

Japan and Tonga - A Discussion on Japan's ODA, the 2003 Charter and 'aid with a face'

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Abstract

This article is the first in a series examining Japan's aid relations. It discusses the history and motivations behind ODA and the role of 'aid with a face', suggesting that this may play an important role. Japan's presence in Tonga is examined, and the impressions of various aid actors discussed. Within Tonga at least, Japan's aid is largely benign and has left a positive image of Japan with Tongans.

Keywords: Japanese ODA, Tonga, 2003 ODA Charter, 'aid with a face', development

1. Introduction

Historically, Official Development Assistance (ODA) has been seen as a major aspect of Japanese foreign policy. Japan's Constitutional abandonment of military force limits the tools it has to project itself on the international stage. As the world's second largest economy and Japan's own experience as a developing country, ODA has been given a great deal of emphasis. However, it has been criticised as being too politicised, for serving the interests of the Japanese economy more than the recipient's and for inefficiency¹. In addition, it has been criticised for lacking focus and a guiding principle, ignoring human rights and environmental issues, lacking flexibility and concentrating on Japan's relatively rich East Asian neighbours. In recent years moves have been made to address these criticisms, chiefly through the *ODA Charter*, Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects and rationalisation of the ODA procedures and bodies. Japan's ODA can be measured in a variety of ways. In absolute terms, Japan is the second largest donor in the world after the USA. However, this masks several disparities: Japan's 2005 ODA total of US\$13.1 billion falls far behind the US's US\$27.46 billion, which is only 0.28% of Japan's GNI (Gross National Income), sixth lowest of the 23 DAC (Development Cooperation Directorate) members and well below the UN target of 0.7% of GNI (OECD, 2006). Despite these statistical failings, the potential impact of Japan's ODA cannot be denied.

This paper is part of a wider study examining Japan's efforts to address the problems

arising from the changing development environment and the role Japan plays within it. This particular article examines Japan's ODA relations with Tonga and how these are perceived. Tonga is unique in the South Pacific in having not been completely absorbed by the British or any other empire in the 19th Century, the royal family having managed to maintain its position throughout the period. It is otherwise an average South Pacific island nation, endeavouring to overcome the problems it faces as a small, isolated country lacking significant natural or strategic resources. It has been a recipient of aid from Japan since the 1970s and has good trade and cultural relations with Japan. Recent events (November, 2006) have put Tonga's otherwise peaceful burgeoning pro-democracy movement in the news, the riots possibly being a consequence of other animosities (The Age, 2006a). However, these events post-date the research and are largely extraneous to the following discussion. An examination of Japan's ODA will be followed by a discussion of the field research carried out in Tonga in August 2006.

2. Japan and ODA

2.1 A Brief History of Japanese ODA

Japan's first experience with development was in the immediate post-War period, recovering from the devastation of war. Japan's role as a major supplier to the US military during the Korean War, and US support for market-protection measures, as well as government-directed investment and planning led to Japan's economic recovery. This has been seen as an ideal model for economic development for many other countries; as will be discussed below, Japan sees itself as being in an ideal position to give assistance, as it is the only aid donor that has any recent experience of development.

In 1954 Japan joined the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific. The financial assistance it gave under this plan was seen as an extension of postwar reparations. This rather ambiguous start meant there was very little in the way of a philosophy behind how the aid was directed. Japan pushed for an Asian development fund similar to the Marshall Plan, but it was not until 1966 that the USA (entangled in the conflict in Vietnam) agreed to jointly found and fund the Asian Development Bank. In the 1970s, under the 'Fukuda Doctrine' of greater cooperation with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Prime Minister Fukuda pledged US\$4 billion to five ASEAN regional economic development projects. This and other Japanese ODA filled the void created by the US defeat in Vietnam and subsequent withdrawal from

the region as a whole (Iokibe, 2003). Furthermore, Fukuda committed Japan to the first of a series of aid doubling plans. In the late 1980s, and as Japan's economy expanded exponentially, Prime Minister Takeshita announced US\$50 billion in ODA over five years as part of his international cooperation initiative (Yasutomo, 1990, p.491), combining it with cultural exchange and non-military contributions to peace-keeping efforts as central to Japanese diplomacy (Yasutomo, 1990, p.498). In 1992, the Foreign Ministry published the first *ODA Charter*, explicitly laying down for the first time Japan's ODA philosophy, guidelines and priorities. It has been reviewed several times to take account of the changing international and domestic environments.

