

A Comparison of Asian Bilateral Agencies' Education Aid to Cambodia: Convergence and Divergence in Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese Donor Agencies

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Accepted 27 December, 2017

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ABSTRACT

Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea, and China pursue development projects in Southeast Asia with the aim of extending their influence for political and economic purposes. This study is the product of a research project which seeks to examine the development of each nation's bilateral aid agencies in terms of organization and policies while at the same time discussing this development in relation to the current theoretical debate on globalization of education between Neo-Institutional and Systems theorists in the field of sociology. Fieldwork was conducted in Cambodia as a case study to research the policy documents and interview officials in Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce in order to compare the degree to which these agencies converge or diverge in their structure with each other and more traditional Western development agencies (such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)) to test the hypotheses of convergence and divergence as it relates to globalization of education in Neo-Institutionalist and Systems Theories. It was found that there is a significant convergence between Japanese and Korean institutions in terms of structure and policy priorities while China seems to be pursuing a divergent path.

Keywords: Cambodia, development, aid, South Korea, Japan, China

INTRODUCTION

Will Japan and other Asian nations lead the global expansion of education? This study will compare government institutions in Asia (JICA, KOICA, etc.) in their roles to promote educational expansion or "Education for All" (EFA) around the world with a focus on a single nation case-study: Cambodia. The researcher will attempt to determine whether "Asian" institutions are following the development policies of "Western" institutions or establishing new "Asian" or national models for education and national development. Sufficient attention has not been given to bilateral aid organizations in their efforts to promote global education expansion. In comparison, there have been a number of studies done on the role of international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank for the promotion of education for all globally (Mundy, 1999; Heyneman,

2003). Few studies have focused on the role of multilateral agencies in Cambodia such as the World Bank and UNICEF (Hattori, 2009) and UNESCO (Dy and Ninomiya, 2003) promoting education in Cambodia. Some other studies have examined the bilateral aid of Japan (Kamibeppu, 2002; King and McGrath, 2002) or China (Gillespie, 2002) for education globally. However, there is a dire need to investigate the historical development of bilateral aid agencies in Asia and "The West" and the future direction of aid to education.

The purpose of this study is to examine a greater question at the center of the current debate in the fields of educational sociology and comparative education as reflected in the research question below.

Do bilateral aid agencies (JICA, KOICA, etc.) in Japan, South Korea, and China converge with each other,

emulate those of “The West,” or create divergent models in their development as policy-making government institutions?

Some related questions would address the nature of this development. For example, do Asian institutions converge with Western institutions? Or, are Asian institutions creating a new “Asian Model” for education in developing nations? In terms of their practices and projects, is each Asian nation creating its own unique models (i.e., a “Japanese Model”, “Korean Model”) for education in developing nations? In the process of attempting to answer these question, this study will also seek to reveal the historical origins of these institutions, the influence of global and local forces on their creation, and the degree of policy consensus among them and with traditional Western donors.

The study will be a unique contribution to global society in two aspects. First, it will use Neo-Institutionalist and Systems Theory to compare bilateral aid agencies. It is important that this study has a firm grounding in the current sociological theory debate in the fields of educational sociology and comparative education. Too little comparative education research uses theory from sociology in order to explain phenomena related to globalization of education or the implications which those phenomena might have for equality of access to education (i.e., Education for All). Secondly, the study will focus on the future role of Asian governments for educational expansion and education models. The study will be of great importance to researchers, policy-makers, and citizens who all have a stake in, not only education but, the greater effort toward development and progress in society. In the 21st Century, it appears inevitable that Asian nations will represent important models for the development of less-developed nations. Thus with the rise of these Asian nations, it will be vital to understand the roles of bilateral aid agencies in promoting these Asian models for national development. It will also be important to re-examine the role of international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank vis-à-vis the bilateral agencies to envision how multilateral and bilateral aid agencies can coordinate aid for sustainable development of education and society in the generations to come.

METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research methods to focus on three aspects of bilateral education aid for educational expansion: institutions, policies, and human resources (practitioners and stakeholders). During the first stage, the researcher examined the historical origins of the bilateral aid institutions (e.g., JICA or USAID) and their policies for EFA. During the second stage, the researcher investigated the human element by analyzing the understanding of recent EFA policies by agency officers.

In the first stage, the researcher examined the history of agencies by collecting first and second-hand resources to describe the origins of the bilateral agencies. The documents were subjected to a historiographic analysis to determine whether institutions have global origins, local origins, or some combination of the two. A policy analysis was also conducted for each nation’s policies regarding Education for All. The researcher collected all policy documents relevant to ODA for Education for All from the bilateral agencies. The documents were subjected to a policy analysis according to the principles laid out in Bardach (2008). This policy analysis focused on the policy as it benefits both the donor and the stakeholders as an element of the country-wide movement for education for all. Secondly, the researcher investigated the policy documents for further analysis to discuss the policies as the exhibit convergence or divergence of policy priorities related to Education for All. In the second stage, the researcher concentrated on gathering data from agency officials. Interviews were conducted with bilateral agency experts in their field offices in Cambodia. Experts were interviewed to ascertain their knowledge of policy priorities both in relation to education policies and projects and the overall mission of their agency in developing nations globally and particularly for the Cambodian case. During the data collection period, before the administration of research instruments, all potential subjects were offered the opportunity to decline participation in the research project either before or during data collection. The identity of all subjects has been strictly protected as well as any other information of private or personal nature. Thus any interviews with agency officials are cited as “JICA Official” with no proper names.

