


Karol Zakowski\*

 0000-0003-2715-570X

## **FROM ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY TO SECURITY POLICY: JAPAN'S OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND NATIONAL INTERESTS**

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this article is to examine the evolution of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA). It is argued that provision of ODA has been closely linked with promotion of Tokyo's national interests, though its use evolved over time. During the Cold War, ODA was taken advantage of to gain access to Asian markets and bolster Japan's economic growth. In the 1970s, greater emphasis was put on stabilizing situation in the region through humanitarian aid. After the end of Cold War, in turn, Tokyo started using ODA to exert political pressure on countries that posed a challenge to the regional security system, such as China. The strategic dimension of ODA was emphasized after revision of ODA rules in 2015, which allowed financing projects with participation of armed forces involved in development cooperation for non-military purposes. Taking advantage of

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\* University of Lodz, Poland, email: karol.zakowski@uni.lodz.pl

institutional and legal analysis as well as comparative method, the article examines the securitization of Japan's ODA through the lens of the evolving international environment. Overcoming the limitations of partial explanations of determinants of Japan's ODA that refer either to economic interests and humanitarian concerns or to security considerations, such approach enables a comprehensive analysis of Tokyo's motivations behind ODA in different periods.

**Keywords:** *Japan, ODA, economic growth strategy, security policy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims at explaining the factors that have influenced the evolution of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) since its inception in the 1950s. In the vein of realism, it is argued that shifts in Tokyo's ODA policy were motivated by national interests and balance of power in East Asia.

ODA can be "defined as government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries" (OECD, 2022). During the Cold War, Japan's ODA increased over time, which reflected the rise of Japan as an economic power. In 1989, Tokyo became the largest donor of development aid in the world with net ODA disbursements amounting to 8.97 billion USD. This status was held until 2001 even despite economic stagnation in Japan in the 1990s (MOFA, 2014a, pp. 3-4). According to OECD data, in 2022, Japan was the third largest donor of ODA in the world (17.5 billion USD), though it provided only 0.39% of its GNI to this goal, less than the 0.7% target specified by the UN (OECD, 2022).

While initially development aid was focused on dealing with the legacy of Japan's territorial expansionism and promoting Japan's trade and investments abroad, over time, it was modified so as to assuage the fears of Japan's economic superiority through the comprehensive security concept. In the destabilized regional security environment after the end of Cold War, in turn, Tokyo started occasionally using ODA as an instrument of applying political pressure on the countries that posed a challenge to the *status quo* or to promote cooperation with those states which could serve counterbalancing and containing the rising China. Through analysis of these developments, the article traces the impact of Japan's changing foreign policy goals on ODA policy. The main hypothesis is that as Japan closely aligned ODA with economic growth strategy ever since launching financial assistance to the developing countries, it was later natural for Tokyo to

strategically employ ODA for other ends, such as security policy. As a result, the use of ODA in different periods intrinsically traced Japan's evolving national interests.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The directions and motives behind Japan's ODA have attracted a considerable interest from researchers. However, rather than perceiving Tokyo's development aid policy as a result of constant evolution of the international environment, most of them have focused either on examining selected determinants of ODA or on the impact of a single critical juncture in international order on provision of financial assistance to partner states. There is also a growing number of publications analyzing gradual securitization of ODA of different countries. This article analyzes unique traits of Japan's development assistance policy that have facilitated Tokyo's compliance with this global trend.

Scholars have pointed to various, often contradictory, determinants of Japan's ODA. Alesina and Dollar (2000) came to a conclusion that development aid policies of the largest donors were to a great extent driven by their political and strategic considerations. According to them, the US targeted mainly the Middle East, France provided assistance to its former colonies, and Japan's ODA was to a considerable extent correlated with UN voting patterns of recipient states. Grant and Nijman (1997) drew attention to the impact of the end of Cold War on the change of development aid provision patterns in Asia-Pacific. While collapse of the Soviet Union prompted Washington to largely reduce its ODA to the region, it gave an incentive for Tokyo to treat ODA spending as one of instruments for searching leadership in East Asia. As stressed by Miyashita (1999), however, Japan remained susceptible to US pressure regarding strategic employment of development aid. According to Qin (2024, p. 16), Japan's ODA policy, unlike the policies of other major donors, was oriented towards helping trade partners rather than assisting countries with humanitarian needs. On the contrary, quantitative analysis of Japan's ODA from 1979 to 2002 performed by Tuman, Strand, and Emmert (2009) showed that humanitarian concerns were more important for Tokyo than mercantilist interests or compliance with US grand strategy. Trinidad (2007), in turn, pointed out that the fact that over time Japan's ODA became less oriented on achieving economic profits and more focused on human security was due to the growing influence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) on formulating development aid disbursement policy since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

