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Japan and China's Summit Competition in Africa

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African perspectives
Global insights

Executive summary

Japan and China play a dual role in Africa. Firstly, they both have direct relationships with Africa, as two of the continent's most important development partners. Two massive, recurring summits provide the main platform for the staging of these relationships between China or Japan on the one side, and Africa on the other – in this policy insight they are labelled 'Africa Plus One' summits. Secondly, China and Japan are both global economic superpowers that also set global norms and priorities in forums such as the G20.

Africa (bar South Africa) is largely excluded from the G20. This policy insight looks at how the Africa Plus One summits are an unexpected avenue for African concerns into the G20. China and Japan provide a useful comparison because they both put on regular Africa Plus One summits (Japan's is called the Tokyo International Conference on African Development [TICAD] and China's is the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC]). They both have also recently headed the G20 (China in 2016 and Japan in 2019).

This policy insight asks how Africa Plus One summits affect the continent's ability to be heard in the G20. Conversely, how have the national priorities that Japan and China promoted in their respective G20 presidencies shaped the interaction between the G20 and Africa? It traces the flow of themes and ideas between Africa Plus One summits and the G20, showing that in some cases this interplay leads to a greater say for Africa in the G20, for example around industrialisation and skills transfer.

The policy insight uses two case studies to examine these dynamics. It shows that in taking different stances on infrastructure provision, China and Japan both influenced the trajectory of the G20 via its engagement with African infrastructure needs. In the second case study, it shows that China and Japan's competing visions of Indian Ocean connectivity crucially draw on African participation. This offers a glimpse of new forms of alliance building expanding into the future. However, it also raises more fundamental questions about how Africa can engage more directly with the G20.

Introduction

Japan and China are increasingly central to Africa's future. They fund and build infrastructure all over the continent, train thousands of African students and officials every year, and offer new forms of connectivity to the continent, most notably via China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). They also are economically powerful enough to potentially shape

Japan and China are increasingly central to Africa's future

international norms in an era when the US is withdrawing from multilateralism and the UK is preoccupied with the internal upheaval of Brexit. Their role as norm setters has been particularly visible in the second half of this decade, through their presidencies of the G20. China's presidency in 2016 and Japan's in 2019 were both moments marking the body's growing engagement with development.

Africa has traditionally found it difficult to get its voice heard in the G20. The body only has one African member (South Africa) and while multilateral bodies like the AU and the AU Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) have observer status, the growing G20 focus on Africa has largely been led by non-African members (for example, Germany's Compact with Africa) rather than by Africa itself.

How can Africa increase its voice in the G20? One under-examined route is the increasingly prevalent 'Africa Plus One' summits. These summits, bringing together a large number of African countries with a single development partner, have become more prominent over the last decade. The [Russia-Africa summit](#) in October 2019 and the [Indonesia-Africa Forum](#) in April 2018 are recent examples. One gets an inkling of the Africa Plus One summits' potential to raise the continent's prominence in multilateral forums such as the G20 when one looks at the two most important of these summits. Japan's TICAD is the oldest, dating back to 1993. It has largely set the template for the Africa Plus One summits held by other countries and greatly influenced China's FOCAC, now perhaps the most important of these summits. TICAD and FOCAC provide crucial platforms for direct interaction between African governments and key development partners, as well as a myriad of Chinese and Japanese private sector firms, banks, provincial and urban governments, and other actors.

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These summits facilitate the flow of large amounts of financing to the continent. The last two FOCAC summits were each the occasion for the announcement of \$60 billion in financing for Africa, while the TICAD summit of 2016 saw a pledge of \$30 billion. But they also function as platforms where African concerns can be put on a shared agenda. In 2016 and 2019 that agenda extended to the G20, with African priority setting around industrialisation, skills transfer and other issues at the summit level also feeding into the G20 agenda. At the same time, the G20's engagement with Africa was filtered through the national priorities of Beijing and Tokyo.

This policy insight traces this bidirectional agenda setting between Africa Plus One summits and the G20 by comparing how China's engagement with Africa via FOCAC stood in conversation with its 2016 G20 agenda, and how Japan's 2019 presidency fed into its

engagement with Africa under TICAD 7 (held from 28–30 August 2019 in Yokohama). The policy insight will provide brief histories of TICAD, FOCAC and the evolution of the G20's focus on development. It will then examine two key areas of engagement with Africa (infrastructure provision and influence building in the Indian Ocean region) where Japan and China engaged in competing agenda setting in the G20, showing how in each case this process took place in conversation with Africa via TICAD and FOCAC.

