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Aid Strategies of an Asian Democracy:

The Formation of Japanese Governance and Democracy Promotion in the Field

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Abstract

This is a study of the promotion of democracy and governance as a part of Japan's official development cooperation. Despite being one of few Asian democracies among aid donors, Japan's work with democracy and governance has largely been overlooked in the discussion of its aid programme. This research seeks to expand on the current literature by examining what factors and driving forces interact to shape the form Japanese governance aid takes in the field. This inductive examination is based on a field study interviewing Japanese aid personnel working on governance projects in the in Cambodia and Vietnam. It centres what these bureaucrats perceive to be the key driving forces of Japanese aid. I argue that three key features interact to shape these aid projects: National interests, Japanese political culture, as well as discretionary power exercised by state employees and NGOs funded by the government. The study conceptualizes aid workers as Street-level bureaucrats possessing important knowledge of how policy is adapted into practice. It finds that the driving forces shaping the outcome of Japanese democracy and governance promotion are highly complex and interdependent, both affected by historical and social factors, national interests and foreign policy, as well as the individual judgement and opinions of street-level bureaucrats in the field. The research offers new insights into the production of aid outcomes, as well as the structure of Japanese development cooperation. It contributes to the current literature by building theory on the driving forces of democracy promotion and opens new possibilities for further empirical and critical investigation of the subject.

Key words: democracy promotion, development assistance, Japanese foreign policy, street-level bureaucrats, Asian development cooperation.
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Abbreviations:

ASEAN = Association of South-East Asian Nations
CSO = Civil Society Organization
DAC = Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
DCC = Development Cooperation Charter (of Japan)
FOIP = Free and Open Indo-Pacific (The Japanese policy agenda)
GOJ = Government of Japan
JICA = Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MOFA = Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of Japan)
NGO = Non-Governmental Organization
ODA = Official Development Assistance
OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs = Sustainable Development Goals
SLB = Street-Level Bureaucrat
VTV = Vietnam Television

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1 Introduction

> "A country is like the human body, all parts must be developed together, without sufficient road quality you cannot deliver ballot boxes" – Japanese aid worker.

In the study of development assistance as a geopolitical tool, Japan stands out among the members of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). In this group of 31 major traditional aid givers, Japan is one of only two Asian members (alongside Korea) stands out in its full embrace of promoting its own companies in aid, and its early use of development assistance as a diplomatic tool. Japanese aid grew out of its war reparations after World War II when it relied on Japanese companies to rebuild severed diplomatic ties and its own industries. Japanese aid is characterized by its large infrastructure projects, its focus on Asia, and its lack of concern for the human rights of the recipient country. As a member of DAC, however, Japan has also signed up to work proactively with promoting democracy and good governance. But how does Japan reconcile its prioritizing of national and economic interests in its development cooperation with a need to consider democracy and civil liberties? And does Japan's status as one of few Asian democracies among the top aid donors affect the form this democracy promotion takes?

1.1 Research question

This study attempts to answer the following question:
How does intersecting driving forces such as national interests, political culture, and the influence of individual bureaucrats and NGOs affect the way that Japan provides promotion of governance and democracy as part of its development assistance in the field?
The object of study is to explore the way that Japanese democracy and governance projects are formulated and carried out in the field, as seen through the eyes of the bureaucrats working on this task. This inductive study is based on field interviews in Japan, Cambodia,

and Vietnam undertaken in February and March 2023 with aid workers from the aid agency JICA, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as from NGOs funded by the Japanese state. It is a case study of the driving forces affecting the implementation of Japanese democracy and governance projects in Cambodia and Vietnam as perceived by the bureaucrats working on these projects.

Whereas most academic studies on this general topic focus on democracy promotion in aid, this study will conceive of this type of aid as democracy *and* governance promotion, as not all aid projects relating to the governing of a country directly contribute to the creation of a democracy. Rather, this research is interested in investigating any project aimed at fostering democracy and/or good governance in a developing country.

I argue that the formation and implementation of a democracy-and-governance-promotion aid scheme is driven by several forces, motivated both by self-interest and altruism. These forces are at work at all levels of the policy ladder from government charters to the mind of the bureaucrat tasked with implementing the project. This study identifies three different driving forces that interactively affect the way Japan conducts democracy and governance promotion on the ground. Firstly, Japanese national interests limit how, where, and to what extent Japan can provide such assistance. Secondly, Japanese political culture, including the Japanese conceptualization of democracy as formed by domestic and regional societal and historical factors, may influence the way Japan approaches recipient countries and how it formulates its policy. This driving force we may call the *Japanese Model* of aid. Thirdly, there is the influence and discretionary power of Japanese aid workers and partner NGOs: they may express their own opinions and act with their own discretion in grey areas of policy that have a real effect on implementation.

2 Background

Most developed democratic countries conduct some form of democracy promotion as a part of their aid programmes, but the motivations behind such efforts, their form, as well as their results vary from case to case. Most of the literature on democracy promotion has been written on the case of the United States, for whom the effort is a key part of its foreign policy (Mitchell, 2016, pp. 18-24). It has long been praxis in the US to attempt the export its views of democracy to every corner of the world, during the Cold War, and with a renewed vigour in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks.

Japan is in many ways a central actor in the early history of democracy promotion. Lincoln A. Mitchell (2016, pp. 32-41) argues that it was largely the Allied efforts to implement democracy in West Germany and Japan following the second world war that cemented the export of democracy as a key part of Western developmental schemes. However, as argued by Edward Friedman (1994, p. 79), the promotion of democracy and human rights only became a cornerstone of Western foreign policy in the 1970s with successful democracy promotion efforts in Argentina and Spain.

Japan, for its part, is counted among the first of Asia's liberal democracies. Even before the forced democratization at the hands of the US following World War II, Japan did enjoy a short homegrown era of liberalization called the Taisho Democracy, in which electoral models were imported from the West and made to fit Japanese standards. The political liberalization also coincided with a liberalized civil society and a budding workers' movement (Sims, 2001, pp. 168-177). In the post-war period Japanese democracy has become somewhat of an outlier internationally. Despite having free and fair elections, the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) has been in government itself or as the major partner of coalitions nearly uninterrupted since it came to power in the 1950s: often referred to as the "1955-system" (Richardson, 1997, pp. 2-4). While peaceful transfers of power to the opposition have happened twice since that point, the dominance of the LDP has fostered what is described as a highly bureaucratically driven democracy. Bradley Richardson (1997, pp. 6-8) describes Japanese political culture as consultative, where decision making is often slow and deliberated and political conflict is often resolved through consensus. Another important

factor is the authority wielded by interest-groups and businesses. However, for all its uniqueness, democracy was not a product that Japan was originally keen on exporting through its development aid.

2.1 Japanese official development assistance

Officially, Japan conducts "Development Cooperation," although it is often described as just aid, or development assistance interchangeably. Previously this was known as Official Development Aid (ODA), a phrase that while not used by the government, still lingers in use today to denote all governmental flows of aid money. As Pundera Jain has argued (2016, pp. 56-57), this scheme grew from the reparations Japan was obligated to pay the countries it had invaded during the second world war. In the 1951 San Francisco treaty Japan was required to offer war reparations to the countries it had occupied (Jain 2016, p 56). Unwilling to repeat imposing unpayable debts, as was the case with Germany after WWI, the allies instead obliged Japan to provide services: the recipient countries would request reparations and Japan would pay its companies to carry them out (Sato, 2022 p. 49-50). This solution established two important precedents for Japanese ODA: the system of working on the request of the recipient country and the use of Japanese private companies to carry out the aid project.

Japan's first post-war prime minister, Yoshida Shigeru, laid down what was to become the basic Japanese foreign policy agenda in the Cold War period and beyond. The so-called Yoshida Doctrine stipulated that Japan would not engage in any military intervention or build-up. Instead, Japan should be a world power in economy and trade, promoting peace and economic development the world over. Due to this doctrine, Japan's early ODA focused primarily on economic growth and the expansion of Japanese companies and economic interests into developing countries, something that also enabled Japan to build good diplomatic relationships with the neighbours it had previously occupied (Yamamoto, 2017, p. 72). With the growth of the Japanese economy, Japanese development cooperation also expanded until the it was the world's number one aid donor in total numbers from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. It was during this time that international pressure would force Japan to start implementing democracy and governance into its ODA.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was created by the OECD to help coordinate and conform aid policy among its members. It also administers evaluation and

criticism of its members (Chianca, 2008, pp. 41-42). Japan joined DAC in 1962 as its first Non-Western member and faced criticism from the body during the Cold War for the low percentage of grant aid, and the exclusive use of Japanese companies (Sato, 2022, p. 55). In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, Japan came under increasing censure from DAC for its national interests in aid. This led to the formation of the 1992 ODA charter, in which Japan shifted to a humanitarian focus of aid emphasizing "market economy, democratization and securing human rights" (Katada, 2004, pp. 6, 9-10). However, since the 2010s and the premiership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japanese aid has started to return to the classic Japanese Model with a greater focus on loans, as well as cooperation with the private sector (Jung, 2022, p. 52). The ODA charter was also replaced with the Development Cooperation Charter (DCC), first in 2010, and in a revised version in 2015. Besides using the aid budget to support its companies, Japanese aid has been criticised for becoming securitized. With increasing aid for self-defence purposes as well as the rise of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) agenda, Japan has pushed use of aid for security purposes to what Paul Midford (2017, p. 190) described as 'its limits'.

Hironi Sasada describes the current Japanese model of aid as "focused on (1) government-led development projects, (2) large-scale projects, (3) infrastructure development assistance (primarily for the manufacturing and agriculture sectors), (4) projects financed through loans rather than gifts, and (5) projects in Asian countries" (2019, p. 1046). This study will highlight other potential features of this Japanese model, but Sasada's list provides a useful starting point. *Figure 1* shows Japanese priorities in a breakdown of aid by sector where infrastructure, energy and health have a far greater budget than for example governance and environmental protection.

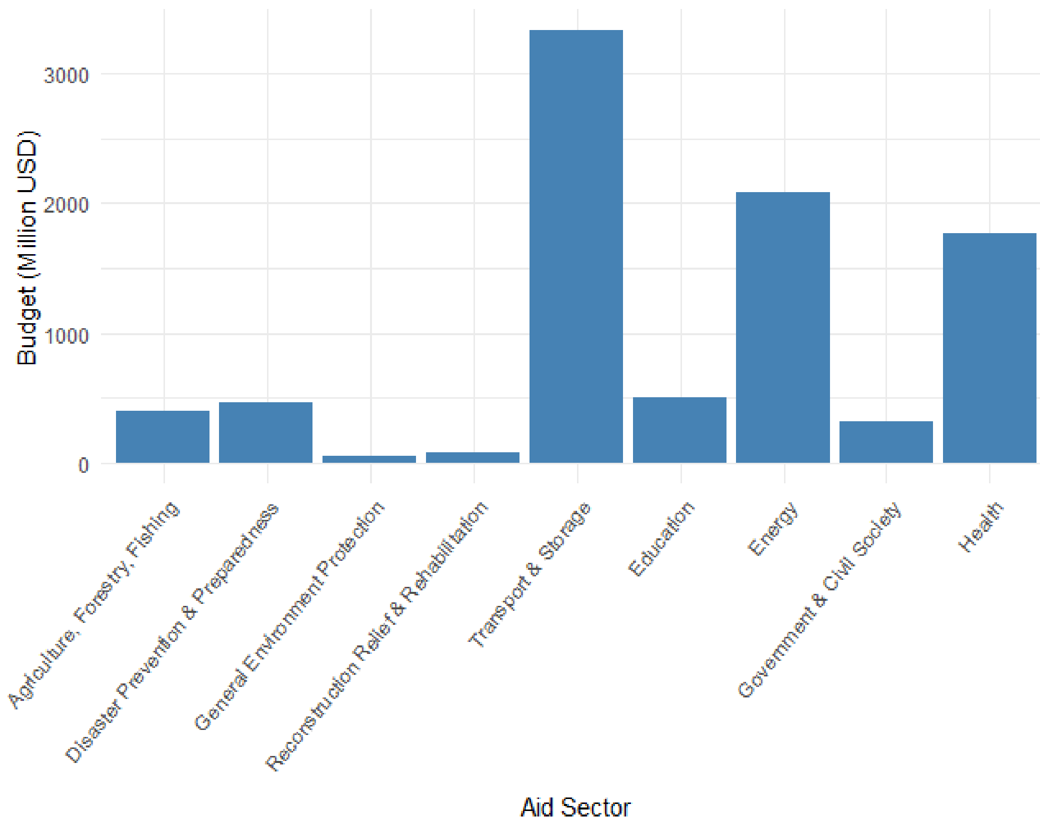

Figure 1: Japanese 2021 ODA budget in million USD spent in a selection of sectors (OECD Stats, 2023).

Most of the Japanese development cooperation is bilateral consisting of 74% of the Official Development aid budget. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is the main state agency responsible for Japanese aid projects. In 2020 it received 68% of the bilateral aid budget. JICA is directly subordinated to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) which administered 21% of the aid budget directly. These two institutions are therefore the focus of this research. The remainder of the bilateral aid budget was administered by other Japanese ministries directly (OECD, 2022). Some other actors that influence the Japanese aid policy is the trade federation *Keidanren*, Japanese Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as other state-run agencies and development banks such as the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC).

