

Japan's Diplomacy towards Africa: Lessons from Historical Experiences

Makoto SATO

Japan's diplomacy in Africa has often been simply interpreted in terms of its economic interests. Peter Schraeder, for example, argues that the relationship between Japan and its recipient countries is a typical neo-mercantilist one involving the barter of trade and aid. Statistical examination easily rectifies this. Schraeder seems to misunderstand the reality, perceiving Japanese diplomacy in Africa as a simple relationship between Japan and each individual country or region of Africa, or the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. However, Japanese diplomacy can never be understood without analyzing its relationships with third parties outside of Africa, which have had vital influences on Japan's Africa policy in each circumstance. The history of Japanese diplomacy in Africa, as seen mainly from the aid perspective, could be divided into five stages: the first stage (basically a pre-historical stage for aid in Africa, with Japanese aid being almost exclusively directed to Asia), the second stage (the beginning of full-scale aid in Africa after the oil shocks), the third stage (a rapid expansion of aid), the fourth stage (the beginning of Japanese political commitment in Africa), and the fifth stage (the latest stage). Major features of each stage indicate that Japan's relationships with third parties outside of Africa have had vital influences on policy formulation by Japan. Some of the basic features of Japanese aid policy formulated in the first stage were later applied to Africa. The beginning of full-scale aid in Africa during the second stage was a reaction to the oil shocks initiated by Middle Eastern countries. The rapid expansion of aid during the third stage was a reaction to other donors. The application of the ODA Charter in Africa during the fourth stage was a reaction to criticism by the international community of Japanese aid to the Philippines and Iraq. This paper concludes that the multiple triangular relationships between Japan, Africa, and third parties are fundamental to understanding Japanese diplomacy in Africa.