spread of communism in Southern Africa. Hence, the different evolutionary patterns could, in part, explain some of the differences in the contemporary trajectory that both Asian giants follow in their engagement with Africa. More importantly, the extant style of engagement would possibly have its roots in the perception and stereotypes about Africa which are traceable, *ab initio*, to the mode of early contacts as discussed above. To be sure, there are some who hold the view that Africa and Africans occupy the bottom rungs in the Japanese worldview and therefore, have not commanded much intellectual and diplomatic attention in spite of all the worthy things Japan has been doing for Africa (Adem 2006).

Evidence of Convergence and Manifestation of Divergence in Japan and China's African Diplomacy

From the preceding section, it is obvious that Japan and China, in their respective relationship with African states, have some shared attributes. There are at least four main areas of similarities in Japan and China's African diplomacy. The first can be seen in the overall context of their relationship with Africa which is firmly rooted in the principle of 'cooperation without intervention'. For China, this principle has its foundation in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. While for Japan, the principle could have originated from the age long tradition of self-help. Again, both might have emanated from the Confucian tradition that forms the socio-cultural foundation of the two societies. Essentially, Japan and China both uphold the principle of state sovereignty in their relationship with Africa to a much greater degree (than the West for instance) and they sometimes invoke a rhetoric of 'non-Westernness' to promote their models of cooperation (Cornelissen and Taylor 2000). The idea of African 'ownership' of its development agenda is shared in both the Japanese and Chinese approaches to African affairs.

Another common theme in Japan and China's policy towards Africa is reflected in their resource diplomacy towards African states. Both states share a view of Africa as a continent of immense potentials that is richly endowed with natural resources. One Japanese Economic Mission to Africa Report referred to Africa as the 'treasure house of natural resources'. The report noted that:

In Africa, natural resources are extremely important for the economic development of the different countries, and, with our dependence on raw materials being what it is, imports of such natural resources are vital to our own economic well-being... (*Nigeria-Japan Economic Newsletter* 1971: 3).

The report however stressed that in pursuing the exploitation of those resources, ‘Japan should explore positively the possibilities of cooperation with *third countries*’ (emphasis added). On the other hand, China’s official African Policy Paper states that the region ‘has a long history, vast expanse of land, rich natural resources and huge potential for development’ (*China’s Africa Policy Paper* 2006). While they share this optimistic view of Africa, evidence from trade statistics suggests that elements of resource diplomacy could possibly be more manifest in contemporary China’s African policy than Japan’s. This has seen China rise to become the third largest importer of African commodities after the United States and France, and its second largest exporter after France. Japan ranks tenth and eighth respectively.

Table 2 Ranking of Africa’s Top Trade Partners

	Africa’s Exports		Africa’s Imports	
	Country	% share of total	Country	% share of total
1	United States	22.3	France	12.5
2	France	8.2	China	8.0
3	China	7.8	Germany	7.0
4	Spain	6.0	United States	5.4
5	Italy	5.9	Italy	4.8
6	UK	4.2	UK	4.5
7	Germany	3.7	Saudi Arabia	3.5
8	Brazil	3.2	Japan	3.4
9	Netherlands	3.1	South Korea	3.3
10	Japan	3.0	Spain	3.2

Source: *African Review of Business and Technology*, 42 (9) (2006): 14.

Another common attribute of the relationship between China and Japan vis-à-vis African countries relates to its patently asymmetric nature. With few exceptions, African states are relatively smaller in terms of the size of their economies, populations, per capita GDP, infrastructures and productive capacities. A direct outcome of this is that trade relations with Japan and China appear lop-sided against several African economies. The recurring decimal in such a relationship concerns how contentious issues, such as deficits (often in favour of the superior party) and vulnerability of local industries which usually result are addressed. Japan’s response has been to offer aid to mitigate the deficits, or in certain cases curtail Japanese exports to reduce the imbalance (Omoruyi 2001). China confronts such issues with offers of aid (however differing from that of Japan) by granting duty-free status to goods emanating from some poor African states to encourage China-bound exports (FOCAC Declaration 2000).

