

China's Aid to Africa: A View from China and Japan¹

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Even in souvenir shops in Westlands, Nairobi, I often get a greeting in Chinese from Kenyans. About two years ago, such greetings were always in Japanese. (Yuki Nakamura, Centre of African Studies, doctoral candidate in Kenya, to K. King, 26.01.07)

China, Africa, the West, and Japan

Since arriving in China in March 2006, less than two months after the publication of *China's African Policy* on 12th January 2006 (China 2006), it seemed appropriate, as an Africanist located in a centre for comparative research,³ to situate the aid dimension of this new policy in the wider context of Western aid to Africa, and as an education researcher to look specifically at the role of human resource development in China's approach to Africa. In what proved to be China's Year of Africa, 2006 turned out to be an extraordinarily rich period for an analysis of China's engagement with Africa, with a lens on aid policy and on education (King 2006a, b, c, d).

Thus far we have interrogated the discourse of China's international cooperation with Africa on its own terms, situating this within the extended history of China-Africa relations (Snow 1998) as well in contrast to the prevailing aid discourse of the West in its relations with Africa. This latter was powerfully captured in Britain's Year of Africa (2005), with the publication of the Commission for Africa (2005), and with the Africa focus of the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in July 2005. At least at the level of discourse, there are very strong contrasts between China's language of mutuality, symmetry, and 'win-win' bilateral, economic cooperation for increased trade with individual African countries, summarised in the outcomes of the great Beijing Africa summit of November 2006, on the one hand, and a great deal of the Western discourse on Africa, with its emphasis on the need for better governance, capacity development, and

¹ The research on China's aid policy towards Africa has been supported by a research grant from the British Academy. The Academy is not responsible for the views expressed in this present paper.

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poverty reduction if the continent is to have any chance of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), on the other.⁴

Since this present seminar is taking place in the headquarters of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Tokyo, it may be useful to add a Japanese lens to the examination of China's growing engagement with the African continent. In 2007, one year before Japan's own Year of Africa in 2008, with its leadership of the G8 Summit in 2008, and with the location of the Tokyo International Conference on Africa (TICAD) in close relationship to the Summit in that same year,⁵ it may be a good vantage point to review China's increasingly visible presence in Africa. This is particularly so as Africa has since 2003 become a much higher priority for JICA. We shall briefly pick out some elements of Japan's cooperation policies towards South East Asia, China and Africa, and will note some apparent commonalities in Japan's early and highly influential engagement with these regions, and some aspects of the pattern that China has apparently been pursuing in Africa. In particular, we shall refer to the special character of Japan's aid philosophy, and a sense of its own comparative advantage over against Western donors, but we shall contrast this bilateralism with the strong pressures towards alignment, harmonisation and donor coordination associated with Japan being a member of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

This tension between bilateralism and multilateralism, between a donor's sense of their own unique history and ways of working, on the one hand, and the impact of being a DAC member, and 'a responsible member of the international community', on the other, are probably present, to different degrees, with all DAC's bilateral agencies. They can be seen, also, very clearly in some of the current commentary on China's activities in Africa, including by the Japanese media, JICA, JBIC and MOFA. But, in fact, China's intensely bilateral engagement with some 48 of Africa's 53 countries⁶ today is reminiscent of an earlier era in the cooperation activities of many other donors, including Japan, though there are some key differences of scale and content.

Finally, in assessing some aspects of China's increasingly ambitious aid programme, as evidenced in the *Declaration and Action Plan* from the November 2006 Beijing Summit (FOCAC 2006), there may turn out to be scope for a degree of mutual learning between agencies working in Africa. The dialogue may not, therefore, need to be the current one-way discourse about how China can be brought into line with DAC's preoccupations about alignment, harmonisation and effectiveness. Rather, it may be more of a two-way learning about how countries and agencies deeply involved in Africa such as Britain, China, France and Japan, not to mention the World Bank, can learn from each other about how Africa can move from poverty to growth. Arguably, there is in fact a good deal of common ground between the investment priorities of the Commission for Africa, the UN's Millennium Project, Japan's sustained focus on economic growth, and the concentrated, cross-sectoral approaches of China in so many African countries.

