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Development as a Brand? Japanese Aid to Asia and the Case of Vietnam in a Historical Perspective

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Introduction

When one analyses the case of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA), it is clear that aid to foreign countries, and Asia in particular, is not just an act of solidarity or complimentary help. In fact, it has been demonstrated that Japanese ODA entails national as well as private economic interest (Söderberg, 1996; Arase, 2007) and that there is a link between public policies and the diffusion of culture abroad (Anholt, 2009). In detail, my analysis will focus on the relationship between Japan and Vietnam, which at least since the first decade of the 21st century has been one of the fastest growing economies in South-east Asia, and Tokyo's ODA top bilateral recipient (OECD, MOFA 2012; Ohno, 2010).

One could argue that wealth and power are not all that a country needs to become a hegemon, meaning the ability to make other countries perceive its values as their own. For many decades, military power and wealth have been the main criteria to measure the role of a country in the international community. However, is it still possible to account for a country's role in the world or in a specific region just in terms of power and capital? Needless to say that the criterion of wealth is still crucial in the age of globalization: the world could be more peaceful and interdependent than before, but it is not more equal (Easterly 2007; Sumner 2013). Thus, the focus of the policy of a country in a position of dominance in the international system has shifted from showing individual power and/or wealth to showing its most appealing assets, like aid and culture. The aim of such policies is to get, where possible, other countries to cooperate thus attaining what will be perceived as a mutually beneficial gain (Nye, 1990).

In the first section of this paper I shall present the main theories I have drawn upon in establishing the topic of the present research¹. After a brief summary of the mainstream approaches to international relations in the field of development, I will consider the ones deemed useful in order to develop a critical analysis of the topic. In addition, Simon Anholt's notion of competitive identity or nation branding (Anholt, 2009) will be taken into consideration. This concept is, in my view, particularly interesting when approaching IR in the context of globalization, as it underlines actual political or economic impact of public policies versus its symbolic value.

I will therefore present an account of the main historical features of Japanese ODA and Japan's role in Asia as a model for development in neighbouring countries and give a brief account of the case study (Vietnam) I intend to analyse. Finally, I will try to define the lines of future development for my research design, particularly focusing on the following questions: what is the future of Japanese foreign aid? What is the idea of “development” entangled in such a public policy? Is it possible to find in Japan any drive to a non-official development in Asia (via NGOs, social and environmental movements, common good movements).

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 The Development Issue

Since 1945, the concept of development has been interwoven with that of nation-state: it can be related to the nation-state's economic growth, i.e. an increase of its national output, expressed by the increase of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); or it can be caused by an increase in the available factors of production (labour, capital and raw materials) or by an increase in the efficiency of their use (Sloman, Wride and Garratt, 2012: 41-43). Nevertheless, as some scholars (Sen, 1999, Todaro, 2009) pointed out, economic growth is only one aspect of development. According to Todaro, “development must be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty” (Todaro, 2009:16).

¹ The research will be carried out during a 3-year doctoral course at Ca'Foscari University of Venice, Department of Asian and North-African Studies.

Against such a background, the definition of development could become highly controversial. What is development, then, and why is the international community so concerned about it?

The United Nations have broadened the scope of its definition of development: in 1990s, UNDP focused on the notion of “human development”, as defined in 1990 by economists Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, which included an evaluation of life expectancy, education and health, and social inequalities. Every year, UNDP publishes a report and a ranking of the most developed countries in the world according to their Human Development Index (HDI). However, there still is a very clear a connection between affluent economies (as measured by more GDP-related statistic by IMF, World Bank or disposable wage-related statistic by OECD) and the level of human development².

1.2 Development as an ideology

Classical liberalism has it that all individuals in the world have the right to enjoy freedom of expression, private property and equal opportunities. So do nation-states that have to cooperate in order to avoid conflict and maintain peace and harmony in the international system. It is not a coincidence that after 1945 liberalism has become embedded in the rules of the international institutions created since, as a consequence of the US hegemonic position. However, it can be argued, this very system has inevitably favoured the USA and its allies, which are now able “to claim special rights and privileges over other members of the international society” (Dunne, 2011: 109).

