

Executive Summary

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● Joint Japanese-Chinese Discussion on Africa

About a decade ago, I began to think about the need to talk with Chinese researchers on African affairs. China has a long history of African studies and began to send researchers to South Africa in the 1990s. As fellow Asians, we were quite interested to learn about their understanding of Africa. The Mecca of African studies is western countries, so we often learn from and exchange views with European and US researchers and people working in the field. We also often meet them at various conferences. Therefore, the perspective of “Africa seen from Asia” is a “lonely” viewpoint of Japan. I then thought it might be possible to find a way to escape from that loneliness through exchanges in African studies between Japan and China.

The process was not easy, however. Although there were opportunities to meet people working on African issues and researchers from China, 10 years passed without us being able to organize an international conference between the two countries. In the meantime, China’s presence in Africa grew rapidly and began to attract attention from around the world. China purchases a large amount of oil from African countries such as Sudan and Angola, and Chinese products have flooded the African markets. As a result, the volume of trade and investment between China and Africa has skyrocketed. China’s political presence in Africa has also grown rapidly. In November 2006, the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was held, with the presence of the heads of many African states, and in May this year the annual conference of the African Development Bank was held in Shanghai. Considered these trends, the United States and United Kingdom have already launched bilateral consultations with China on the topic of Africa. Even in South Africa, tripartite consultations have been held with China and the US. It has become impossible to discuss the African situation without considering China, and Japan lags far behind in this respect.

While feeling that things could have been done more quickly, it so happened that the Institute of Developing Economies – JETRO / IED-JETRO

decided to organize the Japan-China Conference on Africa, which had been originally proposed by JETRO Johannesburg as a FY2007 project, and I was finally able to complete the plans. In March 2007, China specialist Yasuo ONISHI (Director - General, Area Studies Center, IDE-JETRO) and myself, Katsumi HIRANO (Executive Director of JETRO Johannesburg at the time) visited the major African studies institutions in Beijing. Consequently, in September we successfully held this conference, inviting five researchers from the Institute of West Asian and African Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, and Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation of the Ministry of Commerce.

One week after the conference, a Director-Generals' consultation on Africa was held between the Foreign Ministries of the two countries. Thus the IDE was able to host a pioneering conference for the discussion of African issues among Chinese and Japanese specialists.

● Program of the Conference

Here, I will briefly introduce the program of the closed conference and the discussions held there. The conference consisted of five sessions and plenary discussions.

In Session 1 "Perspective on Actual African Economies," Katsumi HIRANO and YAO Guimei (Senior Research Fellow, Institute of West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) presented their views concerning the African economy in recent years. They shared almost identical views on the African economy. After suffering from a long period of stagnation, it turned upward from the mid 1990s and its economic growth continues today at the macro level. This growth, however, has been supported by exports of resources such as oil, and few people in the exporting countries benefit. Poverty is still serious. Africa's recent economic growth is different from Asia's growth supported by the expansion of the manufacturing industry, and there are still concerns about sustainability. The two reporters both referred to these points.

In Session 2, "African Studies in Japan and China," ZHANG Hongming (Deputy Director, Institute of West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) and Shinichi TAKEUCHI (Director, African

Studies Group, Area Studies Center, IDE-JETRO) reported on the history and present situation of African studies in the two countries. This session revealed a sharp contrast between courses in African studies in the two countries. In simple terms, African studies in China have been moving “from politics to academia.” From the 1960s to the 1970s, African studies had a strong political and ideological slant. Since the period of reform and opening, the scientific nature of courses has been strengthened and bases for African studies have been established at several university/research institutions in recent years. In Japan, on the other hand, as typified by the activities of the Kyoto University group, which has long formed the core of African studies with its work in primatology and anthropology, research was initially far removed from policy implementation. From the 1990s, however, research began to focus on aid and development policies, prompted partly by the severe reality of Africa.

In Session 3, “Foreign Policy toward Africa,” the nature of Chinese and Japanese foreign policy toward Africa was discussed. Makoto SATO (Professor, Ritsumaikan University) explained Japan’s foreign policy toward Africa using a “triangle” model. He argued that Japan’s foreign policy toward Africa is decided not within the framework of bilateral relations but always based on the existence of a third party (regions and countries other than Japan and Africa). In the past, Japan applied its experience with Asian and Middle Eastern countries to the African context. In recent years, Japan’s policy toward Africa has been set based on the expected responses of European countries and the US. In discussing China’s policy toward Africa, ZENG Qiang (Research Professor, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations) pointed out that the policy has been consistent since the period of support of the struggle for liberation from colonial rule, and that the ideological nature has diminished since the 12th National People’s Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1982.