The evolution of TICAD, FOCAC, and the G20's Africa engagement

TICAD

TICAD is the main platform for Japan's engagement with Africa. However, it is not purely bilateral. It is co-organised by the Japanese government, the AU, the UN, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. TICAD 7 also featured other development partners such as Germany and Turkey. This lends it a level of openness one does not see in FOCAC.

The first TICAD took place in Tokyo in 1993. Its impetus was to refocus global attention on Africa after the end of the Cold War. By that time Japan was already a major donor to Africa. By 1984 Japan had become the world's second-largest donor to the World Bank, and by 1991 it was the world's largest contributor of overseas development assistance (ODA).¹ In the wake of the Japanese economic crisis in the early 1990s ODA rates decreased, but continued at a steady rate, and summitry was arguably a tool for Japan to refocus the impact of these contributions.² The first three summits (in 1993, 1998 and 2003) were largely shaped by aid-related concerns. These included improving basic education, mitigating health threats such as HIV/AIDS, and ensuring post-conflict reconstruction.³ This focus reflected the needs of the time, with a number of major conflicts still dragging on in Africa. The continent was also reeling in the aftermath of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.⁴

However, by TICAD IV⁵ in 2008, a growing number of African countries were posting positive growth rates, and the Japanese private sector had started showing more interest in the continent. The Japanese government had also noted African priorities that were not easily reducible to aid, such as trade access, and pivoted towards supporting African

1 David Seddon & Makoto Sato, 'Japanese Aid and Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 24, no. 71 (1997): 153–156.

2 Leni Wild et al., *Informing the Future of Japan's ODA: Japan's ODA within an African Context*, (Report, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2011), <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7618.pdf>.

3 Personal interview, Ryosuke Nakata, Chief Economist, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Tokyo, September 5, 2019.

4 Minoru Matsutani, 'The Evolution of TICAD Since Its Inception in 1993', *Japan Times*, June 1, 2013, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/01/world/the-evolution-of-ticad-since-its-inception-in-1993/#.Xb1_2EUzY1g.

5 Until the sixth TICAD summit, the Japanese government numbered the events using Roman numerals. However, the 2019 summit was officially named TICAD 7. This policy insight follows this naming practice.

development initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD, recently renamed AUDA-NEPAD). The TICAD IV summit in Yokohama proved a turning point towards a more business-focused approach.⁶ This trend accelerated at TICAD V (Yokohama 2013) and then TICAD VI, held in 2016 in Nairobi – the first time the summit was held in Africa.

The focus on economic growth showed how by 2016 TICAD had substantially moved away from an aid focus towards one that put the private sector at its centre. TICAD V cited 'boosting economic growth' as its first priority, and five of the six key priorities directly related to this, including accelerating infrastructure development.⁷ TICAD VI built on this foundation with a strong focus on industrialisation as a path to achieving the goals set out in the UN's 2030 Agenda (the Sustainable Development Goals) and the AU's 50-year development blueprint, Agenda 2063.⁸ This turn was summed up by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as 'Our new TICAD is a magnificent "double E, double I" springboard', where E stands for 'entrepreneurship' and 'enterprise', and I for 'investment' and 'innovation'.⁹

TICAD 7 represented a continuation and amplification of a course set at TICAD VI. The 2019 Yokohama Declaration explicitly welcomed the participation of private sector companies at the summit: 'We underscore the importance of private sector development, digital transformation and youth and women entrepreneurship as strategies for implementing the priority areas of TICAD 7'.¹⁰ This echoes a growing emphasis on private-public partnerships from other traditional lenders such as Germany (launched as the Compact with Africa during its 2017 G20 presidency.) The 2018 Argentinian presidency's focus on establishing infrastructure as an asset class¹¹ was a continuation of this trend.

TICAD 7 arguably took this further than the G20, by declaring private companies as full official partners for the first time in TICAD history, and by launching the Public-Private Business Dialogue between Japan and Africa in a plenary session. This shift towards business was reciprocated, with the number of private companies attending TICAD 7 more than doubling after TICAD VI. TICAD 7 also saw the announcement of the new Japan Business Council for Africa.¹²

6 Personal interview, researcher Naohiro Kitano, Waseda University, Tokyo, September 3, 2019.

7 UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI, 27-28 August 2016), <https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/events/2016/ticad6.shtml>.