The relation between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped” is here crucial. Immanuel Wallerstein (2005) clearly identified the link between development and colonialism. In fact, during the colonial era, the concept of development was associated with that of *mise en valeur*, namely, following Wallerstein's analysis, exploitation and profitability (Wallerstein, 2005). From 1945 onwards, development became a “code word” for former colonies: being gradually recognized as nation-states by the international community, they could finally develop and “become as technologically modern and as wealthy as the countries of the North” (Wallerstein,

2 The Human Development Report 2013 can be consulted at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2013> (retrieved on February 9, 2014)

2005: 1264). In compliance with such a view, William Easterly (2007) claimed the birth of the ideology of the new millennium: developmentalism³.

However, such an account cannot disregard Wallerstein's view of a capitalist world-economy, a world-system that is by definition unequal. Such global entity is divided in three zones: core-periphery and semi-periphery, which are necessarily linked together in a relationship that guarantees a continuing drainage of wealth from the periphery to the core (Wallerstein, 1974).

David Harvey (2006) maintains that in the last decade of the 20th century an effective but unequal “neoliberalization” of the global economy took place. This trend was favoured especially in the 1990s by the 'Washington consensus' (World Bank, International Monetary Fund and US Treasury Department): what Harvey calls the new economical “orthodoxy” revolved around a drive towards privatisation, financialisation, manipulation of economic crisis and State redistributions which had the effect of restoring class power (Harvey, 2006:153-155). IMF, and World Trade Organization since 1995, proved to be “convenient vehicles” through which US financial and political power could be exercised in a “global network of power relations”(Harvey, 2006: 151).

In sum, according to critical scholars like Easterly, Harvey and Wallerstein, the triumph of neoliberal governance and globalization since 1980s has increasingly stressed asymmetric relations in terms of economic advance and political power while “development” has become nothing more than a slogan. Such a position, however, is supported by some empirical evidence: as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated in the 2010 Human Development Report, global inequality is, if not rising, very high (UNDP, 2010: 73). Roughly put, the richest 20 percent of the world's population enjoys 75 per cent of the global output, whereas the poorest 20 percent only enjoys 1,5 percent (Dunne, 2011: 109; Casari, 2003: 51).

1.3 Power Relations in the Empire

³ William Easterly, an economist with the New York University Development Research Center, has compared developmentalism to other twentieth century ideologies, such as Communism and Fascism, which have produced damage and not reduced, rather they have increased inequalities in wealth distributions in the world. However debatable this view may be, it seems an interesting approach against the mainstream one that consider development, as defined by the framework of a few developed countries, as a necessity (Easterly, 2007).

In this sense, I will posit that development policies have retained an “imperial” significance: development may still be seen as a mere “code-word” or as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri underline, as a “discourse”. The so-called developed countries in the “global North”, provide aid and advice to the so-called underdeveloped “global South”, thus defining what development is or has to be. Such an aspect is decisive to the analysis of the two Marxist scholars, as developmentalist views strongly relies on unbalanced power relationships in the economic sphere (Hardt, Negri, 2000: 282).

Hence, the importance of the diffusion of developmentalist position through the diverse political, but most of all, financial institutions that contribute to operating the “Empire” (United Nations, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Asian Development Bank) in relation to conflict-prevention and economic stability in the global system by dominant countries. On the other hand, as Hardt and Negri posit, underdeveloped countries remain subordinate in the global system (Hardt, Negri, 2000: 283). In this regard, the increasing role of transnational organizations and international led to the establishment of precise sets of rules that constitute the foundation of what Hardt and Negri identify as a “decentered and deterritorialising apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt, Negri, 2000: 34-37), namely the “Empire”.

As Hardt and Negri maintain, such a system is created in response to the contemporary crisis of the nation-state and implies for the national entities abiding to a globalised concept of rights and ethics. Nonetheless, it can be argued that inside Negri and Hardt's system, there is still room for some countries to exert some sort of economical and cultural hegemony on other countries. My analysis of Japan's aid policies to Asia moves precisely from such a description of the international system provided by the two scholars.