The new century and the post-September 11th era has brought about a change in emphasis, coinciding with changes in domestic politics. Following on from earlier initiatives, Prime Minister Koizumi has dispatched the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to participate in UN peace-keeping operations. He has committed Japan to President Bush's 'war on terror', including a \$500 million contribution over two and a half years to Afghanistan's reconstruction (Koizumi, 2002). This more active role, while controversial, is seen as more dynamic and positive than the 'cheque book diplomacy' of the past. In 2003 the *ODA Charter* was reviewed to include security issues and clarify some other aspects (see below for a fuller discussion). By 2009 two of the main ODA agencies, JBIC and JICA, will be fully merged as part of a major rationalisation programme (Wakasugi, 2006).

2.2 Models of Japanese ODA

There is a wide-ranging debate surrounding the factors behind Japanese aid policy making. Various models have been presented, most analysts suggesting a combination of factors with their preferred model taking the dominant role in most cases.

The first model is *gaiatsu*: external pressure from its strategic and diplomatic partners, in particular the United States (Yasutomo, 1990; Tuman & Ayoub, 2004; Tuman & Strand, 2006). ODA can be seen as facilitating relations with the US and supporting its strategic interests. Pro-US regimes and programmes supported by the US (such as structural adjustment programmes) are given Japanese support and financial backing. Tuman and Ayoub (2004) suggest that, in Africa at least, certain US military-strategic interests guide the flow of Japanese ODA. Japanese ODA is seen as "reactive" and a "resource to help the US ... maintain openness and stability... [which] safeguards the interests of Japanese multinational firms" (Tuman & Strand, 2006, p.63-64), either through access to world markets or to US markets. ODA given in support of US interests was additionally seen as

a means of easing tensions between the US and Japan - the ODA doubling programmes of the 1980s were seen as a response to increasing anti-Japanese sentiment in the US ('Japan-bashing', anti-dumping laws, etc). More recently, Japan has given a great deal of financial (and personnel) support to America's 'war on terror'.

Another approach is to assume a high degree of idealism and humanitarianism informing policy making. Throughout, Japan has insisted on its aid not being used for military purposes, directly and wherever possible indirectly. Japan has withdrawn aid in cases where it might be seen as supporting a repressive military regime, such as in 1991 after the military coup in Haiti and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (at the time, Zaire; most aid has still been suspended). Similarly, aid was suspended in the following year to Sudan. In 1992 Japan's first postwar sortie out into the world was to send a small contingent of the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to Cambodia to help with the elections under the auspices of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia [Okuizumi, 1995]). Financial and technical aid has been given to help with natural disasters throughout the world, such as to earthquakes around the world and to those countries affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. However, as critics point out, the initiative was often taken and led by other donor countries or the UN.

A third model gives domestic politics and national interest a leading role in determining aid policy: a combination of public opinion and the policy making "triad" or "iron triangle" of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the bureaucracy and business (Sato, 2001, p.14). However, the triad is not monolithic and each is fractured into competing parts that are eager to push their position and defend their territory. This is apparent throughout Japanese foreign policy (see Sato, 2001) and in ODA policy can be seen in the diverse ministries involved in aid dispersal. It is often blamed for the sometimes slow response to foreign policy crises.