Finally, China and Japan tend to use aid as an instrument of diplomacy (at

varying degrees) though this is rarely publicly admitted by government officials. While the motive of foreign aid is usually difficult to clearly ascertain, it is possible to argue that Japanese and Chinese aid to Africa are geared, in part, toward building broad political support from as many countries as possible as a measure of boosting their respective standing in international organizations especially at the United Nations General Assembly as well as other multilateral bodies. This stems from their common perception of Africa as comprising of a large number of states upon which immense diplomatic clout could be drawn in international institutions as experiences of both states do suggest.

With respect to Japan's foreign policy, Africa's numerical value in multilateral institutions was clearly articulated in the 2006 *Diplomatic Bluebook* thus:

There are 53 countries in Africa, accounting for nearly 30% of all the countries of the world; they carry considerable weight in the decision-making at international fora, where in many cases voting is carried out on a one-country-one-vote basis. In particular, since the establishment of the African Union (AU), Africa increasingly tends to vote as a single bloc, which further adds to Africa's influence (*Diplomatic Bluebook* 2006: 120).

Although the assumption that African states vote *en bloc* in international bodies appear to be somewhat exaggerated, it goes without saying that the large number of countries could prove decisive in matters that concern one-state-one-vote. The often cited case is Japan's quest for a permanent seat at the United Nation Security Council if (or when) it is enlarged, but there are also other issues in which Japan tends draw on Africa's large voting value in influencing outcome.³

China's experiences reveal an even clearer perspective of Africa's numerical strength in international affairs. The restoration of the PRC to the United Nations Security Council in 1971 was achieved with the support of many African countries (together with several others from elsewhere) despite opposition by the United States and its allies, and that particular scenario remains indelible in the mindset of many Chinese officials. According to one Chinese official statement:

We will never forget the great contributions that African countries made in helping restore the legitimate seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations...We will not forget the strong support given by African countries to China in defeating anti-China draft resolutions *eleven times* in the UN Human Rights Commission. [Emphasis added]
(<http://www.focac.org/eng/zt/zgdfzccwj/t230736.htm>)

³ Japan's election to the non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (and it has been so elected more times than any other country) had usually drawn on African votes together with other countries. Again, UN agencies (e.g. UNESCO, UNHCR, etc) provide another arena where Japan utilizes Africa's numerical value in elections. Lately, at the International Whaling Commission, some African countries have expressed support for Japan's pro-whaling policy. *Diplomatic Bluebook* 2006, Tokyo: MOFA, p. 122; see also "Japan pins its whaling hopes on African duo" *The West Australian* (Perth) p. 13.

Of more strategic importance is the quest for Africa's support in the diplomatic containment of Taiwan. For Chinese officials, the large number of African countries, most of which are poor (and vulnerable to pecuniary inducements), presents a theater for competition for recognition and diplomatic arm-twisting between Beijing and Taipei (Payne and Veney 1998; Tefft 1996). As far as this is concerned, the PRC has succeeded in reducing the number of African countries that has diplomatic ties with Taiwan to five. The official statement notes further that:

We will not forget that African countries uphold the one-China principle and support the reunification of China by opposing the inclusion in UNGA's agenda of the so-called proposals on Taiwan's return to or participation in the UN *thirteen times* at the UNGA General Affairs Committee and repeatedly rejecting Taiwan to squeeze into international institutions where statehood is required.
[Emphasis added]
(<http://www.focac.org/eng/zt/zgdfzccwj/t230736.htm>)

On a less strategic yet important note, the same Chinese official statement cites other instances of Africa's voting capacity and expressed appreciation for Africa's valuable support in China's bid for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. From the above, it is obvious that both Japan and China hold similar views of the potential of African countries as an immense source of political capital in shaping world affairs especially in international organizations where the one-state-one-vote principle holds in decision-making.

While the similar motive for aid could be explained, in part, based on the point addressed above, there are glaring dissimilarities in Chinese and Japanese approaches to foreign aid in Africa. In the first place, Japan's ODA to Africa is 'tied' to certain conditionalities and benchmarks based on its revised ODA Charter (*Diplomatic Bluebook* 2004: 205) and the ground rules set by the DAC - OECD to which Japan is a signatory. Prospective beneficiaries of Japan's development assistance are expected to meet certain conditions of environmental conservation, 'avoid any use of ODA for military purposes' as well as demonstrate strong commitment to democratization, market-oriented policy and observance of human rights and freedoms (*Diplomatic Bluebook* 2004: 205). On the other hand, Chinese officials have often declared that Beijing's aid has 'no strings attached'. This point was clearly stated in the African Policy Paper that:

In light of its own financial capacity and economic situation, China will do its best to provide and gradually increase assistance to African nations with no political strings attached (*China's Africa Policy Paper* 2006).