Data analysis was conducted in order to analyze all historical documents, policy documents, and interview transcripts, according to the following process. A comprehensive conceptually-clustered data matrix was used to compile and organize data as themes emerged (Miles and Huberman,1994). “Data reduction” was performed to identify emerging themes and “constant comparison” to check the validity of those themes (Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Lecompte and Preissle, 1993). Thereby, a theoretical framework was chosen to describe the findings per “theory implications selection” (Lecomte and Preissle, 1993). As such, the discourse was deconstructed as it relates to the wider EFA movement versus donor-specific political priorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While it is recognized that Japan has a long history as an ODA donor, its ODA policy has often diverged from the policies followed by other members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC). This study situates the research on Asian and Western bilateral aid

institutions within the central debate about globalization of education in the fields of educational sociology and comparative education today. On the one hand, Neo-Institutionalist scholars contend that a “world culture” represented by international organizations promotes convergence of common values of “progress” and “justice” to expand education in nations across the globe (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). On the other hand, Systems Theorists argue that the “policy talk” of education policy exists as discourse which displays divergence in the way it is translated into different education practices in each national and cultural context (Schriewer, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Researchers in Anthropology and Cultural Studies insist that we must focus on the processes of “indigenization” or “creolization” of global discourse and practice at the local level (Anderson, 2003; Appadurai, 1990).

Previous studies led by Neo-Institutionalist researchers have examined the presence of ministries of education around the world as evidence of institutional isomorphism (i.e., convergence). Other studies have focused on the role international organizations play in the process of globalization and convergence of world culture (Chabbot, 2009). However, there have not been any comparative studies of government institutions which promote education in foreign nations and their role in educational expansion. It is the purpose of this study to compare those institutions in the “emerging” donor nations of Asia to investigate the degree to which the newer “emerging” donor agencies pursue policies which “converge” with the policies of the “traditional” donor agencies. The comparison focuses on three nations in Asia (Japan, South Korea, and China) in order to broaden the examination of convergence or divergence of educational development policy through the use of a single case study. The single-nation case-study of Cambodia was used to examine how these global policies and practices are experienced by local stakeholders in education.

Despite Japan's previous prominence in the development of Cambodia, China has assumed a more prominent role in terms of foreign direct investment. China has a long history of providing aid to Cambodia which extends back to 1958 in the early independence period. Chinese policy in Cambodia is similar to its policy rhetoric in other countries in emphasizing “win-win” arrangements, and “mutual benefit” as a characteristic of Chinese development projects. China still tends to emphasize its recent status as a developing country and quick rise to global economic power. In fact, China dominates infrastructure projects with over half of transportation projects being financed by China. China is able to impose such a strong presence as a result of the might it wields in terms of finance capital from the China Export-Import Bank. However, despite this prominence in the realm of infrastructure development projects, China has been a minor player in the education sector. In the 1990's China built an Agricultural College and has also been

preoccupied with other sectors. Nevertheless, China's presence has captured the imagination of the Cambodia leadership. Prime Minister Hun Sen has praised China for its detachment of conditionalities related to human rights or government transparency from aid policy and projects. This reveals an important shift in the power landscape among aid donors in Cambodia as Japan attempts to retain a prominent role and South Korea raises its visibility.

China is not alone in making reference to its past history of development as Japan is also keen on promoting the Japanese “experience-sharing” model for national development based on the Japanese nation's development. In a positive light, JICA officials described a situation where “Japanese consultants enter the field with their Cambodian counterparts and proceed to do things together”. At the same time, JICA staff realized that there is much room for cooperation with other agencies, and perhaps especially KOICA. This is not surprising as both agencies realize their similar structures and priorities. JICA staff mentioned that “KOICA is really similar to JICA. Overall KOICA seems very similar, the way that it provides support, the way it focuses on the same sectors such as science and math education and technical education”. Not only the focus on science and mathematics education but also the capacity building projects are designed along similar lines. JICA staff mentioned that KOICA conducts similar transfers of volunteers from the home country to both universities and teacher training centers to promote mathematics, science, and technical education projects (JICA Official). South Korean officials in KOICA also mention the importance of the Korean development experience in formulating their approach and projects for development. As a country which has more recently joined the ranks of developed nations, one KOICA official stated, “I think that Korea has more valid models to share than western countries because it has more recently seen this rapid development” However, KOICA staff were also concerned that some consultants made easy equivalencies between the development state of Cambodia and conditions in the 1960s in South Korea. They were wary of efforts to transfer Korean education models, such as a Korean technical high school, to the Cambodian context without sufficient adaptation.