Sunaga (2004, pp.10-11) argues that there are three groups defining national interest in relation to ODA. The first focuses on the development needs of recipient countries and policy should ignore domestic politics, as this selfless position would ensure Japan's international standing and interests in the long run. A second group calls for a more strategic use of ODA, emphasising bilateral aid and cutting back on multilateral aid, especially to organisations where Japan's views are underrepresented or ignored; in addition, they argue that Japan should be more active in peace building as politically stable countries are in Japan's interests. The third and smallest group takes this position to a more extreme level, arguing that aid should be used (or withheld) as a direct tool of foreign policy where returns

are clear.²

Most writers suggest that all three models play their part in shaping aid policy. As the above examples indicate, each comes to the fore depending on the circumstances.³ All three models can be seen manifesting themselves in the *Official Development Assistance Charter*.

2.3 2003 ODA Charter

During the 1980s, Japan came under increasing criticism for its unfocused approach to aid disbursement and its use of ODA as a political tool - 'cheque book diplomacy'. At the same time, there was an growing on-going international debate on the role and use of development assistance which provided a source of inspiration and direction to Japanese aid policymakers. The first *Official Development Assistance Charter* was published in 1992 and has been through several revisions that have addressed unforeseen problems and changing circumstances. The latest revision was in 2003. The *Charter* sets out several priority issues, principles, basic policies and objectives, as well as guidelines on formulation and implementation. The *Charter* opens by stating that the underlying motive behind ODA is to "ensure Japan's own security and prosperity" through a stable and peaceful international community (MOFA, 2003, p.1). This is a change from earlier versions, but Sunaga (2004, p.9) argues that this is just an acceptance of reality and in line with many other donors. Major themes running through the document are democratization, security issues and 'human security'. The *Charter* is very much concerned with the ownership of the development process, placing emphasis on self-help, local initiative, democracy and good governance.

The region given priority as a recipient of Japanese aid is Asia as it has a "major impact on Japan's stability and prosperity" (MOFA, 2003, p.6). Aid is to be used to strengthen relations and is explicitly stated to be 'strategic'. This smacks of *real politick*, but the *Charter* tempers it with a sensitivity to cultural differences and changing needs. All other regions are mentioned, and Japan's role in stabilizing countries and regions embroiled in conflict is repeatedly mentioned.

The underlying objectives are given as addressing humanitarian issues such as poverty, famine, natural disasters, sustainable development, etc (encapsulated under the term human security) and also tackling terrorism through peace building, democratisation and political stabilisation. Clearly, this is a post-September 11th addition.

These objectives are reinforced by the Principles of Implementation (MOFA, 2003,

pp.7-8) which have remained largely unchanged through all versions of the *Charter*. These are protection of the environment; non-military use of Japanese aid; the recipient's military spending; and promotion of democracy and market economics. The second and third are in line with the Japanese Constitution that restricts Japan's military, and is in accordance with Japan's self image as a pacifist country.

A major addition to the revised *Charter* is cooperation with other donors, and with regional organisations and NGOs. This is in contrast to Japan's traditional emphasis on bilateral aid, but is a response to critics and in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which call for greater cooperation between aid actors and coordination of aid programmes. Japan sees itself as being in a unique position of being both a recipient and a donor of aid. This experience has directed the kind of aid and the projects chosen (Sunaga, 2004, p.16). At the same time, Japanese aid practitioners believe that Japan is both a more sympathetic donor and a model for many developing countries (most explicitly stated by Inagaki, 2006), a sentiment echoed by some recipients (discussed in more detail below). By overly coordinating aid, it is worried by some Japanese policy makers (Iimura, 2001, p.54) that developing countries will be given a standardised, one-size-fits-all development package, and will be unable to benefit from the different development experiences of each donor. This dichotomy runs throughout Japan's aid policy and relations.

A key component of the *Charter* is the role of self-help, including the inclusion of women and the socially vulnerable in the development process (MOFA, 2003, pp.2-3). The 2003 revision links self-help with good governance, but Sunaga (2004, pp.13-14) argues that Japan is “less inclined to articulate such a policy” than other members of the aid community as it suggests an involvement in the internal politics of recipients. At the same time, the ‘request-first principle’ present in earlier versions has been dropped. This was seen as a central tenet of self-help, allowing recipients to set their own development priorities. However, this only means that approval of requests will require more rigorous policy discussion (*ibid.*). Ownership of the process has always been central to Japan's ODA. This essentially means that Japan supports the recipient taking the lead in designing and implementing their own development plan and is one aspect of the fourth Principle of ODA Implementation - democratization, market-oriented economies and human rights.

