



Development Knowledge in the Making: The Case of Japan, South Korea and China

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Abstract: Development knowledge sharing (DKS) by Japan, South Korea and China has rapidly expanded over the last decade. However, little scholarly attention has been paid to the nature and processes of their claimed-to-be ‘unique’ development knowledge production. To address this research gap, we explore their international development studies (IDS) as key sites where researchers and resources are ‘mobilized’ under high-level policy initiatives. We find that processes of DKS are principally dictated by the governmental agenda. We also find that, in contradiction to three countries’ claim of ‘unique knowledge’, their IDS share common traits with Western IDS offering knowledge that is decontextualized, depoliticized and which claims to be universally applicable knowledge.

Key words: China, development cooperation, international development studies, Japan, knowledge sharing, South Korea

I. Introduction

Since the new millennium, the landscape of development cooperation has been diversified by many actors through their ideational, material and financial contributions (Janus et al., 2015). Much of this transformation has been attributed to the absolute and relative rise of South–South Cooperation (SSC)—particularly, the rapidly growing influence of Chinese SSC (Kragelund, 2015; Li and Carey, 2014).

‘The earlier vision of traditional donors in the West¹ of development cooperation with SSC partners, like China, was orientated towards ‘socializing’ them to internalize international norms (Chin, 2012). Today, however, these traditional donors in the West have embraced some policy narratives and

practices of SSC, centred more explicitly on the importance of ‘mutually beneficial’ reciprocity (Mawdsley et al., 2018) and on state-coordinated investment partnerships (Alami et al., 2021; Gonzalez-Vicente, 2019). Such reorientation in development cooperation has been referred to by some as ‘pivoting to Asia’ (Asplund and Söderberg, 2018). This rings especially true if we consider how these SSC features, once a much-discussed ‘unofficial Japanese trademark’ (Söderberg, 2018: 4), have become the prevailing characteristics of various Asian development cooperation partners (namely, China and South Korea). These characteristics include, for example, the principles of non-interference (thus, request-based), self-reliance, the critical importance of infrastructure building with loans and

mutual help or mutually beneficial cooperation that also serves the donor's national interests (Shimomura, 2020; Sato and Shimomura, 2013).

Moreover, this trend is discernible not only in traditional donor policy and practice (Mawdsley, 2018) but also in the Southern political elite's 'Look East' policy initiatives. Southern leaders have begun to seek development knowledge to emulate the 'East Asian miracle' (Fourie, 2017) because they consider the East Asian experience more directly relevant owing to its relatively recent history (see Yi and Mkandawire, 2014). Following Southern demands, the governments of Japan, China and South Korea have accelerated their development knowledge sharing (DKS) while emphasizing their 'unique' and applicable development knowledge. With a surge in DKS, these three countries have increased their efforts and funding for research and teaching in international development studies (IDS) to expedite knowledge production and to nurture experts in the field of development cooperation.²

However, there has been relatively little scholarly attention to the history, nature and constellations of IDS and related knowledge production for DKS in Japan, South Korea and China. Filling the research gap is important for two reasons. First, IDS serves as a key site where researchers are 'mobilized' to produce 'development knowledge' for state-led development cooperation activities that are largely centred on the Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Japan and South Korea or SSC for China. Hence, the very nature of IDS' relationship with the state-led ODA or SSC projects has undeniably impacted the type of knowledge produced. Second, it highlights regional/national traits of knowledge production in the three countries' IDS where the high-level policy initiatives are dominant in dictating the nature and orientation of knowledge production. This aspect accentuates the value of studying IDS by moving beyond Western outlets and spaces to better understand 'the politics of knowledge generation' in the field (Sumner, 2022: 12; see also Patel, 2022; Patel and North, 2022; Schmoll, 2022).

Our article addresses this gap in three steps. First, it begins with a brief discussion of the *contemporary* semantics of 'development' *in relation to development cooperation* as the ideational foundation of IDS. Hence, by exploring the context-dependent translation of development, the study elucidates (a) how 'development at home' is closely associated with the state-led planned intervention, (b) and how such a notion of development at home is inextricably intertwined with particular approaches and principles of development cooperation, that is, 'development abroad'. Second, the article traces processes of the IDS's evolution leading up to its formal institutionalization and thereafter in chronological terms. In doing so, we highlight multiplicities of such processes in which state-led initiatives engendered preference to practice-centred instrumental knowledge in IDS. Finally, the article explores two events to examine how the above propensities of IDS have become dominant in more detail: the rapid growth of state-led development cooperation, and the ardent promotion their own unique development knowledge via DKS amidst increasing donor competition. In doing so, we argue that the content, focus and institutional/organizational incarnation of IDS in East Asia is strongly shaped by high-level policy initiatives for state-led development cooperation. Further, in contrast to three countries' claim to be producing 'unique knowledge', we find that related processes in IDS share common traits with Western IDS offering knowledge that is decontextualized, depoliticized and which claims to be universally applicable knowledge (see Li, 2007; Ferguson, 1994).

Our use of the term 'state-led' is specific and refers to the allocation and mobilization of wide-ranging resources to pursue high-level policy initiatives by the central governments in the three countries (see Haggard, 2018; Woo-Cumings, 1999). Although development cooperation systems in the three countries are fragmented, resulting in ministerial turf wars (Kim and Gray, 2016; Sato, 2015), our assessment is that this complexity does not impinge significantly on the higher-level processes whereby the state

influences the production of IDS (see also Notes 9 and 14). Hence, we focus on those state-led policy initiatives as top-down agendas for which both governmental and non-governmental actors (albeit with divergent approaches and motivations) are mobilized to achieve the set objectives specified in the initiatives (Kim and Kang, 2015: 782–86).