A lot of analyses have been devoted to securitization of ODA since the end of Cold War, with particular attention paid to Japan. As Japan had been long

known as a pacifist country, limited in projection of military power by the Article 9 of Constitution, the sudden alignment of its ODA with security policy seemed surprising. According to Ito (2025, p. 44), while Japan's ODA had initially been "just a tool for development aid," in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it became closely aligned with national strategies and the goal of strengthening economic security. A quantitative analysis conducted by Hoshiro (2022, pp. 322-325) proved that issuing of the Development Cooperation Charter in 2015 paved the way for provision of aid to military personnel of other countries. On the contrary to the drafting of two previous ODA Charters in 1992 and 2003, this securitization was conducted by the cabinet in a top-down fashion. As stressed by Shiga (2023, p. 256), while securitizing ODA and promoting the rule of law, the Abe and Kishida cabinets paid attention not to offend the recipient governments and avoided putting excessive emphasis on democracy. Szczepanska, Barbasiewicz, and Voytsekhovska (2025), in turn, analyzed intensification of ODA to Ukraine after annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russian invasion in 2022 through the lens of Japan's international role of proactive contributor to peace. Similar trend for securitization of ODA has been observed in the UK (Petrikova & Lazell, 2022), Australia (Hameiri, 2008), or Central Europe (Szynol, 2025).

While some authors have referred to economic interests or humanitarian concerns, others have stressed the importance of security considerations and US pressure in shaping Japan's ODA policy. This article supplements the abovementioned findings by analyzing different types of usage of development aid by Tokyo in different periods. In the vein of realism, it is argued that Japan's changing ODA policy reflected Japan's national interests in the evolving international environment. Such approach enables explaining why various researchers came to divergent conclusions regarding Tokyo's motivations behind provision of ODA in different periods. Moreover, while many scholars have perceived the recent securitization of Japan's ODA as a sudden shift from a mere development aid to a centrally planned strategy, this article stresses that the strategic dimension of Japan's ODA had been well visible since the 1960s. It is simply the new international incentives characteristic for different periods that pushed Tokyo to gradually shift the use of development aid from a purely economic strategy to a security policy.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The article employs a realist interpretation of foreign policy as a dimension of state activity determined by objectively definable national interests. In this regard, ODA has not been an exception. Morgenthau (1962, p. 309) stressed that "a policy of foreign aid is no different from diplomatic or military policy or

propaganda. They are all weapons in the political armory of the nation.” Although promotion of values such as human rights and democracy is often cited by donor countries as the main reason of provision of development aid, in fact, even humanitarian assistance is usually underwritten with egoistic foreign policy goals. As such, the scope and directions of ODA provided by Tokyo depended on Japan’s relative position towards other countries, global and regional balance of power, as well as security threats in East Asia.

To uncover the national interests behind Japan’s ODA policy, this article took advantage of comparative method as well as institutional and legal analysis. The rules of provision of development aid, such as the 1992 ODA Charter and the 2015 Development Cooperation Charter, were examined in relationship with the turning points in balance of power in East Asia. If read carefully, both MOFA documents and memoirs of politicians often quite explicitly indicated the national interests behind ODA policy. Description of international pressures exerted on Japan at such crucial moments as payment of postwar reparations in the 1950s, oil shock in 1973, anti-Japanese demonstrations in Southeast Asia in 1974, collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and rise of China’s power at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century served comparison of the scope and character of usage of ODA by Japan as a foreign policy tool.

**Table 1**

*Determinants of Japan’s economic cooperation and ODA*

External stimuli	Framework for ODA	Guiding principle	National interests
Postwar reparations	“Economic cooperation”	Economic growth strategy	Penetration of Asian markets Access to energy resources
Anti-Japanese demonstrations Oil shock Japan’s growing dependence on developing markets Emergence of Japan as an economic power	Fukuda Doctrine 1992/2003 ODA Charter	Comprehensive security	Assuaging of anti-Japanese sentiments Stabilization of trade partners in Asia
End of Cold War	1992 ODA Charter	Nonmilitary use	Activization of foreign policy

Emergence of Japan as a top donor of ODA			Stabilization of security situation in East Asia
Rise of China's power Decline of Japan's power	2015 Development Cooperation Charter	Proactive Contribution to Peace	Counterbalancing and containing the rising China

*Note:* Created by the author.

Table 1 shows how different external stimuli characteristic of the four analyzed periods translated into distinct frameworks for ODA and their guiding principles, which, in turn, were oriented towards realization of various national interests. Comparison of crucial documents concerning development aid and their application in Japan's foreign policy served uncovering of the strategic dimension of ODA that evolved depending on the changing international determinants.