8 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *TICAD VI Nairobi Declaration: Advancing Africa's Sustainable Development Agenda, TICAD Partnership for Prosperity*, August 28, 2016, https://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af1/page3e_000543.html.

9 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Keynote Address by Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Opening Session of the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD7)*, August 28, 2019, at Pacifico Yokohama, https://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af1/page4e_001069.html.

10 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Yokohama Declaration 2019: Advancing Africa's Development through People, Technology and Innovation*, August 30, 2019, 5, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/pdf/yokohama_declaration_en.pdf.

11 This initiative aims at unlocking the approximately \$80 trillion of private funds controlled by institutional investors to fill the gap in infrastructure investment in places such as Africa. It focuses on mitigating risk and building in safeguards in order to make infrastructure a stable and predictable investment class. See Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation, 'Roadmap to Infrastructure as An Asset Class', https://www.oecd.org/g20/roadmap_to_infrastructure_as_an_asset_class_argentina_presidency_1_0.pdf.

12 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Factsheet: The 7th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 7) 28-30 August 2019, Yokohama, Japan*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000521256.pdf>.

Section 3.4 of the Yokohama declaration resulting from the TICAD 7 process drew an explicit link between this work at TICAD and Japan's priorities in the G20.¹³

Knowing that Africa is the region with the highest rate of return on foreign direct investment inflows globally, we will work together to attract foreign investors to Africa's priority sectors. We welcome the G20 consensus on macro-economic stability as stipulated in the G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration and the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment.

The adoption of the Principles for Quality Infrastructure was a major victory for Japan during its G20 presidency, and their prominence in the Yokohama declaration shows how Japan's priorities at the G20 inform and are informed by its engagement with Africa via the TICAD process. This point will be further elaborated below.

The adoption of the Principles for Quality Infrastructure was a major victory for Japan during its G20 presidency

However, while TICAD 7 echoed its predecessors in calling for increased Japanese private investment in Africa, it avoided the trend of announcing official investment targets. TICAD V saw the announcement of a pledge of \$32 billion, and TICAD VI one of about \$30 billion, made up of \$10 billion in public funds earmarked for infrastructure investment and \$20 billion of predicted private sector investment.¹⁴ At TICAD 7 Abe declared¹⁵ that this target had been reached, but the Japanese press pointed out that this was only achieved by the government's changing how investment is measured, by substituting net figures for gross.¹⁶ He pledged to further boost private sector investment, but it was widely noted that he did not announce a target figure for the next five years. This was apparently at the request of Japanese corporations, which did not want to be publicly committed to a specific target,¹⁷ as well as certain groups within the Japanese ministries that favoured flexibility over the optics of a big commitment.¹⁸ The lack of a target was interpreted in the press as a sign that while the Japanese government is focused on private sector investment, the Japanese private sector remains wary of doing business in Africa.

13 Government of Japan, *Factsheet*, 6.

14 George Obulutsa, 'Japan Pledges \$30 Billion to Africa over Next Three Years,' *Reuters*, August 27, 2016, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-africa-japan/japan-pledges-30-billion-for-africa-over-next-three-years-idUKKCN11207D>.

15 Government of Japan, *Keynote Address by Mr. Shinzo Abe*.

16 Reiji Yoshida, 'Abe Pledges to Push Japanese Investment in Africa but Steers Clear of Target at TICAD,' *Japan Times*, August 28, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/08/28/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-pledges-private-investment-africa-ticad/#.Xb2cjkUzY1g>.

17 Personal interview, Hiroshi Kato, Senior Vice President, JICA, Tokyo, September 6, 2019.

18 Personal interview, Nakata.

FOCAC

A general point of comparison between TICAD and FOCAC is that in some ways they follow opposite trajectories. If, as argued above, TICAD started off as an aid initiative gradually shifting to a strong focus on business, FOCAC is a forum that initially had a strong, narrow focus on trade and investment, but that slowly gained additional focus areas as China's engagement with Africa broadened.