⁴ See King 2006b for illustrations of the West's preoccupations with poverty reduction and the MDGs in Africa.

⁵ The TICAD summits have taken place every five years since 1993.

⁶ The remaining 5 countries have diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Earlier integrated approaches to aid, trade and investment by Japan

One of the features of Japan's hugely influential impact in South-East Asia is that its role as an aid donor with grant assistance, concessional loans and technical cooperation was powerfully complemented by foreign direct investment (FDI) from Japanese companies, and by the activities of the great trading houses. In an era before pressure from Western donors obliged Japan increasingly to untie its yen loans, there was a possibility for Japanese private companies, whether in construction, transport or equipment provision, to compete successfully for tenders from the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), the predecessor of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), and also to work in close collaboration with sectoral ministries many of which had some component of the official development assistance (ODA) budget. The overall impact of this concentration of different Japanese initiatives and delivery mechanisms in many different sectors was clearly greater than if there had been just a single modality such as grant assistance in operation. Areas where this combination may have been particularly successful in engendering economic growth would include the Eastern seaboard of Thailand, but it was a pattern across much of South East Asia.

A further example of this complementarity of initiatives would include Japanese cooperation in China itself. Following the Japan-China Long Term Trade Agreement of 1978, a series of five five-year batches of loans was agreed which was expected significantly to support China's Open and Reform Policy. Over a period of 27 years, no less than 3.2 trillion Japanese yen (US\$28 billion) were provided to China through OECF/JBIC, covering all provinces and diversified sectors;⁷ and it is judged that the process had a positive impact on five dimensions in China: 'alleviating infrastructure bottlenecks, regional development, poverty alleviation, provision of advanced technologies, and transfer of institutional frameworks' (Kitano 2003: 467).

Without seeking to comment on the impact of the loans on their own, it is worth noting that they would appear to have been one key factor in facilitating the entry of Japanese foreign direct investment in China from the mid 1980s, not to mention other FDI from Asia, America and Europe. But they need to be considered alongside the continued operations of the great trading houses of Japan in China. Equally, the role of grant assistance and technical cooperation was substantial, amounting to some 4000 Japanese experts in the first 20 years of cooperation, and the admission to Japan of large numbers of both short-term trainees and of longer term students. In respect of both categories, China provided the largest number of trainees and of foreign students studying in Japan (MOFA 2001).

Key elements in Japan's ODA philosophy

This example of a series of integrated initiatives sustained over a very extended time period typifies Japanese engagement with several major countries in the Asian Region. It is important to underline the point that concessional yen loans are strongly felt to have been also a key element in Japan's aid philosophy. Because countries have to think

⁷ The five batches of loans covered transport, electric power and gas, telecommunications, irrigation, mining and manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, commodity loans and social services

carefully about what projects or programmes they should seek to finance from ODA loans, it is accepted in Japan's aid constituency that loans have the effect of enhancing the ownership by the recipient of the projects (JBIC 2005). At the same time, yen loans have been a key ingredient in the development of the economic and social infrastructure which Japan has, to a greater extent than other bilateral agencies, regarded as an 'indispensable condition for economic growth and sustained poverty reduction in developing countries' (ibid. 6).

These two elements, the role of concessional loans and the priority of investment in economic and social infrastructure, we shall return to when we come to consider the characteristics of China's cooperation with Africa today. But there were other elements and approaches which were considered crucial to the specificity of Japan's ODA. These would include a strong emphasis on the self-reliance of the recipient country, and an underlining of the importance of aid being determined by the priorities of the recipients – the so-called 'request basis' for foreign aid. This, we have implied above, was thought to be reinforced by the selectivity required in taking on loans for particular development projects.