The article primarily relies on and integrates the authors' previous research conducted between 2014 and 2019. Our analysis of the three countries' IDS is based on literature reviews and fieldwork in China, Japan, South Korea and beyond (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand). For the literature review, we primarily considered secondary materials published in local languages—including academic and professional research and policy documents. As for the fieldwork, our account derives from: first, participatory observation of academic conferences/workshops, work meetings at aid agencies and relevant government ministries and, second, informal conversations and 31 semi-structured interviews with researchers and teachers in IDS, aid bureaucrats and non-governmental professionals (consultants and NGO workers) in state-led development cooperation.

II. Understanding Development Through Cooperation

We begin our discussion on knowledge production in IDS with locally specific understandings of development and development cooperation as an ideational basis. This is because they foreground what constitutes 'desirable' approaches and principles for each respective aid/SSC provider (see Sumner, 2022; Powell and Cummings, 2019; Mawdsley, 2018, 2012). For example, the English term 'development' was first translated into Japan in the 19th century. And the Japanese context-dependent translations—*kaihatsu* (開発) and *hatten* (発展)—were later 'borrowed' into the Chinese and South Korean languages (Wang, 2020). Despite the etymological diversity in

Table 1. Translating 'Development'.

Origin	Japanese	Chinese	Korean
Intransitive verb	<i>hatten</i> / 発展	<i>fazhan</i> / 发展	<i>bahl-jeon</i> / 발전, 發展
Transitive verb	<i>kaihatsu</i> / 開発	<i>kaifa</i> / 开发	<i>gae-bal</i> / 개발, 開發

meanings and usages owing to the differentiated socio-historical background of the three countries, there are still some generalizable traits relevant to our analysis (see Table 1).

Kaihatsu/kaifa/gae-bal are used to indicate intentional practices as part of state-led planned intervention that advances industrialization or improves material existence by making use of (i.e., exploiting) natural resources (Wang, 2020; Kim and Kang, 2018; Nishikawa, 2004). *Hatten/fazhan/bahl-jeon* refer to broad processes of societal change and connote a more progressive view of history with a vision of improving the quality of life (see Kim, 2009: 29–30).³ And, these locally specific notions of development naturally informed approaches and principles of development cooperation—as highlighted in the remark of Hiroshi Sato, the former president of the Japan Society for International Development (JASID):

For Westerners, development is [intended] for Others. But for Easterners, development is more about ourselves. [Although] we [East Asian donors] distinguish spontaneous development (*hatten*) from development as [state-led planned] intervention (*kaihatsu*), *kaihatsu* [abroad] is intrinsically by/of local people, so we as outsiders only support *hatten* by/of local people [through] ... 'international [development] cooperation' ... [rather than] international development. (Sato, 2014, emphasis added)

Sato's remarks accentuate how locally specific meanings promulgate development as the critical task for both Easterners' and Southern partners to catch up with Western advanced economies through mutual help (i.e., cooperation). This point is also clearly observable in the naming of aid agencies, such as

the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), China International Development Cooperation Agency and South Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). Thus, this notion of development through cooperation led to specific approaches and principles to achieve the goal of development at home and abroad simultaneously (Shimomura, 2013). This is because Japan, China and South Korea ‘have long pursued commercial/capitalist development objectives [at home] through, within, and alongside what could be regarded as their (international) Development interventions [i.e., development abroad]’ (Mawdsley and Taggart, 2021: 12). Such approaches are showcased in the trinity (*sanmi-ittai*) model—in which development at home to catch up with advanced economies is inextricably intertwined with development abroad. Originally promoted by Japan between the late 1980s and the 1990s, the trinity model is a comprehensive economic cooperation package built on a nexus of aid, direct investment and trade in Asia (Abe, 2011: 799). This model was later used as a benchmark for South Korea, and also borrowed and reformulated by China as a key approach for their development cooperation (Shimomura and Wang, 2012; Brautigam, 2009). Hence, development cooperation informed by such approaches and principles further highlights the importance of DKS for mutual help via cooperation.

III. Tracing the Genealogy of IDS

By tracing the evolution of IDS, we elucidate the significance of fuller-scale state-led development cooperation *en route* to the formal institutionalization of IDS in all three countries. In doing so, we first highlight how diverse forces, paths and sources originally constituted the field of IDS in three countries. This underpins an analysis of how high-level policy initiatives have increasingly become a salient determinant for knowledge production in IDS—as some researchers and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have chosen to either

work with, or distance themselves from, state-led projects.

Towards Formal Institutionalization: Diverse Forces at Play

Japan

Among the three countries, Japan has the longest history of IDS-related knowledge production, beginning in the late 19th century, through modernization (‘development at home’) and colonial administration (‘development abroad’). The pre-war ‘colonial policy studies’ emphasized Japan’s mission as a ‘doer of development’ equipped with practical knowledge and technology to govern ‘natives’ in colonized territories, rather than abstraction/theorization of development and modernization processes (Sato, 2021). One such *practical* curriculum was first taught at the nationally established Kyoto Imperial College in 1903 and later at Tokyo Imperial College in 1909 (Kitaoka, 1993). Thus, knowledge production in the pre-war colonial policy studies was ‘practice-centred’ with a strong state-led planned interventionist drive to accelerate modernization via territorial expansion.