2.4 ‘Aid with a face’

The semi-official JICA slogan is ‘aid with a face’ (Iimura, 2001; Inagaki, 2006; Sunaga, 2004, p.11). This serves two functions. Firstly, it is to broaden support for ODA spend-

ing within Japan by highlighting how the money is used and increase the number of people involved in the aid process as volunteers (Iimura, 2001, p.51). This was a response to a fall in public support for ODA due to the slow economy of the 1990s, and the belief that aid was being used for purely economic and political reasons, and was ineffective (Sunaga, 2004., p.4). This has included reproducing the popular Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) programme for older people who wish to share their skills and experience. The Senior Volunteer (SV) programme (originally Senior Cooperation Experts) was started in 1990 and by 2004, 2,280 volunteers aged 40 to 69 had been dispatched around the world (MOFA, 2005).

The second function of 'aid with a face' is to promote Japan's image in recipient countries. As the *Charter* puts it, wider knowledge of Japan's efforts to help with the development of its neighbours and trade partners, "both at home and abroad is the most suitable policy for gaining sympathy and support from the international community for Japan's position [of aspiring for world peace]." (MOFA, 2003, p.2) This includes the use of volunteers and increasing their profile in local communities, and attaching the Japanese flag to the hardware of aid projects - literally "flying the flag" (Iimura, 2001, p.52). This is evidently an attempt to promote Japan's image amongst the general public in recipient countries. This goes against the trend amongst other donors (although, in Tonga and Fiji at least, aid agencies are not shy of attaching their name to all the hardware they provide) and harks back to a less cooperative era when aid was used to promote national interests. However, it is in part the price that has to be paid in exchange for domestic public support. As Japan harmonises its aid with other countries under the MDGs, this will become increasingly difficult (Sunaga, 2004, p.17). 'Aid with a face' falls broadly under the third model discussed above - domestic politics shaping aid policy as suggested by Sato (2001). It would also be a policy approach most suited to Sunaga's (2004) second group that calls for the strategic use of aid. Iimura (2001), the Director-General of the Economic-Cooperation Bureau in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time of his writing, is an outspoken advocate of 'aid with a face' and the need to fly the flag.

3. A Case Study: Japan's ODA in Tonga

3.1 Why Tonga?

Tonga is a small and, for Japan, geo-strategically insignificant country. It was, until recently (The Age, 2006a) politically stable, has no key mineral resources or other eco-

nomically sought-after attributes. While plainly a developing country in need of assistance, it is not in extreme poverty or suffering any major natural or other threat. Although it gave full support to the Allies in World War Two, it was not invaded by Japan nor saw any major action. In all, this is a good test case for Japan's ODA policy as there are no extenuating political, economic or historical circumstances that could influence Japan's motivation.

At the same time, although the amount of aid given is not huge in absolute terms, because of the small size of the population the impact it does have can be felt more widely throughout society. This can be more easily understood when compared to larger aid packages in a country such as, for example, Indonesia where only a relatively small part of the economy and population will be affected.

Research in Tonga was carried out over a two-week period in August 2006. Unfortunately, during this period the King of Tonga fell into a coma and shortly after died, which meant that many people were rather distracted or unavailable for interview. That said, interviewees included journalists, JICA officials, a government minister and the Director of the Central Planning Agency (which coordinates much of the aid entering the country), as well as more informal interviews with 'regular' Tongans and non-Tongan residents. Additional interviews were carried out with Fiji-based Professor Robertson of the University of the South Pacific, the Pacific Islands Forum and officials from the JICA regional head office in Suva, Fiji.