The article is composed of four analytical sections that track different types of application of development aid corresponding to the succeeding periods after the end of the Second World War. The first section examines ODA as a part of economic growth strategy, while the second one describes the international determinants behind addition of a strong humanitarian component to development assistance. Analogically, sections three and four stress the importance of shifts in regional balance of power in the evolution of ODA as an instrument of putting pressure on other states in the security sphere and counterbalancing the rising China.

#### **4. ODA AS A PART OF ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY**

Initially, ODA was used by Japan mainly as an element of economic growth strategy. Japan's strategic importance at the beginning of the Cold War led to a generous treatment of this country by the American occupation authorities. War reparations paved way towards penetration of Asian markets by Japanese products, which led to invention of the ODA as a convenient tool for promoting Japan's economic interests.

The 1945 Potsdam Declaration obliged Japan to provide industrial equipment that could serve rearmament as reparations, but the US quickly abandoned this policy not to excessively weaken the Japanese economy. According to the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Tokyo had to pay reparations in the form of services such as production instead of money. The Japanese government quickly saw that provision of industrial products to Southeast Asian

countries as war compensation could serve expansion of trade and investments in partner states (Wang, 2022). Tokyo provided, partly as development grants, 200 million USD to Burma in 1954 (with additional 140 million USD in 1963), 550 million USD to the Philippines in 1956, 223 million USD to Indonesia in 1958, and 39 million USD to South Vietnam in 1959 (Kuriyama, 2016, p. 36). Instead of compensation for the colonial rule, Seoul received economic support from Japan in the form of free products and services as well as low-interest loans amounting to about 500 million USD. The funds were invested mainly in building South Korea's economic infrastructure and only 5.8% was devoted to individual indemnities to the victims of Japan's occupation (Takasaki, 1996, pp. 188-204). Analogically, while the PRC renounced its right to war compensation in 1972, it became the largest recipient of Japan's ODA from 1979.

Through provision of reparations to Southeast Asian countries, Japan gained experience which was later used in its ODA policy. In 1954, Tokyo joined the UK-led Colombo Plan to develop economic and human resources in South and Southeast Asia. Japan's emergence as an economic power in the 1960s contributed to its greater expansion to Asian markets. Through trials and errors rather than pre-planned strategy, Tokyo created its own model of ODA based on a "cooperative trinity" of economic cooperation, trade, and investment. Promotion of public-private partnership and provision of yen loans by Japan contributed to development of social infrastructure as well as roads, ports, and power plants that created favorable conditions for Japanese companies to invest in recipient states (Araki, 2007, pp. 20-22). As admitted by the Japanese MOFA, "the provision of economic cooperation in parallel with reparations was expected not only to help with the implementation of postwar settlements, and in turn, improve relations with neighboring Asian countries and elevate Japan's international status, but also to contribute to the revival and growth of the Japanese economy by expanding the export market" (MOFA, 2014a, p. 3).

Emulating the form of war compensations, Japan's ODA was initially tied to the obligation of purchasing Japanese products, materials, and services. When, under international pressure, Tokyo attempted to untie development assistance at the end of the 1970s, starting from aid to China and Indonesia, protests from construction and engineering companies slowed down this process (Aden, 2011, p. 10). In comparison with development loans offered by other member states of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, yen loans entailed relatively high interest rates and short maturity periods, which indicated Tokyo's focus on economic gains. Moreover, Japan directed more ODA to industrial, agriculture, and infrastructure sectors than other donor countries who on average allocated proportionally more funds to social development, welfare, education, or health. Unlike other major OECD states, Japan lacked a single central agency managing provision of ODA. Instead, different components of development aid were dealt with by distinct ministries, departments, and

government institutions, such as the MOFA, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Economic Planning Agency, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), or Export-Import Bank of Japan. For that reason, provision of ODA was closely connected to particular interests of different administrative units and pressure groups (Rudner, 1989, pp. 82-90).

Although provision of Japan's ODA seemed decentralized, it was generally the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund that decided on individual yen loans, while distinct ministries and agencies approved its decisions. Among ministries, MITI was the main promoter of the use of ODA for penetration of foreign markets (Committee on the History of Japan's Trade and Industry Policy RIETI, 2020, p. 132). Nevertheless, ODA policy was coherently led by a common conviction among the bureaucrats and politicians that development aid contributed to Japan's economic growth. For example, former Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru underscored that ODA was less an aid than a cooperation leading to a mutual profit. According to him, the wealth created in recipient states by Japan's economic assistance was expected to be spent for the purchase of Japanese products (Takeshita, 1995, p. 81).