1.4 The logic of branding a nation in the global market

Military power and national wealth have been two main factors of influence in traditional approaches to IR. However, the display and use of military power may not be appealing to other countries and may affect the country's national reputation. The origin of this concern could be traced back to Hans Morgenthau's concept of prestige, (i.e., the importance of how a country is perceived as strong by other countries) which is fundamental in the balance of power dynamic. However, a thorough analysis of the shift in the conception of power is that of Joseph Nye (1990).

According to Nye since the end of 1970s the diffusion of technologies and sophisticated weapons in industrialized advanced countries as well as in less advanced countries have changed the nature of world politics. Thus, the ability of great powers “to control their environments” is diminished (Nye, 1990: 163). As a consequence, a way of exerting power alternative but at the same time coordinate to the military – co-optive or soft power (e.g., diplomacy, culture) – has emerged and has become more attractive than costly forms of coercion or hard power. To put it in Nye's words, co-optive power is “the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own” (Nye, 1990: 168).

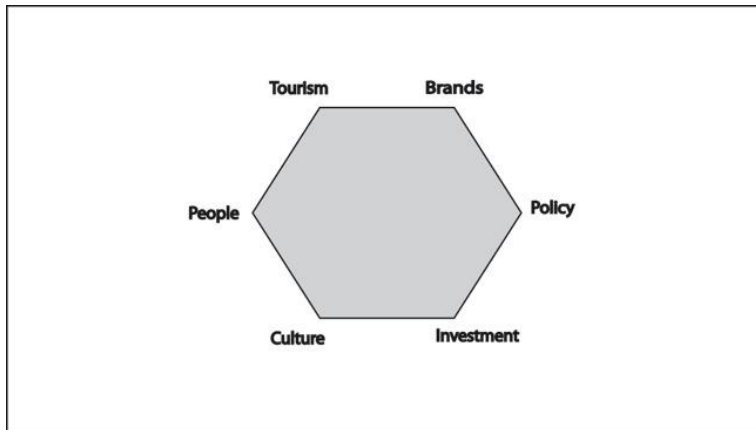
Such a form of power may be efficient not only in a balance of power context, but also in market-oriented environment. As Simon Anholt noted,

Today the world is one market; the rapid advance of globalisation means that every country, every city and every region must compete with every other for its share of the world's consumers, tourists, investors, students, entrepreneurs, international sporting and cultural events, and for the attention and respect of the international media, other governments and the people of their countries (Anholt, 2009: 206).

In the complexity of the contemporary world, people's (i.e.: consumers) perception of one country and its citizens tends to be mediated by clichés and stereotypes. Thus, it is the specific duty of every government to assess what images the world perceives about its country, and consequently to formulate a strategy to manage them in the most appropriate and profitable way (Anholt, 2009). Hence, nation branding becomes a public policy that involves the spreading of cultural as moral values from which dominant countries in the world system succeed in benefiting.

Nation branding policies are particularly worth studying when we approach Japan's international attitude towards Asia. If on the one hand Japan has established a good reputation thanks to its wealth and unprecedented economic development, which brought it among the top-three world economies, as well as high-profile educative institutions; on the other hand, it had, and still has, to come to terms with its history of military aggression and expansionism less than a century ago. If one uses Anholt's approach, an efficient nation branding policy has to coordinate aspects concerning government bureaucracy (especially within the ministries dealing with economic, financial and foreign affairs) and the transmission of its culture abroad. Figure 1 clearly

shows factors like tourism, policy, investment and culture as significant to establishing a national reputation abroad.



[Fig. 1: Anholt's Hexagon of Competitive Identity; source: Anholt, 2009: 209]

In my view, contemporary nation branding policies, such as the Cool Japan campaign designed to promote Japanese popular culture abroad, cannot be fully understood without examining the role of Japan from the 1970s to the early 2000s as one of the world's top donors to developing countries especially in Asia.

2. Japan as ODA top donor

In the modern age, Asia has always been fundamental to the development of Japanese economy. In the 1930's and 1940's under the drive of military imperialism, Japan established a regional empire. By the ruling elite it was perceived as a necessity: on the one hand, Japan perceived the external threat of Euro-American imperialism and opted for a developmental model focused on the motto *fukoku kyōhei*, rich country, strong army. On the other hand, territorial expansion could provide Japanese industrial conglomerates with natural resources and new markets⁴.