3.2 Japan and Tonga's Aid Relations

In the Pacific, Japan is the second largest donor of aid after Australia and is the largest export market for Tonga's main export, squash (MOFA, 2006). Japan sent the first JOCV group in 1973 and started giving bilateral grant aid to Tonga in 1977. JICA arrived in 1978 (four years after it was established) which became the main conduit of ODA (General Grant Aid). Between 1977 and 2004 a total of twenty-nine projects, ranging from 6 million yen to over 1 billion yen, to total 11.68 billion yen (approximately US\$100 million) (compiled from JICA, 2006, pp.90-91). These include fisheries-related and port facilities projects, school construction, coastal protection, construction of roads, construction of a new terminal at the international airport, water supply projects, building a culture centre and, most recently, upgrading and refurbishing of the central hospital. Between 1995 and 2004 there have been 147 Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP; discussed in more detail below) totalling US\$3,877,000, ranging from US\$5,500 to US\$82,000 each. The main categories are health and education (compiled from *ibid.*

pp.107-108).

Between 1974 and 2005 about 250 Tongan citizens received training under the JICA Training Programme in Japan (about 0.2% of the population). Between 1994 and 2004 fifteen JICA technical experts visited Tonga, staying for a couple of months up to three years, almost half in the field of fisheries development (*ibid.* p.31). Over the same period there have been 277 JOC Volunteers dispatched to Tonga, mostly in the field of education (including Japanese language teaching) for a two year period (pp.62-63). Senior Volunteers stay for one to two years each, but some extend for another two years if their situation allows it and if they want to continue their service. The 24 SVs that have been based in Tonga since the programme was first set up in Tonga in 2000 have worked in a wide variety of technical fields (p.75). For the South Pacific as a whole, the volunteer programme is a major expenditure, taking up almost 44% of JICA's regional budget, much higher than other regions (Wakasugi, 2006), highlighting the importance given to this aspect of ODA to the region.

3.3 Japanese ODA in Tonga: Views and Issues

The following discussion will show that, amongst Tongans at least, the public relations objectives of 'aid with a face' can be considered largely successful. At the same time, we will consider how the *Charter* has been applied to the case of Tonga. A major problem with interviews is that interviewees will often provide answers that they believe will satisfy the interviewer. This often means that the interviewer must accept the information gathered with a pinch of salt. We tried to overcome this by asking wide-ranging and open-ended questions that allowed the interviewees to express their views on a variety of issues, making comparisons with other donors and programmes. The downside of this is that the interview often went in unplanned directions and certain questions went unanswered. However, most interviewees expressed themselves candidly once the interview was properly underway. Firstly, we will give a brief overview of the different categories of interviewees followed by a discussion of some issues that came up during the field research.

3.3.1 Aid Practitioners

Three formal interviews were carried out with members of JICA, as well as more informal, conversational interviews with several others. Two of the formal interviews were carried out at JICA regional head office in Fiji with Project supervisors, the third in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, with the JICA Resident Representative. The informal interviews were with JICA volunteers, both JOCV and Senior Volunteers.

These groups had two different experiences of ODA and, although there was a certain overlap, expressed different views. The first group was more willing to acknowledge the implicit political aspects of ODA. In particular, the emphasis on bilateral aid relations was seen as a diplomatic tool that in part put an obligation on the recipient - *ongaeshi* - the obligation to return a favour or kindness (Wakasugi, 2006). The various aspects of ‘aid with a face’ were fully understood, in particular by the Resident Representative, Inagaki (2006), the senior JICA officer interviewed. At the same time, however, this group believed that Japan had altruistic humanitarian reasons for giving aid to the region, and that their efforts were well-meant and effective.

The various volunteers were all very sincere about their work in Tonga, although some admitted that they believed they had little impact or contribution to Tongan development. Participating in the volunteer programme evidently had as much to do with personal development and experience as selfless altruism or a desire to help. The SVs in particular mentioned the “propaganda” (“*senden*”) aspects of ODA and the role it played in stabilising the region.