Direct relationship between Japan's ODA and national interests became evident after the 1973 oil crisis. When during the Yom Kippur War OPEC states imposed an oil embargo against pro-Israel countries, Tokyo quickly dispatched emissaries to the Middle East to express pro-Arab sentiments. Being almost deprived of its own energy resources, Japan remained dependent on their import from OPEC members. To maintain import of oil, Tokyo considerably increased its ODA contributions to Middle-East states. The importance of the region was reconfirmed during Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo's visit to Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia in September 1978 (Trinidad, 2007, pp. 101-102). The oil crisis led to greater globalization of Japan's ODA, which until 1973 had been focused almost exclusively on Asia. In order to nurture friendly relations with resource-exporting states, development aid was diversified by Tokyo not only towards the Middle East, but also towards Africa and Latin America (Yasutomo, 1989-1990, p. 493).

Treatment of ODA as a part of economic growth policy was a natural result of Japan's situation immediately after the Second World War. Tokyo quickly discovered that provision of tied financial assistance to the developing countries served penetration of their markets, which was instrumental in rebuilding Japan's economy after the wartime destruction. However, disregard for other aspects of ODA could not be continued after Japan regained its dominant economic position in the region.



## 5. ODA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY

Japan's overwhelming economic superiority in East Asia, coupled with still fresh memory of war atrocities committed by the Imperial Army, led to the fears of reemergence of Japan's imperial ambitions. The strict tying of ODA to Tokyo's economic interests aroused anti-Japanese sentiments among the recipient states. As a result, Japan had to modify its development aid rules so as to assuage the concerns over excessive penetration of Asian markets by Japanese companies. At the same time, greater attention was paid to maintaining regional stability, vital for Tokyo, as Japan was becoming more and more dependent on trade with the developing countries.

The fear of Japanese economic domination, fueled by the memory of war atrocities, caused a series of anti-Japanese incidents in Southeast Asia in the 1970s. In 1972, boycott of Japanese products was announced by activists in Thailand (Sudo, 1988, p. 511). Anti-Japanese sentiments erupted in particular during Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's visit to Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia in January 1974. Violent riots and demonstrations took place in Jakarta and Bangkok. Concerns over potential revival of Japanese militarism initially hindered the prospects for cooperation between Tokyo and ASEAN, founded in 1967 (Singh, 2002, p. 282). The Tanaka cabinet responded to the accusations regarding overfocus of Japan's ODA on commercial objectives by increasing aid amounts and improving their terms and conditions (Yasutomo, 1989-1990, p. 492). This process was continued by his successors. In August 1977, the so-called Fukuda Doctrine was announced by Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo in Manila. In his famous speech, Fukuda stressed that Japan did not intend to become a military power, appealed for establishment of "heart-to-heart" relationship between Tokyo and ASEAN based on mutual confidence, and emphasized that both sides would be equal partners in contributing to stability and prosperity in the region (Haddad, 1980, p. 10). Financial aid was perceived as the most important instrument of promoting friendly relations with Southeast Asia. Under the Fukuda Doctrine, Tokyo promised to double ODA to the region in five years (Hellmann, 1979, p. 1196).

In 1978, MOFA published "The Current State of Economic Cooperation, and Its Outlook: The North-South Problem and Development Assistance," in which it explicitly linked Japan's economic interests with stability in the region:

1. "Japan can insure its security and prosperity only in a peaceful and stable world. One of the most appropriate means for Japan to contribute to the peace and stability of the world is assistance to developing countries.
2. Japan is closely interdependent with developing countries since it is able to secure natural resources only through trade with those countries. Therefore, it is essential to maintain friendly relations with developing countries for Japan's economic growth." (MOFA, 1994)

As stressed in point 2, changes in ODA policy were motivated by the fact that over time Japan's economic security became dependent on situation in developing nations. In 1987, 32% of Japan's exports and 47% of its imports were oriented to or from developing countries, while only 21% and 22%, respectively, depended on trade with six top industrialized states (Zhou, 1991, p. 348).

The awareness of both the necessity to assuage anti-Japanese sentiments in the region and the growing economic interdependence between Japan and its less developed partners contributed to elaboration of the concept of comprehensive security. In 1980, MOFA issued a document entitled "The philosophies of Economic Cooperation: Why Official Development Assistance?," in which, among other factors, it admitted "humanitarian and moral considerations" in provision of ODA. According to MOFA, development aid was "a cost for building an international environment to secure Japan's comprehensive security" (MOFA, 1994).

The concept of "comprehensive security" (*sōgōteki anzen hoshō*) was proposed by Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi in 1979. It broadened the definition of national security to spheres other than military, such as trade or development aid (Pharr, 1993, p. 248). In the 1990s, Japan continued referring to this concept under the term of "human security" (*ningen no anzen hoshō*), adopted by the UN Development Programme in 1994. By the initiative of Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō from 1999, the UN Trust Fund for Human Security was established, which stressed the importance of economic, food, ecologic, and health security. Japan became actively involved in formulating the Millenium Development Goals during the Millenium Summit in 2000 and founding the Commission on Human Security in 2001, co-chaired by a Japanese diplomat, Ogata Sadako (Soeya, 2005, pp. 211-216).