⁴ For a better understanding of Japanese imperialism, see Duus, Myers, Peattie (eds) (1998) and Oguma (1998 and 2002).

After the defeat of the Empire of Japan in 1945, countries in Asia and South-east Asia that were occupied by Japanese military started claiming for war reparations. In the 1950s, leaving aside China, Korea and Taiwan, war reparations were evaluated in terms of Japanese assets and infrastructures, Japanese war reparations started flowing to countries that had been militarily occupied from 1941 until 1945. In 1952 Burma agreed on a 200 million dollar war reparation plan; in 1956, the Philippines reached an agreement on a 550 million dollar plan in yearly instalments over 20 years; in 1958, Indonesia accepted a 220 million agreement; Vietnam ratified the San Francisco Treaty, receiving nearly 39 million dollar (MOFA)⁵, barely a tenth of what they had asked for (Bouissou, 2003: 136).

There is no doubt that the then prime minister Yoshida Shigeru saw in this an opportunity to boost Tokyo's national interest, namely national security and prosperity (*kokueki*), in a more pacific, thus softer, way and to help Japan's postwar recovery. In fact, such disbursements provided the chance for the post-war leadership to rehabilitate Japan's national image in front of the newly born international community: especially with regards to the US, which became Japan's most prominent ally (*tsukiai*)⁶.

Moreover, if we consider South-east Asia's traditional richness in raw materials, it was an occasion, using the words of prime minister Kishi Nobusuke at a Budget committee of the House of Representatives in 1960, to secure “as many raw materials as possible, and sell manufactured goods overseas” (Sato, 2013:14). It is possible to argue that Kishi's words revealed a new interest towards Asia, which needed to be coordinated by a set of institutions (a research institute, a special fund and a bank for Asian development) through an effective economic policy.

However, a real implementation of this new and pacific “Asian policy” was enacted a few years later. Under the Ikeda administration, in 1964, Japan entered the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as the first Asian country to be accepted in a Euro-American institution. This diplomatic success gave Ikeda the possibility to put Japan on a different

5 Retrieved December 3, 2013 from http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html

6 The term *kokueki* means national interest; the term *tsukiai* means “company”, “association” even “friendship”. These two words acquire significance when we consider the scope of Japanese ODA in the 1970s. It was a process directed by both an endogenous (*kokueki*) and an exogenous pull. The concepts were introduced in the field of Japanese ODA studies by the scholar and UN advisor Hasegawa Sukehiro 's 1975 *The objectives of foreign aid: Japanese aid for domestic prosperity and international ascendancy* and cited in Arase (2007).

position in the East-Asian frame of political and economical relationships. In those years, the *gankō keitai* (flying geese) paradigm gained popularity. According to this economic model of development defined by the Japanese economist Akamatsu Kaname (1961), industrial development is the leading force of economic development. This can be attained through the adoption of industrialised advanced countries' industries in order for a less advanced countries to catch up with them on the path of development (Korhonen, 1994). However, as Kasahara (2004) noted, when applied to the Japan-Asia relationship, during the mid-1960s, this paradigm implied a hierarchical structure with Japan at its top. Following this interpretation, a disparity in political and economic power between Japan and its Asian neighbours is apparent.

2.1 Development institutions

Japan's ODA is a highly institutionalised and bureaucratized process that involves key ministries and agencies. The entire process is also monitored and coordinated by supranational institutions such as the OECD. In fact, OECD defines ODA as aid flows to countries and territories identified by the Development Co-operation Directorate that is “provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies” and “administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective”; it must be “concessional in character” and convey “a grant element of at least 25 percent (calculated at a discount rate of 10 per cent)” (DAC-OECD, 1972). The high degree of institutionalization of Japanese foreign aid has attracted much attention from both economics and IR scholars. Along with the recent work by David Arase (2007), Marie Söderberg (1996) described the main features of Japanese ODA, considering for the first time the recipient perspective, i.e., the impact of Japanese aid abroad.

