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**Japan's Positive Aid Sanctions Policies:  
Case Study of African Developing Countries**

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*Abstract*

*The Japanese government has implemented various positive aid sanctions policies in African countries. There are two main reasons why the Japanese government preferred to use the positive sanctions. Firstly, the Japanese government refrained from taking strict measures against countries that maintain strong economic and diplomatic relations with Japan. Second, even if the Japanese government did take punitive measure against those countries it softened its stance as soon as a convenient pretext could be found. All this indicates that policymakers in Japanese government still give priority to Japan's economic interests.*

## **1. Introduction**

To understand Japan's positive aid sanctions policy, the Japanese way of imposing aid sanctions needs to be taken into account. The Japanese government justifies its dealings with repressive regimes by stressing the importance of the "persuasive approach" practiced or "positive aid sanction" by Japanese government. According to Nikitina and Furuoka (2007), the Japanese government maintained that the policy dialogue pursued by Japan was "unique" in that Japan does not apply its standards automatically to the planning of development projects".

Furthermore, *Japan's ODA 1995* states that when problems contravening the principles of the ODA Charter occur, it is important to listen to explanations of recipient countries and hold dialogues with them. The document thus describes Tokyo's methods, "The Japanese approach is to work tenaciously on the recipient countries toward achieving the goal through friendly persuasion and quiet and patient diplomacy" (MOFA, 1995a: 47).

As can be seen from the above statements, the Japanese government uses its aid power to influence aid recipients not only by employing "negative aid sanctions" but also through the use of the "positive aid sanctions". In other words, Japan can choose to impose negative aid sanction positive aid sanction (an increase in foreign aid) would be applied to aid recipients that conduct desirable policies in the light of Japan's ODA Charter (Furuoka, 2007).

The Japanese government admits that it prefers to use positive aid sanction. According to *Japan's ODA 1995*, Tokyo adopts positive aid sanctions with the aim of encouraging recipient countries that show signs of improvement in such areas as democratisation,

human rights and restraints in military expenditure. By contrast, Japan employs negative sanctions when political situations in recipient countries are viewed as undesirable in the light of Japan's ODA Charter (MOFA, 1995a: 48).

According to Nikitina and Furuoka, the Japanese government tends to think that positive aid sanctions are more practical and effective than negative sanctions. The Japanese government explains its preference for the use of positive aid sanctions by stating that negative sanctions can backfire and thus retard the movement toward improvement. Besides, the use of negative sanctions may create an impression that Japan is trying to impose her values on aid recipients (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007, p.5).

However, an important question is whether Japan's preference for positive sanction is effective or desirable. There are contradicting views on the practice of dealing with repressive regimes through positive aid sanctions. For example, a leading Japanese economic journal praised Japan's initiative in Myanmar, calling it "Sun diplomacy". Using an analogy of Aesop's fable about a wager between the north wind and the sun, the article compared the US approach (negative aid sanctions) to the north wind while Japan's policy (positive aid sanctions) was equated with the sun. According to the journal, Tokyo's diplomatic efforts and contacts with the Myanmar military government contributed to the release of Aung San Su Kyi (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2007, p.7).

## **2. Positive Aid Sanctions**

Although the Japanese government has more frequently employed positive aid sanctions since the ODA Charter's introduction in 1992, a prototype of this method had existed before the announcement of the new aid guidelines. According to Inada (1995: 5), Japan's active assistance to the new government of the Philippines, after President

Marcos was ousted in 1986, can be considered the first case of the application of positive sanction.

Since the introduction of the new aid guidelines, Tokyo applied positive aid sanctions provided foreign aid to three Latin American countries, Nicaragua (1991), El Salvador (1991) and Peru (1992). These nations had a long history of civil disorder and had struggled to establish more democratic political systems. Positive sanctions was also employed in Africa in Madagascar (1991), Zambia (1992) and Guinea (1992).

#### **4. Case Study: Japan's Positive Aid Sanctions in Africa**

There were three cases of positive said sanctions in Africa, i.e. in Madagascar (1991), Zambia (1992) and Guinea (1992). First of ally, in 1989, in Madagascar, the military socialist government led by Didier Ratsiraka won the general election. However, soon after the election, people became disillusioned and started to criticise the socialist regime. As an anti-government movement gained strength, the political situation in Madagascar became shaky. In 1991, the socialist government ceased to rule the country. A referendum for a new constitution was held in August 1991. In November 1991, a plan to hold presidential and parliamentary elections was announced. With the help of the French government, the new constitution was implemented and elections were held. In the presidential election in February 1992, Albert Zafy defeated Ratsiraka and became Madagascar's new president.<sup>1</sup>

To support political changes in Madagascar, the Japanese government donated ¥5.46 million (US\$43 thousand) to purchase portable radios for the election. As *Japan's ODA 1993* noted, "The two-way portable radios donated to the City of Tananarive... proved

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<sup>1</sup> In 1997, Zafy was defeated by Ratsiraka in the presidential election.

to be quite helpful in the presidential and parliamentary elections held in that country (Madagascar)” (MOFA, 1993a: 37). In one year, Japan’s ODA to Madagascar increased more than three-fold from US\$13 million in 1990 to US\$40 million in 1991 (MOFA, 1995a: 402-423).