In 1992, Tokyo announced its first ODA Charter, which formulated four principles of development aid:

- (1) Environmental conservation and development should be pursued in tandem.
- (2) Any use of ODA for military purposes or for aggravation of international conflicts should be avoided.
- (3) Full attention should be paid to trends in recipient countries' military expenditures, their development and production of mass destruction weapons and missiles, their export and import of arms, etc., so as to maintain and strengthen international peace and stability, and from the viewpoint that developing countries should place appropriate priorities in the allocation of their resources in their own economic and social development.
- (4) Full attention should be paid to efforts for promoting democratization and introduction of a market-oriented economy, and the situation regarding the securing of basic human rights and freedoms in the recipient country. (MOFA, 1992)

The revised ODA Charter of 2003 explicitly added the perspective of “human security” aimed at enhancing the capacity of local communities and empowering individuals. The Charter put particular emphasis on “poverty reduction,” “sustainable growth,” “addressing global issues (...) such as global warming and other environmental problems, infectious diseases, population, food, energy, natural disasters, terrorism, drugs, and international organized crime,” and “peace-building” as priority issues (MOFA, 2003).

Over time, Japan broadened the geographical scope of its ODA from Asia to other regions. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) was initiated in 1993 with participation of 48 African states and 12 donors. In the Tokyo Declaration on African Development, the African participants stressed their commitment to economic and political reforms, while development partners promised to assist financially in building human and institutional capacities in the region (MOFA, 1993).

Thanks to the concept of comprehensive/human security Japan redefined its international role as a nonmilitary power and the top donor of ODA. This change was motivated by Tokyo’s national interests, which required assuagement of anti-Japanese sentiments in Asia in order to stabilize situation in partner countries and continue mutually beneficial economic exchange. The end of Cold War paved way towards further evolution of the strategic dimension of development aid as a tool for supporting democratization, human rights, and environmental conservation in recipient states.

## **6. ODA AS A MEANS OF POLITICAL PRESSURE**

As Japan became the world’s top ODA donor at the end of the 1980s, it gained a considerable political leverage over the countries receiving financial aid. Due to destabilization of the regional security order and Tokyo’s growing ambitions to perform a more active role in global community in the 1990s, Japan became more willing to use suspension of ODA as a means of applying pressure on those states that violated human rights or committed provocative acts in the security sphere.

After the end of the Cold War, Japan intensified the use of ODA as a “stick,” not only a “carrot.” Formulation of the four principles of development aid in 1992 facilitated suspension of ODA towards those countries that violated human rights, were involved in military conflicts, produced weapons of mass destruction, or conducted aggressive foreign policy. Still, at the beginning of the 1990s, aid sanctions were applied mostly towards impoverished recipient states from sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America which did not have overly close ties

with Japan. In case of authoritarian regimes in Asia, such as Myanmar, Tokyo was much less willing to resort to cutoffs of aids, not to endanger mutually beneficial economic exchange (Hook & Zhang, 1998, pp. 1062-1063). On the other hand, gradual change in balance of power in East Asia prompted Japan to display a more assertive posture towards those states that caused potential threat to national security.

The change in Japan's development aid policy in this regard was the most visible in relations with China. ODA towards that country was launched by Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi in 1979. From the onset, low-interest yen loans, technical cooperation, and grant aid were unofficially considered as a way of compensation for war destruction instead of formal reparations, to which the PRC had renounced the right during normalization of bilateral diplomatic contacts in 1972. Through a range of big infrastructural projects, such as Beijing-Qinhuangdao Railway, Beijing Subway, Shanghai Pudong International Airport, Beijing Sewage Treatment Plant, or China-Japan Friendship Hospital, Japan's ODA contributed to economic growth and development of human resources in China (MOFA, 2018).

The massacre of protesting students on Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989, led to the first suspension of Japan's ODA to China. Interestingly, however, immediately after the incident, Prime Minister Uno Sōsuke excluded the possibility of applying such a drastic measure, claiming that Tokyo should not impose sanctions on the PRC as the Chinese nation had suffered a lot from Japanese imperialism during the Second World War (Shambaugh, 1996, p. 85). Nevertheless, under American pressure, on June 20, 1989, Japan announced suspension of the third yen loan as well as grant aid to China. On the other hand, Tokyo only reluctantly conceded to the sanction policy and promoted China's interests during the G-7 summit in Paris in July 1989 (Sekiyama, 2008, pp. 80-81). As early as August 1989, Japan became the first industrialized country that relaunched humanitarian support to China amounting to 200 million yen for disaster-relief activities after a flood in Sichuan. In December 1989, in turn, Tokyo provided Beijing with the first grant aid for a project planned before suspension of ODA. However, only after thawing of Sino-American relations did Japan officially resume yen loans to the PRC in November 1990 (Tanaka, 1996, pp. 179-186).