It is important to note that while China's doctrine of 'no strings attached' has endeared it to some ostracized regimes in Africa, especially Sudan and Zimbabwe, it has stirred criticism particularly in the Western media (Traub 2006; Eedes 2006; Mooney 2005).

As a corollary (or complement) to the similar foundation for the politics of aid,

Japan and China tend to adopt conference and summit diplomacy as mechanism for dialogue and consultation on African development and overall relationship with Africa. The Tokyo International Conference for Africa's Development (TICAD) began in 1993 as a mechanism to discuss, deliberate and consult on the issues concerning African development thereby halting the potential of Africa's marginalization with the end of cold war. It was seen as a manifestation of the cardinal foreign policy principle of *kokusai koken* ('contribution to the international community') which replaced the *sogo anzen hoshō* ('comprehensive security') in the 1990s (Ochiai 2001: 37-52). It was also construed as a clear demonstration of Japan's concern for Africa's humanitarian needs while simultaneously projecting its soft power appeal as a champion of the Asian model for African development (Lehman 2005). While TICAD has been held consistently after every five years since its inaugural edition in 1993, its achievements remain a subject of provocative but no less interesting debates (Ampiah 2005; Horiuchi 2005; Morikawa 2006).

In a similar fashion, the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) began with the First Ministerial Meeting in October 2000 in Beijing. The second Ministerial Meeting was held in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia and the Headquarters of the African Union where the Addis Ababa Action Plan was adopted in December 2003. The Third Ministerial Meeting in Beijing was elevated to a summit of Heads of State and Government and was attended by the PRC and 48 African countries in November 2006 which simultaneously marked the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of diplomatic relations between the PRC and African countries (Egypt being the first in 1956).

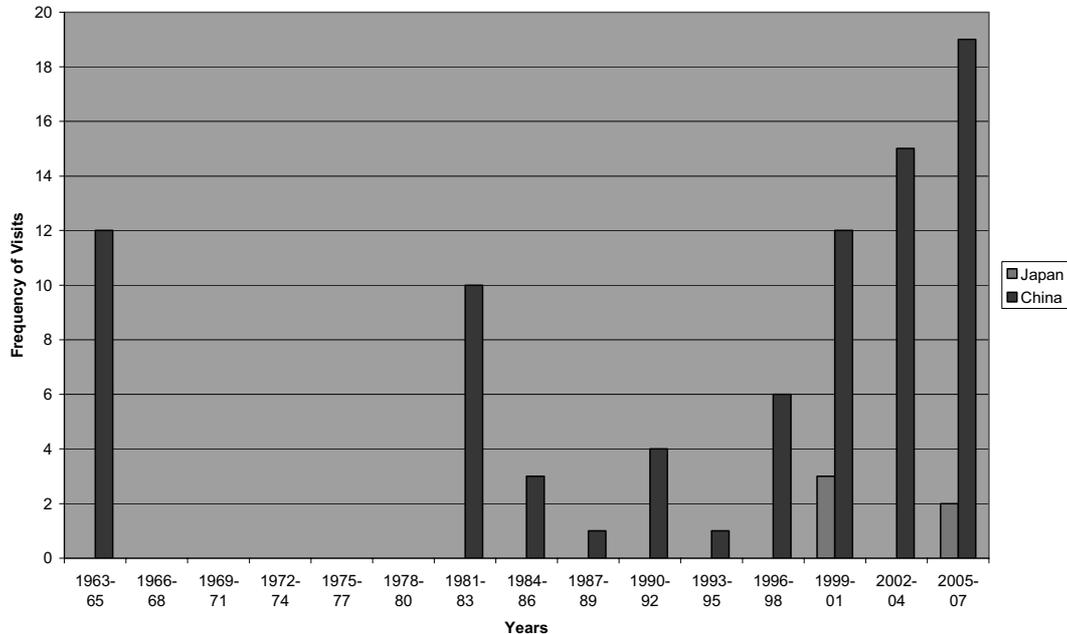
While conference diplomacy appears to be a common attribute of China and Japan's African policy, there are some elements of dissimilarities therein. First, Japanese officials have often stressed that TICAD would essentially be a non-pledging conference while Chinese officials have used the FOCAC summit to announce new packages of assistance and economic cooperation. Second, while TICAD has consistently been held in Tokyo (though preparatory summits are usually held in selected African capitals), FOCAC appear (preliminarily) to be alternated between Beijing and Addis Ababa, the African Union Headquarters. Finally, while TICAD adopts a multilateralist strategy and incorporates other stakeholders (e.g. UN agencies, Global Coalition for Africa and other NGOs, etc) in African development discourse, FOCAC appears more autonomous and only involves China and the African countries to the exclusion of *third parties*.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that whilst there are points of convergence, Japan and China's patterns of relationship with Africa diverge in several ways. One notably discernible difference relates to the degree and intensity of diplomatic activity. While Japan's Africa policy could be summarily described as 'coping' (Curtis 1993), high profile diplomacy characterizes China's Africa policy. This is shown by the fact whereas Japan has often exhibited some palpable restraint with regards to the frequency and spread of the visits to African countries (see table 1), China pursues more elaborate top-level official visits to African countries. In a feature article by *Xinhua News*, it was observed that:

The all-weather friendship between China and African countries has stood the test of time and become more and more consolidated with frequent high-level mutual visits. From the 1960s to September 2004, altogether 92 Chinese officials at or above foreign minister

level made 149 visits to Africa and 459 officials from 51 African countries at or above foreign minister level made 609 visits to China. (*Xinhua News*, October 14, 2005).

Figure 1 Top Level Diplomatic Visits to Africa



Note: For convenience, the figure excludes the visits by officials from Vice-Premiers, Ministers and Vice-Ministers and below.

Source: Author's compilation from various sources.

Second, while Japan's African diplomacy is based on what has been described as a 'key country approach',⁴ China has tended to pursue broad based diplomacy that is spread across a wider spectrum of countries, rich or poor, big or small, coastal or landlocked, democratic or non-democratic.

Another noticeable difference in the pattern of Japan and China's African diplomacy relates to the degree of deference accorded the West as discussed elsewhere in this paper. While Japan tends to confer greater deference to Europe and the United States on African matters (a likely consequence of the mode of early contact discussed in previous section), China pursues a more direct and 'independent' policy towards Africa including engagement of regimes isolated by the West due to their abysmal human rights and democratic credentials. Perhaps, on the part of Japan's decision makers, because

⁴ Morikawa espoused the 'key-country approach' thesis as an attribute of Japan's African policy in his work, *Japan and Africa: Big Business and Diplomacy...* op cit, to refer to a situation by which Japan concentrates diplomatic attention on a few potentially viable states culminating in a double-decker-like structure in its overall African relations. South Africa remains the core while other countries like Kenya and Nigeria would be in the first tier. Many other countries would be in the lower deck. His thoughts on the 'key-country approach' were also evident in Morikawa, Jun "Japan and Africa after the Cold War" in Adem, Seifudein (ed.) *Japan, a Model and a Partner: Views and Issues in African Development*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006.

of a commitment to Western neo-liberal ideals, strategic partnership with the United States and the need to prevent suspicion in Europe (especially France and Britain) of likely interference in their spheres of influence and possibly a genuine desire to leverage the knowledge deficit on African issues, there has always been a proclivity to carry the Europeans along in Tokyo's African agenda. Hence, the incorporation of several Western-based or West-leaning institutional stakeholders in the TICAD process as well as the use of Crown Agents, for instance, to deliver certain aspects of Japan's assistance to Africa could be seen as the manifestation of such deference. On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that China has sought to incorporate Western organizations either in its FOCAC initiative or in the delivery of assistance.