China's relationship with Africa dates back to the Cold War, when it supported the African anti-colonial struggle and forged diplomatic relationships that contributed to its accession to the UN. The relationship lost some energy during the 1980s when China's development policies focused its attention inward, but was reignited from the early 1990s by Beijing's Going Out strategy, which identified Africa as both a source of raw materials and a space where Chinese companies could gain international experience. This relationship was formalised under the umbrella of FOCAC in 2000. FOCAC takes place every three years, held alternately in China and Africa. Over time, it has expanded both its scope and its diplomatic ranking. Starting off as a ministerial meeting in 2000, it was upgraded to a summit (where heads of state are present) in 2006, and was again held at the summit level in 2015.¹⁹ Initially the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had planned to return to the ministerial level in 2018 but ended up maintaining it as a summit, in response to pressure from African leaders.²⁰

While FOCAC seems like a multilateral (or, more specifically, minilateral) institution, it is more accurate to describe it as a conglomeration of bilateral relationships between China and each individual African member country. Reforms proposed under the Rwandan leadership of the AU complicated this distinction, through a suggestion that engagement with China should be streamlined with a smaller group representing the continent. However, that suggestion has not been implemented so far, and FOCAC still does not fully function as a space for a unified African negotiation agenda with China.²¹ Rather, it is a space for the public enactment of China-Africa solidarity, but one that is still fundamentally structured by bilateral relationships and therefore also by the fundamental power difference between China and individual African countries.

That said, FOCAC has proven amenable to African influence. African leaders have managed to enhance it to a summit level, and also widened its ambit beyond China's original narrow focus on trade and investment. This includes the addition of peace and security as an area

19 Yu-Shan Wu, 'Highlights from FOCAC 2018', Africa-China Reporting Project, September 5, 2018, <https://africachinareporting.co.za/2018/09/highlights-from-focac-2018/>.

20 Personal interview, official in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, July 9, 2018. The respondent requested anonymity in order to fully express his views.

21 Cobus van Staden, Chris Alden & Yu-Shan Wu, 'In the Driver's Seat? African Agency and Chinese Power at FOCAC, the AU, and the BRI' (Occasional Paper 286, South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, September 2018), <https://saiia.org.za/research/in-the-drivers-seat-african-agency-and-chinese-power/>.

of cooperation in 2012²² and a stronger focus on the issue of wildlife poaching, a problem driven by Chinese consumer demand for wildlife products such as ivory.²³ Another example of this dynamic is FOCAC's increasing focus on training and skills transfer. The 2015 and 2018 summits revealed a greater emphasis on this issue, far outstripping earlier FOCAC declarations, arguably owing to pressure from African countries for greater localisation of Chinese companies doing business on the continent and for Chinese investment to provide greater positive spill-over effects on human capital development.²⁴

FOCAC should therefore not be characterised as China alone setting the terms of its relationship with the African continent – rather it is a space where these parameters are actively negotiated. However, one should also take care not to overstate the level of this negotiation. While African leaders certainly possess a certain amount of agency in the relationship, this agency is circumscribed by the power imbalances built into the bilateral relationships that structure it.

FOCAC has also become the main arena for the announcement of Chinese financing to the continent. The announcement of an ever-increasing amount of financing has become a prominent FOCAC ritual. This financing grew from \$5 billion in 2006 to \$10 billion in 2009, \$20 billion in 2012 and \$60 billion in 2015. At the 2018 summit China changed direction by announcing that it would again grant \$60 billion in financing to Africa. This ended the trend of constantly increasing sums, and researchers quickly pointed out that because some of the funds included in the sum were future-dated private investments, the 2018 number was actually a *reduction* from previous commitments.²⁵

The plateauing of financing commitments is arguably both a reflection of changing economic circumstances as China faces a frosty trade relationship with the US, and possibly a reaction to the worldwide criticism of Chinese lending, which has been labelled as 'debt trap diplomacy'. In addition, it could imply rising concern about debt recovery and an internal move to lessen China's exposure to African debt.

The G20's changing commitment to development

The G20 started as a response to crisis. It was first convened in 1999 to secure global financial stability in the wake of the Asian economic crisis, and gained its current status as a global agenda setter through its actions to mitigate the 2008 global financial crisis. Its focus widened from managing fiscal and economic crises to building sustainable global growth

22 Walter Ruigu, *FOCAC 2012: Sino-African Partnership Gains Momentum*, The Beijing Axis, October 2012, http://thebeijingaxis.com/tca/oct2012/docs/The_China_Analyst_October_2012_FOCAC.pdf.