3.3.2 *Tongan Interviewees*

Interviews were carried out with the Minister of Transport (Karalus, 2006) and the Director of Central Planning (Fusimalohi, 2006). Both were very knowledgeable, although the Minister in particular was understandably less candid in his comments than any of those interviewed. However, both were willing to both praise and criticise different aspects of Japanese aid. They perceived aid as a part of Tonga's political relations with Japan and they fully accepted any obligation Tonga had, but believed that Tonga had the right to decide how this obligation would be paid back. It was remarked that occasionally ODA would be explicitly linked to Japan's aspirations and Tonga's voting behaviour in international bodies; but only informally and only by non-government aid-related officials (Fusimalohi, 2006).

Interviews were carried out with journalists from Radio Tonga and Matangi Tonga Online. It was suggested that Japanese aid was more “realistic” (Fonua, 2006) and that Japan less “condescending” and had less of a “colonial attitude” (Petelo, 2006) than other aid donors.

Informal interviews were held with other Tongans and the general attitude was one of gratitude for the aid. Those who came into direct contact with Japanese volunteers often preferred them to their Australian and New Zealand counterparts, seeing greater cultural similarities between themselves and Japanese people (for example attitudes towards diffi-

dence and clothing modesty). Those who had no or little contact saw the Japanese as quiet but friendly. Both groups were grateful for Japanese aid but did not rate it as any better or worse than any other country's aid.

3.3.3 *Non-Tongan Residents and Other Interviewees*

Non-Tongan residents fall into two categories - Japanese and non-Japanese. The former (and we were able to talk with two long-term residents) were obviously more positive about Japan's presence in Tonga and believed more should and could be done, although they believed that some of the aid had political strings attached. The latter group and other, shorter-term foreigners in Tonga were surprisingly hostile to Japanese aid. Australian volunteers were quick to praise their Japanese counterparts individually but criticised Japanese ODA overall. Almost all mentioned the whaling issue and access to fisheries (discussed below) and saw Japanese aid as largely political. When asked about the political aspects of Australian aid, they suggested that Australia was just being a good neighbour, or that politically and economically stable countries in the region were in Australia's interests - much the same reasons given by Japanese interviewees.

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) criticised Japan's preference for bilateralism and project-specific funding rather than programme-specific (Sachs-Cornish, 2006). However, they were pleased with the fourth Japan-Pacific Islands Forum Summit Meeting (PALM; held in Okinawa every three years and most recently held in May 2006) in which Japan pledged to increase funding and improve follow-up assessment measures. Furthermore, Japan moved closer to working with regional bodies, but still expressed a preference for working bilaterally.

3.3.4 *Fisheries and the Whaling Issue*

Almost all the interviewees brought up the fishing industry. Three of the first five projects funded by Japanese grant aid were fisheries development related (JICA, 2006, p.90). However, since these projects there have been only two more. Currently, none of the JICA experts or volunteers are working in fisheries related industries. Although Japanese fishing fleets operate in Tongan waters (under a treaty) very little or no processing occurs in Tonga.

Coincidentally, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) was held in June 2006. Japan and other pro-whaling countries were able to win a resolution criticising the moratorium on commercial whaling, a vote won by a single vote (Guardian, 2006). Japan came under heavy criticism for 'cheque book diplomacy' as many of those countries supporting the resolution were recipients of generous Japanese aid, including several from the Pacific

region. However, Tonga was not one of these and its official policy is to ban whaling, although there have been attempts to change this and even the Prime Minister is not against limited whaling (Matangi, 2006a). It was suggested by some of the Japanese interviewees that Tonga's position was the result of pressure from Australia and New Zealand. As mentioned above, many non-Japanese and non-Tongans brought up the issue of whaling, apparently ignorant of the fact that Tonga is not an IWC member. Evidently, this aspect of Japan's foreign policy will always impact on perceptions of Japan's relations with other countries.⁴

3.3.5 *China*

China has recently raised its diplomatic presence in the region. This includes a recent pledge of over US\$380 million (three billion yuan) in preferential loans (Matangi, 2006b) for the region as a whole. In Tonga they have built and furnished schools and, as a centre piece, a new conference centre for the Pacific Island Leaders Forum Meeting (which will be completed even though the conference for which it was intended has been cancelled [Matangi, 2006c]). There have been high level government visits, free twenty-four hour broadcasting of CCTV, China's English language satellite channel, and scholarships for journalism-related studies in China.