Söderberg identified four main themes of analysis of Japanese ODA: first, the institutionalization of Japan's development aid, which is based on the request of the recipient country via formal diplomatic channels. Such a system leaves room for non public agents to be involved, as private companies and local leaders, experts or technicians (Söderberg, 1996: 55). As Arase adds, the decisional process can be complicated as it involves 13 bureaucratic actors at the cabinet level; in particular three main institutions are involved: the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) which is in charge of managing the requests for grant-aid; the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) in charge of loans; and finally the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Some argue that such a system, which is unique among DAC

countries, often lacks transparency and coherence. Moreover, there have been reports of misuse and illicit appropriation of ODA funds by politicians⁷.

Second, the relationship between private and public sectors. ODA, as Söderberg stresses, are a fundamental ingredient of economic cooperation with the developing countries. In particular, Japanese business associations and entrepreneurs who in the mid-1980s started transferring parts of their productive activities abroad, especially in developing countries in Asia, like Indonesia and China, ODA is crucial in order to support Japan's competitiveness. That is why the keidanren, the most prominent association of Japanese entrepreneurs, is particularly keen to have ODA increased as they are crucial in developing the infrastructural frame necessary to support industrial production (communications, energy, etc.) .

Third, the relationship with the international institutions. Even if Japan has been the world's top donor in terms of total amount of aid provided (volume of aid) for 22 years (1989-2001), several aspects of its ODA policy have fallen under criticism by DAC. To begin with, its geographical distribution. The flow of aid disbursement has been directed mainly to Asia (Söderberg, 1996: 34): in 1970s aid to Asia counted for the 80 percent of the total, in 65percent in 1980s and still held a predominant position in the first decade of the 21st century (53 percent in 2007-8) (Potter, 2012: 12); secondly, ODA disbursement as percentage of GDP (0,25 percent) lags far behind the 0,7 percent established as a target for the next decade at the Monterrey Consensus in 2002⁸. Moreover, Japanese ODA, in comparison to other DAC countries, are less gratuitous as the interest rates on ODA loans are higher⁹.

Japanese ODA has also been criticized for being ineffective, due to

7 In 2002, an ODA-linked scandal involving MOFA bureaucrat and Liberal-democratic party (LDP) member Suzuki Muneo, and then minister of Foreign Affairs, Tanaka Makiko, had a great resonance among the public opinion. See Berkofsky (2002), 'Corruption and Bribery in Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the case of Muneo Suzuki', Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper, No 86, June 2002 Retrieved February 9, 2014 from <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp86.html>

8 The 0,7 percent target was reaffirmed in 2002 as the ratio of GDP "rich countries" should commit to Official Development Aid, in order to attain the UN's Millennium Development Goal and end poverty by 2030.

9 According to OECD's data, in 2011 Japan received nearly 2,6 billion dollars in loan repayments. See <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/apr/30/aid-overstated-donors-interest-payments> (retrieved February 10, 2014)

a relatively underdeveloped field presence; a limited capacity to engage recipients and other donors in a multilevel policy dialogue at the country level; low coherence in overall ODA policy direction and implementation due to bureaucratic factors; and difficulty in meeting actual recipient needs in technical cooperation (Arase, 2007: 14).

Such criticism has to be understood in terms of national polity. In fact, as both Arase and Söderberg maintain, since 1945, ODA has been a key element of Japanese *nemawashi* diplomacy¹⁰. ODA helped Japan to present itself to the world, and other Asian countries, as a “peace” country, trying to forge a national image alternative to the tremendous memories of the Empire of Japan's military expansionism. Finally, it must be noted that the domestic political debate has influenced ODA disbursement. Especially in 1990's, Japan's ODA has fallen under the criticism of politicians opposed to the LDP rule and civil society, as Japan lost its status of economic superpower. Japan needed first to help itself and then other countries (Arase, 2007: 4-5). Nevertheless, public involvement in the ODA decisional process is very limited. In addition, it must be emphasised that, despite pledges to enhance transparency and greater involvement from non-governmental organizations (NGO) in the ODA Policy Charter of 1992 and its revision in 2003, more has to be done in terms of enlarging the scope of public debate around ODA (Williamson, 2011).