23 Van Staden, Alden & Wu, 'In the Driver's Seat?.'

24 Van Staden, Alden & Wu, 'In the Driver's Seat?.'

25 Wu, 'Highlights from FOCAC 2018'.

gradually. However, by the Antalya summit of 2015 in Turkey it had become clear that such growth would have to include a robust focus on sustainable development in places such as Africa.²⁶ Sustainable development came into full focus the year after, during the 2016 Hangzhou summit. China's intervention can be described as a significant reorientation of the G20's agenda towards a full engagement with sustainable development.²⁷ This included the G20's commitment to the UN's 2030 Agenda, as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2015 and by the G20 during the Hangzhou summit in 2016.²⁸

China's approach to sustainable development is also deeply informed by its own engagement with Africa through the FOCAC platform

While this focus was no doubt influenced by the UN's agenda setting, China's approach to sustainable development is also deeply informed by its own engagement with Africa through the FOCAC platform. One of the key structuring mechanisms of FOCAC is China's self-identification as a fellow developing country. This assertion of Global South solidarity is a key part of how China builds diplomatic support, frequently seen in forums such as the G77 + China. In Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's statement²⁹ on the outcomes of the 2016 G20 summit, this self-identification is clear:

As the biggest developing country, China believes that the G20 should pay more attention to the issue of development and devote more efforts in this regard. This year, we are dedicated to two 'first-time[s]': the first time to give priority to development in global macro policy framework and the first time to draft action plans for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

One of the main achievements of the 2016 summit was a stronger focus on African industrialisation, via 'capacity building, increasing investment, improving infrastructure and other measures'.³⁰ However, these have been fundamental aspects of China–Africa relations

26 Cobus van Staden & Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, 'G20–Africa Engagement: Finding a Roadmap to Shared Development' (Occasional Paper 294, SAIIA, Johannesburg, February 2019), <https://saiia.org.za/research/g20-africa-engagement-finding-a-roadmap-to-shared-development/>.

27 G20, Osaka Update on the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, https://www.g20.org/pdf/documents/en/annex_11.pdf.

28 UN, Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, August 2015, https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf.

29 People's Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi: *Strive to Achieve Ten Results from G20 Hangzhou Summit*, May 26, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1367533.shtml.

30 Republic of China, Wang Yi.

for the last two decades; the result not only of China's own development experience but also of the FOCAC process.³¹ In fact, research has shown that certain themes (for example capacity building and skills transfer) have become more prominent on the FOCAC agenda thanks to advocacy by African countries.³² The centrality of African industrialisation on China's G20 agenda should therefore be seen as influenced by China's interaction with the continent.

This developmental agenda was strengthened over subsequent G20 presidencies. The 2017 German presidency was another major step in the direction of full engagement with development in the form of the Compact with Africa, an initiative driven by the German government aimed at simultaneously implementing business-friendly reforms in participating African countries while forging links between these countries and potential private sector investors.³³ The Argentinian presidency of 2018 did not announce any new African initiatives, but did lend support to these earlier initiatives, and worked to maximise engagement between key African actors and the G20. While the AU and AUDA-NEPAD generally have observer status at the G20, Argentina used people-to-people diplomacy to deepen this engagement.³⁴

The Japanese G20 presidency in 2019 reflects a continuation of the G20's commitment to development, albeit filtered through Japan's national priorities. These included a new focus on demographic change, Abe's Data Free Flow with Trust cybersecurity initiative, which aims to protect big data firms from restrictive data transfer laws championed by countries such as China,³⁵ and the Abe administration's Society 5.0 initiative, which advocates for the centrality of artificial intelligence, machine learning and the Internet of things in national economic development plans.³⁶

Similar to how China's engagement with Africa in FOCAC informed the way its presidency shaped the G20, the national priorities Japan positioned in the context of the G20 also informed its engagement with Africa at TICAD, as will be shown below.

These two trends should not be seen in isolation. Japan and China are not only key development partners to Africa but also important strategic and economic rivals. In many ways China and Japan represent two distinct and, in some aspects, incompatible worldviews. Japan's traditional focus on aid and close cooperation with institutions such as the UNDP and World Bank stand in contrast to China's dedication to state-centred development. Both of these worldviews gained international influence via

31 Van Staden & Sidiropoulos, 'G20-Africa Engagement'.

32 Van Staden, Alden & Wu, 'In the Driver's Seat?'

33 The Compact with Africa, 'About the Compact with Africa', <https://www.compactwithafrica.org/content/compactwithafrica/home.html>.