MOFA's aid budget largely consists of stipends and grants given directly by the Japanese government. They run one project for grassroots organizations and NGOs that are funded by the Japanese embassies in the countries in which they operate (Embassy of Japan in Kosovo, 2023). It also dispenses emergency assistance after natural disasters or other crises (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023).

JICA's activities are structured into three basic components. Firstly, there are what JICA simply calls Grants, donated with no obligation for repayment, provided to developing countries to improve basic infrastructure such as hospitals and water-supply facilities. In 2021, these Grants had a budget of 3,255 million USD. Secondly, Technical Cooperation, means that Japan sends experts to developing countries to foster human resource development and improvements of administrative systems with a budget of 2,424 million USD in 2021. This form of aid is also covered by grants, the difference being more in terms of content than form of funding. Finally, there are what JICA calls Finance and Investment Cooperation, which comprises both investments into developing countries as well as ODA loans (JICA, 2019, pp. 5-6). The use of loans in the development cooperation scheme is one of the key factors in Japanese aid. The funds from this third category are primarily used for large infrastructure projects, principally in South and South-East Asian countries. In 2021, JICA provided 12,126 million USD in ODA-loans (JICA, Databook, 2022). Today, by far the largest portion of Japanese ODA goes to South and South-East Asia, primarily in the form of Finance and Investment Cooperation and ODA loans. In terms of grant aid (including technical cooperation), the largest sum is given to Africa.

2.1.1 JICA in Cambodia

JICA's current development cooperation policy for Cambodia (largely decided on by MOFA) was written in 2017, shortly before the Cambodian election of 2018. This is an important distinction as the 2018 election would see the Cambodian government ban oppositional parties, which saw several donor countries (but not Japan) pull their operation from the country (Croissant, 2019, pp. 172-174). It is heavily focused on economic growth with the number one policy area being industrial growth. To this end, JICA is supposed to improve infrastructure and the investment environment, and to secure basic human needs such as food value chain. This area is the one closest linked to investment and economic opportunities for Japan.

JICA also focuses on improving water, sewage, urban communication, and power supply. These activities are referred to as creating 'better quality of life' and is the second focus area JICA covers in the country.

The third focus area is governance. Most points here do not explicitly deal with democracy itself, rather areas such as strengthening organizations, working against

corruption, and, specifically for Cambodia, dealing with the consequences of the civil war by for example removing land mines and unexploded ordnances. Two points here, however, deal explicitly with democracy. JICA is supposed to “further consolidate democracy including supporting the electoral reform, improving environmental management” (pp. 2-4). This last point shows that JICA does explicitly promote democracy in Cambodia to some extent. However, it is one focus area among many, not a theme underlying the entire development cooperation scheme.

2.1.2 JICA in Vietnam

The Japanese ODA policy for Vietnam, formulated in the *Country assistance policy for the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,* published in 2012, to some degree resembles the Cambodian counterpart. The largest differences owe to Vietnam being a more developed country. The issue of humanitarian assistance is absent, replaced by the focus area of building resilience to deal with the negative impacts of rapid economic growth. Alleviating environmental issues constitutes the second focus area. The primary aim is again economic growth and competitiveness, largely expressed in infrastructure projects but also in projects designed to improve the country’s market economy systems (JICA, 2012).

As in Cambodia, JICA’s third priority in Vietnam is governance. As opposed to the Cambodian case, there is no explicit mention of promoting democracy. Instead, JICA supports “good governance,” which includes improving “judiciary and administrative functions, for example, Japan supports the country to enhance its capacity of improving and executing the legal system, ensure justice, fairness, neutrality and transparency of the governance.” (p. 2).

3 Literature Review

The following literature review will be thematically discussing several academic works that relate to some core parts of the methodology and focus of this study. Specifically, I will review studies that in other ways have tried to measure political strategies and aid. It will look at some writings on democracy promotion as an area of development assistance. It will also further investigate Japanese development cooperation and its major themes (not discussed in the background section) with special attention paid to Japanese promotion of democracy and governance.

3.1 On measuring political strategies in aid

A. Maurits Van der Veen (2011, pp. 55-61) seeks to track the changes in motivations for aid, what he calls aid frames over time using legislative debates on development assistance. He uses quantitative content analysis to track the usage of various aid frames over time in the following groupings: humanitarianism, obligation, reputation, enlightened self-interest, wealth, power, and security. By aggregating this over time across the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, and Norway he found that over the second half of the 20th century the salience of various frames of aid shifted drastically from decade to decade. One grand pattern is the gradual decline of legislators describing aid as an obligation, largely being replaced by discussions of aid as important for reputation, and for enlightened self-interested purposes. Japan does not feature in this study; nor does it cover the 21st century (pp. 55-61). While Van der Veen's study is quantitative whereas this one is qualitative, it does provide an interesting example of another study that has investigated driving forces of aid based on how it is discussed among policy makers. The difference here is that his study focused on the official statements of politicians, whereas mine highlights the personal views of aid workers in the field, what Michael Lipsky (2010) calls street-level bureaucrats.

Thomas L. Oomen (2020, pp. 306-308) has studied the effects of greater trade interests in aid using Dutch development cooperation in Bangladesh between 2005 to 2016 as

a case study. Oomen finds that ambiguity in the goals and strategy of the aid program due to the introduction of trade interests caused it to become less efficient in delivering development aid. Oomen's research makes a strong argument for a causative relationship between increased self-interested trade objectives and decreased efficiency in development aid.

The inclusion of security concerns with development assistance is far more directly controversial than economic aid, especially when donors can be suspected of using aid to increase their own security. One of the more recent debates around the motivation behind aid has also surrounded accusations of the securitization of aid. Whereas the Cold-War era saw aid allocations follow the logic and power play of the time while largely focusing on economic growth in practice, Stephen Brown and Jörn Grävingholt (2016, pp. 7-8) have argued that aid has become a specific tool to solve security concerns of the donor country since the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, since 9/11 more aid money has been earmarked specifically for security: with the politicisation of anti-terrorism efforts, the overall growth of aid budgets in Western countries oftentimes has seen the surplus used not for development purposes, but to bolster the security sector (Aning, 2010, pp. 13-14).

There is a wealth of academic material on the motivations of aid. Three major themes that emerge are those of self-interest, economics, and security. This study will attempt to make a similar examination, albeit qualitative and inductive, on Japan.

3.2 Democracy promotion

Most literature focuses on democracy promotion as a concept, rather than governance. Modern democracy promotion in the EU and US, argues Thomas Risse and Nelli Babayan, is a mix of normative and security goals. It has also been argued that democracy promotion can misfire and instead increase autocratic tendencies. (2015 pp. 392-393). The EU, for example, has moved from a leverage to a governance policy in Democracy promotion. The union has become closer to the US in mode of operation paying greater mind to strategic concerns. Both actors, contends Risse and Babayan, also put stability in general over promoting democracy and human rights (383). While democracy promotion can be conceptualized as a liberalist force on the global stage, there are also self-interested and strategic motives that could be driving the agenda. Among these more realist motivations is the current competition between the West (and allies, Japan among them) on the one side and (predominately) China and

Russia on the other. These latter two have been engaging in the deliberate counteraction of democracy promotion, what is sometimes called "Autocracy promotion" (p. 385). Because of this, democracy promotion is no longer the general tool for the promotion of free elections and civil liberties, but one arena of international competition among many.

One explanatory factor that may affect the form of democracy promotion is the country's own democratization process. This is called the donor model of democracy promotion. As described by Leonie Holthaus (2019, pp. 1219-1220) it claims that the way democracies attempt to export their democracy depends on what form their own democratization process took. Germany, for example, saw their long history of flipping between autocracy and democracy while becoming a steady liberal democratic state first after achieving long term social and economic stability. Because of this, long-term sustainability is a key aspect of German democracy promotion.

Tsveta Petrova (2015 p. 152) gives credence to this idea. She examined the democracy promotion of the EU to Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union and contrasted this with the democracy promotion of the same Eastern European countries (Poland and Slovakia) when they transitioned from aid recipients to aid donors. Contrary to the hypothesis that the Eastern European countries would adopt the governance-based EU-model of democracy promotion, they in fact adopted a model centred around strengthening the civil society of the recipient countries. This reflects not the efforts of the EU but instead Poland and Slovakia's own experiences with democratization where civil society was a major factor.

The effects of democracy promotion are difficult to measure, and the literature is mixed. EU's democracy assistance, for example, show slow and small but consistent results as shown by new research by Adea Gafuri (2021, pp. 15-16). As opposed to previous findings, her study shows that democracy promotion seems to show long term results in improved democracy and civil liberties in the recipient country. This, however, is not true for all actors. USAID, for example, does not show the same level of success in its democracy assistance programmes (p. 16).

The future effectiveness of democracy promotion as a worldwide force for good, however, has increasingly come under question. Western democracies, argues Thomas Carothers (2020, p. 115) have isolated themselves, liberal forces are bogged down with the rise of illiberalism domestically and new democratic powers such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, and Turkey have all lost the ability to promote democracy or have fallen into illiberalism

themselves. Even autocracies such as China and Russia are becoming less and less interested in liberal ideas and more adamantly opposed to the West (pp. 116-117).

This raises the question of where Japan, a country ruled by the same conservative-liberal party for the most part of half a century, stands on the matter. Does Japan at all consider democracy worth promoting, and why? And do these efforts follow patters of Japan's own democratization process? Do Japanese aid workers see their job as inherently promoting democracy, or is democracy simply one focus area among many? This research will attempt to answer these questions in relating the Japanese view of democracy promotion to other important driving forces of aid.

3.3 Japanese development cooperation

When the ODA charters from 1992 and 2003 attempted to bring Japan in line further with the other DAC-members, the concept of "Human security" rose to the forefront, defined as "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" (Lewis-Workman, 2018, p. 92) Hyomin Jung (2022, p. 48) describes a current shift back to the traditional model of Japanese aid with the Abe administration and the adoption of the 2010 and 2015 DCC charters. Japanese aid is again explicitly to be used to further Japanese strategic interests, often in the form of tied aid. Economic benefit for Japan has also been reintroduced.

This is linked to the fact that Japanese aid policy is highly affected by public opinion (Midford, 2017). After the 90s economic crisis the Japanese public was highly sceptical of its high development aid spending which resulted in lower ODA budget. However, in the 2010s public support for aid grew again. What is described as a new feature of the 2010s by Jung is the public support for ODA loans and national interests in aid. In a 2016 poll, a record high of 42.9% of the public perceived the advance of Japanese foreign policy to be the most important goal of Japan's economic cooperation. A far lower 36.5% cited that humanitarian obligation as the most important (pp. 48-49).

Japan's development aid system is unique for the seamless way that state actors have integrated Japan's private business into its aid framework. This has allowed Japan, Sasada (2019, pp. 1057, 1068) argues, to utilise its greatest asset—its large economy and industry—in its development schemes in a more organic and efficient manner than the efforts of European states in the 2000s. Sasada goes on to observe that Japan's model is based on its

own experiences in becoming one of the first countries to follow the developmental state model where the state focuses on large improvements to infrastructure and economic growth above all else (pp.1047-1049). The return to this policy during the Abe administration is primarily attributed by Sasada to a rising demand for infrastructure in recipient countries, coupled with a return to state-sponsored development at home. This shift coincides with greater diplomatic competition from states such as China, countered by Japan through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Framework (pp. 1058-1062).

Sasada assessment this model positively, arguing that stands among the world's best to promote economic growth and long-term prosperity in developing countries (p. 1069). This evaluation is echoed by Ohno Izumi (2022, pp. 169-170), who argues that the 2010s has seen increased competition in the Asian development cooperation sphere. Coinciding with the change from ODA to DCC charters, Japanese aid has seen an increasing variety of actors, including private companies and NGOs, being utilized in Japanese aid. Ohno argues that the mobilization of these Japanese actors in organizational networks across Asia is one of the country's greatest strengths as a donor, allowing it to engage in policy dialogue and discussions on all levels with late-comer economies in Asia.

As noted above, there is a recent concern with securitization of aid. While constitutionally banned from exporting arms, re-interpretations of the Japanese constitution have allowed Japan to provide nonmilitary aid to foreign armed forces. Workman (2018, pp. 110-113) suggests that the trend of the securitization of aid is likely to continue in the future. Raymond Yamamoto (2017, pp. 80-82) describes how the 2015 DCC charter specifies that Japan's ODA should not be used for military purposes, while at the same time it says that the new national defence strategy must be taken into consideration. ODA should be used strategically to preserve Japanese "peace and security" and the country's survival. The new charter also allowed for "quasi-military" aid such as bolstering a country's police or coastguard capabilities. Even before Abe, Japan had partly used ODA in order to protect its interests in keeping the seas around Japan open, a long-term goal for the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI) and MOFA. The early 2010s also saw the Government of Japan (GOJ) worry increasingly over China's military expansion, especially in the South China Sea. The use of its technical cooperation scheme to help improve the Philippine coastguard can be seen as a consequence of this development.

3.3.1 Governance and Democracy in Japanese Aid

Japanese promotion of democracy and governance as a part of its ODA is a far less studied subject than other areas. The Sasakwa Foundation think-tank report *US-Japan approaches to Democracy Promotion* (Sato, Bob, 2017, pp. 38-40) states that Japanese governance aid is driven by a long-term gradualist approach that positively incentivizes good governance, rather than punishing mismanagement. Governance promotion focuses primarily on improving law, judicial reforms, and transparency.