But there were other elements that were central to the particularity of Japan's bilateralism as it was fashioned in the early decades of its ODA, and which have retained their salience until the present. One of these was the strong emphasis on the role of Japanese expertise in the delivery of Japanese aid projects. The belief that the transfer of more advanced technology, whether in rice production, in transport systems or telecommunications, was best implemented by the technical cooperation of Japanese experts over a long time frame was central to Japanese aid philosophy. This emphasis on the importance of Japanese personnel and expertise in the successful delivery of projects has continued up to the present, and we shall argue that it is another characteristic that is shared with contemporary Chinese cooperation projects in Africa.⁸

Another element that is associated with the fashioning of Japan's comparative advantage in ODA is the strong belief that Japan's own experience of development and transformation, whether in the Meiji period or more particularly after the second world war, is directly relevant to its model of development for others. The critical role of the state in this process, but also the contributions from Japan's own experience in education, agriculture, forestry or other sectors, were strongly felt to be relevant to development cooperation. This capacity to draw directly from its own experience was of course facilitated by the much greater involvement of sectoral ministries and their personnel in ODA than would be the case if there had been a single aid ministry or agency such as in Scandinavia, the UK or Canada. Finally in this analysis of its special aid philosophy, Japan, as China today, would often make the case that it was still receiving aid and accepting concessional loans, and thus knew what it was like to be a recipient (or a developing country) while it was already beginning to provide development assistance itself (King and McGrath 2004).

⁸ For an extended discussion of Japanese expertise in Japanese ODA, see King and McGrath 2004.

Japan's engagement with Africa

These different aspects of Japan's bilateralism and its experience in Asia of ODA operating as a locomotive for economic growth along with other crucial components such as Japanese FDI were also tried out in Africa. There too there was an important role for Japan's yen loans in the 1970s and early 1980s. More work would be needed on how the macro-economic and political situation in Sub-Saharan Africa was different from South East Asia, but it would appear that the tight concentration of many different Japanese resources, both public and private, which had been a feature of Japan's ODA in Asia was absent in Africa. Furthermore, the oil shocks, followed by the lost decade of structural adjustment, meant that the loans had little of the multiplier effect that had been evident in Asia.⁹

Arguably, however, it was Japan's continuing belief in the development model that it claimed had worked for itself which accounted in part for its proposing the start of the TICAD process in 1993. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development allowed Japan to propose an African policy that was at odds with structural adjustment and the so-called Washington Consensus (Lehman 2005). In addition, and in parallel with what China would propose in its *African Policy* of 13 years later, there was a strong emphasis on the need for a new strategic partnership for sustainable development based on the self-reliance of African countries (TICAD 1993). Also unlike the conditionalities associated with the IMF and World Bank adjustment regime, the TICAD process explicitly stressed the mutuality and symmetry of the relationship with African countries. TICAD allowed Japan to present the place of the Asian model of development, in whose fashioning Japan had played such a key role itself (TICAD 1993).

Japan's bilateral vision in the context of donor coordination

These different elements which have combined to make Japan's version of bilateralism have been in an uneasy tension with the pressures on Japan to conform to the OECD DAC's interests in donor coordination, alignment and harmonisation. Thus, the DAC's narrow focus on the six international development targets (IDTs), which emerged from its report of 1996 on *Shaping the 21st Century: the contribution of development cooperation* (OECD 1996), paid scant attention to the crucial role of economic infrastructure which had been so central to Japan's engagement with Asia.¹⁰ It was these social sector targets which became installed in 2000 as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were claimed to be the world's development agenda.¹¹ These goals with their focus on poverty reduction sidelined the centrality of economic growth which

⁹ In addition, and as a result of Western pressure, yen loans were increasingly untied, thus breaking the potential for Japanese firms to be so closely connected to the processes of development cooperation as in earlier years.

¹⁰ The DAC report admitted that 'Development assistance has financed numerous projects to extend and improve energy, transportation and communications infrastructure as well as to strengthen capacity for the management of these systems. That physical investment and institutional capacity have been important to bring more people and more nations into the modern economy' (OECD 1996: 8). Nevertheless, the IDTs emphasised principally social sector targets.

¹¹ For a critique of the Western role in the creation of this allegedly global development agenda, see King (2007).

Japan believed was critical in sustained development.¹² In other ways too the DAC and Western agencies had influenced Japan progressively to untie its concessional loans, and have focused on sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) and on direct budget support (DBS), which are seen as moving in a very different direction from the traditional project approach of Japan. Equally, Japan's strong emphasis on technical assistance and on the crucial role of its own expertise is not seen to fit well within these new frameworks for pooling donor aid in support of agreed sector or national policies.

