Japanese and South Korean Official Development Assistance (ODA): A Comparative Analysis of Rhetoric and Behavior

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Methodology and Approach
Role theory as the theoretical framework of this research allowed investigating the self-image and actual behavior of the two donor countries (cf. Aggestam 2006; Breuning 2011; Edström 1988). Three different role concepts can be distinguished:

- Role expectations or prescriptions are held by other actors in a system and prescribe or set expectations for the behavior of an actor.
- Role conceptions are an actor’s self-defined status in the system in relation to others as well as the actor’s perception of others’ expectations, which are held by agents such as policy-makers.
- Role performances entail the characteristic patterns of behavior of actors, including attitudes, decisions, and actions for the implementation of a certain policy.

Role conceptions and role performances were set in context with each other. To arrive at roles for comparison a four-step analysis was chosen to identify role conceptions, role performances and possible gaps between the two.

1. Qualitative Content Analysis: The aid-related rhetoric of policy-makers between 2005 and 2012 was analyzed in 55 Japanese and 46 South Korean speeches and documents to derive role conceptions. This analytical step was based on speech act theory (cf. Kratovil 1995; Onuf 2013).

2. Development of Indicator Categories and Quantitative Data Analysis: The approach used to identify role performance based on decisions and actions was a comparative analysis of aid standards as defined in the role conceptions of the donors themselves and by previous academic literature on donor aid practices. Commitment indicators were then compared to aid disbursement data from the OECD’s Creditor Reporting System (CRS) (OECD 2014).

3. Case Study Approach: The two most important recipients (Vietnam and Tanzania) were selected for two case studies to provide information on indicators that could not be derived from quantitative data.

4. Comparative Analysis of Roles: Role performances were set in the context of the previously derived role conceptions to identify role gaps.

Main Facts
Five role conceptions (“Bridge”, “Model”, “Respected Member of the International Community”, “Responsible Leader”, “Partner”) for Japan and six (the previous five as well as “Newcomer”) for South Korea were identified.

- Five commitment indicator categories were found:
  - Overall ODA Disbursements
  - Distribution of ODA (Regional Distribution; Recipient Need; Mutual Benefit)
  - Universal Values
  - Quality of Aid
  - Aid Philosophy

These categories were measured based on quantitative data of gross ODA disbursements, ODA to GNI ratio, share of ODA by region and income category, Human Development Index (HDI) of recipient, social allocation, the share of tied aid, grants and loans etc.

As no indicators for Aid Philosophy could be derived from quantitative data, the country assistance policies of both donors for Vietnam and Tanzania were examined in the case study approach based on partnership and ownership aspects.

Results
In the final step of analysis the role conceptions of both donor countries were compared with the role performances as derived from the quantitative and qualitative analyses. As shown in Table 1, for several indicators the results varied between Japan and South Korea due to the different commitments made by policy-makers in the role conceptions. Several gaps between the role conceptions and role performances became evident in the comparative analysis.

By directly comparing the identified role gaps the two donors roles are set in context with each other. Both donor countries—despite offering up to six role conceptions—only performed in coherence with two role conceptions respectively. In the case of Japan, the roles of “Bridge” and “Partner” were assessed to have been taken up in both rhetoric and behavior. South Korea was found to take up the role of “Partner” to some extent and fulfilled the role of “Newcomer”. The role of “Partner” exemplifies the difference in how policy-makers defined this role conception and the indicator categories for assessment of role performance. The role conception of “Newcomer” was only expressed by South Korean policymakers, making it an inherently South Korean role conception.

In conclusion, neither Japan nor South Korea performed fully in coherence with their role conceptions except for two roles. These results expand role theory research as ODA behavior was measured based on the donors’ own conceptions rather than external expectations and contribute to a better understanding of Japanese and South Korean foreign policy.

References
All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at http://rothes.unive.ac.at/

About the Author
Julia Peitl holds a Bachelor degree in Japanese Studies from the University of Vienna. During her studies she spent a year in Yokohama, Japan, and a semester in Melbourne, Australia. She was student representative of the Master Program in Asian Economy and Society from 2011-2013.

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