Secondly, in Zambia, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) was in power for more than 25 years, since that country’s independence. Gradually, a one party system was established in the country, and fair elections had not been held. In October 1991, prompted by moves towards democracy in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, general and presidential elections took place in Zambia. The Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) won a landslide victory and a critic of President Kenneth Kaunda and co-founder of the MMD, Frederick Chiluba, was inaugurated as the new president of Zambia. This was the first time since Zambia’s independence 27 years before that the power in the country was transferred peacefully (MOFA, 1993b: 146).

In response to positive changes in Zambia, “Japan is assisting the new administration, which is facing economic difficulties, in its efforts to move toward democracy and a market-oriented economy. In March 1992, it provided ¥3.5 billion (US\$26.9 million) in non-project grant aid” (MOFA, 1992a: 28).

Japan’s ODA to Zambia doubled from US\$40 million in 1990 to US\$82 million in 1991. By 1993, it increased by 45 percent and reached US\$116 million, making Japan Zambia’s second biggest aid donor. In 1992, Zambia received from the Japanese government a bilateral loan amounting to ¥9.74 billion (US\$74.9 million) to support privatisation and industrial reform projects. In the same year, Japan gave a grant amounting to ¥912 million (US\$7.01 million) for the Kafue bridge reconstruction

project (MOFA, 1995a: 429-431).

Finally, in 1990, Guinea's military government pledged to introduce political reforms. The government promised to enact the country's constitution and give rights to the people. The new constitution established a two-party system and universal adult suffrage (MOFA, 1993c: 38-39). Guinea's government also pledged to hold a general election and to peacefully transfer power to a civilian government.<sup>2</sup>

Japan showed support for positive changes in Guinea by providing funds to assist the country's general election. The Japanese government gave non-project grant assistance to purchase equipment necessary for running the election in 1992. However, according to *Japan's ODA 1993*, "As Guinea had postponed the election itself,<sup>3</sup> the counterpart funds (Japanese funds) have not been used yet" (MOFA, 1993a: 37).

Japan's bilateral grants to Guinea increased almost three-fold from US\$7.7 million in 1990 to US\$21 million in 1991, and amounted to US\$24 million in 1992. In 1991, with ODA amounting to US\$98 million, Japan was the second biggest aid donor to Guinea after France (MOFA, 1995a: 395-397).

Furthermore, besides giving bilateral assistance to African countries, the Japanese government organized the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in October 1993. The conference adopted the "Tokyo Declaration on African Development" that urged African countries to learn from Asia's experience. The provision of foreign aid to TICAD can be considered as a part of Japan's positive aid

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<sup>2</sup> President Lansana Conte won elections both in 1993 and 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The presidential election was held in 1993. The legislative election after having been postponed several times was finally held in 1995.

sanctions in Africa. The declaration of the conference announced, “We acknowledge some relevance of the Asian experience for African development. The very diversity of successful Asian countries gives hope that lessons can be drawn for African development” (MOFA, 2007).

*The Economist* reported that at the Tokyo conference the debate concerning the lessons from the East Asian development model was intense. “Perhaps the brand of capitalism urged upon Africa by western donors was faulty, ran the implication: Africa should follow the Asian way”. The conference became a platform to deliver the voice of dissent against Western methods of development. According to *The Economist*, while Western aid is increasingly conditional upon clean and open government, some of the African leaders felt unhappy about this interference. As the journal put it, “Uganda’s President Yowen Museveni told the Tokyo conference that donors should not interfere in Africa’s general development. Foreigners had interfered with Africa for the past 500 years, he said, and its present crisis had been caused mainly by outsiders” (*The Economist*, October, 1993: 35).

Japan contributed to development in Africa not only by giving foreign aid. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) was an attempt by the Japanese government to show an alternative development model to African countries. Some Japanese policymakers are sceptical about Western attempts to induce development and democracy in Africa. For example, a top Japanese diplomat, Director of the African Division (II) of the MOFA, Kiyokazu Ota, argues that Japan should recognise an “African way of democracy” and refrain from applying Western standards to African countries (*Gaiko Foramu*, August/September, 1998: 26).