The early years of post-war era (1950s–1960s) witnessed both continuity and discontinuity from the pre-war era. Those who were part of the pre-war and war-time bureaucracy and IDS-related studies continued their work into post-war IDS-related knowledge production (Nakauchi, 2010; Ohno, 2004). For example, the former foreign minister Okita Saburo, an economist and a statesman, played a key role in designing the policy for Japan’s economic reconstruction as well as for advising many governments in Asia and international institutions in formulating development strategies (Kosai and Van Tho, 1994).

Thus, knowledge from the pre-war and wartime laid a foundation for IDS despite abrupt administrative and social changes brought about by the defeat in the Pacific War. Simultaneously, the legacy of the pre-war ‘colonial policy studies’ was deliberately muted in post-war IDS-related knowledge production (Matsuda, 2020;

Sato, 2018). This selective mutism, stemmed from historical sensitivity for Japan's war guilt, was particularly designed to address anti-Japanese sentiments in neighbouring Asia (Suehiro, 1995). For example, the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) was originally established under the auspices of the Japanese government in 1958 to provide knowledge to support the overseas expansion of Japanese companies (Interview, 2022c). However, some key members of IDE then were critical of actively partaking in state-led development cooperation projects (Sato, 2021; Karashima, 2018). Their distancing efforts aimed to pave the way for Japan's (more welcomed) re-entry into international society (Interview, 2022c). Thus, while some IDE researchers actively partook in projects guided by the high-level policy initiatives, others were trained to become developing country (area) specialists through more locally grounded field research in the global South (Interview, 2022c). The majority of area specialists emphasized the contribution of IDS-related research to the people of developing countries rather than Japan's business and the mercantilist ODA policies and practices (see Karashima, 2015).⁴

Such area specialists' apathy towards the mercantilist ODA gained more ground in the late 1980s as the widely reported Marcos Scandal in the Philippines⁵ exposed corruption and embezzlement in Japan's ODA projects (Tsuda and Yokoyama, 1999). Field-based research by area specialists began to raise concerns about Japan's large-scale ODA-funded projects. Hence, the scope and volume of research increased which was critical of development cooperation, in relation to corruption, and (adverse) impact on local environments, livelihoods and human rights (Murai and ODA-chosakenkyukai, 1989; Sumi, 1989). Such reflexive knowledge production was further strengthened by Western-trained academics whose research casted a critical eye on Japan's own development at home (Nishikawa, 1990; Tsurumi, 1990) and by campaigns for Japan's ODA reform by CSOs (Sato, 2021).

South Korea

The genesis of South Korea's IDS can be traced to the state's (re)building and industrialization process between the 1950s and 1970s, after the South Korean War (Kim, 2011). Propensities towards the nascent 'planned interventionism' were clearly observable in IDS-related knowledge production at this time. Hence, research focused on economics, engineering, international trade and public administration—largely as a practical tool for 'development at home'. Although limited, there was some IDS-related academic research on the socio-economic effects of foreign aid on developing countries—in particular, the effect of US aid to South Korea (Lee, 1956 cited in Zoo et al., 2016: 16). Until the 1960s, the US assistance was the major form of foreign capital inflow (Han, 1980), which was critical for state (re)building and industrialization.

However, IDS-related research grew through the 1980s and 1990s, driven by South Korea's graduation from being an ODA recipient and its achievement of lower-middle-income country status (Calleja and Prizzon, 2019). As an emerging economy undergoing rapid growth, South Korea embarked upon its own SSC (development abroad) to respond to the increasingly challenging climate of the international political economy in the 1980s (Gills, 1996). Thus, IDS-related research during this period began to focus on two areas. The first was SSC, with the purpose of exploring the topics of the mutually beneficial economic and technical cooperation among developing countries (Zoo et al., 2016). For economic SSC, IDS-related research aimed to help South Korean firms/industries diversify their markets in, and secure resources from, developing nations (Kim, 2016)—mainly by learning from Japan's aid diplomacy (Zoo et al., 2016). Thus, research reflected the South Korean government's intention to utilize SSC as statecraft for commercial advancement in developing countries (Zoo et al., 2016). For technical SSC, a state-funded think-tank, the South Korean Development Institute (KDI),

played a key role in operating the International Development Exchange Program (IDEP) to share South Korea's development experience (KDI, 1998: i).⁶ Ultimately, IDEP's main activities were to produce tailor-made practice-centred knowledge to meet the specific needs of developing and transitional economies, through which the South Korean government shared its experience based on major development policies (e.g., industrial and trade).

China

The root of China's IDS can be traced back to related fields of research—including development economics and area studies⁷ and its early experience both as a donor and a recipient since 1945.⁸ However, this extensive experience in development cooperation has neither systematically informed nor shaped the knowledge production *specifically for* IDS until the 1990s (Zhang, 2012:7). IDS was introduced to China in the 1990s with the inflow of various international aid activities. 'Advanced' and 'progressive' Western approaches were mainly adopted to improve China's domestic development—for example, participatory development and gender-mainstreaming (Wang, 2021: 110; Li, 2019). The import of the Western knowledge has been mainly led by agronomists from China Agricultural University (CAU). For example, Li Xiaoyun, dubbed 'the father of China's IDS', first learned about IDS through his work with West Germany's aid projects in China in the late 1980s, and later received academic training in IDS in Germany and the Netherlands (Wang, 2021). Funded by the Ford Foundation, the first Chinese academic department in IDS specializing in the rural development, and which later became one part of the College of Humanities and Development Studies, was established primarily through the intellectual endeavours of individual scholars at CAU in 1998.

