

Research Summary

According to my interviews and documentary research in Japan and Thailand, the findings of my research project reveal two important aspects of Thailand's adoption and adaptation of the Japanese ODA model in the case of the Ayeyawady – Chao Phraya – Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), which includes all five countries in the Mekong sub-region with Thailand as a lead player.

First, as Thailand is now transforming into an emerging donor, Japan is definitely its most important development partner, especially in the Mekong sub-region and the ACMECS forum. Japanese aid agencies, JICA and JBIC, have worked very closely with Thai counterparts, TICA (in charge of technical cooperation) and NEDA (in charge of concessional loans). This naturally facilitates and encourages Thailand's adoption of the Japanese ODA model. For example, in the beginning, NEDA's guidelines were almost entirely based on that of OECF. JBIC along with ADB actively helps NEDA with its capacity-building in terms of institutional structure and personnel. TICA officials also admitted that they are most familiar with JICA's terminology and procedure. TICA is now trying to promote the assignment of its experts to work with Thai neighbors' government agencies like what JICA previously did in Thailand. The regional-level trilateral cooperation between Japan, Thailand and developing countries can be the model for Thailand's development cooperation with other traditional donors. However, Thailand does not adopt the Japanese model of ODA wholesale but also tries to address some of the shortcomings that Thailand has witnessed, such as the problem about the dispatch of experts, the sending of too many missions, and the issue of rigidity in the ODA procedure.

Second, Japan-Thailand cooperation in the Mekong sub-region and ACMECS suggests strategic considerations, which lead to 'mutual benefits' on both sides. For instance, Thailand's cooperation with Japan is very cost-effective. Although based on the partnership concept, Thailand does not necessarily bear 50/50% cost-sharing with Japan because it argues that it still needs some handicaps as an emerging donor. Also, the fact that Thailand cooperates with Japan in some development programs better solves the problems of sensibilities and suspicion among Thai neighbors toward Thailand. As for Japan, its development cooperation with Thailand also helps reduce its aid budget at the time when the country has faced fiscal constraints at home. Moreover, Japan can use Thailand as an ally to counterbalance the rising presence of another important emerging donor in the Mekong sub-region -- China. Since China is not part of the DAC and its aid program might not comply with the DAC standards, Chinese aid sometimes competes with Japanese aid. If Japan can foster strong development cooperation with Thailand and encourages Thailand to follow its model, the world of emerging donors can be made more favorable for Japan.

To conclude, Thailand finds some features of the Japanese ODA model applicable to its activities while rectifying some weaknesses it has seen from its own experience as Japan's aid recipient. Japan-Thailand development cooperation also yields mutual benefits for both sides in their aid activities in the Mekong sub-region

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)
Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.) Title:” Politics of Official Development Assistance by an Emerging Donor: Thailand’s Strategic Interactions with Japan in the Mekong Sub-region” by Kesarin Phanarangsang; Date: around June 2009
Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)