Given Japan's interest in maintaining some scope for its own comparative advantage and special historical contribution to development assistance, over against the DAC pressures for conformity, it is perhaps surprising that Japan should in its reactions to China's aid activities in Africa, appear to be criticising China on the very grounds for which it had been so frequently criticised itself. We shall therefore turn now to review some of the main characteristics of China's engagement with Africa, and pay particular attention to the contrasts with Western agencies, but also some of the resonances and commonalities with Japanese development cooperation.

China's integrated development and cooperation with Africa

China as a developing country helping other developing countries

In analysing the increasingly visible presence of China in Africa in the current period, it should be remembered that for certain countries in the continent, China has cooperation credentials that go back to the late 1950s and early 1960s. The widespread knowledge in Africa of this history of anti-colonial solidarity and support, at a time when China itself was very poor, has been important in China's ability to present itself in terms of South-South cooperation, and as the largest developing country helping, to the extent that it can, the continent with the largest number of developing countries. In other words, China is hesitant to present itself as a donor, preferring the image of itself as a poor friend pulling on the oars with other poor friends, in the same boat.

Mutual benefit rather than one-way assistance

Part of these aid credentials were the eight principles of foreign aid which were laid out by Zhou Enlai's in his 1963/4 visits to Mali and Ghana. Like Japan's emphasis on self-reliance and mutuality of benefit, these principles insist on mutual benefit, and not on one-way alms-giving, as if to a beggar. They talk of the crucial need to respect the sovereignty of the recipient, and of the need not to attach any conditions. The assistance should not place a burden on the recipient, or make them dependent, but rather should allow the recipient rapidly to get results, build income and accumulate capital. If technical assistance is required, then there should be no special privileges for the Chinese experts; they should have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country (China 2000).

¹² 'Japan believes that increasing the income of the people of developing countries, especially the poor, through economic growth is crucial for achieving this foremost objective of the MDGs' (Japan, MOFA 2005).

Rather than the language of donor and recipient, China strongly prefers to present its activities in terms of two-way exchanges, and two-sided cooperation. Thus in *China's African Policy*, in the Declarations that have emerged from the three-yearly meetings of the Forum on China - Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, 2003 and 2006, and in the write-ups of each of the 48 African countries on the Foreign Ministry's website, the emphasis is on parallelism and equal cooperation. This is the case with the two-way high level visits at the political level, 'trade relations and economic and technical cooperation, and 'exchanges in the fields of culture, science and technology'. To the extent possible, these different fields are presented as cooperative exchanges rather than as donor-recipient relations. Even when, as in the field of educational cooperation, it is clear that there is a marked imbalance between the numbers of Chinese teachers going to Africa, and the increasing numbers of African students and professionals going to China, on the one hand, and African teachers and Chinese students going in the other direction, there is still a preference to present the relationship in terms of mutual benefit. This spirit is well-captured in President Hu Jintao's words: 'The different civilisations can learn from each other through communication so as to enrich and develop themselves respectively in this way' (China 2003: 9).

Win-win economic cooperation and trade relations, rather than poverty reduction

In a way that is reminiscent of Japan's sustained focus on the importance of economic growth for poverty reduction in its development cooperation, China constantly focuses on the role of two-way trade and economic cooperation in its presentation of its African partner countries. Thus on the Beijing Summit website (November 2006), for each of the 48 African countries, large or small, with which China has diplomatic relations, there is a precise indication of the extent of their bilateral trade with China.¹³ By contrast, Western agencies regularly present Africa as the poorest continent in the world, and as the continent least likely to reach the Millennium Development Goals. An interesting comparison is that *China's African Policy* does not even contain the word 'poverty', while it contains multiple references to economic cooperation.

Integration of Chinese development initiatives in a holistic bilateral framework

One of the characteristics of China's collaboration with a large number of African countries is that it appears to be sponsoring a very wide range of development activities that have emerged from bilateral agreements at the highest political level.¹⁴ Some of these appear to be grant assistance, for example, the medical, health and educational support to Africa, or the increasing numbers of short and longer term trainees going to China since 2000. Other modalities look like low interest or no interest loans, while others again are clearly Chinese contracts won in the face of international competitive bidding, like the

¹³ Thus Burundi is described in the following terms, despite having only US\$12.22 million in trade: 'The two countries (China and Burundi) respect each other politically and treat each other on an equal footing, and work in close cooperation in international affairs and have carried out fruitful cooperation in such areas as trade, economic and social development' (Beijing Summit 2006).