As a corollary to the above, the administration and focus of Japanese and Chinese aid offer another point of divergent patterns of diplomacy. On the one hand Japan's unswerving commitment to international organizations and attachment to the ideals of multilateralism (Yasutomo 1995; *Africa News* May 2, 2006; *Africa News* May 6, 2006) manifests in its African policy. This is illustrated by the reliance on UN agencies such as the WFP, UNDP, and so on in channeling its assistance to African countries. China on the other hand exhibits less commitment to those multilateral institutions in its African diplomacy. It is therefore possible to argue that the use of *third parties* (based mainly in Europe and US) or what is now termed 'triangular assistance' in the administration of Japanese aid in Africa not only reflects the historical dynamics of the evolution of Japan-African relations, but it also enables Japan to avoid strong engagement thereby leveraging its limited expertise and knowledge about the continent, dispel possible European suspicion of interference in its traditional sphere of influence while simultaneously boosting its political capital in the West as well as in multilateral international institutions. Whether the triangular pattern has yielded commensurate political dividend in return for the impressive record of Japan's aid disbursement in Africa is unclear and may constitute an interesting subject of inquiry. However, it is likely that the ultimate beneficiary of such aid would rarely notice the original donor in cases where its delivery was conducted via *third parties*.

It is also important to note that whereas Japan's African policy seeks to de-emphasize and discourage military spending as well as arms build-up, China allows for military cooperation and exports arms to several African countries. A Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) paper reveals that China's arms sales to Africa between 1996 and 2003 accounted for more than 10% of total conventional arms transfers to the continent (*China Brief*, October 13, 2005). Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Burundi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Nigeria are some of the beneficiaries of Chinese arms deals (although only one aspect of a larger picture in which Western deals form a significant part) in Africa where repressive regimes have emasculated human rights and constricted civil liberty with reckless abandon.

On the whole, while China and Japan have some common grounds in their approach to African affairs, there are several points of divergence. Japan could be seen to exhibit some degree of restraint and less autonomy (at least in so far as this relates to a deliberate attempt not to rupture or destabilize relations with European states by preventing suspicion of encroachment in their traditional spheres of influence in Africa) in its African diplomacy. On the other hand, China displays and pursues a more autonomous and high-profile policy towards Africa. How do we explain this admixture of convergences and divergences? As noted above, the mode of early contact could

provide only partial explanation for the differences but there are other factors that possibly account for the trajectories that both Asian giants follow vis-à-vis Africa affairs.

Explaining the Sources of the Patterns of China and Japan's Africa Diplomacy

From the foregoing analysis, it has been shown that China and Japan, in their relationship with Africa, share the principle of 'cooperation without intervention', use aid as an instrument of diplomacy, perceive Africa's numerical value as a useful source of political capital in international organizations and adopt conference diplomacy for periodic dialogue and consultation with African countries. Meanwhile, there are differential levels of activism in China and Japan's African policies as the frequency of top-level leadership visits to Africa and other indicators suggests. While China adopts high-profile and broad based diplomacy that cut across many countries in the region, Japan maintains a low-key and 'key-country' approach. Direct and autonomous diplomacy characterize China's African policy while Japan often seeks multilateral support for its African agenda. How do we explain these patterns of relationship? One plausible (but obviously insufficient) explanation could be derived from the historical evolution of the two patterns discussed earlier. Such a tendentious an explanation would be problematic because of the tenuous nexus between historical modes of contact and contemporary policy. Therefore, in searching for more plausible sources of the patterns of Japan and China's African diplomatic styles, we focus on the political economy of the two states, the domestic decisional structures and processes as well as the nature and impact of external pressure on their foreign policies.

In light of the above, one possible explanatory model would be to focus on Japan's 'Peace Constitution' and the pacifist public consensus that has propped it which tend to restrict its international engagements primarily to economic matters. In that context, the Japanese state is often generally analyzed as a 'non-hegemonic economic power' or a model in the exercise of 'soft power' in international relations (Drifte 1998; Adem 2002). By that it implies that the domain of foreign policy making and implementation is irrevocably constricted to the economic and associated issues. It follows that the diplomacy of the Japanese state becomes more active where (and/or when) economic interests are stronger. On the contrary, diplomatic activity could be weaker where there is limited tangible economic interest. When this model is juxtaposed against Japan's African diplomacy, a generally dull overall image should be expected with sporadic bright spots on countries with better economic potential. In a way, the 'key country approach' by which South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya tend to tower above other African states and are often regarded by analysts as the sub-regional hubs or 'launch pads' for Japan's African policy could (however roughly) fit into that jigsaw.⁵