Some Japanese scholars share this point of view. A researcher from a government think-tank maintains that African countries should embrace the “African way of democracy”. He argues that if, as in some Asian nations, African countries adopt authoritarian political systems to develop their economies and such systems contribute to the advancement of the nation’s welfare, the authoritarianism can be justified (*Gaiko Foramu*, August/September, 1998: 26).

According to Stein (1998: 45), the Japanese government, especially the MOFA, is particularly critical about the feasibility of the “Structural Adjustment Policy” advocated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). He claims that after a high-ranking African official criticised the social dimension of the adjustment policy, the MOFA asked UNCTAD (United Nations Conference for Trade and Development) to reassess applying the lessons from Asian development to Africa.

### **3. Evaluation of Japanese Positive Aid Sanctions in Africa**

Japan applied positive aid sanctions and provided additional foreign aid to assist the political and economic reforms in Madagascar, Zambia and Guinea. However, it would be an oversimplification to say that these positive aid sanctions methods have effectively contributed to the improvement of the political situations in these countries. The political situation in Zambia deteriorated after the election in 1991. In Guinea, the military junta continued to control the country.

Only in Madagascar, have there been some positive developments after the election in 1992 when the newly elected government discarded the socialist ideology and pledged to establish a system based on human rights and democracy (MOFA, 1993b, 151-152).

However, the major factor behind Madagascar’s transformation to a more democratic system was the efforts of the French government that stressed the political conditions in the former French colonies (Aoki, 1998: 6).

**Table 1**  
**Positive Aid Sanctions (1986-2002)**

Country	Year	Measures	Human Rights Condition Index	Area
1. Madagascar	1991	To assist the general elections	Four (1991)	Africa
2. Zambia	1992	To assist privatisation and industrial reform	Two (1992)	Africa
3. Guinea	1992	To assist the general election	Six (1992)	Africa

Source: Nikitina and Furuoka (2007), p.11

On the other hand, at least three questions arise concerning the relevance of the TICAD. First, Asian countries had been developing in a specific international environment that T.J. Pempel called the “Developmental Regime”. Western countries supported East Asian countries by providing them with vast amounts of foreign aid and importing their production. However, a unique “Asian Development Model” cannot be easily transferred to other regions. As Pempel (2000: 82) put it, “It is highly unlikely that potential emulator will have anything like the favourable international conditions that were enjoyed by these countries (East Asian countries)”.

Second, after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the region faced a serious economic setback. Despite the fact that during the Tokyo conference in 1993, delegates were sufficiently impressed by the successful economic performance of East Asian nations, African leaders might not any longer be interested in learning from Asia. The

fundamental question remains: are the lessons from Asia really relevant for African countries?

Another point to consider is that Asian countries stressed economic development as the ultimate target for a nation. East Asian countries with strong propensities for promotion of economic development could be defined as “developmental states”. According to Peter Evans (1995), the developmental states tend to act as coherent entities to deliver the collective good. Such developmental states tend to be immersed in dense networks of groups and classes that can become allies in the pursuit of the societal goal, which is “economic development”.

In “developmental states”, authoritarian regimes are justified for the sake of development. Chalmers Johnson (2000: 53) gave the following answer to the question as to whether the developmental state is democratic, “If one means by democracy some form of state accountability to the representatives of the majority of citizens combined with respect for the rights of minorities, the answer is probably no”. In other words, there is a danger that African countries might be tempted to justify authoritarian rule by adopting the “Developmental State Model” argument.

## **12. Conclusion**

The Japanese government prefers to use the method of positive aid sanction rather than negative aid sanctions, claiming the former to be more effective in reaching policy goals. Policymakers in Tokyo maintain that negative aid sanctions can backfire and retard democratic movements in aid recipients. Putting aside official explanations, the facts show that Japan avoids taking stern actions when human rights abuses occur in Asia. Special treatment of Japan’s important economic partners in Asia may be the real

reason for Tokyo's preference for the use of positive aid sanction. The Japanese government did not take punitive measures against several countries when grave human rights violations happened, because suspending aid could seriously hurt Japan's economic interests.

When the new aid guidelines were adopted in 1991, the Japanese government promised to rigorously apply those to promote "universal values". In practice, the principles were often sacrificed for the sake of economic interests. Japan seems to pledge to promote human rights and democracy with the aim of showing solidarity with other aid donor countries while the pursuit of economic interests remains the main driving force behind Japanese aid sanctions policy.

Overall, two trends can be observed in Japan's positive aid sanctions policy. First, the Japanese government refrained from taking strict measures against countries that maintain strong economic and diplomatic relations with Japan. Second, even if Tokyo did take punitive measure against those countries it softened its stance as soon as a convenient pretext could be found. All this indicates that policymakers in Tokyo still give priority to Japan's economic interests.

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