2.2 Why Vietnam?

Choosing Vietnam as a case study is no coincidence. As Ohno (2009; 84-86) pointed out, since 2001, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has been among the top four recipients of Japan's aid.

10 As noted by Hook, Gilson, Dobson and Hughes, Japanese postwar diplomacy is characterized by three “key modes” to lay the groundwork needed for the deployment of Japanese power. One is the *omote* (surface or explicit) mode (e.g.: bilateral meetings at ministerial level); then there is the *ura* (back or implicit) mode (e.g: single members of parliament or political parties visits to China or North Korea) and the proxy channels' mode. These two “behind the scenes” modes are specifically identified by their focus on laying the groundwork (*nemawashi*) via an informal process of interaction (Hook, Gilson, Dobson, Hughes, 2005 :80).

Official Development Assistance has provided nearly two trillion yen in infrastructural and social development projects in the last few years (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan's data)¹¹. This trend is clearly illustrated by fig. 2, which refers to FY 2011.

Chart III-8 Japan's Assistance in the East Asia Region									
2011 (Net disbursements, US\$ million)									
Rank	Country or region	Grants			Loan aid			Total	
		Grant aid	Grants provided through multilateral institutions	Technical cooperation	Total	Amount disbursed	Amount recovered		Total
1	Viet Nam	26.74	—	125.07	151.81	1,198.72	337.48	861.24	1,013.05
2	Cambodia	62.12	14.67	50.25	112.37	20.88	2.32	18.56	130.93
3	Mongolia	58.47	—	23.42	81.88	14.56	20.81	-6.25	75.63
4	Laos	8.60	1.00	36.63	45.23	6.85	3.57	3.28	48.51
5	Myanmar	19.70	7.70	22.80	42.50	—	—	—	42.50
6	Timor-Leste	18.08	1.69	8.63	26.71	—	—	—	26.71
7	Malaysia	6.87	—	22.03	28.91	163.82	213.74	-49.92	-21.01
8	Thailand	7.25	1.25	45.89	53.14	240.89	478.04	-237.15	-184.01
9	China	13.42	—	286.97	300.38	560.44	1,342.14	-781.70	-481.32
10	Philippines	37.62	0.81	59.00	96.62	311.79	975.30	-663.51	-566.89
11	Indonesia	23.95	0.98	110.17	134.12	879.74	1,647.58	-767.83	-633.71
	Multiple countries in East Asia	0.13	—	6.23	6.36	—	—	—	6.36
	East Asia region total	282.94	28.11	798.47	1,081.41	3,397.69	5,020.98	-1,623.29	-541.88
	(ASEAN total)	192.84	26.41	473.04	665.88	2,822.68	3,658.02	-835.34	-169.46

[Fig. 2: Japanese bilateral ODA in Asian countries; source: MOFA, Japan Official Development Assistance White Paper 2012]

ODA impact has been particularly relevant since 1993, when Tokyo and Hanoi normalized their relations, and the bilateral ODA flow restarted after a 20 year hiatus. The case of Vietnam clearly shows that Japanese aid is mainly directed to middle-low income countries (as identified by UN's HDI ranking), contradicting the DAC guidelines on boosting help to the least developed countries (Potter, 2012: 17). As figure 2 shows, Japan's aid initiatives in Vietnam focus on a) infrastructural and poverty reduction projects, financed through ODA loans (National Highway N.1, North-South Express way, Hanoi's Noi Bai airport, power plants, etc.; Poverty Reduction Support Credit); b) grant assistance to scholarships and environment-linked projects (Human Resource Development Scholarship; Afforestation in Central and South Vietnam); c) technical cooperation (Training in food, education, public health and fund management sectors)

11 Available data updated to F.Y. 2011; retrieved September 28, 2013 from http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryu/kuni/12_databook/pdfs/01-07.pdf

(MOFA, 2012)¹². Figure 3 shows in greater detail the relative amounts of Japanese aid from 2007 to 2011.