While Tokyo suspended ODA only reluctantly under external pressure in 1989, situation was different in mid-1990s. After the end of Cold War, the PRC was emerging as the main threat for Japan in the region instead of the Soviet Union. China's growing military budget and increased assertiveness in the territorial dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as well as in delimitation of exclusive economic zones in the East China Sea caused concerns about disturbance of the regional balance of power. In October 1993, the PRC conducted an underground nuclear test, which was met with sharp criticism from

Japan, as it violated the rules of the 1992 ODA Charter. While the tests continued in 1994, a discussion began in ruling parties about possible sanctions against China. In addition, Japanese public strongly resented China's nuclear tests, which influenced the stance of politicians in this regard (Takamine, 2005, pp. 445-448; Hiramatsu, 2006, pp. 231-233). Only MOFA bureaucrats opposed sanctions against the PRC. However, even Foreign Minister Kōno Yōhei, who was a pro-Beijing politician, could not indefinitely resist pressure from both the socialists and the conservatives in the government (Green, 2003, p. 81). In December 1994, Japan granted the PRC the fourth installment of a yen loan for 1996-2000, but at the same time, it announced that, unlike the previous loans, which had been paid in advance for the entire period, the loan would be granted in two tranches. When China carried out further nuclear tests in May and August 1995, it became clear that more decisive action was required. The coalition parties even threatened MOFA that they would not pass the ministry's budget for next year unless new sanctions against China were introduced (Sekiyama, 2008, pp. 85-87).

Finally, in late August 1995, Japan froze non-repayable financial assistance to China under ODA except for humanitarian aid (Sekiyama, 2008, p. 87). These sanctions were serious enough to satisfy the politicians of the coalition parties, and at the same time mild enough to be reluctantly accepted by the MOFA. Unlike in 1989, the freezing of funds did not apply to the most important component of ODA, i.e. yen loans. On the other hand, while after the Tiananmen Square incident Japan applied sanctions against the PRC only after pressure from the US and Western Europe, this time, it stood at the forefront of the countries wanting to punish China. For this reason, Japan's unilateral decision was a much greater shock for the PRC than the similar step in 1989 (Takamine, 2005, pp. 447-449).

The crisis peaked in March 1996, when the People's Liberation Army organized military maneuvers and ballistic missile tests to put pressure on Taiwan in the midst of the campaign for the first democratic presidential election on the island (Scobell, 2000, pp. 231-232). The PRC wanted to prevent Lee Teng-hui's re-election, accusing him of seeking to declare Taiwan's independence (Matsuda, 1999, pp. 108-110). China's "missile diplomacy" shocked the Japanese public. One of the Chinese missiles fell just 60 km away from the Japanese island of Yonaguni, and the military maneuvers disrupted Japanese air and sea traffic near Taiwan. This time, even MOFA bureaucrats supported the sanctions. After China ignored Japanese warnings, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō decided in March 1996 to suspend talks with the PRC regarding the payment of the first portion of the fourth installment of the ODA loan, worth 580 billion yen. These sanctions were more serious than those imposed in 1995, as they concerned much larger amounts, but they did not bring the expected results. In the case of Taiwan, it was very difficult to influence China through external pressure (Takamine, 2005, pp. 450-451). On the other hand, the crisis ended naturally

after the presidential election on the island ended. At the end of July 1996, China officially announced suspension of further nuclear tests. Finally, in December 1996, Japan decided to grant a yen loan to the PRC, and in February 1997, it resumed non-repayable ODA assistance to this country (Sekiyama, 2008, p. 88).

China was not the only regional power towards which Tokyo temporarily suspended ODA. In 1998, Japan applied a similar policy towards India and Pakistan in response to their nuclear tests. On the other hand, while Tokyo did not terminate development aid to the other regional powers, it eventually discontinued yen loans to Beijing. Although Japan officially explained that the reason for this decision was attainment by the PRC of a higher level of economic development, security factors also played an important role. ODA to China was widely criticized in Japan as ineffective in discouraging Beijing from provocative moves on the international scene and assuaging anti-Japanese sentiments among the Chinese people. In 2005, Tokyo announced that yen loans to the PRC would be discontinued in 2008 – the year of Summer Olympics in Beijing (Okada, 2008, pp. 179-184).

Just as in previous periods, after the end of Cold War, Japan found new applications of ODA in response to the evolving international situation. This time, provision of development aid was linked not only with broadly defined security, but also with potential military threats. In particular, concerns over the rising ambitions of China prompted Tokyo to temporarily suspend and eventually terminate ODA towards that country. It is the challenge against the US-centric regional order posed by the PRC that would fuel further evolution of development assistance provision rules in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **7. ODA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PROACTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE**

China's growing assertiveness on the international arena prompted Tokyo to strategically use the ODA to strengthen those states that could oppose the hegemonic aspirations of Beijing. Securitization of development aid was conducted within the framework of Proactive Contribution to Peace – a concept formulated by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and continued by his successors.