Japan, according to Nobumichi Teramura (2021, p. 28), was first reluctant to engage in "rule of law"-promotion due to its recent history as a colonial power. Up until the 2015, revision of the DCC charter the term was not featured. At that point, however, rule of law surfaced to become an explicit policy goal of Japanese ODA. Teramura argues that the effect of Japanese legal cooperation in the Mekong region has been underrated by Western scholars, partly due to the lack of translation of related documents to English.

One example where Japan has made great contributions is Cambodia where Teramura points to several projects where Japanese legal models were incorporated into the Cambodia civil code, as a part of what he calls the "pluralism" of South-East Asian legal tradition (pp. 25-26). The Cambodian legal system does not use previous legal cases as precedent, rather relying on authoritative writing. This is why, according to Teramura, Japanese democratic juris prudence may become a positive influence when used as precedent in Cambodian law (p. 34).

Japan has recently seen democracy promotion as more and more of an important component in its ODA. Takeshi Yuzawa (2013, 243-252) points to the inclusion of support for democracy into the Japan-ASEAN dialogue as an important piece of evidence in this regard. While its work with judicial reforms has been successful, Japan's work to support CSOs in the recipient countries have been weak. As to what effect this might have accomplished Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail et. al (2020, pp. 2890-2892) studied Japan's democracy and governance promotion in Malaysia. They found that Japan's style of supporting democratic systems without civil society engagement may serve primarily to stabilize the current regime rather than strengthening democracy as whole. What drives Japan to adopt this style of democracy promotion, however, is not evident in the literature.

A significant work about Japanese aid motivations and democracy promotion that this study relies heavily is a chapter by André Asplund (2017, pp. 41-56). in *Japanese Development Cooperation: The making of an aid architecture pivoting to Asia* Asplund argues that, as of 2016, democracy plays an insignificant role in determining the form and limits of Japanese development cooperation. Whereas the Japanese DCC charter says that

non-compliance to democratic values in the recipient country should force Japan to revalue its ODA commitment, in the strategically important ASEAN countries this has not been the case. In Vietnam, a country which has not taken any steps toward democratization, Japanese aid has been steady. The same can be said for Myanmar which has seen a worsening of civil and democratic rights. Asplund argues that this is evidence of a country-specific application of the ODA-charter; one where Japan believes they cannot afford to take human rights into account in important countries in ASEAN where Japan competes for influence with China.

Still, while Asplund argues for the increased securitization of Japanese aid, he predicts that this may leave greater room for an expanded role of democracy promotion in the future, should the GOJ link increased democratization with increased security benefits for Japan. The Japanese government may indeed choose to see increased liberalization efforts as a method of shifting the ASEAN countries away from the authoritarian sphere of Russia and China to settle more safely in the Japanese camp. Still, he argues that in countries with little prospects for democratization such as Laos or Vietnam, Japan is likely to downplay the role of democracy, to instead try to gain the countries' cooperation through other avenues of ODA (pp. 41-53). This study will try to investigate this claim: that national interests repeatedly exceed concerns for democracy and civil liberties in Japanese aid, and can be said to be the main deciding factor in the form of Japanese democracy and governance promotion.

As evident in this literature review, much of the academic writing on Japan specifically also adopt an empirical perspective, simply outlining the facts of Japanese development cooperation. More normative statements usually emphasise the positive aspects of Japanese ODA. While this study will not be grounded in any critical theoretical framework and will also be largely empirical, it will attempt to bring in some critical theoretical voices and analyses into the debate around Japanese democracy and governance promotion as well.

4 Theoretical Concepts

This study is inductive, letting the perceptions of the aid workers interviewed guide the research. This study primarily relies on Kathy Charmaz (2006) for its understanding of grounded theory. Charmaz places much importance on collecting rich data with an open mind, and coding it thoroughly. It is through the process of coding that meaning is created from the data. In coding without heavy reliance on previous academic theory, new ideas emerge. After initial coding you can bring in analysis from previous academic sources to expand on your codes and place them in a context.

Owing to this, the primary accounts of this study were collected before any major academic theoretical reading was done. Instead, the theory chapter was written after a primary round of coding was already completed. During the process of data collection, I used what Charmaz (pp. 101-104) described as theoretical sampling where the researcher, using notes, creates a theoretical understanding of the topic from the data which is then used in further data collection. In this study I used this method during the early stages of the research by analysing the interviews for theoretically interesting ideas that were later incorporated into a revised version of my interview guide. It is this theoretical sampling of my data that guided the following section of theoretical analysis.

In this section, I will discuss the theoretical understanding of core concepts identified as “driving forces” of aid during my analysis of the interview material. This section seeks to formulate theoretical conclusions drawn from empirical studies on the subject that are relevant to test in the case of Japan. This includes the following ideas regarding the motivations for aid: national interests; political culture in aid, using the example of an Asian model of aid; and theories around street-level bureaucrats and the use of discretion in aid. The analysis is not theory driven (or rather driven by theory grounded in the field study), however, various theoretical concepts will be important to bear in mind. Thus, what follows can be viewed as a form of review of theoretical considerations that will be relevant for the analysis.

4.1 The motivation for development aid

In theoretically conceptualizing the motivation or driving forces of aid as they relate to goals and outcomes of aid programmes. I use John Degnebol-Martinussen and Poul Engeberg-Pedersen's model (2003). They propose that motives behind aid must be separated from its goals, or that goals of aid may follow from motives, but that there are cases of "motives that are not directly related to the development goals such as national security policy or commercial motives in the donor country" (pp. 7-12). Therefore, we must first discuss the motivation for a polity to engage in aid before going into how these motivations translate into various goals of aid which in turn are translated as practice by those conducting the aid work.

They (pp. 16-20) list four primary motivations for aid: Moral and Humanitarian, Political, Economic, and Environmental. They then go on to link these motivations — whether springing from self-interest or altruism—to aid goals, which are put into practice as development projects. Goals driven by political motivations may include democratization and capacity development. Goals driven by economic motivations include things such as growth and social goals including human development and fighting against poverty, but also goals such as supporting the business of the donor country (pp. 36-38). These goals are complex and situated and must be studied from case to case. This study treats the way Japan works with promotion of democracy and governance as a dependent variable and will investigate what other driving forces are perceived by aid workers to be important independent variables.

4.2 Altruism or national interests?

Following this view of aid motivation, an important factor to bear in mind in studying the driving forces of aid is the complexity of aid as both an altruistic and selfless act, as well as deeply grounded in national interests and uneven power dynamics. Der Veen (2011, pp. 1-3) problematises aid as a humanitarian and selfless effort by contextualizing aid as a form of colonial guilt. Still, even if described as a form of colonialist apologism, such motivations should still result in aid being distributed to where there is most need. This is the humanitarian or selfless view of aid: that those with power and wealth to some extent have a moral obligation to give back and help develop poorer regions without profiting from it

themselves. This view is traditionally strongly held by for example the aid agencies of the Nordic countries (Degnebol-Martinussen, Engeberg-Pedersen, pp. 9-10).

Contrary to this ideal, argues Van der Veen, there are an abundance of cases where aid has gone to wealthier countries, where aid money keeps going to projects proven to be inefficient and where larger amounts of aid is diverted to one country over another despite relatively similar conditions in the recipient countries (pp. 7-10). Instead, he describes two camps: Those who argue that self-interest dominates ODA and those who believe it a still largely humanitarian practice. This contradiction is also evident in official communication from various developmental agencies. USAID, the American aid provider, and the largest bilateral aid agency in the world, describes its mission as follows: “USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience.” (USAID homepage, 2023).

We can consider this, the view that development assistance is a mutual exchange beneficial for both the recipient and donor countries, as what sets “development cooperation” apart from “development aid”. Niels Keijzer and Erik Lundsgaarde (2018, 211-214) argues that the modern language of mutual cooperation in development aid arose from South-South ODA, specifically Chinese aid to Africa, but has later been incorporated into the UN 2030 agenda and DAC-Country North-South aid discourse. They point out that this is not a change in policy, countries like the US and Japan have long explicitly used aid as a diplomatic tool. Instead, it is a change in discourse where the idea of a more equal mutual benefit-based relationship serves both to present a more ethical veneer to self-interested objectives in aid as well as to provide justification for aid money to the taxpayer.

On a more critical note, Nancy Thede (2013, pp. 785-797) criticizes the DAC-community and their aim to promote a framework of coherence in aid based on what is referred to as mutual benefit. She argues that this concretization of donor country policy toward recipients has not only further cemented a global hierarchy where Western ideas of economic growth reign, but also allowed donor countries to further their own agenda in aid, including its securitization. “By making them responsible, as ‘partners’ in an undertaking that draws all aid actors into a single integrated script for market-led economic growth as a proxy for development—no longer construed here even as its pale shadow, poverty reduction—policy coherence for development has redrawn the boundaries of the possible and turned aid recipients into agents of donor agendas within their own territories.” (p. 797). The language of mutual benefit and cooperation, in other words, masks the power imbalance in favour of the donor country when national interests are involved in aid. Thus, while investigating

national interests in Japanese aid it is important to be critical of phrases such as "development cooperation" and investigate how mutual these relationships really are.

4.3 An Asian model of aid? Political culture as a driving force

The research discusses political culture, expressed as The Japanese Model, as one possible driver of aid. There is theoretical precedent for the idea that different regions have different concepts of aid, for example the idea of an Asian Model of aid. Mark Duffield (pp. 42-43) criticizes Western development frameworks as simply another form of modern imperialism where development aid becomes a tool to reproduce the dominant neoliberal world order. South Korean developmental economist Ha-Joon Chang (2007, pp. 50-63) makes a similar claim in suggesting that the global north's push of neoliberal free trade ideals on the south has largely not created rapid development and economic security but instead perpetuated a world order of dominant industrial nations and developing countries largely dependent on export of raw materials. Instead, contends Chang, the Western world industrialized not based on free trade but on trade tariffs and state support of industry, something that was first privatized when the economy had developed (pp. 26-37).

Analysing Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Thai aid Marie Söderberg (2010, pp. 130-135) suggests that there is no single Asian model of aid but several. One general trend is a reliance on ODA loans in addition to grants with fewer conditional strings surrounding human rights attached than similar aid from Western donors. Others are a belief in industrialization and infrastructure improvements as major focus areas as well as a blurring between development aid and other forms of investment and monetary flows such as FDI. Söderberg suggests that the successes of Asian ODA have encouraged other aid donors to focus more on mutual benefit and industrial growth and that this model based on the Asian development state may be an influence in the emerging south-south development schemes (131-134). Still, while the export of the Asian development state-model may counter the Western neoliberal free-trade agenda described by Chang, Asian aid is still largely based on the capitalist system, almost exclusively dealing with industrialization and development of wealth and capital, perhaps even more so than the West, which has traditionally devoted large portions of its aid budget to governance and democracy. Söderberg (p. 133) does however

mention how Japan and South Korea have been influenced in turn by the West to incorporate more development and democracy promotion into their development.

Based on these discussions it must be taken into consideration that peculiarities of Japanese aid may be driven not only by national interests, nor the best interests of the recipients, but perhaps by simply having a special model of aid based on regional or domestic political culture. Whether this model is specifically Japanese or generally Asian is beside the scope of this study, but as we will see aspects of specifically Asian and Japanese culture does feature somewhat prominently in the interview data.

4.4 Street-level bureaucrats: influence and discretion

Finally, this study uses Lipsky's conceptualization of Street-level bureaucrats as policy makers to understand the role of aid workers as shapers of policy outcome. Street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) is a category of civil servants and state employees defined by Michael Lipsky as workers that "interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions" (2010, p. *xi*). An aid worker dispensing the aid budget to the users in a recipient country can therefore be conceptualized as a form of street-level bureaucrat. Lipsky further argues that at the street – or dispensary – level, SLBs have a high degree of freedom to exercise their own discretion in delivering public policy based on their own judgement. A teacher, for example, may use policy guidelines when grading a test. In the end, however, the final grade will to a large part be based on the personal opinion of the teacher. This, argues Lipsky, makes the SLB not just a dispenser of policy, but a policy maker in their own right.

Of course, the way that SLBs exercise discretion and the reason behind it may vary from country to country, institution to institution, and person to person. Søren C. Winter, Maria Falk Mikkelsen, and Peter Rohde Skov (2022) argue that the way SLBs decide to implement policy may be "affected by their attitudes toward the policy and particularly by their evaluation of the efficacy of the mandated policy measures in achieving the goals of the policy" (p. 789). Therefore, even when a bureaucrat may want to implement a policy, their opinion about the policy and the measures to implement them may give rise to different decisions based on personal judgement. SLBs may also, as argued by Tony Evans (2020, pp. 16-20), choose to not comply with policy by speaking up against it or, by working in the grey

zones of policy ambiguity, to subvert it. This is especially true when considering NGOs and CSOs and their employees and volunteers as SLBs.

I also argue that the NGO workers funded by the Japanese state function as one form of Street-level bureaucrat. Lipsky (p. 216) argues that in many cases NGOs have been integrated into government programmes to the point where their workers can be considered as SLBs with far greater levels of discretionary power than civil servants in government employ. Through interviews with state-funded volunteers in Germany, Lisa Fischer (2021, pp. 90-93) finds SLBs that are less bound by the neutral stance of a state actor strictly following policy. Instead, these actors consider their purpose to pursue civic engagement, something that can be seen as a form of explicit discretionary power. This is an important angle when considering state supported Japanese NGOs in the development sector.