The thesis, however plausible, could be problematic in its overall validity in the sense that it may unwittingly support some authors' arguments that sought to view Japan as merely a 'reactive state' (Calder 1988). In other words, the argument that Japan's foreign policy responds actively to economic stimuli could, in a way, help explain

⁵ By virtue of certain indicators, analysts tend to (rightly or wrongly) see South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria as the 'tripod' or sub-regional launch-pads for Japan's overall African diplomacy. A recently published ranking of top companies in Africa indicates the dominance of South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya in Southern Africa, West and East Africa respectively. See "Africa's 1000 top Companies", *African Business*, April 2006.

the relatively low-profile status that African diplomacy (at least with respect to many countries on the continent) generally enjoys but would not stand against the records of a series of initiatives that Japan had sought to boost its relations with Africa in spite of the lack of remarkable economic interest in several countries on the continent. In order to fix the jigsaw further, therefore, it might be useful to examine the nature and structure of the foreign policy decision making process.

Ordinarily, Japan's parliamentary democracy should guarantee that the *Diet* exercise foreign policy decision making responsibilities and since the Cabinet is derived from the *Diet*, equally exercise control over policy implementation. In reality, the parliament has not played a central role in Japan's foreign affairs (Baerwald 1977). As contended by some authors, foreign 'policy formulation and effective decision making power remain in the hands of the *Jimiinto* (LDP) leadership, government bureaucrats in relevant ministries and agencies, and leaders of important LDP support groups' (Baerwald 1977; Osada 2002: 10-18). A picture that emerges from that characterization of Japanese decision making processes would be akin to that of a corporatist state with 'fragmented authority' in which power is shared and diffused among various units in the polity.

Another major attribute (related to the one above) of Japan's policy process is that the Prime Minister rarely put up charismatic posturing in shaping the direction of its government's policy and orientation (Kenji 1993). Therefore, regardless of the 'pressure' by African leaders and their interlocutors exerted on successive Japanese Prime Ministers to boost Japan's presence (investment, aid, etcetera) on the continent, he hardly could dramatically alter the status quo.

Even within the LDP, which has consistently produced Japan's post-war leaders (with a brief interlude between 1993 and 1996), there are limited motivations for elaborate foreign policy engagement among the various factions (*habatsu*) except where there are justifiable economic interests. This is possibly due to the fact that foreign policy lacks a conspicuous domestic constituency and a politician's career is unlikely to be enhanced when it is not founded on a strong domestic support base. The *zoku* system by which parliamentarians intermediate between powerful interest groups and the policy establishment leave foreign policy matters (especially those with little or no rational justification) generally unattractive. In that case, some decisional space could be open to the bureaucratic actors in the policy process.

The bureaucracy and its role in the policy process in Japan is a subject of debate (Fukui 1977). One would have expected that the *Gaimusho* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MOFA) take central responsibility in foreign policy decision making but, as it is in most political systems, the turf wars with other ministries circumscribe the powers of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. In particular, the *Keizaisangyusho* (Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry, METI) and the *Zaimusho* (Ministry of Finance, MOF) together with other institutional actors compete and often share responsibility over foreign policy outcomes. Even then, the centrality of the overall bureaucratic actors in the decision making process remains unclear (Pempel 1992). The complex network of politicians, bureaucrats and 'big business' makes a clear delineation of the source of action or inaction difficult to establish for analytical purposes. As noted by Edwin Reischauer:

...Japanese decision-making process may prove too complex and uncertain to produce decisions of adequate clarity...perhaps more

complex than in other countries and certainly more of it proceeds out of sight... (Reischauer 1977).

In summary, the Japanese decision-making process with its fragmented centers of authority and an irrevocable commitment to consensus building guarantees that no single actor, individual or institution, could appropriate the policy making process. One can safely assume that Tokyo's African diplomacy not only reflects the overall low-profile foreign policy that Japan usually pursues, and that the various bargaining and consensus building processes ensure that African issues get calibrated to generally low priority areas usually justifiable more or less on humanitarian grounds with only a few exceptions discussed earlier.