Since the turn of the millennium, China resumed fuller-scale SSC (development abroad) via the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). During

this period, Chinese scholars began to more thoroughly question previous practices of simply borrowing and learning from the West. Three factors drove this change. First, researchers grew more confident in China's own experience and knowledge since China recorded 'uninterrupted' growth despite the 2007–2008 global financial crisis. As such, researchers began to revisit and revalidate China's development experience (Cheng and Liu, 2021; Lin and Wang, 2017). The second factor stemmed from the rapid expansion of China's SSC (King, 2013; Taylor, 2010). The phenomenal growth of China's SSC to Africa has naturally attracted international attention—particularly from Western critics such as Naím (2007). An increased number of critical studies have also investigated the negative effects of China's SSC, including trade imbalance, resource grabbing and its neo-colonial nature (Alden and Alves, 2009; Brookes, 2007; Naidu and Davies, 2006). Hence, Chinese researchers have made concerted efforts to refute the criticisms (Li, 2006; Liu, 2006). Their works highlight how China's SSC values 'learning by doing' and feasible practice-centred approaches in contrast to the traditional DAC donors' overemphasis on theory-led policy prescriptions underpinned by neoliberal norms (Li et al., 2014). The third factor relates to the introduction of poststructuralist and post-developmental critiques from Western academia. After the introduction of Arturo Escobar's work (1995) in the mid-2000s, Chinese scholars began to critique development as a chimeric construct of the West (Ye, 2015, 2011). Thus, a significant number of development experts began to work with Southern partner countries to find their own locally suitable approaches as opposed to working with universal development models (Li, 2019).

Institutionalizing the Field: The State-led Initiatives at Work

Japan

Reaching the world's largest donor status in 1989 precipitated a dire need to improve the capacities and human resources of Japan's 'aid industry', including ODA-implementing

agencies and development professionals (Sato, 2022). The aid industry was unequipped to handle rapidly expanding budgets and operations (see Araki, 2020). Thus, think-tanks were organized within ODA implementing agencies to address these needs. For example, the Institute for International Cooperation (JICA-IIC) was established within JICA in 1983 to provide knowledge and skills of immediate relevance to its technical cooperation (JICA-RI, n.d.b). The Research Institute of Development Assistance (RIDA) was established within the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF—handling bilateral loans) in 1993 to support developing countries by providing knowledge based on Japan’s development experience (Nishigaki, 1994). Further, a government-commissioned advisory group—the ‘Study Group on the Optimisation of ODA Implementation’—stressed the urgency of higher education programmes to expand/expedite human resource training for the aid industry (MOFA, 1986). Hence, the Japanese government instituted various research and teaching/training organizations and university programmes in IDS. They included the Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID) in 1990, the IDE’s Advanced School (IDEAS) in 1990, the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) in 1997 and graduate IDS degree programmes at major national universities at Nagoya in 1991, Kobe in 1992, Hiroshima in 1994 and Tokyo in 1999 (Interview 2022c; Ito 2017; GRIPS, n.d.; IDE, n.d.).⁹

Japan’s IDS formally took shape when JASID, established in 1990 with Okita Saburo as its first president, gathered 500 members ranging from consultants and practitioners to academics and representing various disciplines of study. JASID contributed not only to promoting interdisciplinary research and teaching in IDS but also to creating a platform for development practitioners to share their professional experiences (Nishikawa, 2010). However, IDS as an emerging academic field failed to reflect on Japan’s own development

experience. This was because the aid industry prioritized instrumental knowledge to assist Japan’s expanding ODA operation. Such a tendency deprived Japan’s development experts of opportunities to fully reflect upon Japan’s development experience spanning from the colonial policy studies, to becoming an aid recipient and then to promoting economic development (Sato, 2021).

Since the mid-2000s, the above tendency has become stronger with the greater participation of IDS scholars in state-led development cooperation projects, which was further underpinned by two developments. First, JICA-IIC was upgraded to the JICA Research Institute (JICA-RI) in 2008 through its merger with RIDA. This constitution was largely due to the late Ogata Sadako’s vision of research as a foundation for development activities which would in turn strengthen the institutional capacity of JICA.¹⁰ Second, the government funded some universities to establish graduate programs on Japan’s modernization experience in partnership with JICA. These courses were designed to share Japan’s development knowledge with policymakers and practitioners from developing countries (JICA, 2022, n.d.)

South Korea

South Korea’s IDS was formally institutionalized during the 2000s. Not only did the volume of IDS research increase, but its scope also diversified to include issues of human rights, poverty reduction and education (Zoo et al., 2016) by importing relevant theoretical debates from Anglo-American academia (Kim and Kang, 2015: 785–89). It was during this period that the South Korean government started its full-fledged preparation for entry in OECD-DAC scheduled for 2010. Therefore, IDS shifted to focus on the mainstream aid discourse (e.g., the OECD-DAC norms, the Millennium Development Goals) as well as on ODA architecture (Zoo et al., 2016). With a rapidly increasing aid budget, there was a strong state-led initiative to forge and expand

the ‘international development sector’ (Kim and Kang, 2018).¹¹ The industry lacked both institutional capacity (of aid agencies) and well-trained professionals to handle expanding operations (Interview, 2020). Thus, the South Korean Association of International Development and Cooperation (KAIDEC) was formally established out of necessity in 2007 (Interview, 2020).