In sum, I argue that several different factors, motivated by self-interest, altruism, or social and historical factors affect the outcome of an aid project on the ground. These factors also exist on different levels of the policy ladder. Another important feature of this theoretical framing is the significance of the judgement of individual aid workers who act not only as implementers of policy, but shapers of it as well.

5 Method

5.1 Sampling

All interviewees were sourced through snowball sampling, or sampling where contacts help find participants who in turn sources yet more participants. Beginning with contacting a few staff members at JICA's head office in Tokyo who provided access to their offices in Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as some Japanese NGO workers in Cambodia. These in turn, introduced me to other interviewees. While I was able to provide a brief description of what kind of people would be most interesting for me to talk to, given my brief timeline and lack of contact network I interviewed all professional aid workers that I was able to schedule a meeting with. Because of this sampling, as well as my expressed interest in democracy during the contacting phase, I ended up getting a hold of many workers specialized in democracy and governance. This is partly what led my research to be focused on this area. Given the grounded theory approach, this turned out to be more of an advantage than a disadvantage to the analysis.

Vietnam and Cambodia were chosen because they signify two typical cases of places where Japan has special strategic interests in aid, with the key difference being how Japan works with promotion of democracy and governance. In Cambodia, despite the banning of oppositional parties, Japan still explicitly promotes democracy. In Vietnam, Japan officially promotes governance, not democracy. One weakness in this study is that I was also unable to interview any current NGO workers in Vietnam, but two in Cambodia. However, the similarities (Japan's general development and diplomatic goals) and differences (the way Japan works with democracy and governance between the countries) makes these two countries good case studies in this research. They also represent two locations where it was practically possible to conduct the research needed in the time at my disposal.

5.2 Semi-structured interviews

The research is based on semi-structured interviews. These are based on an interview guide that was written and re-written as the research went on. Eva Magnusson and Jeanne Marecek (2015, p. 50-51) distinguish between a 'researchable question' and an 'interview question' where the researchable question posits the general type of information the researcher seeks to acquire whereas an interview question is localized and framed in order to extract the personal, situated, experiences of the interviewee that will lead in turn to answer the researchable question. In constructing my interview guide I set up several core themes and sub-themes covering any subject that I thought could be interesting. These ended up being to a large extent researchable questions. I then rewrote them to become situated questions suitable for the interview. After a few interviews I would rewrite the interview guide to reflect the new direction the research took based on what interested me in earlier interviews.

All in all, the content of ten interviews is presented in this study. The interviews are all anonymous. Because of the sensitive position of some of the workers I have interviewed, both with respects to their employer as well as the country they are stationed in, I have anonymized them as much as possible by for example not recording their interviews and not quoting directly unless specifically given permission to do so. Because of this in my presentation of the interviewees I will only give as general a description of their identities as possible. Here follows a list of interviewees as well as their code names used to identify them from *A* to *J*.

- **A.** Retired from JICA, long experience working with Japanese ODA in the field as well as in HQ on all continents, including Cambodia and Vietnam.
- **B.** Works in JICA HQ, primarily with the Philippines but also South-East Asia in general.
- **C.** Individual with recent work experience from MOFA in Cambodia. Has worked with supporting NGOs in the country.
- **D.** JICA Vietnam, works with governance.
- **E.** Long experience working with Japanese and international NGOs both in Cambodia and Vietnam and other countries. Advisor to the GOJ.
- **F.** JICA Vietnam, works with governance.
- **G.** JICA Cambodia, works with governance. Also has experience from international institutions and multilateral ODA.
- **H.** Long experience of working with NGOs in Cambodia, often in collaboration with Japanese state actors.
- **I.** Works at JICA HQ with Cambodia and the Philippines.

J. Previous staff of JICA Cambodia with some experience working with governance. One major factor that may change their outlook is of course their institutions, where those working for JICA or MOFA have likely undergone a long on-the-job training which is common in Japan and may influence their answers and perspectives on aid, as opposed to those working for NGOs who may have a more critical perspective. The age range also varies widely with the oldest being over 70 and the youngest being under 30 which of course may affect their answers. Two of the interviewees were women whereas eight were men. With respect to their privacy, I have elected to not include any further information on their demographics.

All interviews were conducted in English beside two that were partially conducted in Japanese. While all important themes were brought up in each interview, I also more and more structured the interviews as a flowing narrative, moving over to new themes as they naturally emerged from the account. This also ensured that each interview was tailored to create as much discussion relating to the situated expert knowledge of the interviewee as possible. After completing my field research, I transcribed all my interviews, first using an AI service, and then in a second round by hand. The interviews conducted in Japanese were not transcribed but were translated into a summary detailed enough to be coded with the rest of the material. When these parts are quoted, I have translated them word for word and checked them with a fluent Japanese speaker. About half the interviews (including all interviews in Cambodia and Vietnam) were conducted in person, whereas the other half (largely people based in Japan or in a third location) were conducted online.

5.2.1 On interviewing bureaucrats

Much interesting scholarship has been written on the epistemology of interviewing bureaucrats. A vital question is of course why interview is the best method for extracting information about the strategies of aid, what epistemological logic guides the choice of interview. A standard view would be that this is because the interview allows insights into situated knowledge of personal experiences of the interviewee (Mason, 2018, p. 111-113).

This study is in many ways a very fact-heavy work whose findings might otherwise best be sourced using document analysis. Such studies have also been conducted in the past. However, the argument can be made that interviewing bureaucrats and decision makers can

also produce more objective and general empirical data about the processes of policy making that might be accessible using document analysis, where the experiences of bureaucrats can offer insights on how policy is created that is not necessarily written down in official documentation (Berry, 2002, p. 679). This study uses this methodology to some extent where official Japanese documentation of for example internal approval methods for aid projects is lacking or not translated to English.

There are four main reasons why this study relies on interview data. 1: Studies have shown that street-level bureaucrats exercise a high level of discretion in their work that may impact how policy is being executed; therefore, understanding what aspects of Japanese aid is perceived as important by those working in the field may be just as important as knowing what is important to the GOJ. 2: Documents may reveal what factors are important to the government in principle, however, especially with the importance of the aforementioned discretion, interviews also allow for the understanding the *rationale* of their importance. With extensive on-the-job training and a life working in Japanese bureaucracy, the interviews with aid workers reveal *why* the strategies discussed are relevant and of interest. This is especially important in understanding how the strategical driving forces are considered in the democracy and governance promotion. 3: Several documents of interest as well as parliamentary debates and other forums where one might in other ways analyse the rationale behind the way Japan conducts promotion of democracy and governance are not available in English and may not be available to the public. There are also strategies which may not be discussed openly for political reasons. Japan does not have as strong laws of public access to government documents as some other democracies, and therefore, for the scope of this study, interviews were the best means to procure the information that might in a larger study be best sourced from documents.

A factor that eased the interview process in this research is the fact that I was not necessarily looking for any sensitive or secret information. Indeed, the interviews where I asked did not explicitly ask for such information were the ones where most sensitive and critical information tended to appear. The study also had the advantage of interviewing both people working for state-run agencies, as well as people working for NGOs with insight into the state-run agencies. In this case, the former group would gladly provide information about how the Japanese state treats aid, and how day to day business is conducted, whereas the latter group were more interested in providing context, and at times, criticism of Japanese aid.

5.3 Thematic analysis

This study uses a thematic analysis approach to coding. As described by Kuckartz (2014, pp. 69-72) thematic analysis is highly compatible with grounded theory open coding and is the creation of data through the building of themes during the coding of the material. At the start of the data analysis stage through re-reading all notes and the theoretical sampling conducted during the research collection phase, I already had some good idea of what to look for in the transcriptions. At this point I also undertook some academic theoretical reading based on this early phase of theory sampling.

After this point the data was coded firstly into more specific and situated codes. After this I put these codes into larger categories under themes relevant to the research topic. During this point the research question started to become more concrete and finalized. This led me to group my themes after strategies driving Japanese aid, acting as a form of independent variables, and discussions on projects relating to democracy and governance acting as a dependent variable. These independent variables are presented in the analysis, followed by the material on governance and democracy. It is also at this point that some key primary documents such as the DCC and the JICA development plans for Cambodia and Vietnam were consulted to provide context.

5.4 Ehtics

As mentioned before, some of the information discussed in the interviews is somewhat sensitive. Because of this I have taken several steps to ensure that all interviewees remain anonymous, including the lack of any personal identifiers such as name, gender, and age. All interviewees were read a free and informed consent reading and gave oral consent to being included in the study (See Appendix II for full informed consent reading). All participants were given the ability to ask that any mention organization, project, or other factor that could have identified them also be removed from the final research, none chose this option. They were also told that the recording may be turned off at any part of the interview. Two chose not to be recorded. Overall, the entire study is based on free consent on the part of all participants. All interviewees may be in vulnerable positions with regards to the country they

do fieldwork in and to their employer However, I have decided to respect their status as professionals and experts in their field by giving them the option to be as anonymized as they wished, as well as their ability to understand the terms of the informed consent reading and to be able to agree to it orally. In the cases I believed the participant's English level may leave some unclearness in the informed consent reading, I ensured to read it through again and confirm with the participant that they had understood the content.

6 Analysis

This section will present the findings in the research interviews and relate them to relevant theoretical concepts. It will discuss the three important themes perceived by aid workers to affect Japanese promotion of democracy and governance. Firstly, Japanese political culture, or features of the Japanese model of aid. Secondly, Japanese national interests in aid. And thirdly, the role of Japanese aid workers in the government and NGOs as street-level bureaucrats able to exercise discretion in aid. After this will follow a more grounded enquiry into how Japanese aid workers conduct promotion of democracy and governance in the field, and how this work is affected by the previously mentioned driving forces of aid. This final section will discuss the Japanese view of democracy and democracy promotion, as well as the situated cases of some projects in this area in Vietnam and Cambodia

6.1 Japanese political culture in aid

Here follows what Japanese aid workers consider some the most important factors of the Japanese model of aid, or in other words, what are perceived to be important uniquely Japanese features of its aid. Some, such as the request-based model of aid are based in modern political arrangements, others are deeply linked to Japanese history and self-image. These latter factors especially highlight the importance of understanding a country's culture and society to understand outcomes of its policy.

Important to note here that while about half of the people interviewed for this study has experience working for non-Japanese actors and can therefore be said to have lived comparative experience of what sets Japan apart internationally, the other half had only worked for Japanese actors and can therefore be said to have a more limited comparative perspective. Still, all interviews will be included here as they both illustrate what sets Japan apart in practice, and what is *believed* to be quintessentially Japanese traits in development assistance.

One major theme that arises is that Japan's own experiences as a country shape its aid. What shapes Japanese aid may not be as much guided by modern politics, but by Japan's historical experiences. Japan has one of the highest rates of earthquakes and other natural disasters in the world which several of my sources argue makes the Japanese experience especially suited to projects in countries suffering from similar vulnerabilities resulting in more efficient disaster prevention, and more durable infrastructure.

The other sub-theme that came up in nearly all interviews was Japan's experience during the late 19th and early 20th century. As Japan modernized it studied and imported Western technology as well as systems of governance and law and transformed them to suit the Japanese system. Echoing Holthaus' (pp. 1219-1220) donor model of aid strategy formation, the aid workers argue that this experience is vital in understanding how Japan exports its own technologies and governances to developing countries today. They argue that Japan has a unique ability to help recipient countries adapt the Japanese technological and institutional expertise to the local environment and society.

6.1.1 Japanese isolationism/uniqueness

One idea that is often cited as central to the Japanese self-image is the idea of *uniqueness*, or *exceptionalism*, often also discussed as Japanese isolationism (Lau, 2022, pp. 80-95). The reproduction of the Japanese national self-image has for example been found to place a high emphasis on the myth of the Japanese people as an exceptionally homogenous group which differentiates itself from outsiders through the idea of "the insurmountability of cultural difference" (Shani, 2015, pp. 161-162). This is still a highly contentious topic in Japanese foreign policy where Japan is still debating whether or not to hold on to the isolationist view of the country as a unique (if not neutral) force on the international stage that may be allied with the US but otherwise holds a pacifist position charting its own course preferring to treat with other countries individually, rather than as a part of any international grouping (Michishita, 2021, pp. 506-507).

This sentiment also comes up in the experiences of Japanese aid workers, especially when comparing Japan to other entities. "JICA operates a monocultural system and a way of working that is distinctly Japanese. EU aid providers usually collaborate and work together in larger projects based on a common view. Japan and JICA prefers to work more alone directly with the recipient country" (*G*). Interviewee *G* with large experience in European aid

agencies contends that whereas Western aid agencies are integrated with one another but are to some extent independent from other branches of their own governments, JICA is very independent from other aid providers but highly integrated into the Japanese government. They are directly subordinate to MOFA and is one of the major diplomatic tools to further various foreign policy agendas of the GOJ. Western aid providers can often act on their own and sometimes rebel to a certain extent against the agendas of their foreign ministry whereas JICA needs consensus from Tokyo to move, something referred to as "Typical Asian culture" by *G*. Collaboration with Western donors is also described as difficult as it is hard to evaluate what country produces what effect which may present a difficulty in providing accountability to the taxpayers. This idea of Asian culture placing an importance on consensus is a key factor of Asian political culture. Ho-Beng Chia et. al. (2007, pp. 315-316), for example, found that importance of political consensus was a significant common denominator of the Asian Tiger economies in the 2000s.