The case of China reveals a starkly different decision-making model in which foreign policy is almost inseparable from the charismatic personality of the Communist Party leader. Theoretically, in the hierarchy of the Chinese political structure the National People's Congress is the highest in the state power structure. The Congress elects a Standing Committee, the President and Vice President for a five-year term. Legislative business is carried out by the Standing Committee when the Congress is not in session. The State Council (supervised by the Standing Committee) is the supreme executive organ and comprises of the Prime Minister and his Deputies as well as State Councilors. The Central Military Commission is the highest military organ of the state and, according to some analysts control over the Commission symbolizes the effective control of the Chinese state (Cheung 2001). In practice, however, the personality of the President, the Prime Minister, top officials of the Communist Party and a few other top officials dwarfs the visibility of those institutions in the decision-making process.

Some discernible structures of authority in the Chinese political system were identified by Lieberthal and Oksenberg to include; 1. the core group of twenty-five to thirty-five top leaders who articulate national policy; 2. the layer of staff, leadership groups, research centers that link the elites to and buffer them from bureaucracy; 3. State Council commissions; and 4. line ministries which implement policy (Lieberthal, 1988; 1992). Generally speaking, the fundamental directives and initiatives originate from within the core elements of the leadership. This perspective was supported by Barnouin and Yu when they argued that:

...the Chinese political system, characterized a firmly controlled and personalized hierarchy - produced weak institutions which, at their apex, were dominated by the paramount leader... (Barnouin and Yu 1998: 51).

Hence, unlike Japan, China's political system could be said to have been organized around charismatic leaderships in the likes of Mao Zedong, Zhou En Lai, Deng Xiaoping and Hu Jintao who not only decisively shape the direction of the nation's foreign policy, but also mobilize the state apparatus towards its effective delivery. Ideological contest, revolutionary diplomacy, and the quest for recognition, more than Japan's own economic rationality, provided the initial foundations of China's African diplomacy in particular. Beijing's African policy was relatively devoid of the bureaucratic 'turf wars' or the lengthy factional negotiations or parliamentary debates that tend to symbolize the Japanese political system. Compared with Japan, therefore,

one could plausibly argue that China's top leadership elements have greater space for maneuverability on foreign policy issues and this factor could have impacted on the tempo and degree of activism in their respective African diplomacy.

Historical factors could equally provide some insights to the understanding of the dynamics of Japan and China's African diplomacy. Both states have different post-WWII experiences which dictated different foreign policy ends and means. On the one hand, Japan's preoccupation with post-war reconstruction through sustained economic growth required unfettered access to Western (and other) markets as well as access to strategic minerals (which Japan lacked) needed for industrial expansion. These objectives logically necessitated demonstrable loyalty and commitment to the Western bloc. The defense alliance with the United States further reinforced Japan's attachment to Western preferences and has constricted policy choices available to Tokyo's leadership. This combined set of factors possibly informed Japan's ambivalence on apartheid issues in South Africa which enraged other African countries that saw Japan as the only 'non-White' state that propped the Apartheid regime (Hayashi 1989; Morikawa 1997).

On the other spectrum, China's competition with the Soviet Union (after the split), an anti-imperialist campaign against the U.S and the struggle for diplomatic recognition against Taiwan dictated a relentless quest for friends and international supporters. In particular, the struggle for restoration to the UN Security Council provided the impetus for Chinese leaders to mobilize across third world countries many of which are found in Africa (Adie 1964; Yu 1988). Having to contend with opposition from the United States and its allies, the logic of national interest could have constricted Chinese policy choices to supporting the 'popular' liberation forces and the newly decolonized countries across Africa in order to gain or retain their support for PRC's ambitions in the United Nations. While the investment could be said to have paid off with China's admission to (and Taiwan's expulsion from) the United Nations in 1971, subsequent events continue to make Sino-African exchanges mutually complementary. The Tiananmen saga, for instance, led Chinese leaders to mobilize African support to leverage international (mostly Western) opprobrium and criticism (Taylor 1998). Essentially, therefore, Japan and China have different historical experiences in the post-Second World War era, and these certainly defined, and perhaps continue to influence the parameters and the trajectory of their African policy.