I. Japan's ODA Disbursements to Vietnam

Year	Loan Aid	Grant Aid	Technical Cooperation	Total
2007	547.71	18.48	73.85	640.04
2008	518.15	26.29	74.59	619.04
2009	1,082.29	22.82	86.24	1,191.36
2010	649.12	51.84	106.84	807.81
2011	861.24	26.74	125.07	1,013.05
Total	8,109.44	1,031.84	1,364.54	10,505.80

Source: OECD/DAC

[Figure 3. Japan's ODA to Vietnam (2007-2011); source: MOFA, OECD/DAC, 2012]

Bilateral diplomatic relations were in place since 1973 but remained cold after the demise of South Vietnam and the newly born Socialist Republic of Vietnam's rapprochement with the USSR. However, it is worth noting that one of the main aim of the 1977 Fukuda Doctrine, which marked a new era in Japan relations with Asia, was to “support ASEAN” with “economic means”, leaving room for a deeper cooperation with Hanoi that at the time was seen with suspicion by the member countries of the Association (Bouissou, 2003: 233).

Since 1986, Vietnam has undergone a process of massive political and economic process of reform, called *doi moi* (literally “renovation”). This state-mediated process of opening the country to the global market economy spurred an unprecedented growth, which helped to reduce poverty by a third and favoured the transition from an import-substitution economy to an export-oriented one. In 1995, Vietnam joined ASEAN and secured a stronger relationship with Japan and the other South-east Asian countries. The joining of ASEAN was followed in 1998 by that of APEC and finally in 2007 after a long negotiation, of WTO, thus ensuring fairer access for Vietnam exports to the international market (Kokko, 1998: 319-321).

With the launch of the Japan-Vietnam Joint Initiative in 2003, under Koizumi administration, the relationship between the two countries gained further strength. In fact, economic cooperation has ushered in activism by Japanese cultural institutions as the Japan

12 Further details on the entity of Japanese aid in Vietnam can be found on Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs website at the link: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/data/pdfs/vietnam.pdf> (retrieved February 9, 2014)

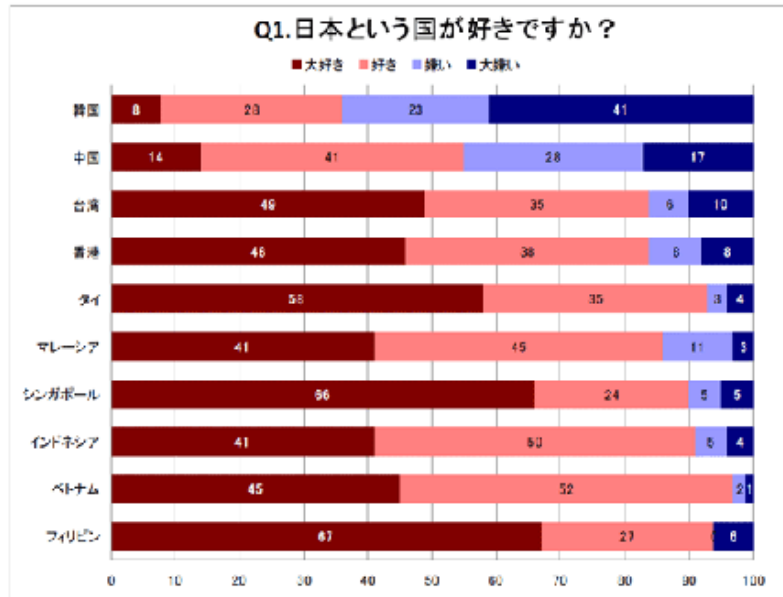
Foundation in further promoting Japanese language education in Vietnam as well as artistic, cultural and scientific exchange between the two countries¹³. For instance, in November 2013, a Japanese film and animation festival was hosted in Hanoi with the support of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Japanese Image Council to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Japan-Vietnam bilateral relations and enhance mutual cultural comprehension¹⁴. In this regard, how is the bilateral relation perceived in the public sphere? Did ODA play a role in establishing a positive image of Japan as a “developed country” among the Vietnamese public?

In 2012 AUN Consulting Inc., a Japanese marketing consultancy agency, conducted a survey among the top 10 Asian countries by GDP (Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines) on their people's degree of fondness of Japan. Answers from 100 male individuals for each country, aged 18 on, were collected. The results (Figure 4) show that the country where Japan is appreciated the most is Vietnam. Nearly 97 percent of the interviewed responded positively, confirming the good reputation Japanese enjoys in the country (AUN Consulting, 2012). As shown by the survey, the Vietnamese's fondness of Japan is higher than that of Thai and Filipino. 45 per cent of Vietnamese responders told AUN Consulting that they “like Japan very much”, while 52 per cent told that they “like Japan”¹⁵.