¹⁴ No national leaders from Europe, Asia or the Americas (presidents, prime-ministers, foreign ministers and trade ministers) have visited Africa with anything even beginning to approach the consistency and frequency of China.

major contract to renovate the Nigerian railways. At the same time, both larger scale and also very small scale Chinese foreign direct investment has been appearing in many different parts of Africa. This ranges from the large 'Chinatown' malls that can now be found in cities as different as Johannesburg and Nairobi, but they also cover the very small scale Chinese traders that have appeared in the Kariokor Market of Dar es Salaam, and along many of the streets of a city like Dakar.

We have almost no coherent analysis of these multiple modalities, some of which might be termed ODA by DAC criteria, others non-ODA; some public sector, some private, others are mixtures of public and private. In the case of infrastructure and construction, we do have an account for four countries (Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia) of the range of what is being undertaken by Chinese construction companies (Centre for Chinese Studies 2006), and it is a very remarkable range of activities. But it must be remembered that there are very few studies for any country that systematically seek to map its development assistance (both grants and loans) its technical assistance, including by international NGOs, its foreign direct investment, and the impact of its foreign nationals, whether as tourists or as small-scale entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, we appear to lack such accounts for all other countries that have been involved in development assistance.¹⁵ We may have an account of a specific sector such as construction, agriculture or of education aid (e.g. King 1991; Kamibeppu 2002), or of the operations of a particular modality such as yen loans in one country (e.g. Kitano 2004), but we do not have any study that cuts across ODA/non-ODA, public and private direct investment, and the role of NGOs and citizen groups. Yet, it is precisely this kind of integrated, multi-sectoral investment that has been so powerfully recommended by the Commission for Africa and by the UN's Millennium Project Report, *Investing in development* (UN 2005). What is missing in so many countries of Africa is not the achievement of a particular MDG, such as universal primary education, important though that is. Rather it is the markets, trade, transport, investment, and infrastructure that makes it worthwhile for individuals and for enterprises to explore new products and new technologies.

The focus on the MDGs and on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) has diverted attention from the crucial role of the enabling environment and of the investment climate. And it would appear that it is precisely this element that China's wide-ranging engagement with African countries is beginning to supply.

Infrastructure as a key element in development

Illustrative of this crucial role of infrastructure is that no less than 79% of the total amount of the Africa operations of the Export-Import Bank of China were in 259 projects in 36 countries at the end of September 2006. Infrastructure covered road and rail transport, energy (power plant, transmission lines, oil and gas pipelines), ICT, and water supply and sanitation. In the view of the Ex-Im Bank, this kind of concessionary lending which was one type of 'official development assistance' acted as a form of 'South-South

¹⁵ It would be fascinating to know if there is any study of how Japan's economic cooperation in all its different modalities impacted on countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines etc.

cooperation' on an 'equal and mutual beneficial basis'. The Bank claimed that it promoted 'social and economic development' and improved living standards in developing countries. Interestingly, and here again there are resonances with Japan, the Bank claimed that their activities enhanced 'development efforts by developing countries through transferring experiences and technology learned in the development of Chinese economy' (China, Ex-Im Bank, 2006).

China's aid and investment in Africa: scope for critique or collaboration?

China's extraordinarily wide range of investments in Africa are, perhaps surprisingly, often the subject of critical commentary from Western media and even from some OECD DAC donors. China is said to be undermining the good work that OECD DAC agencies have carefully constructed in the areas of good governance, debt cancellation and donor coordination. China's bilateralism is claimed to operate without transparency outside the existing donor frameworks, and allegedly offers prestige projects with none of the conditions associated with other development assistance.

On the other hand, it is admitted by other sources that the Chinese were the only ones that were willing to come in to support certain crucial infrastructure projects in Africa, and that China is 'investing in areas that Western aid agencies and private investors ignore, such as infrastructure, health, communications, industry and agriculture' (quoted in Sautman and Yan 2007: 11).