34 Van Staden & Sidiropoulos, 'G20-Africa Engagement'.

35 Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, 'The Osaka G20 Summit and Africa', (SAIIA, June 28, 2019), <https://saiia.org.za/research/the-osaka-g20-summit-and-africa/>.

36 *Japan Times*, 'Full Text of the G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration', June 29, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/29/national/full-text-g20-osaka-leaders-declaration/#.Xb2uoEUzY1g>.

their presidencies of the G20, and both shape Africa through the way they funnel flows of investment and policy. In areas such as infrastructure development they are direct commercial rivals, and yet their approaches are also in conversation. In key ways, they are influencing each other in Africa and it is crucial for African policymakers to take this into account. This will be illustrated through two case studies: infrastructure provision and transnational connectivity initiatives.

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Infrastructure

Infrastructure formed a cornerstone of the China–Africa relationship long before it was formalised through the FOCAC process. During the Cold War China built the TAZARA railway from Zambia to Tanzania, allowing Zambian exports to evade apartheid South Africa’s stranglehold on port access. Infrastructure has remained key to the relationship. This is reflected in the 2015 FOCAC Johannesburg Declaration, which called for ‘a focus on strengthening cooperation in infrastructure projects including, but not limited to, railways, highways, regional aviation, power, water supply, information and communication, airport and posts’.³⁷

The 2016 Hangzhou G20 summit was notable for its focus on broad-based and inclusive growth, and this extended to a greater focus on industrialisation in the Global South as a whole and Africa in particular. Infrastructure connectivity was seen as crucial to this development, and the final 2016 leaders’ communiqué committed the body to increasing both the quantity and quality of infrastructure projects, while coordinating them with national development agendas and ensuring environmental sustainability. It also endorsed the World Bank Group as the secretariat of the Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance.³⁸ This focus was continued through Germany’s launch of the Compact with Africa in 2017 and Argentina’s inclusion of infrastructure as an asset class.

Japan put its own stamp on this evolution in 2019 through its promotion of ‘quality infrastructure’, defined through a set of five principles adopted at the G7 summit in

37 Government of South Africa, *Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation*, December 5, 2015, <https://www.gov.za/speeches/declaration-johannesburg-summit-forum-china-africa-cooperation-5-dec-2015-0000>.

38 G20 Information Center, *G20 Leaders’ Communiqué: Hangzhou Summit*, (Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto, September 5, 2016), <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2016/160905-communiqué.html>.

Ise-Shima, Japan in 2016.³⁹ They were subsequently promoted as one of Japan's core priorities under its G20 presidency.⁴⁰ The adoption of these principles by the G20 was seen as a rebuke to China, with calls for greater transparency in infrastructure lending, more robust anti-corruption measures, and more attention to be paid to the full lifecycle of infrastructure projects. This was interpreted as an implication that China provides lower quality, less sustainable and more opaque infrastructure deals.⁴¹ It was also argued that the theme of 'quality' over, say, 'efficiency' was an attempt to create a space for Japanese companies finding it difficult to compete with Chinese counterparts in places such as Africa. The implication was that, while Japanese-provided infrastructure is more expensive, it is more durable and sustainable than infrastructure provided by Chinese companies.⁴²

Another example of how Japan's engagement with Africa dovetails with its promotion of its priorities in the G20 is the Enhanced Private Sector Assistance for Africa Initiative (EPSA4), which was announced at TICAD 7. The initiative is aimed at boosting infrastructure and private sector development in Africa in three sectors: electricity, transportation and health. The initiative will be funded through \$1.75 billion each provided by the Japanese government and the African Development Bank.⁴³ While ostensibly a project limited to the Japan-Africa space, the projects funded through EPSA4 will be subject to the newly adopted G20 Rules for Quality Infrastructure Investment. The initiative is a clear indication of how Japan's priorities in TICAD and the G20 are in conversation with each other and how Africa's position in the G20 is influenced by decisions made in TICAD, and vice versa.

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Japan's promotion of quality infrastructure coincided with growing international pressure on China. Throughout 2018 the US alleged that China practised 'debt-trap diplomacy',

39 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *G7 Ise-Shima Principles for Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investment*, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000160272.pdf>.

40 Government of Japan, Ministry of Finance, *G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment*, https://www.mof.go.jp/english/international_policy/convention/g20/annex6_1.pdf.