Strategic calculations connected with the changing balance of power in East Asia led to the shift in distribution of ODA away from the PRC to the countries that border China. This evolution was perhaps the best reflected in Tokyo's approach to New Delhi. While India had been the first country that profited from Japan's ODA in 1958, until the 1990s, it received relatively little development aid for economic reasons. Not only India was not an important exporter of natural resources needed by Japanese industry, but also its economy was largely closed to foreign investors, which limited opportunities for mutual

cooperation. However, despite a general decrease in Japan's ODA as a result of economic stagnation, yen loans to New Delhi rose significantly at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and India became the largest recipient of ODA from Tokyo in 2003. This process reflected India's importance in counterbalancing the rising China. Numerous conflicts of interests between New Delhi and Beijing, including a border dispute, made India a potential partner in ensuring regional stability. Moreover, India's image as the world's largest democracy lent credibility to Tokyo's "values diplomacy" oriented against the authoritarian PRC. Importantly, India's geographic location along the sea routes used for transportation of oil from the Middle East to East Asia was strategically important for Japan (Varma, 2009, pp. 237-242). During his visit to India in August 2007, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō delivered his famous speech titled "Confluence of the Two Seas," in which he stressed that "a strong India is in the best interest of Japan, and a strong Japan is in the best interest of India," while reminding that his grandfather Kishi Nobusuke was the head of government who had launched ODA to New Delhi (MOFA, 2007).

Development aid constituted an important part of Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, a foreign-policy strategy formulated by the first Abe cabinet. In November 2006, Foreign Minister Asō Tarō announced his intention to base Japan's contacts with other countries on "value oriented diplomacy," involving promotion of "universal values" – "democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy." According to him, Japan should focus its endeavours on a geopolitical "arc" composed of "budding democracies that line the outer rim of the Eurasian continent." Asō described Tokyo's role as the one of an "escort runner" who supports democratization and nation-building efforts both through financial assistance and sharing its experience (MOFA, 2006). Prime Minister Abe put emphasis on strengthening cooperation within Quad initiative with the US and two regional powers, India and Australia, which shared democratic political system with Japan. However, these policies were discontinued after Abe's resignation in 2007.

After returning to power in 2012, Prime Minister Abe revived the idea of "value oriented diplomacy" and Quad, which were explicitly aimed at containing the rising China. This time, strategic usage of ODA was facilitated by centralization of decision-making process under the head of government through such policy venues as the Ministerial Meeting on Strategy relating Infrastructure Export and Economic Cooperation, established in March 2013 (Sasada, 2019, p. 1067). In February 2015, the ODA Charter was replaced with the Development Cooperation Charter. The new document explicitly linked development aid with Proactive Contribution to Peace promoted by Tokyo in order to secure international peace, prosperity, and stability. The Development Cooperation Charter allowed more flexibility in providing ODA to the countries strategically important to Japan. While assistance for military purposes remained prohibited,

it was allowed to fund projects, in which “the armed forces or members of the armed forces in recipient countries are involved in development cooperation for non-military purposes such as public welfare or disaster-relief purposes” (MOFA, 2015, pp. 10-11). Interestingly, the new name of the Charter suggested that Japan was backtracking to the 1950s and 1960s, when its economic assistance was not restrained by the definitions of ODA imposed by the OECD (Söderberg, 2017, p. 12). This change was preceded by a relaxation of the ban on arms exports in April 2014. The new Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology allowed a transfer that “contributes to active promotion of peace contribution and international cooperation” or “to Japan’s security” (MOFA, 2014b).

The new rules allowed Japan to strategically support those countries that had territorial disputes with the PRC. In September 2016, Prime Minister Abe announced his decision to provide the Philippines with two large patrol ships through a yen loan, assist in training the Philippine Navy pilots, and transfer Maritime Self-Defense Force’s TC-90 training aircraft to that country. He also stressed that the dispute over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea should be resolved peacefully based on the decision of the arbitral tribunal between the Philippines and China (MOFA, 2016a). Similar cooperation was initiated with Vietnam. During his visit to Hanoi in January 2017, Abe announced his decision to provide six new patrol ships to Vietnamese maritime law enforcement entities (MOFA, 2017).

In addition, ODA became an instrument for Japan’s competition with China’s Belt and Road Initiative aimed at building a new silk route between East Asia and Europe. In May 2015, Prime Minister Abe declared his intention to provide 110 billion USD for infrastructure projects in Asia over the following five years within the so-called “Quality Investment for Infrastructure” program. Tokyo tried to distinguish its initiative from China’s policy by avoiding debt-trap projects for the developing countries that lacked sufficient financial resources. “Quality Investment for Infrastructure” focused on improving connectivity between South and Southeast Asia through such projects as Mekong-India Economic Corridor or Dawei Port Special Economic Zone (Song, 2021, pp. 6-14).