As far as transparency is concerned, it is indeed the case that it is difficult readily to determine (in English) what is the precise scope of the Department of Foreign Aid in China, though there is a regular short report of its work in the annual yearbook of the Ministry of Commerce (Wang 2005). Even though there is a Department of Foreign Aid, it is obviously more difficult to be clear about the shape of development assistance when in China as in Japan it appears to be the responsibility of a whole range of different ministries. Naturally, also, it is problematic to track the Beijing Summit pledge to double aid to Africa by 2009, when the baseline figure for ODA was not known in 2006. Here, it has to be acknowledged, however, that there are similar problems of accountability for several of the G8 donors who supported the doubling of aid to Africa at the 2005 G8 Summit in Scotland.

An alternative to the critique of China's assistance to Africa from the supposedly higher moral ground of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD would be to recognise that there is probably very little done by China in Africa that was not commonplace with other donors and investors in Africa and Asia a decade or so earlier. Secondly, China's capacity to benefit from its own comparative advantage (for example through the use of large quantities of skilled, low cost labour from China) is probably an aspect that is appreciated by their partner countries, just as there is evidence of the appreciation of Japan's long term experts who have been prepared to work long hours in the fields in agricultural demonstration in South East Asia and Africa.¹⁶ Thirdly, as compared with the project approach to development cooperation which China and,

¹⁶ For a positive account of Japanese long term experts by recipient governments, see King and McGrath (2004).

arguably, also Japan prefer, the jury is still out on the supposed advantages of sector-wide approaches and direct budget support which have been recently favoured by many Western donors. In the eyes of some recipient governments, these newly favoured approaches allow external donor agencies a degree of access to the very heart of the national budget processes which may raise questions about sovereignty and parliamentary authority.

Finally, and most importantly, there are new areas of development assistance marked out by the great Beijing Africa Summit of November 2006 where China has had very little if any experience, but where Japan has built up a reservoir of potentially relevant insight and assessment over the years. Thus, in respect of China's desire to expand their 'Chinese Young Volunteers Serving Africa' from just a handful to 300 in the first instance, there is more than 40 years of Japanese experience in running the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) scheme. In terms of the Beijing Summit's commitment to build 100 rural schools over the period to 2009, Japan has almost certainly been responsible for more school construction, including in rural areas, than any other bilateral donor, and has amassed a good deal of experience that could be of value to a country that has not been associated at all with school construction. Equally, in China's plan to build 30 hospitals, Japan has built up experience, including in one of its largest ever grant assistance projects, the Japan-China Friendship Hospital. Also, in the Summit's commitment to double the Scholarship students to China, as well as raise the short term professionals to 15,000 by 2009, there are major possibilities for collaboration as Japan currently rethinks its own very large short-term training programme (of 8000 per annum).

These are not of course technical questions about school or hospital construction *per se*, but are the 'softer' questions about selectivity, sustainability and capacity development around which Japan has done a great deal of rethinking.

Concluding comments on two Asian models of development assistance

Since the creation in 1961 of the Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency (OTCA), the predecessor to JICA, Japan has been the only substantial non-Western member of the Development Assistance Committee. With the dramatic re-emergence of China as a donor in recent years, Japan suddenly has, next door, another really major Asian nation which is substantially engaged in development cooperation.¹⁷ As a country which has been obliged over several decades, somewhat reluctantly, to come into line with what the West deemed appropriate, Japan may have two options in relation to China's rise as a donor.

It can join the chorus of DAC donors criticising China for undermining the West's carefully constructed agenda for the development of Africa. Or it might possibly perceive that its own preference to articulate more sharply the advantages of an Asian model of development assistance could be immeasurably assisted by both China and Japan arguing for the priority of economic growth, and an Asian preference for people-to-people

¹⁷ This is not to deny the importance of Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and India as so-called 'emerging donors', but their range and visibility can currently not begin to be compared to China.

cooperation through technical assistance. In combination, Japan and China could rebalance the discourse of harmonisation, alignment and coordination to take greater account of the unique contribution of donors' own experience of development, FDI, and the expert contribution of their own people in the developing world.

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