41 Tomohiro Osaki, 'In Blow to China, Japan's "Quality Infrastructure" to get Endorsement at Osaka G20', *Japan Times*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/25/business/economy-business/blow-china-japans-quality-infrastructure-get-endorsement-osaka-g20/#.Xbw6kOgzbIW>.

42 Personal interview, Nakata.

43 African Development Bank, *Japan and African Development Bank Announce \$3.5 Billion in Support of Africa's Private Sector Development*, (August 30, 2019), <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/japan-and-african-development-bank-announce-35-billion-support-africas-private-sector-development-29588>.

strategically using debt as a way to gain leverage over Global South countries.⁴⁴ Concern about rapidly rising debt levels in the Global South informed the G20's call for more sustainable and transparent infrastructure lending – a move interpreted as a rebuke of the BRI, China's global infrastructure connectivity rollout.⁴⁵

In fact, at the second Belt and Road Forum in April 2019 Chinese President Xi Jinping also called for greater debt sustainability in infrastructure provision, condemning the building of 'vanity projects'.⁴⁶ Chinese concern about African lending was proven when Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta came back empty-handed from a trip to Beijing where he had requested a loan and grant package to finance the third phase of the country's Standard Gauge Railway, after the first phase had come in for criticism owing to corruption and a lack of transparency. Despite the project's being lauded as an example of the cross-border integration possible under the BRI (the project is envisioned to eventually connect several countries in East Africa) the Chinese government declined to finance the third phase. Instead, it called for another, enhanced, set of sustainability and profitability studies.⁴⁷ The incident (which caused considerable embarrassment for the Kenyatta government) was an indication that despite the debt trap narrative, China was concerned about debt sustainability in Africa. This was also confirmed by the reduction of the financing offered at FOCAC 2018.

Free and Open Indo-Pacific versus BRI

The 2016 Hangzhou summit was an important occasion for the popularising of Xi's signature BRI. While the BRI did not make it into the 2016 leaders' communiqué, Xi stressed the centrality of the initiative, and its compatibility with the G20 goals of inclusive growth and shared development, in his remarks at the opening of the Business20 summit, which led up to that year's G20 leaders' summit.⁴⁸ China's state press also approvingly quoted comments from delegates that the BRI had the potential to aid the implementation of G20 objectives.⁴⁹ The 2016 Hangzhou summit was therefore a significant occasion for broadening support for the BRI and to position it in a multilateral

44 Charissa Yong, 'Apec Summit: Pence Warns Indo-Pacific Region against China's Debt Diplomacy, Says US Offers "Better Option"', *Straits Times*, November 17, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/pence-slams-china-says-us-offers-countries-better-option>.

45 Tetsushi Kajimoto, 'World's Top Economies Lay Out Principles on Debt Sustainability at G20 Meet', *Reuters*, June 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g20-japan-infrastructure/worlds-top-economies-lay-out-principles-on-debt-sustainability-at-g20-meet-idUSKCNITA09U>.

46 Liu Qiang, 'Belt and Road Initiative Not a "Vanity Project"', *China.org.cn*, April 26, 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2019-04/26/content_74726463.htm.

47 Allan Olingo, 'Kenya Fails to Secure \$3.6 Billion from China for Third Phase of SGR Line to Kisumu', *The East African*, April 27, 2019, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Kenya-fails-to-secure-loan-from-China-for-third-phase-of-SGR/2560-5090192-2o0y9j/index.html>.

48 The People's Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the B20 Summit*, (September 3, 2016), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/t1396112.shtml

49 Yu Yang et al., "'Belt and Road' Initiative Highlighted at G20 Summit', *People's Daily*, September 6, 2016, https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Belt-and-Road-initiative-highlighted-at-G20-Summit_a40273.html.

rather than narrowly nationalistic space. This was preceded by the promotion of the BRI at FOCAC 2015, with the Johannesburg Declaration calling on China and Africa to⁵⁰

actively explore the linkages between China's initiatives of building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road⁵¹ and Africa's economic integration and sustainable development agenda, and seek more opportunities to promote common development and realize our common dreams.