The Japanese tendency toward isolationism in aid also extends beyond the government actors. The interviewees working in Japanese NGOs also to some extent attested to a tendency among Japanese NGOs to gravitate toward other Japanese actors rather than the state. In Cambodia, for example, there are several networks of NGOs working in fields such as education or healthcare featuring both local Cambodian NGOs and organizations from other countries. Interviewee *H*, with insight into Cambodian NGOs, noted that Japanese non-profit organizations did not participate in these groups to any large extent. Instead, the Japanese NGOs were more active in a network of specifically Japanese NGOs. These Japanese organization were according to the experiences of the interviewee in fact more likely to collaborate with the Japanese government than with an NGO from a different country. For its part the Japanese government, which operates grants for NGOs both through JICA and through the embassy were more likely to award these funds to Japanese NGOs both because these are better at filling in the forms in Japanese and jumping the bureaucratic hoops necessary to be awarded these grants but also, according to my contact in the NGO, because the Japanese government tend to trust Japanese organizations more as collaboration partners. Thus, while the uniqueness of Japan is often discussed as a myth, it is clear that a perception of such uniqueness both among policy makers and bureaucrats affect Japanese foreign policy to a great degree.

6.1.2 Recipient country in the driver's seat

One central aspect of the Japanese ODA process that virtually all interviewees mentioned as a significant factor in affecting what work is carried out on the ground is the way that JICA accepts and designs projects. Unlike other aid providers who may work primarily with the civil society or with individual villages, or hospitals in a recipient country, JICA can only act on the explicit request of the government in the recipient country and designs its aid plan for every country together with that government.

This is something that sets JICA apart from MOFA. The foreign ministry can make diplomatic protests, however if the government of the recipient country does not request an aid project, JICA cannot act. Here is how interviewee *A* motivates this stance: "JICA, is a Development Agency, and tries not to intervene in politics or political discussion." JICA of course has their own development plan for a country, but this plan too is developed in discussion with the Japanese MOFA and the representatives of the recipient government. The request-based system of aid too is a historical remnant from the war reparations post WWII from which the Japanese aid system grew (Sato, 2022, pp. 49-50).

On one hand, this stance is motivated as a way to establish real accountability toward the recipient country. "The global north is starting to lose its advantage over global south that can often speak for themselves and make their own demands, therefore collaboration with government of recipient countries is becoming more important" (*G*). Japanese aid is an explicitly diplomatic tool, which is why it makes some sense that Japan should always seek explicit consent from the recipient state, and thereby elevating them as an equal partner while limiting the use of recipient countries as tools for donor agendas as described by Thede (2013, p. 797). However, given the difference in power between Japan and the recipient country, it bears examining how equal this "mutual" cooperation is in practice. In the end, Japan as the world's third largest economy and in the position of aid provider will always have more power and has a far higher ability to impose its own agenda on the recipient country than the reverse.

This relationship also calls into question who aid is for. It gives all the power to the government of the recipient state to set the agenda. Especially in corrupt or authoritarian states, between the strategic political goals of Japan and those of the recipient country, there is little direct accountability toward the people who are supposed to benefit from the aid. One famous example of this is the how the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the 1980s used Japan's request-based non-conditional ODA loans to divert funds into his own pocket (Sato, 2022 p. 59). It seems especially difficult to promote good governance and democracy while the aid agency is constrained by the agenda of a state that may be actively trying to

suppress these features. Still, the aid workers I talked to all defended this system to some extent stating that while the more opinionated and combative stances of other aid agencies may sound better, it is Japan's slow and steady request-based principles that allows it to build trust long-term allowing it to bring affect more qualitative development both in economic growth and good governance.

6.1.3 Cooperating, not imposing

The cooperative and non-confrontational approach to dealing with not-always-democratic recipient countries can be said to permeate the aid strategy in general. And indeed, Japan with its consensus-based political system, marks itself on the stage of democratic aid donors as very reluctant to push human rights agendas. In working on governance for the UN, for example, *G* found that pushing human rights was one major factor that different from working for Japan. This distinct feature of Japanese development cooperation is vital to understand if we are to also discuss how Japan perceives its role in promoting democracy and human rights through aid.

> One thing is that generally you UK or European or American, Canada and Australia people, also including NGO, believe that they already have a basement in theory of human rights development, and they are they think they are advanced countries. It [becomes kind of a] teaching posture or even preaching posture against people outside of the European interpretation, European theory or European culture. […] Japanese people do not usually have a very strong superior mind or attitude toward them, we walk with them, working with them in a very equal partnership. (*E*)

The above quote largely exemplifies how Japanese aid workers explain the benefit of the Japanese stance not to push hard on sensitive topics such as human rights. *E,* it should be noted, works for an NGO and is critical of the Japanese stance as passive. Still, in this regard *E* believes that Japan may have a greater respect for the recipient country than Western donors.

Many aid workers argue that in several cases, pushing your own views very hard is a form of superiority, thinking that you are better than the people of the recipient country and factually counterproductive in producing good human rights. "I think it's also our strength

that because we do not judge or push, but rather respect their choice we are able to discuss lots of rather sensitive. If we try to say you know gender policy should be this and that they may not want to change much" (*F*). Interviewee *J* mentions that JICA sometimes pushes certain basic human rights values (when supported by MOFA and the GOJ) but largely prefers to come to a gradual understanding with the government of the recipient country through dialogue. This thinking is in line with broader Japanese foreign policy goals, especially in strategically important states such as Cambodia and Vietnam. In larger security discussions with ASEAN, for example, Japan has taken this approach, being unwilling to push its agenda strongly: "instead taking a bilateral approach to strengthen security cooperation with each member state at its own pace, similar to a 'coalition of the willing' approach" (Koga, 2019, p. 55). This again brings up the issue of how Japan is to broach topics such as democracy and human rights, which are enshrined in its development cooperation charter, with states that are reluctant to listen.

6.2 Japanese national interests in the ODA

National interests as a driver of Japanese aid outcome cannot be overlooked. It permeates all projects and the very procedures of the Japanese aid institutions. Issues of national interests also deeply affect how and where Japan can promote democracy at all. To the GOJ aid is an explicit tool to further Japan's national interests. Besides being a part of the DCC this is also no hidden secret to the aid workers I talked to; it is the stated goal. "So JICA, implements ODA for the government. And in my understanding, it is a bit sad to say, and I will not say that is everything, but basically, ODA is for kind of strategic purposes. For the country, for the national […] to expand relationship in economics, trade, politics, […] many things. So, in a way, of course, Japan can get some benefit" (*B*). This tracks well with the academic literature which focuses on increasing self-interest in aid following the more altruistic tones of the 1990s and early 2000s (Workman, 2018, p. 110-113).

6.2.1 Focus on Asia

One aspect of Japanese aid the country has faced criticism for is the fact that the majority of Japanese ODA is still going to Asian countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia that have

largely grown to middle-income economies (The World Bank, 2023). Especially the ODA loans and large infrastructure projects are located in this area, rather than targeting poorer countries in Africa where the need might be greater (JICA annual report 2022). All interviewees from JICA pointed out that Japan has stepped up in Africa with the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), but agree that the strategic focus is on South and South-East Asia.

The reasons perceived by aid workers for this agenda are threefold. First, there are the historical and cultural reasons. Japanese aid as stemming from its war reparations has a lot of history in Asia. Japan, it is said, also understands other Asian countries and the political culture of these places better. *F* described the following experience in Vietnam:

> You know, how [Japanese] ODA started, right, compensation for World War Two. I was sent to one village, I was actually living in the Vietnamese people's family for two years doing homestay. […] That village, that province itself, during World War Two, the Japanese military, actually occupied that area. Though, I didn't know that before, and I don't think that JICA intentionally actually supported that area because of it, just because there was a request of support to dispatch a volunteer. […] Then after like two years of activity there one elderly woman said to the top leader or village that 'you know, half a century ago, the Japanese came to do harm to the village but then half century later, this Japanese lady came, and she did good for our village'. […] So, I really do recognize in myself, kind of the role of the Japanese like of responsibility, not to do compensation, but be responsible as a Japanese citizen in Vietnam." (*F*)

Here is a clear example of an aid worker who still very much feels the original purpose of Japanese development cooperation alive and well today, expressing the view that Japan has a duty to provide ODA after the imperialist regime of the 1940s. In some small ways therefore, Japanese aid is still by its structure a project to rebuild and develop East Asia.

The other two other reasons for the focus on Asia are based in national interests. The second reason is economical: Japanese companies are already well established in Asian countries which makes aid delivery easier. These middle-income countries are also a safer bet for large ODA loans which is becoming one of Japan's largest forms of funding for aid projects. The final, and perhaps larger, reason is that of politics. Asia and specifically ASEAN is strategically important both for Japan's economy and business as well as for Japan's security. "The situation with Southeast Asia is that there are many Japanese

companies and factories, and many Japanese companies have business have in the region" (*I*). Maintaining good diplomatic relations and a high level of trust in these countries is necessary to achieve Japan's strategic goals such as FOIP. Japan cannot simply disengage as they are facing increasing competition from one country in particular. This last point is what Asplund (pp. 41-56) argues is keeping Japan in authoritarian countries like Cambodia and Myanmar where other actors have left, it prioritizes its own national interests over democracy.

Here again Japan may be criticized for the power imbalance in entering as a major power in Asia, using aid to advance its national interests. Especially as these countries are ones that have been occupied by Japan in the past. France has faced great criticism for using aid to push neoliberal agendas and its own self-interests in its old colonies in the West African CFA-zone (Taylor, 2019, p. 1070). Similar criticisms can be made of Japan's promotion of national interests in its aid to South-East Asia as neocolonialist. Most of the ASEAN countries, for example, were members of the so called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a Japanese WWII colonial project to create a zone of influence in Asia from which to extract natural resources to the home islands (Anamwathana & Huff, 2022, p.1). On the other hand, staying in Asia is a matter of national security for Japan. If they leave, others will take their place.

6.2.2 Competition with China

If Japan's national interests in the ODA is explicitly stated, one feature that is officially denied but an open secret among the aid workers, is the aid competition with China. This is the same motive that underpins the FOIP-agenda and perhaps the current main reason why Japanese aid is till focusing on Asia. Chinese aid is partly modelled after the Japanese example focusing on national interest and infrastructure projects. (Katada, Liao, 2020, pp. 465-467). Japan and China are competing for diplomatic favour in their neighbourhood using infrastructure and aid is the method through which this competition is playing out. A practical example of how this strategic rivalry (for Japan's part) may be overshadowing human rights issues is through ODA to the Philippines during its controversial president Duterte. Despite allegations of human rights abuses both Japan and China made increasing visits and promises of ODA money up to the tune of one trillion yen promised by prime minister Abe in 2017 (Trinidad, 2020, pp. 106-108).

Most of my interviewees admitted that while it is not spoken of outright competition with China is a large part of the strategic goals of Japanese aid policy. Especially since the

launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative-investment framework. "I think many of the development assistance projects that JICA has been providing in Southeast Asia can be seen as a kind of […] a competition with the One Belt, One Road initiative" (*A*). *C,* working for MOFA in Cambodia argued that when the US aid programme withdrew from the country due to human rights violations surrounding the banning of opposition parties in the 2018 election, Japan had to step up. During this time, China moved in and increased its aid and infrastructure spending. Japan, for its part, felt the need to fill the gap of other democratic donors to balance out China's influence. This is something the ODA workers in Cambodia admit to being a large concern. *I* describes it as "it's not about the amount of money but also in terms of the relationship with the government, it is also important to show […] how we can support that country. And so China has a great influence on the how the Japanese Government and JICA formulate projects and where we work". *D*, *G,* and *F,* who work with governance, argue that China does not affect Japan's governance or democracy promotion nor projects around sanitation and other basic needs to a great extent, but rather the area of infrastructure. Japan's infrastructural support is also defended by the interviewees as more ethical because Japan uses local labourers to a large extent and build durable high-quality infrastructure; two areas where Chinese projects have been heavily criticised (Tippett & Hillman, 2021).

At the same time Japan is dismantling its own ODA to China. This was a big investment as China was opening up to the global markets with the hope to liberalize the country (Katada, Liao, 2020 p. 455). Japan became the largest donor to China making up 56% of the aid the country received in the 1990s. However, the programme has been quickly dismantled and came to an end in 2023. In this regard the aid workers I talked to all deny that this decision was based on diplomacy, instead they mean that now when China is becoming one of the largest aid donors in the world with little signs of democratizing, it is unnecessary and futile of Japan to stay around. Or as *I* puts it "the time to end, has simply come. They can take care of themselves".

6.2.3 Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Security is one of the major up and coming driving forces of aid. Besides the prominence of the Human Security concept, the Development Cooperation Charter also emphasizes the need for "contributing even more proactively to securing the peace, stability and prosperity of the

international community from the perspective of 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' based on the principle of international cooperation; and securing the national interests of Japan" (DCC, 2015, p. 1). This development goes hand in hand with Japan's remilitarization. This securitization of aid is likely to continue in the future following the new Security Strategy published in 2022 which explicitly evokes ODA as one of the major tools Japan will use to enact its new security policy (Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2022). However, for the purposes of this analysis the most significant security agenda that guides contemporary Japanese democracy and governance promotion is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific agenda, or FOIP.