In Session 4, “Development Cooperation for Africa,” the development aid policies of the two countries were discussed. XU Weizhong (Director, Department of African Studies, Institute of Asian and African Studies, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations) stressed that before the Reform and Opening Up policy, aid was given to liberation struggles and that China’s aid is still based on different principles from those of OECD and DAC, as seen on the issue of Taiwan. He also brought up the question of how

to develop assistance guidelines and how to address issues of capacity building in African nations, corporate social responsibility, etc. as a task for recent years. Katsuya MOCHIZUKI (Senior Researcher, Inter-disciplinary Studies Center, IDE-JETRO) pointed out that Japan's development aid has changed from the past ideal of being based on requests and being separated from politics and economy, and that while advocating the utilization of the Asian experience, Japan has implemented its aid policies in cooperation with the Western countries.

In Session 5, "Trade and Investment vis-à-vis Africa," the economic relations between the two countries and Africa were elucidated based on concrete statistical data. Shigeki OKADA (Deputy Executive Director, JETRO Johannesburg) cited, as a feature of Japan's trade with Africa in recent years, the fact that Japan has faced a trade deficit due to the expansion of imports of oil and other mineral resources, and that South Africa is an important import market for automobiles. He also mentioned that while many of the Japanese companies that had moved into Africa in the 1960s and 1970s had retreated by the 1980s, a new type of investment (such as Toyota) with a large sum of capital per investment, although with limited numbers of projects, emerged in the 1990s. According to SONG Zhiyong (Deputy Director and Associate Professor, Department of Asian & African Studies, Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Commerce), China's trade with Africa has been expanding rapidly since 2000 and like Japan, has been in deficit since 2004. The structure involves importing resources (oil) and exporting industrial products such as electronic appliances and clothing. The advance by not just state-owned enterprises but private companies as well is accelerating, and the Ministry of Commerce has not been able to grasp the real picture. The Chinese government considers trade friction with African nations to be a serious problem and is considering countermeasures, including the provision of guidance to companies that export poor-quality commodities.

● Impressions after the Conference

China's aggressive policies toward Africa in recent years have been discussed in various ways, and have sometimes attracted criticism. China seems to be perplexed as it tries to construct a new economic relationship with Africa.

Companies in both Japan and China are troubled by the poor investment environment in Africa, and although Chinese companies have actively invested there, they have faced various problems. Security is a particularly serious problem: there was an incident in Ethiopia this year where a Chinese company was attacked by an armed anti-government group and nearly ten people were killed.

Of course there are many points upon which the stances of the two countries differ greatly, such as Taiwan and arms exports. Since China seeks to act as the leader of the developing countries and its relations with Africa are defined within the framework of this policy, it is natural that it has a view that differs from Japan or Western countries. However, it should be noted that researchers from China stressed the importance of improving governance, capacity building, and peace building in Africa. If the Chinese government shares this understanding, terms such as “non-interference in the domestic affairs of another nation” and “separation of politics and economy” will likely become no more than a “pretext” in official policy. Improving governance or peace building cannot be achieved without some involvement in the domestic affairs of the country, and are areas where cooperation with other countries is essential. China cannot involve itself in African countries alone and thus must keep the international community and other donors in mind. In fact, China signed the aid guidelines set by OECD in 2005 (Paris Declaration).

The conference was effectively a “first contact” for researchers in African studies from Japan and China. African studies in China is going to be ‘science’ after ideological period in the middle of China’s new policy for Africa, which was repeatedly mentioned by our guests. Because the relationship between China and African countries has rapidly enlarged, the task of Chinese researchers is quite heavy and never easy. When I visited several institutes in Beijing to prepare this conference, I find that researchers struggle with limited materials on Africa and the number of staffs for African studies is also limited. The majority of senior researchers has no experience to study abroad but had stayed in Africa as an embassy staff. Some had sent to rural area as a worker during ‘Cultural Revolution’.

The international community including Japan wishes that China in Africa will share our common understanding on Africa and policies to improve African situations. Researchers in China can play a great role in

this regards. China never wishes to be blamed or treated as a trouble maker. This wish should be reflected into policies, to which task researchers can contribute. Therefore, exchange between Japan and China on African studies will be also expected to help to bring mutual understandings between our governments. African studies in Japan have a 40-year history, academic association with 1000 membership, and biggest collection of materials in Asia. African studies in Japan can assist our counterpart in other Asian countries, and it will be fruitful for us too.

We will have to wait to find out how we can cooperate from now on, but it seems certain at least that we will be able to build a relationship of trust for future cooperation. China and Japan are experiencing similar problems in Africa. In this conference, I realize that we can share many views with our Chinese colleagues on Africa with that both of us confront as responsible professionals. These common understandings may come from Asian point-of-view. We may have witnessed Asian view on Africa to be established after long-lasting 'loneness'.