As a multi-disciplinary association encompassing diverse actors from academia, government, business and CSOs, KAIDEC’s aim was to promote research and teaching to better support policy development for state-led development cooperation (KAIDEC, 2015). KAIDEC’s annual conference themes were, until recently, decided by South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), which also financed the conferences. Key members of KAIDEC (i.e., presidents and various committee chairs) have been important contributors at the MOFA-organized international ODA conferences and meetings. Further, the South Korean government established funding to expand undergraduate training in IDS under KOICA through which universities bid and run undergraduate introductory IDS courses to train future ODA workers (Park et al., 2015).¹² As curricula were in the making, they remained largely ad hoc and disparate in character, including basic introductions to the ODA architecture and key policy issues concerning OECD-DAC norms (Park et al., 2015). Hence, both research and teaching in IDS lacked a systemic approach to a wide range of epistemological debates and critical issues concerning development cooperation (Kim and Kang, 2018). As such, some South Korean students chose to study abroad to receive their postgraduate IDS degrees from universities in anglophone countries—mostly the US and the UK.

With South Korea’s DAC entry in 2010, a stronger drive was made by the government to synthesize knowledge from South Korea’s own development experience (mainly centred on the state-planned intervention) to share with

developing countries (Doucette, 2020; Jeong, 2013).¹³ The drive led to rapid growth of IDS research in volume and thematic focus (Zoo et al., 2016).¹⁴ Further, some critical scholarship emerged mainly from individuals trained in anglophone countries. Yet, even with drastic changes in South Korea’s IDS since 2000s, the nature of knowledge production still remains practice-centred for the effective implementation of ODA (Kim and Kang, 2018). As some commentators in the field have pointed out, there is a grave need to develop IDS as an independent academic discipline by building a shared theoretical ground (Zoo et al., 2016: 26–27) as well as emphasizing more critical and reflexive research away from state-led development cooperation projects (Kim and Kang, 2018).

China

With China’s irrefutable importance and influence as an SSC provider, an increased number of Chinese scholars from various disciplines have begun to work in IDS since the early 2010s (Cheng and Liu, 2021). Despite this change, neither formal establishment of academic associations (as in Japan and South Korea) nor debates on the nature of IDS have been observed (Interview, 2022a). Instead, more loosely formed fora/networks were established to facilitate academic discussion on international development. For example, CAU has coordinated the China International Development Research Network (CIDRN) since 2012. CIDRN was funded by the former UK Department for International Development (DFID) to advance dialogue and share knowledge between Chinese and international scholars (Li et al., 2015).¹⁵ These dialogues through CIDRN have contributed not only to a deeper understanding of China’s SSC but also to easing the escalating tensions fuelled by the politicized debates on China’s SSC. Published mainly in English, CIDRN research titles have pursued a more comprehensive approach to researching China’s development cooperation through its

history, policy decisions and economic effects (CIDRN, 2017).

Particularly since the initiation of BRI in 2013, the government initiative established new IDS-related institutes to strengthen research and teaching in IDS (Cheng and Liu, 2021). For example, a national research institute—the Centre for International Knowledge on Development (CIKD)—was established in 2017 to accelerate knowledge production in China’s IDS to support economic growth in developing countries (CIKD, 2020). Such activities highlighted how China’s SSC valued ‘learning by doing’ and feasible practice-oriented approaches in contrast to DAC donors’ overemphasis on policy prescriptions based on abstract and universal development models (Li et al., 2014). Hence, with strong state guidance to support China’s geopolitical and geo-economic strategies, its IDS reflects a rather strong ‘anti-West’ orientation to assert and justify China’s position in the world (CIKD, 2020; Xu and Li, 2020).

IV. The Relationship Between IDS and State-led Development Cooperation Programmes

This section traces processes culminating in the formal institutionalization of IDS while highlighting how high-level policy initiatives engendered preference to practice-oriented instrumental knowledge in research and teaching. In what follows, we focus on two events in more detail through which the above propensities of IDS can be better understood. The first is the rapid expansion of state-led development cooperation. The second is the ardent promotion of knowledge sharing programmes amidst increasing donor competition.

IDS Amidst Expanding State-led Development Cooperation Programmes

All three countries witnessed the drastic increase in instrumental knowledge production driven by rapidly growing state-led development cooperation operations.

Various state-led initiatives and funding-guided research and teaching in IDS were initiated to meet the needs of government operations by providing knowledge relevant to policy for *immediate* application. Since IDS in the three countries were being ‘built on the fly’, the speed of knowledge production was as vital as its applicability. Thus, the utility of research and training largely suited the ‘practical’ needs of policymakers and development workers in the aid industry. Simultaneously, both critical and collaborative engagements from CSOs have also been important in shaping some key debates in IDS, although the state remained the major force behind the institutionalization of IDS.