FOIP is a grand defence agenda intended to secure Japanese interests in the Indo-Pacific region, specifically against what is perceived to be an increasingly hostile China. While the project is not specifically aid-oriented it is supposed to be integrated into all Japanese foreign policy. Governance promotion, for example, is explicitly alluded to as a policy tool in the first pillar of the agenda: "Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019, p. 9). In fact, to illustrate how central this scheme has become to Japan's official ODA policy, in the foreword describing its core mission in JICA's annual report 2022, the agency lists achieving FOIP as the number one of six core missions in its operation stating: "JICA will play its role in realizing the Japanese government's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and contribute to peace and prosperity not only in the Indo-Pacific region but also in the world as a whole." (JICA, 2022, p. 16).

FOIP is described by many interviewees as perceived to be a large reason behind a change in Japan's ODA direction both in defence, economic growth, and governance promotion. *G* describes FOIP as a democracy promoting project, stating that while part of the project deals with economic and security self-interest on Japan's part, the project also deals with creating better, more transparent and democratic governance the world over. "A part of FOIP is sharing universal values including governance assistance and democracy promotion which are expressed as strengthening rule of law". In this effort ODA is one of the major tools to build long-term friendly relationships in countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam (Saifullah Akon, Charoensri, Alam, 2023, pp. 15-17). *D* echoes this idea in citing FOIP as one of the major reasons for Japan's engagement with the governance sector in Vietnam "In order to achieve Free and open Indo Pacific, we need support from the government of Vietnam. So, in order to create a good relationship with Vietnam, in order to achieve this, we need to implement such kind of cooperation". These quotes show how the increasing importance of security-related concerns in Japanese ODA is felt in the day to day

work of implementing aid projects. The rise of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific being another step as in the increasing global tensions between American allied countries on one side, with China and Russia on the other.

6.3 The defence of strategic aid, or: accountability to the public

So, how is aid used as a diplomatic tool justified by those working to carry it out—especially in cases when it requires cooperating with states perpetrating human rights abuses, such as Cambodia or Myanmar? The response I received from talking to those working in ODA can be summarized in one word: Accountability. Or, to quote *C*: "the Japanese government has the accountability, and they have to explain why we use this money for the other countries." Japanese ODA is highly reliant on public opinion. Japanese ODA rose to be the largest in the world with public support. In the early 2000s, partly due to worries following the 9/11 attacks, the number of citizens wanting to decrease the ODA budget overtook those wanting to increase it. This led to an actual decrease in the ODA budget and deprioritizing of it. After this Japan restructured its ODA policy emphasising "international cooperation" rather than aid and increasing the importance of mutual benefit. Now the Japanese public is positive to ODA again, with the vast majority wanting it to remain on current levels (Sakurai, 2022, p. 79-81).

This is also the justification that aid workers provide as to why Japanese aid is a diplomatic tool: it is a way to defend the existence of aid to the taxpayer. In this light, aid is intrinsically both altruistic and self-serving. Public opinion affects parliamentary debates which affects aid policy, and the tax paying individuals and businesses want to get something back from their aid. One interviewee argues that in multilateral organizations such as the UN the sense of accountability is low which allows them more independence. Where accountability to the public exists, in their opinion, aid will always be political. This is argued to be especially salient in case of Japan. "The Japanese government debt to GDP is the worst in the world. It's more than 200% in accumulated debt to Japan's GDP. So, we do not have much fiscal space to provide grant assistance" (*A*). This is especially important when explaining why Japan relies so much on loans to finance their aid. With a large dept to GDP and an aging population with a decreasing tax paying population, the country cannot be a top

aid donor on grants alone, it must prove that aid is a vital tool to benefit the people of Japan, or else risk public opinion turning against it.

Accountability can be described as a core feature of democracy: the government is accountable to the people. In the case of aid, however, the question becomes *who* the donor should be held accountable to. Matthew S. Winters (2010, pp. 222- 225) argues that accountability in aid is a complex issue where the donor must be accountable to both the recipient government and the "end user" (by "end user" Winters means the population in the developing country expected to benefit from the aid project, not its government). The recipient country government must also be held accountable both to the end user and the donor. In this system only the end user remains as the one all parties must be held accountable to. Leif Wenar (2006, p. 18) illustrates this by arguing that in evaluating an aid project both the donor and the recipient country government are often incentivized to review any development project as a success as their own reputation or diplomatic relations are at stake. Because of this, in evaluating a project both institutions must be held accountable to the recipient population, rather than the government. This presents a difficulty with Japan's collaborative non-confrontational approach to democracy and governance promotion, as well as its use of national interests therein. Japan argues that its aid policy is dictated by accountability to the Japanese public and the recipient country government. But if these evaluations are based primarily on what value Japan or the recipient country government gets out of the governance project, this fails to show any accountability in visible improvement of quality of life in the end user.

6.4 Street-level bureaucrats: influence and discretion

Just as the Japanese government promotes its own interests through aid, evident (or not) in the policy, the aid workers acting as street-level bureaucrats are able to promote their own personal judgement. The academic literature suggests that many important decisions in the front line even in the most bureaucratic systems allows for individual SLBs to exercise a high amount of discretion when it comes to policy implementation (Meyers, Nielsen, 2014, pp. 4-6, 14-16). Or, in other words: field workers as street-level bureaucrats, while acting as unfeeling cogs in a political system, have a high degree of power to affect the outcome of policy in situations where the implications of official policy are not entirely clear. On the

other hand, whistleblowing, or the ability for bureaucrats to explicitly criticize their employers, has been found to be difficult in aid organizations, especially when the aid is donated to corrupt states where a donor agency from a democratic country frequently may encounter moral grey zones (Francis & Armstrong, 2011, p. 321).

From my discussion with aid workers many describe the Japanese system as inherently top-down and hierarchical. Just as MOFA decides policy for JICA, workers in the field must constantly communicate with HQ. Or, as JICA staff *D* puts it: “I think the role of the staff is different in each level, for example, the role of our chief representative is different [from mine]. But for staff like me, I think my most important role is to create better conditions for our experts to work efficiently with the Vietnamese counterparts”. Many do agree, however, that JICA employees have some leverage to affect both the direction and outline of a project. *B* describes how a colleague was able to for example start up projects on digitalization because of a personal interest in the subject. All JICA employees describe that they have been able to report on issues arising from a project and have been able to elevate these even when the issue is of a political nature or concerning human rights in which case it must be brought to the attention of MOFA and the GOJ.

> When it comes to the issues affecting the project, if the staff concerned has identified some issues we have to work on those issues. That means we may have to discuss with the bosses and other departments and if necessary, we may have a discussion with government of the developing country, and then we may have to also involve with the Government of Japan, if the issue is huge. But that's always the responsibility of the staff concerned. -*A*

What is described as more difficult is to directly criticize a project where no direct issue is found, for example due to human rights violations in the country. In fact, most JICA employees I talked to do not venture the idea of debating human rights with the employer as an option they may have considered. Even JICA as an organization, described by *J* and *G* as caring more about democracy and human rights than the GOJ, will always have to follow the lead of the Japanese government.

Here the street-level bureaucrat’s ability to exercise their own discretion comes into the picture. One major difference between the JICA workers in the field and those working at the HQ evident in the research, is their ability to act on their own decisions. Work in the JICA HQ, close to power and the ministries, is described by *J* as more controlled and more administrative, workers simply doing the tasks assigned to them. *G*, however, argues that

among field workers there is a significant dislike of Japan's national interests in aid. "JICA must be able to take situation on the ground into consideration. That's why the personal judgement of individual employees on the ground may have great effect on the direction and implementation of projects; usually by making diplomatic or economic benefits for Japan play a smaller part." (*G*). In this way too, JICA experts on the ground are in some cases able to advocate for more democracy and public participation in governance, even when the state wants more focus on Japanese interests. This may also be evident in institutional differences, where JICA as an organization, according to *G,* despite being subordinated MOFA tries to push for more aid money going to the places where the need is the greatest.

6.5 NGOs in the Japanese aid ecosystem

Other entities that may affect Japanese ODA are the Japanese NGOs. The GOJ through various agencies work with funding Japanese NGOs to deliver development assistance. And Japanese NGOs for their part largely associate with the Japanese government more than any other actor. In this regard NGOs can be seen as a part of the official Japanese aid strategy. In a study from Malaysia, Ismail et al. (2019, pp. 35-38, 53-55) found that Japanese NGOs play an important role in promoting democracy from a Japanese perspective, while also keeping some of the hallmarks of Japanese ODA. Japanese NGOs were found to also operate largely on the request of a local government, much like JICA operates. They also approached the Malaysian government more cautiously than Western organizations in general, framing democracy as a way of strengthening relations with ASEAN which the Malaysian government approved of. Japanese civil society organizations can be said to mirror the role played by state-actors in strategically collaborating and avoiding confrontations. Japanese NGOs therefore have more similarities in terms of strategic goals with Japanese state actors than either of these two have with their counterparts from other countries.

Japanese NGOs is a small part of the overall ODA scheme. To the average of 15% of the aid budget among DAC-countries, in 2018 Japan only spent 1.7% of on NGOs (Takayanagi, 2022, 214, 220). Despite this the GOJ considers Japanese NGOs to be partner organizations in development cooperation. As such they are also invited to dialogues with MOFA and the GOJ on aid policy. Here they have often played a necessary role of critics, able to criticize mainly Japan's use of aid as a policy tool to bolster national interests in the

recipient country (Takayanagi, pp. 227-231). The Japanese development-oriented NGO-network JANIC has also criticized Japan's lack of aid to sub-Saharan Africa as well as the country's low investment in governance and civil society efforts.

This role is mirrored among the NGO workers in Cambodia I talked to. *E* who has served as an advisor to the Japanese government describes their mission, partly, as criticizing the GOJ for not working more with democracy and human rights. *H* describes that Japanese NGOs also has had a role in arranging meetings with anti-government oppositional organizations in Cambodia with the Japanese embassy. However, he also states that much like the Japanese government, Japanese NGOs are disinclined to criticise the government of the country they are active in regarding human rights abuses: "Japanese NGO do not criticize directly, they keep silent. Well one Japanese NGO, Mekong Watch, criticize the Cambodian government because of the vote, so now [there] is in no staff or office in in Cambodia".

NGOs, *H* argues, are closer to the grassroots than JICA. While a JICA project will end after a while or get suspended, Japanese NGOs can work indefinitely in an area which allows them to build trust long-term with the local population. The Japanese government agencies are also not allowed by law to support any religious institutions. Because of this, according to *H*, Japanese NGOs were vital in helping to rebuild Cambodian Buddhism after the ousting of the Khmer Rouge.

One situated example of how NGOs serve as advisors to the Japanese government is described by *H*. When drafting the development goals for Cambodia, Japanese NGOs in the country were invited to advise the government.

> Japanese government made a Cambodian development master plan. At the point NGOs were invited to provide comments. Especially Japanese NGOs were invited to Phnom Penh to make a draft of the policy with the government. At that time the government focused on the economic growth and trade, but NGO argued that the government should also include basic human needs such as education and healthcare as important goals. Democracy was not good at this point, this should also be included. -*H*

It was after this meeting that the current development plan for Cambodia was written, one that explicitly mentions Japan's need to promote democracy in the country.

6.6 Japanese democracy and governance promotion

So, how do these driving forces shape Japan's democracy and governance aid? For one, democracy is conceptualized as less essential than for some Western donors. It is not seen as a part of the general mission of aid, but one of them. While human rights and gender equality must be accounted for in each project, democracy is for democracy promotion projects. Japan also works a great deal with promotion of good governance where others may have focused on democracy. Not explicitly working for free elections, but for increased transparency, less corruption, and a well-managed bureaucracy. All interviewees, however, argued that Japan to some extent always promotes democracy as all projects go to self-help in developing countries that may, in turn, increase democracy.

Aid workers working with projects centred around economic development and growth, for example, made the argument that economic development may benefit democracy. While democracy is not always explicitly considered, JICA at its core is therefore a democracy promoting organization. The following two quotes exemplify this: "By doing such [infrastructure] projects, I think we can create better relationships among those countries, which contributes to realizing democracy, or good relationship with those countries." (*D*), or "many JICA staff believe that while we support the self-help efforts of the developing countries to attain its socio-economic development, then the political stability and civil liberty will automatically follow" (*A*). *G*, however, does admit that with the failure to liberalize China, JICA is abandoning the view that economic development absolutely leads to freedom, and are adopting a view closer to Western donors: that democracy promotion is a goal worth pursuing in its own right.

What is always considered by JICA is human rights and discrimination. While not directly related to democracy promotion, questions of gender equality and disability inclusion are always taken into consideration. As *F* explains, especially Japan's gender equality promotion in governance projects can be odd as many of the developing countries Japan works in have better gender equality than Japan. In a World Bank report Japan ranked worst among all industrial countries in gender equality under the law, placing 104th of 190 countries (Ken, 2023). For example, in Japan 14% of seats in parliament are women compared to 19% for Cambodia and 30% for Vietnam. This, *F* argues is an area where Japan can learn from the recipient country. JICA's work with vulnerable groups, however, do make a real difference. In Cambodia for example according to *G,* emigrants have difficulty voting and have been identified by JICA as a group that needed extra attention.