The nature of the economy could also yield another source of the pattern of relationship between Japan and Africa on the one hand, and China and Africa on the other. Japan's relatively 'matured' economy places it at the high end of the global value chain. Its high-tech and relatively more expensive products could barely find appreciable ready markets in Africa where a large proportion of the population live on less than a dollar per day. On the other hand, China's cheaper products, including textiles and home appliances, suit African markets and this could partly explain the surge in trade statistics as noted earlier. Above all, China certainly needs the resources, especially energy, to feed its rapidly growing economy (Servant 2005; Dexter 2006; Thompson 2004). As a relative newcomer in global resource (particularly energy) diplomacy, contending with already established players in gaining access to resources could be daunting as the Unocal and the Gorgon gas deals suggest. This logically dictates that China's decision-makers expand the circumference of their diplomatic reach especially to areas where entrenched interests are relatively weaker. Hence, while Japan has a declining economic

complementarity with most African countries (with the exception of South Africa and a few others), China has a growing basis for trade and exchange.

Finally, it could also serve a useful purpose to consider how and why external pressure could have impacted on the differential approach to African diplomacy by China and Japan. An incontrovertible fact is that the alliance between Japan and the United States limit the scope of maneuverability for Japanese officials in foreign policy choices. As one observer succinctly noted:

...Japan's defense alliance with the United States has had an enormous impact on foreign policy, both inhibiting and aiding Japan's relations with other states. Japanese dependence on American defense guarantees sometimes conflicts with Japan's attempt to strike a more independent foreign policy (Bowen 1992).

In dealing with African countries, some of which sometimes have been under Washington's scrutiny on human rights violations or poor democratic credentials, Japanese officials exercise more caution by following the lead of the United States and Europe. In giving or suspending aid to African countries for example, Washington's preferences play an important role in shaping Tokyo's behavioral outcomes.⁶ It is important, however, to observe that the role of *gaiatsu* in shaping Japan's foreign policy is not confined to African affairs alone. Indeed, the *gaiatsu* impact on Japanese policy choices is profound not because Japan is simply a 'reactive state' but because Japan depends on the United States for two crucial commodities that no other state could provide: trade and security.

China can hardly be said to have displayed much responsiveness to American pressure (if any) in its African diplomacy. In fact, Chinese leadership elements have (hitherto) sought to promote anti-imperialist (*a la* anti-American) or at least stimulated and encouraged non-committal mid-stream posturing by African countries through South-South Cooperation, non-alignment and other appealing Third World rhetoric. Above all, China has attempted to promote a cultural relativist conception of human rights contrary to the Western based definition that apply periodic stress on Beijing's own records. More importantly, China has demonstrated its 'independent' approach to African affairs by publicly supporting regimes that have been ostracized by the United States and its allies. For instance, China's veto at the United Nations Security Council, against the preferences of the US other Western states, has been used to shield Sudan from decisive action by the international community (*New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 19, 2006: 6). Beijing's approach to the Mugabe administration in Zimbabwe has not reflected any responsiveness to external pressure either. Therefore, it is possible to posit that the extent of responsiveness (and/or vulnerability) to external pressure could have influenced the patterns of China and Japan's African diplomacy in varying degrees.

⁶ The suspension of aid to Nigeria (1994), Sudan (1992) and Kenya (1991) are some of the cases in which *gaiatsu* effectively shaped Tokyo's policy outcomes towards African countries as shown in Akitoshi Miyashita's perceptive study, *Limits to Power: Asymmetric Dependence and Japanese Foreign Aid Policy*, New York: Lexington Books (2003) p. 42.

Conclusion

The study finds that while there are some convergent areas in China's and Japan's African diplomacy, China's more pro-active and broad based approach contrasts with Japan's 'low-profile' and 'key-country' approach. The factors that account for the different approaches are discussed. These include the modes of historical contacts with Africa which might have shaped their respective perceptions of the continent *ab initio*, the role of actors on decision-making structures of both states, the nature of the economy and the degree of responsiveness to external pressure. Indeed, these sets of factors combine to produce two broad patterns of African diplomacy in Beijing and Tokyo in which the former actively engages the African countries irrespective of Western preferences while the latter usually tends to mobilize multilateralist (mainly Western) support for its African initiatives. While the relative efficacy of the diplomatic approaches might be difficult to establish here (and may be a subject of further inquiry), it is arguable that the Japan's 'restrictive' and China's 'expansive' diplomatic styles towards Africa have basically suited the interests of both states.

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