It appears that KOICA staff are keenly aware that they should “emulate more OECD DAC countries”. Not only are they supposed to pursue a more program-based approach to development but there is an encouragement to create more partnerships with other OECD DAC partners. One KOICA official stated, “Since Korea joined OECD DAC it is very recommended that we should cooperate more with other development partners” Similar interest was expressed on the Korean side to pursue more collaboration with JICA. KOICA officials recognized directly that KOICA as an agency “is obviously modeled after JICA from the establishment”. At the same time, it

seemed that KOICA staff are aware that JICA is a senior member of the OECD-DAC and thus their ultimate aim is to gain legitimacy as a younger member of the donor community. On several occasions, KOICA staff mentioned that they must pursue this agenda which is emphasized in communications from KOICA headquarters. However, KOICA as a relatively new development agency does seem intent on creating its own uniquely Korean development models for Cambodia and other developing nations.

KOICA is making an effort to establish new education models in Cambodia in both secondary and tertiary education. At the secondary level, a project to establish a Korean-style technical high school has gained traction both with KOICA and the Cambodian government. In a similar vein, at the tertiary level KOICA in tandem with the Korean Ministry of Education has established and supported the ASEAN Cyber University which provides distance education to individuals in ASEAN nations. However, KOICA officials pointed to the technical school as the new type of project, whereas the Cyber University represented the old style of KOICA project. The Cyber University focused mainly on the equipment and hardware side with extensive support from Korean high-tech corporations and benefit to those economic actors. On the other hand, the technical high school project focuses on software aspects such as curriculum and training.

In contrast to both Japan and South Korea, China is perceived to be establishing its own identity as a donor country. An overarching image is that China sets its own priorities, does not attach conditions, and moves quickly to projects. JICA officials were keenly aware that they face more bureaucratic hurdles in their efforts to keep pace with China. They also stated that “there is some lack of transparency”. There has been a gradual shift in that now China has started to attend the monthly donor coordination meetings in the education sector which are a key element of SWAPs (sector-wide approaches).

CONCLUSIONS

Results showed both convergence and divergence between Asian bilateral aid agencies. Beyond similarity in agency name for JICA and KOICA, the departmental structure of both agencies is uncannily similar and KOICA officials readily admit that the organizational structure of KOICA was borrowed from that of JICA. In terms of the thematic foci of development projects, it is difficult to discern why both nations promote similar projects in mathematics, science, and technical education. Naturally, both countries are known for their high-tech industries which may attract interest from aid recipients. In addition, Japan and South Korea consistently rank high in the OECD’s PISA rankings particularly in mathematics and science which would be another reason for the cross-

national attraction. On the one hand, Japan (JICA) and South Korea (KOICA) display a stronger will to follow the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in its articulation of aid priorities for the international donor community. Both of these nations are members of this committee and to some degree, their membership was an achievement related to their arrival at developed nation status. Thus in regard to aspects of organization and policies, both nations seem to display a high level of convergence in terms of their isomorphic agency structures and similar projects and policies. In this sense, JICA and KOICA have developed in highly convergent ways in terms of organization and policy priorities. Whether KOICA is converging with the JICA model or just following JICA in converging with the OECD DAC model is difficult to say. Nevertheless, it is apparent that JICA served as a key model for KOICA in its nascent stages. This would seem to lend credence to the Neo-Institutional theory of isomorphism in that organization, such as ministries of education in different nations, converge and become more similar in varied contexts or nations, at least at the organization level. However, both nations also make ample reference to the uniqueness of their development histories and models.

Japan and South Korea emphasize unique models in order to offer education aid and projects at different levels of education and in different subjects to gain influence in Cambodia by offering new and attractive models. Japan has been active in promoting its teacher training model known as “lesson-study” which has been exported to over 30 countries internationally. Similarly, South Korea has touted its technical high school model as a uniquely Korean model which would be well-suited to Cambodia. This is a potentially controversial claim in that technical high schools in South Korea have lost favor among secondary students and their parents had to re-formulate and re-invent themselves to fit into the 21st Century Korean economic system and appeal to those stakeholders. Moreover, it is apparent that nations such as Japan and South Korea must carve out a space for themselves in the education sector in any developing nation such as Cambodia, in that countries cannot replicate the same projects in the same subjects or levels of education as they risk losing competitive advantage in appealing to aid recipients to gain influence and improve international relations. One KOICA official stated that it was necessary for them to focus on the secondary and tertiary levels of education in Cambodia because, “in primary education, there is SIDA, the EU, and UNESCO and it’s quite crowded there”. Thus it is apparent that bilateral agencies in their need to specialize will often formulate their development themes, policies, and projects in order to differentiate themselves from other potential donors and thus tend to practice divergence. This need to diverge and diversify would support the Systems Theory thesis that donor agencies must establish their own vocabulary and grammar in the form

of discourse and action.

The fact that there are elements of both convergence and divergence between bilateral aid agencies, such as JICA, KOICA and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, in Cambodia belies the fact that there is a very complex array of actors which operate according to different priorities in relation to international organizations such as OECD DAC and the Cambodian government. It is apparent that further research is required to examine the coherence between the policy rhetoric of both bilateral agencies and the policy priorities exhibited as a product of education projects supported in Cambodia and other developing nations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was made possible by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

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