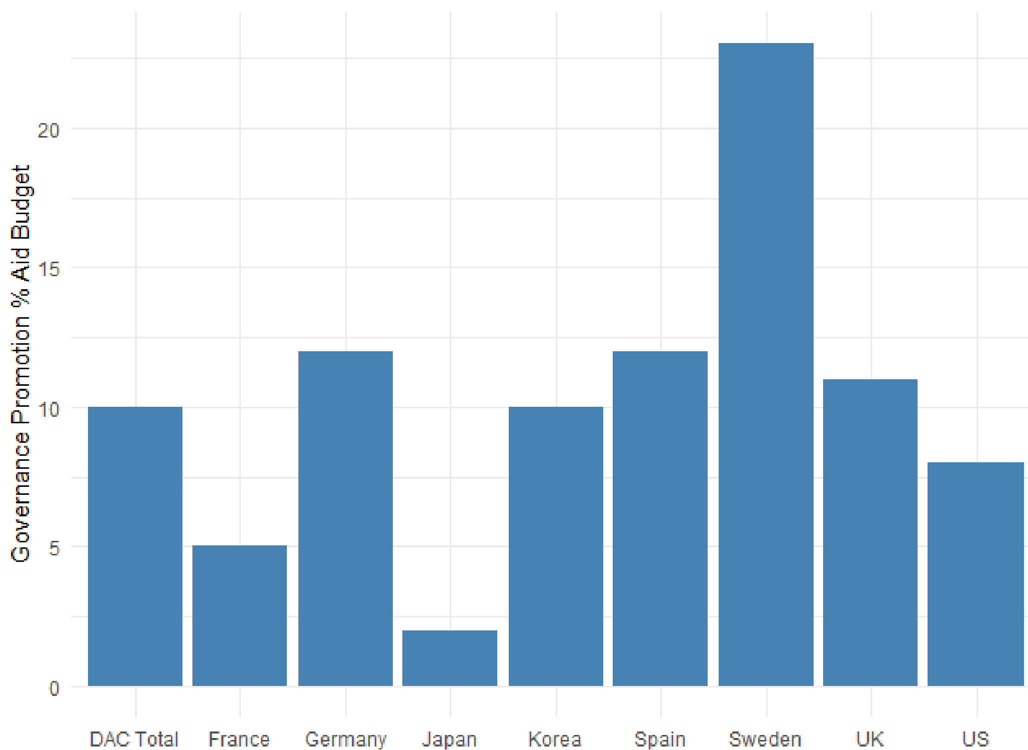

Figure 2: Governance- (including democracy) promotion as percentage of the total 2021 aid budget of a few major DAC-members (OECD Stats 2023).

Democracy promotion today makes up a small part of Japan's ODA budget, especially compared to other DAC-members (see *Figure 2*). Compared to other DAC members it is the smallest share of the aid budget after Greece and Hungary, well behind Korea, the only other Asian member. But this portion is expected to grow. Internally, democracy and good governance is being described as an important way to tie the ASEAN countries closer to Japan, the thinking being that a democratic ASEAN and South Asia will be far more likely to ally with Japan than China. Something that is now tied to the FOIP-agenda. Still, with Japan's unwillingness to push, its ability to promote democracy is far more contingent on the recipient country government than other donors. This has a large effect on what forms the promotion of democracy and governance takes and by what rationale it operates. This is defended by those working with democracy as Japan's conceptual method to improve democracy. Rather than protesting and pulling out when democracy worsens, Japan stays to improve the areas where they are allowed to make change. Or to quote *G*:

> The Western way to pull out and protest and put pressure on a non-democratic government is not always the best way to go. Japan's approach to stay is not

> always the best either. The variation in approach is the best way of helping democracy in the world. The end goal for JICA and for Western actors is largely the same.

One aspect that is described as unique for governance projects is the fact that several of them are evaluated more qualitatively than other aid projects. JICA, in general, use very strict numerical and quantitative evaluations of each project. *G* and *J*, however, both describe that governance projects are often assessed more through a narrative description of the project. Thus, good governance and improvements in democracy are partly understood as a process that cannot be measured entirely through numbers and data but can in some cases be best evaluated through the qualitative descriptions by the expert working in the field. This qualitative evaluation enables the JICA governance experts to pursue paths based on their own judgement of what is best for the recipient country, a form of institutionalized discretion. This is easier in Cambodia where Japan is tasked to promote democracy, rather than Vietnam where it simply works on good governance. The difference between these two countries tells an interesting story of how Japan's aid model and national interests serve to change how governance projects are conceptualized in the field.

6.6.1 Cambodia

JICA's mission to explicitly support democracy in Cambodia is highly visible in the kind of work my interviewees are doing in the country. The 2018 Cambodian elections saw the government ban the major opposition party the Cambodian National Rescue Party leading to a 77% victory for the incumbent Cambodian People's Party which also netted them every seat in parliament. This saw the US and the EU cut their support from the national election committee and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen deepening the country's connections to China with increasing loans and a military training scheme (Croissant, pp. 172-174). As opposed to Western donors, Japan did not pull out. JICA still operates an office at the National Election Committee, working to improve the transparency and efficiency of voting in a country where the opposition is banned. The office also conducts voter education based on similar education programmes in Japan. China, because of their policy not to intervene in domestic politics, does not participate in the work with the election committee leaving Japan as one of few donors to still support Cambodian governance.

The reasons my contacts in Cambodia give for still supporting the election system in Cambodia may get into the key differences between the EU and American ways of promoting democracy vis-á-vis Japan's. "Japan sees democracy as several independent elements. Electoral management is one important part, rule of law another, freedom of speech another, oppositional parties another. Japan helps to promote what they can. Decentralization of election systems, developing capacity of judges etc." (*G*). In other words, even if oppositional parties were banned this is not the be all and end all of democratic progress in Cambodia. *G,* with insight into both Japanese and multilateral democracy promotion in the country points out that the Western way of pulling out and protesting and putting pressure on a non-democratic government is not always the best way to go. *G* contends that issues with transparency in the election system was an issue that helped lead the Cambodian government to gain the power to ban opposition in the first place. One way to disrupt democracy is to manipulate the election commission. In Cambodia, with Japanese cooperation, the electoral system is becoming robust, institutionally strong, and well-developed. According to *G,* this means that regardless of other autocratic practices by the Cambodian government the election commission should still be able to operate transparently and fairly. Because Japan has helped make headway in this one area, therefore, should multi-party competition return there is already infrastructure to hold free and fair elections. Japan also helps with other forms of good transparent governance. JICA's work on the Cambodian civil code, as well as sponsoring of NGOs are both cited as work to help bolster democracy with tacit government approval.

The Japanese non-confrontational system, it is argued, also suits itself to make slow and steady progress in this area. While the opposition is still banned nationally, in local elections the opposition was allowed in again winning up to 20% of seats in some constituencies. One specific example of the Japanese model of democracy promotion is NGOs participating in the election preparations. This was a long-term goal suggested by Japanese experts in the Election Committee which was originally discarded off hand. However, through long collaborative discussions, the proposition to involve NGOs in voter education became more and more accepted and is now a question of *how* and not *if*. Perhaps without the Japanese presence, the election committee may have been entirely subsumed into the Cambodian government rather than remaining strong and independent.

On the embassy side, as described by *C*, Japan has had a history of supporting a few Cambodian local NGOs working with democracy and good governance such as voter education. However, recently, due to JICA's involvement with the election committee they

were not able to approve a grant to an NGO working with a similar voter education. While the NGO was not directly in any opposition to the government *C* hinted that the organization's competition with the election committee may have made it more difficult for it to carry out its own programme and get grant money from Japan. This may also be evidence that while Japan is willing to support democracy-related NGOs in dictatorships when it can, it is reluctant to engage with projects that could be politically risky.

6.6.2 Vietnam

Vietnam is a more difficult case when it comes to democracy. With a government that does not engage even with the pretence of competitive elections, Japan does not use the word democracy in its development plan. Rather they focus on "good governance". Still, all aid workers in governance I talked to still argue that they engage in promoting democracy to some extent. Just like in Cambodia, Japan does what it can with the approval of the government. In practice in the sector of governance this means working on a transparent well-functioning bureaucracy, rule of law, and anti-corruption. As described by *D*, one development-related project sees Japan engage with six legal institutions in Vietnam such as its ministry of justice. This project is divided into two phases: During the first phase Japan works with the institutions to identify key issues facing the smooth and fair running of the legal system. In the second phase the Vietnamese institutions work to solve these issues with Japanese expert advice.

Both two other projects have to do with the training of civil servants in Japan. In the first of these Japan is helping Vietnam reform its civil servant entrance exam to increase transparency and fairness of the exam, as well as to tailor the exam more closely to test for the skills needed to be a good bureaucrat, moving away from testing memorization ability and toward critical thinking skills. The final project is a highly unique one in the stage of governance promotion and centres around the training of Vietnamese top politicians.

The idea of an aid agency helping to train or educate civil servants of an authoritarian developing country is not new or original to Japan. Swedish SIDA (2023), for example, runs a concurrent project to train Ethiopian, Kenyan, Rwandan, Tanzanian and Ugandan civil servants on inclusive green economy. It has been suggested that capable civil servants are one of the largest contributors to quality governance (Tilley, et. al. pp. 23-24). An assertion that has been found to be true, at least when the training programmes are designed well (Lyu et

al., 2022, p. 185). In Vietnam JICA runs the descriptively named "Project for Training and Refresher Training of Leaders and Managers at Different Levels, especially the Strategic One". This project is unique in that it is not a request from the Vietnamese state. This is an aid project on the direct request of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Through the Ho Chi Minh Academy, the so called "incubation hub" of new party officials several high and middle ranking members will be sent to Japan to conduct exercises and training in statecraft, global trends, and how to be an incorruptible bureaucrat in the Japanese fashion. Many of the goals of the training are lifted directly from the Vietnamese party programme and the current five-year plan.

This project also serves as an example of how governance promotion is used for Japanese strategical interests. *F* states that this is the first time a democratic country gets to take part in the education of high-level officials to this extent. Vietnam usually leans on China for advice regarding the communist party whereas Western donors provide business advice. If Japan can build good relations with a generation of Vietnamese upper-level executives it can ensure Japanese interests in the long-term. This is why one of the specific outputs of the project evaluated by JICA is networking. Both Japanese and Vietnamese attendees of the project are given a feedback sheet where they get to answer such questions as "were you able to get connections through this training in the business sector? Do you plan to contact these persons after?" (*F*).

These governance projects are also explained as being about democracy to some extent by reducing corruption and securing transparency, echoing the Japanese wholistic way of viewing democratic progress. While Vietnam never requests for JICA to work on anything related to democracy, and while projects in Vietnam do not explicitly promote democracy, Japanese aid workers still feel that they are contributing to liberalization. Interviewee *D* would not use the word "Democracy" but discussed it in terms of "Universal Values", this is the specific term used in the 2015 DCC to signify Japan's overall work on human and civil rights and democracy in aid. *F* discussed how Vietnam has a form of inner party-democracy:

> If you look at Vietnam closely, democracy actually exists. I mean, if we say like, one party system is not democratic, then there is no democracy, but the if you look within the party, there is so much discussion going on. And then because of its history the people love to talk about politics, and they often speak against the party. I mean, their interest in politics is much higher than Japan. So we're not really like trying to hide or to be too sensitive about the discussion, our position

> is that we are not forcing them to implement this, our position is rather to share our experience […] If we say we will discuss gender or multiparty system from the beginning, then the Vietnamese people may think "Japan wants us to be like this, or this etc". But if we say [we plan to discuss] like public administration system with special care to vulnerable, then they will feel more equal, they will feel safer. Then we are on the same ground to discuss. I actually thought that, when I was discussing with the Office of National Assembly we did talk about gender issues, because they're trying to promote the participation of women and ethnic minorities. (*F*)

There is some truth to this. Political analysts have pointed to how Vietnam allows access to foreign media, as well as plenty of internal debate with some limited public challenge to the party line (Thayer, 2010, p. 441). However, this is to a very limited extent. Press freedom is highly limited. While debate may exist in the margin on topics considered by the party not to threaten its existence such as LGBT issues and the environment, the party can crack down on any speech once the debate becomes disruptive to its rule (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

One project where the aid workers argued Japan worked directly with the topic of democracy and civil liberties was its work with VTV, the Vietnamese state-run public service TV-channel. Here, Japan used experts from its own public broadcast, the NHK, to help train VTV in public broadcasting rather than propagandizing. They, for example, helped create a TV programme about agriculture where those working in the sector would be able to speak about their lives and daily struggles. In this way Japan allegedly promotes democracy at the margins to strengthen public service, give a voice to regular people, and balance the media consumed by the Vietnamese public.

7 Conclusion

This research suggests that several different yet intersecting factors affect the shape and outcome of Japanese democracy and governance promotion. National interests play a vital part in determining how Japan is willing to push democracy promotion. The focus on democracy in Cambodia but governance in Vietnam must be at least partly dictated by the need to keep Japan on good terms with the rulers of both these states. Especially the Vietnamese projects of educating its bureaucrats while explicitly promoting networking with Japan shows a long-term deliberate project to promote Japanese diplomatic interests in the country. This would fit André's (pp. 41-56) argument that national interests would be the major determinant of how Japan is able to promote democracy. Should this be the case, Japanese Democracy and governance aid could be criticised as simply a tool to promote national interests in the guise of development cooperation. All efforts on behalf of democracy and civil rights simply a necessity forced upon Japan by Western actors to be utilized when convenient.