Typically the main target of China's diplomacy in the region has been Taiwan and the one-China policy, support for which is usually a condition of Chinese aid. However, as mentioned above, Japan pledged 45 billion yen over the next three years at the fourth PALM, a sum equal to just over US\$380 million (Matangi, 2006a). Prime Minister Koizumi stated that China was not seen as competition and that its participation in the region's development was welcome. However, many of the interviewees expressed the opinion that they saw China as trying to replace Japan and win influence at Japan's expense. The general opinion was that the quality of Chinese aid was not as good as Japan's. In particular, construction did not use local companies or staff, and the equipment provided for the schools were not robust enough for the solidly built Tongan high school students (Inagaki, 2006 and many Tongans). The lack of focus and heavy-handed nature of the Chinese aid is reminiscent of Japan of an earlier era.

3.3.6 *Vaiola Hospital*

Japan's most recent large scale project in Tonga is the on-going construction and refurbishing of the Vaiola hospital, jointly funded with the UN and other donors (Matangi, 2006d). So far US\$9.7 million of Japanese aid has been spent. Naturally, everybody is grateful for the improvement of the hospital, but many commented on the various prob-

lems involved in its construction. These include the lack of coordination between the different donors (resulting in the different wings not having direct connecting passageways), disagreements between the Japanese and local contractors and several delays.

3.3.7 *Ovalaha Ferry*

Tonga is made up of three island groups, so transportation is an important issue. There are currently two privately-owned airlines linking the island groups, but most Tongans have to use the inter-island ferries. There are two ferries serving the Tongan island group, one state-owned (the Ovalaha ferry) and one privately-owned. Both are old and not in the best condition. The Japanese government agreed to replace the Ovalaha ferry at the request of the Tongan government. However, a letter was sent to the Japanese embassy from a Tongan MP complaining about Japan's interference in private enterprise, suggesting that the replacement ferry would damage the business of the privately owned ferry, describing it as "cruel and unkind" (Tonga Broadcasting 2006). Japan's initial response was to withdraw its funding. The MP concerned also happened to be the owner of the private ferry and insists on being party to any discussions. The debate became increasingly political, and Japan has still not decided to renew its funding. The MP concerned has come under a great deal of criticism and is seen as holding inter-island communications to ransom, especially as his own ferry is often unable to run (Karalus, 2006).

Japan's response is very much in line with the *Charter*. As noted above, one of the central Principles is support for market-oriented economies, so an accusation of damaging an indigenous private business could lead to Japan being in an embarrassing position. It would furthermore suggest that Japan is interfering in local politics.

3.3.8 *The Culture Centre, Airport and Road*

Three major programmes that have had a huge impact on Tongan life have been construction of the Tonga Culture and Handicrafts Centre (1986; over 5 hundred million yen), the Fua'amotu International Airport (1989-90; almost 14 hundred million yen) and a major road linking the airport to the capital city of Nuku'alofa (1995-6; almost 16 hundred million yen) (JICA, 2006, p.90). In addition to being a source of tourism dollars, the Culture Centre has become a community focus independent of the many churches for the main island, Tongatapu, and has led to a revival of interest in traditional cultural practices. The airport has improved links with the outside world, important for a country where the main source of income is remittances from Tongans working overseas (CIA, 2006). The road, which bisects the island, has meant travelling within the island has been made much easier. All of these were commented on and praised. Each of these are typical examples of tradi-

tional Japanese, one-off project-based, construction-type aid. However, they would conform to the *2003 Charter* because they used local construction firms, were requested by the Tongan government, and benefit Tongan economy and society.

3.3.9 *Water and Waste Disposal*

Japan has become a world leader in water and waste disposal projects, pioneering a cheap, low-tech highly effective solid waste processing technique. The Fukuoka method allows landfills to be constructed in an easy and environmentally friendly way, and made safe quickly. Japan has implemented this method throughout the region and elsewhere, and although waste disposal in Tonga comes under the remit of the Australian aid agency, they use a similar method (Suzuki, 2006).