This support for the BRI did not extend to Japan. Japan and the US are the only members of the G7 that have not signed on to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a key financier of BRI projects, and Japanese leaders are on the record as disapproving of the initiative.⁵² This opposition has shaped the Abe regime's own commitment to a competing vision of global connectivity, namely the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The FOIP concept has been embraced by the US as a move towards free navigation in the region, and therefore an explicit countermeasure to China's growing influence in the South China Sea, while also implying disapproval of the BRI through boosting strategic cooperation between the so-called Quad (the US, India, Australia and Japan).

Japan's articulation of the FOIP concept does not give the same weight to containing the BRI.⁵³ Rather it is couched in terms of infrastructural connectivity and people-to-people exchange. However, it still represents a significant challenge to the BRI, one that directly involves Africa. In fact, Abe first raised the FOIP in his keynote speech at TICAD VI in Nairobi in 2016.⁵⁴

Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous. Japan wants to work together with you in Africa in order to make the seas that connect

Japan's articulation of the FOIP concept does not give the same weight to containing the BRI. Rather it is couched in terms of infrastructural connectivity and people-to-people exchange

50 Government of South Africa, 'Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit'.

51 The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road were later collectively renamed as the Belt and Road Initiative.

52 Kyodo News Agency, 'Japan Would Consider Joining China-led AIIB if Doubts Are Dispelled, Abe Says', *Japan Times*, May 16, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/05/16/business/japan-consider-joining-china-led-aiib-doubts-dispelled-abe-says/#.XbsR4OUzY1g>.

53 The distinction between the Japanese and American approaches to FOIP can also be seen in the different nouns employed by the two governments. While the US frequently calls it a 'strategy', Japan prefers 'vision'. Personal interview, Kitano.

54 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development*, (August 27, 2016), https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e_000496.html.

the two continents into peaceful seas that are governed by the rule of law.⁵⁵ That is what we wish to do with you.

This vision of cross-ocean connectivity between Africa and Asia became much more prominent at TICAD 7, which featured a Special Conference on Promoting Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean. This ministerial conference was chaired by Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, and attended by representatives from 10 African Indian Ocean countries. The official summary of the closed meeting does not mention the BRI, but notes that '[t]he participants welcomed Japan's efforts to promote its vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), as the goal of the vision is in line with the efforts by the countries in the region as well as the regional frameworks'.⁵⁶

Throughout FOIP is characterised as having both a Blue Economy and a safety and security focus.⁵⁷ This potentially creates leeway for Japan's only foreign military base (in Djibouti) to play a bigger role in the FOIP than currently stipulated. However, this will depend on the future success of the Abe administration's well-documented ambition to change Japan's pacifist constitution. Meanwhile, at TICAD 7 Japan signalled its intention to become more involved in the Indian Ocean by announcing it was joining the Indian Ocean Commission as an observer.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The case studies of infrastructure and regional connectivity show how Japan and China interweave the African agendas developed at Africa Plus One summits with global agenda setting at the G20. Both countries use the Africa Plus One platform to advance their interests on the continent, while African nations use it to promote their own priorities with key development partners.

However, questions remain as to what both sides gain by also promoting these agendas at the G20. Fully exploring this issue requires more research, but initially I would argue that it is an acknowledgement that China and Japan's relationships with Africa exceed the traditional aid silo enough to warrant being integrated into forums such as the G20 and the G7. Leadership of the G20 allows a country to gain cooperation from other major economies on preferred issues. In the case of Japan, this dovetails with the larger focus on multilateralism that also characterised TICAD 7, where it featured the work of Africa's other development partners. This could signal an ambition to emulate Germany's Compact with Africa in the way it engaged some G7 countries to join that initiative. However, this could also reinforce an unhelpful division between major powers and developing countries.

55 This could arguably be read as an implied criticism of China's stance in the South China Sea.

56 Government of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Special Conference on Promoting Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean*, (August 30, 2019, Yokohama, Chair's Summary), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000512266.pdf>.

57 Government of Japan, Special Conference.

58 Government of Japan, *Factsheet*.

In the case of China, putting development in the Global South on the agenda of the world's 20 largest economies could be seen as part of China's wider ambition to rebalance global governance systems.

Both these approaches offer Africa the opportunity to increase its voice in the G20. However, this raises the wider question of whether its voice will be listened to, and whether the G20 is willing to make space for a truly African agenda.

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Cover image

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres (far R), Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono (2nd R) and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (3rd R) attend a special conference on peace and stability in the horn of Africa during the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Yokohama, 29 August 2019 (JIJI PRESS/AFP via Getty Images)

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