However, this research puts such a view into question. Firstly, as suggested by André (pp. 41-53), Japanese national interests signify an increase in its promotion of democracy and governance in order to build in new predictable Japanese allies. Secondly, and more importantly, Japan has several other reasons for promoting democracy and governance. This study highlights the importance of Japanese political culture and its conceptualization of democracy and democratization as determinants. For one, its focus on Asia can be conceptualized not only in terms of national interests but also in terms of historical and cultural reasons. The history of aid as war reparations to Asia is still alive and well. Japan's tendency not to push its own agenda seems also not only to be driven by diplomatic considerations but also by domestic political culture of consensus-building.

Contrary to what is suggested by André, this research implies that national interests is one important factor but not the be all and end all determining Japanese democracy promotion. In Japan's case the donor model of aid described by Holthaus (pp. 1219-1220) breaks down, or rather, reverses. Japan does not provide democracy and governance assistance in the format of its own democratisation experience, forced into democracy by the

United States. Rather Japan choses to prioritize respect for the recipient country's government's wishes instead; it chooses itself to only extent help at the request of the development cooperation partner.

The Japanese view of democracy is more than just free elections; it is expansive and structural, incorporating rule of law, good governance, and transparency. One where staying in a backsliding democracy to improve what they can is genuinely believed to be a better way to promote democracy than pulling out and protesting. Uwe Wissenbach and Eun Mee Kim (2013, pp. 446-447) argues that the Asian model of aid may serve as a challenge to the Western neoliberal consensus on aid. Perhaps Japan and Korea as the two major non-Western democratic aid donors may serve to present an Asian model of democracy promotion as well.

This study also hints at interesting implications of Japanese aid workers both in state employ and in NGOs as street-level bureaucrats. A literature review on street-level bureaucrats by Ahrum Chang and Gene. A. Brewer (2022, p. 15) found that the majority of studies on the influence of SLBs were made on Europe and North America, utilizing quantitative survey data. An easy hypothesis drawing on other writing about Japanese democracy as highly structured and bureaucratic would be that Japanese SLBs would closely follow government policy. This study both confirms and problematizes this notion. Japanese SLBs in aid largely follows JICA that in turn follows MOFA. The interview data does, however, suggest that Japanese SLBs and NGOs exercise discretion both officially by speaking up against what they see as issues, but also by using their judgement as field workers to subvert official policy. More study on this subject is needed, but this data suggests that SLB discretion may have a mitigating effect on the influence of national interests. Especially the fact that JICA experts in democracy projects are free to provide qualitative evaluations likely increase their discretionary power. Most interviewees, however, in grand strokes, did defend the Japanese model as well as the institutions they work for.

The theoretical implications of this study seem to suggest a highly interconnected and complex web of factors that together shape the form of Japanese democracy and governance promotion in the field. There are of course other actors and other driving forces in this relationship beside those studied here. One weakness of this research is the near absence of businesses discussed as a driving force; so is other donor countries such as the United States, as well as international institutions such as the OECD. This is primarily due to the inductive approach where the research is driven by what factors aid workers perceived to be important. However, this study leaves it open for future research to continue exploring possible

additional explanatory factors for the shape of governance and democracy promotion in the case of Japan and other countries.

This evidence for a complex system of factors affecting Japanese democracy and governance promotion of course serve as no defence against criticism of Japanese development cooperation or the Japanese model. This analysis has not focused on the outcome of Japanese democracy and governance promotion. However, it affirms the view of Ismail, et. al. (2020, pp. 2891-2892) of Japanese aid as highly structural and focused on institutions that they ague serve as a stabilizer of the recipient country government. Regardless of its underlying driving forces, the effects of Japanese democracy and governance promotion must be further evaluated. Should Japan's methods prove inefficient or counterproductive to improving human rights and democracy in the recipient country, Japan's use of national interests in aid, as well as parts of the Japanese model, may need to be revised. Japan may need to forgo its system of dealing only with the recipient country government and open for more direct cooperation with the civil society of the recipient country to ensure that the aid remains accountable to the end users.

The normative implications of Japanese aid as a diplomatic tool in general may also need to be further evaluated. Japan may need to review its commitment on aid to Asia as the region keeps developing. Finally, Japan claims that it deals with the recipient country as an equal partner. The implications of this must be considered given the great power imbalance between the countries, especially considering that some of Japan's major aid recipients are countries which the country previously attempted to colonize. It is doubtful whether Japan's request-based system clears the country of the accusation levelled by Thede (p. 797) against DAC donors as turning "aid recipients into agents of donor agendas within their own territories".

7.1 The future of Japanese development cooperation

To round off I want to discuss what this research implies for Japanese promotion of democracy and governance going forward? *G*, *D*, and *J* all believe that Japan has become more and more convinced that promoting Japanese-style governance and democracy to potential allies is a key strategic objective. The revised DCC charter is set to be voted on later this year. An early draft of the document seems to give credence to this idea. The major

expected changes is an overt mission to promote FOIP, with its governance pillar included. The other major change is the move from "request-based" ODA where the recipient country government approaches Japan, to "offer-based" where Japan offers projects based on mutual interests (Strefford, 2023). While the recipient country government will remain the only other major stakeholder, this system will allow Japan to more actively assert its own agenda and interests, opening the ability to more freely suggest projects around democracy and civil rights along the Japanese model. It will be the task of future research to show how these changes affect Japanese democracy and governance promotion. This study, however, reveals that Japan works with democracy and governance in aid the way it does, not despite its model of aid nor the national interests therein, but largely, because of them.

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9 Appendix:

9.1 Appendix I: Interview Guide

Note: This interview guide was used during the second round of interviews for number 3 and 4 in order. Following the inductive structure of the research design, following interview guides would expand on the role of democracy and governance promotion and discuss economic and security factors less. Following from this version, as I started getting into the field, subsequent interview guides would also be more situated and tailored to the interviewee I was talking to at the time.

1: Demographic/Close-ended Questions:

- Name of interviewee (for internal use only)
- Nationality
- Current employer
- Length of work with employer
- Current position
- Past organizations worked in development at
- Time working in the field
- Regions and countries worked with
- Areas/types of aid worked with
  - o Type of projects worked on (ex. civil society, water, education)

2: Topics:

Current project:

3) Please describe the project you are currently working on

a) For what organization?

b) In/with what country/area?

4) What is the end goal of your current project?

a) What benefit is this projected to bring to the recipient country?

b) What benefit (if any) is it projected to bring to Japan?

Mission of aid:

5) What would you say is the mission or goal of providing development aid?

a) Is this your own opinion or the opinion of your organization?

b) Is there any difference between the two?

6) Based on your experiences, what would you say is the overarching motivation behind Japanese aid?

a) Is there in your opinion a difference between the mission of Japanese aid as expressed in the documents and the work you actually carry out on the ground?

7) Would you say there is any crucial difference between the way Japan does development cooperation compared to other countries (where you work now)?

8) How are development cooperation projects evaluated? Only numbers? Qualitatively?

Strategic questions:

7) Do you believe there is a difference in what kind of projects are prioritized (eg. Infrastructure, education)?

a) Are different projects prioritized for different funding ie ODA-loans, grants, finance investment?

8) How do you perceive different areas of the world are prioritized differently?

a) Do you believe Japanese development cooperation you have worked on has had any connection to cultural and/or religious ties Japan has with other Asian countries?

Abilities for workers to affect the situation:

9) In your organization, to what extent are you and other individual members able to affect the form or content of a project?

10) If you are critical of a part of a project, are you able to speak up and question it?

a) If yes, does your criticism tend to be considered?

11) When you work in the field, how far are you able to use your own judgement to affect a project?

Democracy Promotion:

6) Do you know of "Democracy Promotion"

7) Do you believe you have worked with democracy promotion to any extent?

a) If yes, how? What kind?

b) If from Cambodia or Vietnam: How do you do this in a non-democratic society?

i)Who are your partners?

ii) What are the challenges.

c) If no, do you perceive any of the other projects have had any affect, positive or negative, on democracy?

8) Do you believe any of the unique characteristics of Japanese democracy affects the way Japan carries our development cooperation?

9) Is democracy and civil liberties concerns something that has been relevant in all your projects or only governance ones?

10) Do you believe JICA, as a whole, in all its projects promote democracy?

a) How?

11) If the recipient country governments take the "drivers seat" how do you reconcile if that government might not want the best for its citizens?

a) Does JICA primarily have a duty to the recipient governments or the recipient population?

Economic Growth and PPP

7) Do you think economic growth for Japan and its companies play into development cooperation?
8) What role does Japanese companies play in development cooperation?
9) The need for development cooperation to be of economic benefit to Japan has been expressed more clearly since 2015. Has this affected your work in a noticeable way?
a) How is this motivated within JICA?
b) Is there any debate in your country as to how and if you should involve or support Japanese companies?
10) Vietnam and Cambodia are middle income countries now, why do you perceive they are still the focus of several large-scale aid funded infrastructure projects instead of poorer countries?
11) Is economic growth explicitly discussed as a form of democracy promotion in your organization?
a) If yes, how are these linked?

Security:

6) Do you believe security considerations play a role in Japanese development cooperation?
7) Do you perceive a change in the way security questions have permeated development cooperation over time?
8) How do you perceive strategies around development cooperation have changed with the creation of the FOIP-agenda?
a) Would you say this is more of a security or economic agenda?
9) Do you think security concerns play into JICA's prioritization of Cambodia or Vietnam?
a) How come?
b) Is there a difference between Japan's relationship to non-democracies such as Cambodia and Vietnam as allies compared to democratic countries?
10) Is there a security angle to the fact that Japan spends most its development money in the same countries China does?
a) Does Japan compete with China?
b) Why do you believe JICA is pulling out of China?
11) Is there any debate to security cooperation with non-democracies?

Change over time (for those with over 10 years' experience in the field):

4) What do you perceive have been the largest changes in Japanese development cooperation over time?
5) Specifically, what has been the largest change in the strategical considerations and/or driving forces motivating development cooperation?

a) Has any of the three previously discussed factors (democracy/ethics, economy, security) received a larger role? Has any of the factors decreased in prominence?
6) Do you think changes in strategical considerations have helped or hindered Japanese development cooperation?
a) How come?

Difference NGO/Government Actors
For those with experience in NGOs:
5) Do you perceive that Japanese NGOs in general differ in their purpose from JICA and other state actors?
a) How come?
6) Do you perceive that Japanese non-state aid actors abroad stand out against organizations from other countries?
7) Do you believe that NGOs have more considerations of ethics or values than Japanese state actors?
a) If Yes: How come?
8) Does JICA and other Japanese state actors work with Japanese NGOs in delivering development cooperation?
9) Does NGOs have any affect on the Japanese aid policy?

9.2 Appendix II Informed Consent Agreement

Project Description:
My name is Hugo Ekelund, I study the global studies programme at Lund University. This field study is a part of my approved fieldwork in order to collect data for a Master's thesis.
My research investigates the strategies motivating Japanese development cooperation. It will investigate what the driving forces of Japanese development cooperation are in relation to Japan's role as a global democratic power with regional influence in Asia.
The goal with the interviews is to centre the knowledge of this relationship through the experiences and perspectives of the people carrying out development aid. That is to say, your own experiences of what motivates Japan.
I am interviewing a number of Japanese professionals working in development aid. I may also approach representatives of multilateral organizations or aid recipients. My main sampling method is what is called snowball sampling, that each person I talk to can recommend me other people in turn.
The schedule of my research is between now and April. In February and the first week of March I will undertake field research in Cambodia, Vietnam and Japan talking to people in person. After this I will do further research online.

We will now conduct a semi-structured interview. The idea is that I will ask a few short questions about who you are and what you have worked with. Then I will ask a few more open-ended questions about your opinions on Japanese development aid. Feel free to discuss as much or as little of your own experiences as you wish.

The results of this research will be published on Lund University. I may also seek to publish the thesis in other academic publications as well. I hope that my research will increase the understanding of the drivers of Japanese development cooperation and increase abilities for other actors to collaborate with Japan. I also hope to understand more the role of the individual actors in Japan's aid project.

This interview will be recorded and transcribed into text. Anything you say may be quoted directly into the final research; however, the recordings and full transcriptions will only be available to me and my supervisor, Anders Uhlin. I will personally be the only one keeping a copy of the recordings and once the research project is complete, I will not share them with anyone.

Your name will be anonymized during all stages of writing as well as in the final thesis.

Informed Consent Agreement:

You may if you chose:
i. Decline to answer any question.
ii. Withdraw from the study and have all data from your interview destroyed at any point up until the first of May at which point the final thesis may be distributed to a wider audience.
iii. Ask any questions you may have about the project before, during, or after the interview.
iv. Ask for the recording to be turned off during any point of the interview.
v. Ask that any name you mention during the interview be anonymized.
vi. Ask that any information you have shared not be presented and/or quoted in the final research.
vii. Receive a summary of the project and its findings after its final publication the 18th of May.

Have you understood these terms?
Do you consent to these terms and to be interviewed for my research project under these terms?

If yes, we begin the interview.