

Study Group on China's Foreign Aid

Aim and Background

The aim of this research group is to study and analyze the China's foreign aid comprehensively with a future-oriented perspective, and determine the potential for Japan-China development cooperation based on Japan's experiences in development assistance cooperation.

In recent years, China's presence in the area of development (economic) cooperation has grown exponentially. However, China's involvement in developing countries, above all its support of certain non-democratic states, has at times been seen as a problem and caused a certain measure of alarm and concern internationally. At the same time, information about China's development aid is not readily available because China is not a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Under these circumstances, international debates about China's foreign aid policy often depend on episodic information, and there is no denying that often this form of analysis magnifies alarm and concern.

However, the central actors in the international aid community, such as the OECD and other organizations, are largely colored by Western values and interests. Even as China's development aid has been expanding, South Korea became an official member of the Development Assistance Committee (a sub-committee of the OECD dedicated to development aid) in January 2011. Hence, the relative weight of non-Western actors in the donor community is growing. This suggests the possibility that, in the future, "Western-type" organizations and "non-Western type" organizations will spur each other on. Keeping this issue in mind, efforts to turn Sino-Japanese development cooperation into a strategic element of current relations take on great significance.

This project will last throughout 2010 and 2011, with the group conducting research while actively promoting intellectual exchange between Chinese and Japanese development aid policy experts. With the correct preconditions, this research might have a pioneering academic significance with regard to China's hitherto veiled and opaque development aid policy. At the same time, it could also become a valuable intellectual asset for Japanese diplomacy.

Outline of Activities

The current research is primarily focused on drafting a systematic blueprint of China's foreign aid. The particular issues of discussion will be:

1. China's foreign aid philosophy and policies
2. The mechanisms and structure of China's foreign aid
3. An evaluation of China's foreign aid record
4. The consistency between international development aid regimes and China's foreign aid
5. The possibility of Japan-China cooperation in development aid

The first period of research lasted from August 2010 until January 2011, during which four meetings (including presentations by visiting lecturers) were held. Chinese documents were also collected and translated where appropriate, and basic bibliographies and materials were compiled. By the end of the year the research results were summarized in an interim report.

While building on the previous research, the main springboard of discussion from April 2011 will be the "White Paper on Foreign Aid Policy", published by the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China in April. We will sort through the facts revealed by this paper, determine the undisclosed points requiring more research, and clarify the particular features of China's aid policy. In addition we will undertake a multifaceted study to investigate the opportunities and risks this might pose for the international community.

Special report meetings will be held on a monthly basis throughout the year. In addition, the study group has scheduled an international workshop for the end of September and invited several Chinese researchers. The workshop is aimed at initiating a frank exchange of opinions between Japanese and Chinese experts and policy makers; in addition to making available the most recent material, this should help promote mutual comprehension and dialogue between Japan and China. The results obtained from the research and workshop will be compiled in a final report by March 2012.

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