On Applicability and Speed

In terms of research, government initiatives demanded knowledge of immediate and practical use to support state-led development cooperation activities. Since becoming the world’s largest donor in 1989, the Japanese government has made explicit efforts to expedite policy/professional research via state-funded institutions. In addition to GRIPS and JICA-RI, ‘International Cooperation Centres’ were instituted at five national universities between 1997 and 2002 to promote education and technical cooperation in areas of agriculture, education, medicine, etc. (Kayashima, 2019: 12). Since beginning to prepare for DAC membership, South Korea has launched various government-commissioned projects (*yong-yuk sa-eop*) to strengthen research in IDS since the mid-2000s. Priorities of government-commissioned projects stressed the applicability and speed of knowledge production that explored policy ideas, programmes and the institutional settings of DAC donors. Many South Korean academics and professional researchers have been key bidders in these projects that aimed for predominantly instrumental knowledge production (Interviews, 2019, 2017). As for China, its growing SSC via BRI has led to more state funding for new research institutions

since the early 2010s. These new institutions were designed to produce immediately applicable knowledge to support China's SSC operations. Further, a large number of existing institutes have reoriented their research foci from China's domestic/rural issues to those of international cooperation to better support China's efforts to improve the effectiveness of its SSC (Cheng and Liu, 2021).

Guided by state interests, teaching focuses on training students as future workers capable of 'effective' ODA delivery (i.e., implementation, management and evaluation). This government drive was apparent in all three countries. For Japan, particularly note-worthy was the Ministry of Education's initiatives since the 1990s towards practice-centred curricula at the university level (Kayashima, 2019). These degree courses also provided teaching on (standardized) techniques for ODA projects to improve development effectiveness including project cycle management and DAC evaluation schemes.¹⁶ The ministry emphasized the contribution of well-trained professionals from both Japan and overseas (Kayashima, 2019: 10).¹⁷ For South Korea, along with practice-centred curricula at the university level, the government gives preference to candidates well-versed in technical knowledge for its ODA operation. For example, the KOICA-run test-based system known as the 'ODA certificate' sets key 'hiring' standards for the aid industry. Hence, by preparing for the test, young graduate jobseekers and ODA-contractors learn/memorize largely practice-oriented knowledge useful for running, managing and evaluating projects (Kim and Kang, 2018). For China, the state-led initiative gave preference to university courses nurturing talent to support and work for China's SSC in a highly international setting. Greater efforts have been made to enable these courses to build students' capacity to inform policymaking as well as learning practical skills of project management, planning, implementation and evaluation (Li et al., 2015, 2012). Thus, graduates of

IDS courses are often considered as essential human resources to make an immediate contribution to both policy and practice in China's SSC (see Cui and Huang, 2021).

On CSOs' Engagement

There is a clear disparity among the three countries in the manner of engagement by their CSOs with state-led operations—particularly in CSOs' response to the issues of development cooperation projects, including those of corruption and socio-environmental impact. Although the majority of CSOs in the three countries have been active participants of state-led development cooperation as service providers, some CSOs in Japan and South Korea maintained their distance from the state and its projects. For Japan, advocacy CSOs campaigned for ODA reform through their rigorous public engagement research between the 1970s and 1990s. They used insights from research by area specialists and critical scholars in IDS who were well-versed in the local impact of Japan's development cooperation in the global South. The CSOs' campaign to reform ODA not only successfully secured public interest during the late 1980s—but also culminated in the ODA Charter in 1992 and a series of socio-environmental guidelines for ODA projects (Kim, 2009). Between the late 2000s and the early 2010s, South Korean CSOs—in particular, ODA Watch—provided a much-needed critical voice on and informed assessment of South Korea's ODA through its public engagement research (ODA Watch, n.d.). Such research targeted two consecutive administrations (Lee Myung Bak and Park Geun Hye: 2008–2016) that not only instrumentalized ODA in pursuit of South Korea's own 'national (business) interests' but also rendered South Korea's ODA more susceptible to collusion and corruption. These works by South Korean CSOs were largely influenced by critical debates on international development within Western academia as well as international CSOs.

For China, the impact of state-led strategies is most visible in dictating the

nature of CSOs' relationship with the state-led development cooperation under one-party rule (Interview, 2023). Despite the limited space in this country for critical engagement with state-led SSC projects, as compared with that in Japan and South Korea, these groups have managed to work as service providers for state-led SSC and to engage with Chinese policymakers through a 'consultative' relationship (Teets, 2013; Fulda et al., 2012). Particularly under BRI, their knowledge (in the form of expertise and professional skills) has been absorbed into state-led SSC projects to better counter international criticism by improving SSC on the ground (Interview, 2023). Yet, due to the political and selective process of absorption into state-led SSC projects, the range of knowledge in China's IDS remains lacks reflexivity.

DKS Amidst Increasing Donor Competition

A more competitive development cooperation landscape in the 'age of choice' (Greenhill et al., 2013) has driven all three countries to devote significant efforts towards promoting and sharing their own 'unique' development experience. Japan, South Korea and China promoted their development knowledge as more relevant and practical for developing countries than traditional donors' abstract development models (see Doucette, 2020; Ohno and Ohno, 2013, 1998). Such policy narratives about DKS evoke both images of empathy/solidarity and high expectations from Southern partners (see Watanabe, 2019; Mawdsley, 2018). However, they lack a systemic knowledge base of development experience that is immediately applicable for DKS. Thus, to accelerate DKS programmes, the governments stressed both the utility and the urgency of turning past experience into sharable knowledge.