Also TICAD was linked with Japan’s strategic aims. In August 2016, the conference was held for the first time in Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya. During the summit, Prime Minister Abe stressed the importance of both ODA and peacekeeping operations with participation of Self-Defense Forces as the means of implementing Proactive Contribution to Peace on the continent. At the same time, he underlined that Japan bore “the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous” (MOFA, 2016b).



Abe's successors, Prime Ministers Suga Yoshihide (2020-2021), Kishida Fumio (2021-2024), and Ishiba Shigeru (2024-2025), continued the basic philosophy of Proactive Contribution to Peace. Moreover, Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 prompted Tokyo to securitize ODA even further. During the Quad summit in Tokyo in May 2022, Prime Minister Kishida announced that the four countries intended to invest 50 billion USD in infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific within the following five years. During the Shangri-La Dialogue meeting in Singapore in June 2022, in turn, he promised to expand ODA aimed at "enhancing maritime law enforcement capabilities" through training of personnel, provision of "patrol vessels and development of maritime transportation infrastructure, to Indo-Pacific countries over the next three years" (MOFA, 2022). In the revised Development Cooperation Charter from June 2023, the Kishida cabinet expressed concerns over the challenge to "the free and open international order and multilateralism" caused by "changes in the balance of power and intensifying geopolitical competition," as well as over the fact that some developing countries "seem to be sympathetic to" these developments. Among ODA priority policies, much attention was paid to "realization of peaceful, secure, and stable societies, and maintenance and strengthening of a free and open international order based on the rule of law" (MOFA, 2023a).

On the other hand, Tokyo started providing financial support in the security field through a separate framework, which was mentioned in the National Security Strategy in December 2022. In April 2023, Tokyo issued implementation guidelines for Official Security Assistance (OSA) to strengthen security and deterrence capabilities of partner states. The recipient countries remained subject to the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology (MOFA, 2023b). Through OSA, Japan planned to provide patrol boats to Fiji and Bangladeshi Navies, rescue boats to the Malaysian Armed Forces, and coastal radar systems to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (MOFA, 2023c). If further developed, the new framework might lead to at least partial desecuritization of ODA.

Responding to the change of balance of power in East Asia, Japan started using ODA not only to realize its commercial interests, stabilize situation in developing countries, and punish those states that disturbed regional order, but also to strategically encircle and counterbalance the new rising hegemon, China. This securitization of development aid was a natural result of the challenge against the US-centric regional order posed by Beijing.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of Japan's ODA attests to its importance in realization of Tokyo's foreign policy goals. In the early postwar period, Japan was focused on reconstructing its economy after the wartime destruction, which explains why development aid was closely linked with searching business opportunities for Japanese companies. Reemergence of anti-Japanese sentiments due to Japan's growing economic domination in East Asia in the 1970s, in turn, compelled Tokyo to promise it would never attempt to become a military power and shift to using ODA as an instrument of comprehensive/human security. Over time, development aid from Japan became a considerable revenue for many developing countries. In some cases, such as China, financial assistance was informally considered as a substitute for war compensation. After the end of Cold War, Tokyo started occasionally using ODA to apply political pressure on recipient states, in particular on the PRC whose rising position on the international arena caused security concerns in the region. Modification of ODA rules in the 21<sup>st</sup> century so as to conditionally allow provision of financial resources to armed forces reflected the need to better respond to the changing balance of power in the region in order to counterbalance China. As such, ODA was instrumentally used in all the analyzed periods to fulfill Japan's evolving national interests.

In the vein of realism, the changing rules of provision of Japan's ODA closely followed the shifts in balance of power in East Asia. In the early postwar period, Tokyo was free to focus on economic recovery under the American security umbrella. Once Japan became a dominant regional economy in the 1970s, it became interested in the concept of comprehensive security not only to expand its political influence, but also to increase its international prestige. The gaining of the status of top provider of ODA at the end of the 1980s, in turn, created conditions for Tokyo to use this new position in applying pressure on countries disturbing the regional order or violating human rights. Further securitization of development assistance was caused by the waning in Japan's economic power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Having been replaced by China as the second world economy in terms of GDP in 2010, Japan started to strategically use ODA to encircle and counterbalance the new rising regional hegemon. As such, rather than being rigidly based on a preset philosophy, development aid remained one of the tools for flexibly adapting foreign policy to the evolving international conditions. Development aid has been perceived as a flexible instrument of foreign policy by decision-makers in Tokyo ever since the beginning of Japan's economic cooperation with Asian trade partners, which facilitated its later securitization.

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