13 It is important to note that Hanoi's Japan Foundation Center for Cultural Exchange opened in 2008, as one of the newest overseas office of the organization. A statement with the Center aims and projects can be found here <http://jpf.org.vn/jp/about-us/brief-introduction/> (retrieved on February 11, 2014)

14 See 'Betonamu de Nihon animation tokushu jōei, gekiba anime kara tampen made 19 sakuhin' , Animeanime.jp, November 2, 2013, retrieved February 11, 2014 from <http://animeanime.jp/article/2013/11/02/16171.html>

15 The survey was articulated in five questions: 1. Do you like Japan? 2. Do you like Japanese people? 3. Would you go to Japan on a trip? 4. Do you like Japanese goods and services? The possible answers were: “like very much” (daisuki); “like” (suki) “don't like” (kirai); “hate” (daikirai). The majority (97 per cent) of Vietnamese respondents declared that they like (suki) Japan or they like it very much (daisuki); 98 per cent of them answered positively to the second question as well. The third question presents slightly different outcomes, as respondents from Philippines (95 per cent) and Singapore (94 per cent) showed more interest in tourism to Japan. Finally, 62 per cent of Vietnamese respondents said they “like very much” Japanese products and services. Retrieved February 10, 2014 from <http://www.globalmarketingchannel.com/press/2012110602>



[Figure 4. Reputation Survey: Do you like Japan? Source: AUN Consulting, *Ajia 10ka koku shinnichi do chōsa* (November 2012)]

3. Conclusions

As shown above, developmental issues are highly debated. International organizations such as UN, OECD, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have tried to get rich countries to cooperate in order to reduce the development gap between the first world and the third world through developmental aid initiatives. The results are not very encouraging, as those supranational institutions are accused of not being democratic and influenced in their decisions by the world's richest countries in their decisions (Dunne, 2011: 111). Critics as Easterly (2007) argue that the guidelines for development aid agreed on by those countries as disregarding the viewpoint of the recipients of their aid. In fact, criticism from NGOs, independent research institutes and media is that ODA masks public and private interests¹⁵. It is then possible to argue that the definition of development itself depends on unequal power relations between nation states in the international system.

In the case of Japan, these features have been here briefly examined. However, in order to have a better insight on the matter, one cannot overlook the historical importance that Asia has

had in Japanese history spurring Tokyo's strive for regional leadership. The need, on the one hand, for raw materials and for an outlet for commodities and investments by domestic industrial groups on the other has driven such a peaceful economic activism by the Japanese governments since 1945. To this end, one could argue that development has become one of the main elements of the Japanese national brand. If one considers the developmental state model that Japan has helped to introduce in developing countries across Asia since the 1960s, the era of Chalmers Johnson's "Japanese Miracle" (Johnson, 1982), thanks to Tokyo's aid programmes, one cannot help but to identify a clear hierarchical structure, which reflects dichotomies, such as the North/South and developed/underdeveloped, still recognizable in the contemporary world.

If on the one hand, official aid policy's effectiveness in the infrastructure sector, especially in low growth countries, has been ascertained (e.g. Kasuga, Morita, 2009), on the other, it appears clear that ODA to Asia, and Vietnam in particular in the last decade, can be interpreted as a political means through which Japanese governments (mainly LDP-led) have enhanced favourable environments for private investments by Japanese industries. However, achievements in what UNDP identifies as human development should be better considered. Furthermore, for a future development of my research it will be useful to investigate ODA awareness in the Japanese civil society and how the Tokyo's branding endeavour is perceived abroad, through interviews with social actors, representatives of the state institutions and NGO involved in the ODA process. Moreover, it will be of particular interest to study social alternatives to official aid for development programmes in the non-public sphere. Thus, a multidisciplinary approach that entangles IR and social studies seems the most appropriate to deal with the subject.

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