For example, since the mid-2000s, the Japanese government has begun to re-examine and revalidate its development experience for DKS as part of its 'international contribution'. State-led DKS has taken many different forms

of cooperation between agencies/ministries in Japan and recipient countries, including policy dialogues through development planning, joint research, seminar/lecture series, training and site visits (Ohno, 2011). To strengthen Japan's intellectual presence globally, the state-led initiative further mobilized various sector specialists in IDS to advance research and training programmes for DSK (IDE, n.d.; JICA-RI, n.d.b). Topics of these programmes included industrial development, pollution management, rural livelihood improvement and disaster mitigation (GRIPS, 2022; JICA-RI, n.d.a, 2022). More recently with the heightened aid competition with China (Trinidad 2019), Japan has increasingly aligned its ODA principles with its diplomatic vision of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy (MOFA, 2022; Nishida, 2022) that has rendered knowledge production for DKS increasingly receptive to the government strategy (Interview, 2022b).¹⁸ Hence, Japan's IDS runs the risk of selecting, interpreting and packaging its development experience consistently with those geopolitical strategies highlighted in the FOIP (Interview, 2022d).

With the growing demands for DKS from Southern political elites since the early 2000s, the South Korean government co-/sponsored various research projects promoting South Korea's case (Doucette, 2020). The thematic focus is on a strong state-planned interventionist drive to accelerate modernization and industrialization (Yi and Mkandawire, 2014). With support of President Lee Myung-Bak, a knowledge sharing programme (KSP) was inaugurated as a national flagship programme in 2009. Thus, greater efforts and resources have been poured into KSP. These produced around 150 case studies on South Korea's development experience between 2010 and 2015 (KSP, 2018a, 2018b; Jeong, 2013). Yet, because of the overly short production time, KSP studies were criticized as 'low quality' technical reports, each comprised of a list of stylized 'facts' that lacked crucial historical and political economic

contexts (Jeong, 2013: 43). Such omissions are due to processes of KSP ‘selecting, interpreting and packaging development facts’ to highlight the master narrative of South Korea’s miraculous development past (Taniguchi and Babb, 2009: 277). Such post-hoc reconstruction in the processes of KSP leaves out inconvenient histories, such as the oppression of labour movements, environmental and public health harms from industrial pollution, and forced displacement.

For China, DKS is a relatively recent activity that is seen as a way to counter international criticism (e.g., Naím, 2007) towards the growing influence of its SSC in the global South (Meng and Li, 2022). In deterring criticism, on the one hand, China’s DKS places a greater emphasis on aligning its contents with the UN agenda (i.e., Sustainable Development Goals) and mutual learning and sharing with international community to strengthen China’s soft power globally (see CIKD, 2022). On the other hand, the Chinese government attempts to share its own stories more competently via DKS. Its DKS includes topics ranging from China’s experience in modernization, poverty reduction and science/technology cooperation (see World Bank and Development Research Center of the State Council, 2022).¹⁹ The strong state-led initiative has shaped the research agenda for IDS as the latter’s thematic focus has led to a growing number of Chinese academic papers echoing the policy narratives of BRI and a ‘Community of Human Destiny’²⁰ (Interview, 2022a). However, there has been some disagreement among Chinese researchers discussing how their Southern partners approach China’s development experience. While some stress the importance of learning/adopting lessons from China (i.e., the central role of the state’s planned intervention economic development, see Tang, 2021; Li, 2019), others maintain the criticality of partner countries’ ownership in determining their own development paths (CIKD, 2020). The former’s emphasis—principally reflecting

priorities of the state-led DKS—render knowledge production prone to more selective interpretation and packaging as the socio-ecological costs of rapid economic growth are largely muted in DKS (Interview 2022a). In addition to the selectivity in DKS processes, DSK-related studies mostly lack in-depth knowledge of partner countries’ local contexts, as this research is largely generic desk-based and macroscopic with little direct input from long-term fieldworkers (Liu et al., 2018).

V. Conclusion

The article examined little-studied cases of IDS and their related knowledge production in Japan, South Korea and China. In doing so, we analysed processes culminating in the formal institutionalization of IDS as a key site where researchers and resources are mobilized to produce knowledge for state-led development cooperation operations. Our analysis revealed that the field of IDS was originally constituted by divergent forces, processes and sources (specific to each country). Hence, we found that both proximity to and distancing from state-led projects were initially important forces in determining the nature of knowledge production in IDS—particularly with respect to the role of area specialists and CSOs in the case of Japan. Although the state has been the major force behind the institutionalization of IDS, critical engagement from CSOs in Japan and South Korea have also been crucial in shaping some key debates in IDS.

Further, two traits were commonly noted among the three countries’ IDS. One is the prevalence of practice-centred instrumental knowledge. The other is the role of the high-level policy initiatives in determining patterns and propensities of development knowledge production. Our findings highlight how these traits were brought about. First, we found that these common traits are inherent to the three countries’ notion of development—catching up with the Western advanced economies—through mutual help with their partner countries. This idea stressed the importance of pursuing commercial/capitalist development at home

through, within and alongside development abroad (i.e., development cooperation).

Second, with rapidly growing state-led development cooperation operations, this article demonstrates that both the applicability of knowledge and the speed of knowledge production have become vital. As IDS in three countries were being ‘built on the fly’, the knowledge produced was required to be of relevance to policy and immediately applicable. Thus, research and training in IDS responded to ‘practical’ needs of the expanding state-led operations for development cooperation.

Third, our analysis elucidates that increased donor competition precipitated greater efforts devoted to promoting DKS. Despite the lack of systemic knowledge bases for DKS, the governments of Japan, South Korea and China promoted their own development experience as ‘the one’ with more relevant and practical knowledge. Such state-driven DKS rendered knowledge production prone to more selective interpretation and packaging—consistent with either the master narrative of their miraculous economic growth or the state’s geopolitical strategies. Hence, the post-hoc reconstruction of processes in IDS ends up largely decontextualized and depoliticized—therefore, ‘one-size-fits-all’ development knowledge.