Japan has given almost 15 hundred million yen in grant aid for water supply related projects (JICA, 2006, p.90). As will be mentioned below, Tongan villages are spotted with signboards displaying the Japanese flag proclaiming a Japanese funded water supply project. For a country with few natural sources of fresh water, these projects without a doubt address this fundamental ‘human security’ issue.

3.3.10 *Grant Assistance Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP)*

As mentioned above, Japan has funded 147 Grassroots Projects over nine years at a cost of US\$3,877,000 (JICA, 2006, pp.107-111). GGPs are a relatively new aid instrument aimed at villages, local organisations and local communities that address small-scale projects, usually no more than 10 million yen (approximately US\$90,000). In Tonga most GGPs are used for water supply facilities, classroom construction and equipment and on average are US\$21,000 each.

As the initiative for the grant comes from local communities and organisations, and the application process is relatively straightforward and fast, the GGPs have proven to be extremely popular. In addition, they provide an opportunity for Japan to engage with the people of a recipient country at the widest level. Groundbreaking and completion ceremonies are usually attended by an embassy official and come with a signboard with the Japanese flag and the legend ‘From the people of Japan’.

The GGPs have probably done more than anything to raise the image of Japan at the most basic level, undoubtedly giving a face to Japanese aid.

4. Tentative Conclusions

Given that this is only the first part of a wider research project on Japanese ODA,

only partial and tentative conclusions can be drawn. The 2003 *ODA Charter* was written with the intention of clarifying and redirecting Japan's aid relations. This research has found that, in relation to Tonga, the *gaiastu* model has had little apparent influence on Japan's aid policy, with the possible exception of increasing aid as a reaction to China's entry into the region. More likely, Japan's aid policy is shaped by a combination of humanitarianism (and the Millennium Development Goals) and domestic bureaucratic politics. Japan's earlier emphasis on large construction projects, often in the interests of Japanese business (in Tonga, this would mean improving fisheries and port facilities) has shifted towards projects that have more direct impact on local communities. Human security, in the form of education and water supply, has been given priority in Tonga and throughout the Pacific region. Although predating the 2003 revision, this can arguably be seen as part of an attempt to address critics of Japan's aid practices and so is part of the same process. The humanitarian, altruistic aspects of the *Charter* manifest themselves in the good intentions of the Volunteers. Ownership of the development process, the free market economy and self-help have also been given priority and possibly abused by local businessmen as in the case of the Ovalaha ferry debacle.

At the same time, the shift from larger to smaller projects also has greater propaganda value (that is to say, 'aid with a face'); its insistence on attaching the flag belies purely altruistic intentions. Regardless of government protestations, Japan uses aid to win support in international bodies, most controversially the IWC. The question is not so much one of 'whether' as one of 'to what extent'. In Tonga, as far as the whaling issue is concerned, the answer is 'zero', as Tonga is not even an IWC member. However, no government gives aid for purely altruistic reasons (including Tonga's two other aid donors Australia and New Zealand, who arguably see Tonga as part of their 'backyard').

This research will be continued with examinations of other countries and issues relating to Japan's ODA to provide further comparisons and analysis in order to give a fuller picture.

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Notes

- ¹ Most recently, revelations of JICA built wells in Laos costing 13 times as much as similar wells by local construction companies under contract to a Japanese company (Daily Yomiuri, 2006a). Bid-rigging of construction projects is also claimed to be "rampant" (Daily Yomiuri, 2006b).
- ² Japan's whaling policy can be seen as arising from domestic politics, with nationalist groups overcoming liberal and business groups fearing international repercussions (BBC, 2006; Sato, 2001, pp.26-30).
- ³ Japan's delay in imposing sanctions on China after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 can be seen as *gaiastu* eventually overcoming domestic politics (Miyashita, 2001, pp.41-47).
- ⁴ Not without cause. There is, for the second year running, a great deal of controversy surrounding the voting behaviour of the IWC delegate from the Solomon Islands and his relations with Japan (The Age, 2006b)