While regional/national traits of knowledge production were found, the politics of knowledge generation in the three countries suggest similarities with those in Western IDS. The priority given to producing immediately applicable knowledge in Japan, South Korea and China rendered knowledge production in IDS technical. Such knowledge production decontextualized and depoliticized the complex historical and political economic contexts behind the ‘miraculous’ growth of the three countries. More recently, the governments of Japan, South Korea and China have increasingly asserted their ‘unique’ development experience as a solution that is universally applicable. This recent trend in Japan, South Korea and China’s IDS seems to contradict their policy narratives about their own DKS programmes being ‘distinctive’ from

those of traditional donors’. This reorientation towards promoting a universally applicable solution raises two vital questions. One is how far the contents and methods of their current DSK programmes really are ‘unique’ (through shifting their reference point to East Asia, see Kim, 2023). A strong emphasis on differentiation through the (implicit or explicit) critique of traditional donors’ policy prescriptions may not automatically qualify their development knowledge as an ‘alternative’. Claiming uniqueness on this basis further strengthened instrumental universal logics in DSK programmes. The other question is whether such a growing emphasis on ‘one-size-fits-all’ development knowledge could be read as a further marked shift towards an interventionist approach to development (*kaihatsu/gae-bal/kaifa*) within both state-led development cooperation and IDS. These questions merit further enquiry as a future research avenue to better understand the rapidly changing landscape of knowledge production for global development.

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Notes

1. The West in this article refers to the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation, Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) excluding Japan and South Korea.

2. Our analysis focuses on *international* development studies because DKS activities are primarily with developing countries eligible for the Official Development Assistance (OECD, 2022).
3. We are keenly aware that locally specific understanding of development seemingly echoes the often-cited debates on the ‘big D’ Development and ‘little d’ development dialectic (Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Hart, 2001; Rigg, 2004; Lewis, 2019; Mawdsley and Taggart, 2021). However, contributing to this debate is neither the main focus nor aim of this article. We rather focus on highlighting how locally specific understanding of development naturalizes particular ideas and practices at the heart of knowledge production in IDS for development cooperation (see Mawdsley, 2012, 2018).
4. Reviewing published articles from the 1970s and 1980s in two major area studies journals in Japanese—*Ajia Kenkyu (Asian Studies)* and *Ajia Keizai (Asian Economies)*—confirms area specialists’ disinterest in issues of economic cooperation and development policy (Sato, 2021).
5. During the Filipino President Fernando Marcos’s fall from power in 1985, leaked secret documents revealed how contractors of Japanese ODA projects paid huge kickbacks to Marcos (Tsuda and Yokoyama, 1999).
6. IDEP has been essentially a knowledge-sharing and capacity-building programme, inviting government officials and policymakers from developing countries to participate (KDI, 1998: i).
7. Development economics has been introduced to China since 1945 while area studies was prompted by Zhou Enlai’s 1964 state visits in 14 countries of Asia and Africa (Mönks et al., 2017).
8. China’s experience includes its receiving of the Soviet assistance and its provision of military aid to Vietnam and North Korea in the early years of its establishment (Shen, 2009). Since 1979 with the implementation of the ‘reform and open-up’ policy, China began to receiving foreign aid from Western donors including multilateral providers (Zhou et al., 2013).
9. This process was impacted by turf wars among ministries with ODA budgets. For example, due to the fragmented aid system (Aoki, 1998), FASID was founded by the Foreign Ministry and IDEAS by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. The university programmes were established by funds and initiatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Ushiogi, 2013).
10. President of JICA between October 2003 and March 2012.
11. This sector includes both governmental and non-governmental actors, for example, aid agencies, academic institutions, businesses and CSOs.
12. Between 2009 and 2018, 96 universities participated in the KOICA programme (KOICA, 2018).
13. South Korea has two IDS-based academic associations: KAIDEC working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and KOICA; and the South Korea Development Policy Studies Association, established in 2012, under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance and Strategy (MOFS) and Korea Exim Bank.
14. Research themes included both sectoral (e.g., agriculture, education, health) and stakeholder issues (e.g., the role of business and CSOs).
15. Compared with China’s national research institutes, CIDRN is more likely to lean more on DFID’s goals and interests than national research institutes close to the state (Interview, 2022a).
16. The change was also partly driven by the increasing external pressure on the country to further comply with international aid norms and practices (Katada, 2002).
17. These IDS programme—originally intended to nurture Japanese experts—have become major centres for overseas students. As of May 2022, international students, mostly from Asia and Africa, from 47 countries represented 70% of the total enrolled at Nagoya University’s IDS programme (GSID, 2022).
18. FOIP promotes good governance in the Indo-Pacific region by (a) establishing rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade; (b) pursuing economic prosperity; and (c) committing to peace and stability (MOFA, 2018).
19. For instance, Peking University founded the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development in 2016 to offer courses to study Chinese development experiences for students largely from BRI partner countries (Guo et al., 2016). These courses promote DKS not only through in-class teaching but also by site-visits to its big cities, military facilities and ultramodern infrastructure projects.
20. A diplomatic concept by President Xi Jinping’s government (a) to resolve territorial disputes through cooperation among nations, (b) to promote shared interests on the five pillars of political partnership, security, economic development, cultural exchanges and environment (Zhang, 2018).

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