Japan's cooperation with the South Pacific region[1]

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The Kuranari doctrine, enunciated by the then Foreign Minister of Japan, Tadashi Kuranari, in Suva in January 1987, was hailed as the first articulation of the main principles of Japan's South Pacific policy in postwar years. Odd as it may seem to talk about 'postwar' years more than forty years after the end of World War II, it is relevant in seeing Japan's relations with the island states of the Pacific in an historical context.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Japan pursued its quest for a 'postwar new deal'; having pledged never again to become a military power, Japan placed its central foreign policy focus on the promotion of friendly and cooperative relations with other countries, particularly neighbouring countries.

Why was this quest late in coming to the South Pacific region? With the benefit of hindsight, one could argue that the memories of thirty years of Japan's rule in Micronesia in the interwar period inhibited initiatives in the region, especially as the islands were undergoing the radical changes from colonial rule to independence through the 60s and 70s.

When, in the latter half of the 1980s, Japan did focus on its policy towards the island states, which had come to assert their individual and regional identity and look to Japan for active contribution to their development, the guiding feeling was, as Foreign Minister Kuranari put it, that 'it [Japan] cannot be indifferent to the problems facing the Pacific island nations in the region it belongs to and therefore seeks, in a spirit of neighbourly friendship and open-mindedness, to work with them in contributing to their development'. Thus, despite its traditional and geographical links with this part of the world, Japan is today a newcomer in the region characterized by closely intertwined networks of island states and former 'metropolitan' states. The five principles of the Kuranari doctrine (respect for the island nations' independence and autonomy, support for regional cooperation, preservation of political stability, assistance towards economic prosperity and promotion of human exchange) can be seen as the guideposts as Japan re-embarks to feel its way through this region.

However, there has been a tendency in Australia and elsewhere in the region to see behind Japan's policy a hidden and well-orchestrated design to establish dominance over its 'natural sphere of influence', to exercise further political influence over it against the background of superpower rivalry, or to grab or monopolize fisheries and whatever other resources the region may have to offer. As is sometimes the case in international relations, we are suspected of having motives of which we ourselves are not aware.

Such perception gaps may be an inevitable part of what is essentially an evolving process. But, perhaps it is time, nearly four years after the enunciation of the Kuranari doctrine, to examine the changing context, the priorities, problems and future possibilities of Japan's relations with the island states, so that the process may not be further plagued by stereotypes.

Political and strategic context

The recent dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have called into question the validity of the international order based on East–West confrontation centreing on the two superpowers, and the search for a new order is beginning in Europe and will, in due course, begin in the Asia–Pacific region as

1 This paper is written in a personal capacity, and the opinions expressed in it do not necessarily reflect the views of the Japanese government.

well. The lessening of the superpower rivalry does not eliminate sources of instability or uncertainty in the South Pacific region; rather, it is at times of transition like this that one needs to be watchful about new sources of tension, from either within or outside.

Japan has an active interest in ensuring that the changes in the international order will take firm hold in the Asia–Pacific region as well, and has a stake in seeing that the process will unfold in the Pacific island region in a climate of continued political stability.

In working together with the Pacific island states toward political stability and economic prosperity in the region, Japan is in the process of developing a keener appreciation of the regional approach of dialogue and cooperation, or the 'Pacific way', as a means of concerting their nation-building efforts and reflecting their interests and aspirations in the international community.

There are four notable points in this regard.

The first is the increasingly important role that the South Pacific Forum (SPF) is assuming in Japan's dialogue and cooperation with the region. Following the visits to Japan of the Forum Chairmen, the Honourable Vaai Kolone in August 1987, and the Honourable Baron Vaea in December 1988, the first dialogue between the Forum and Japan took place in Tarawa in July 1989. Ambassador Toshio Isogai, representing Japan, said that the SPF played a 'central role' in the efforts for a peaceful settlement in New Caledonia, for the promotion of regional cooperation, and the moves to strengthen relations with non-member countries and external organizations. In the second dialogue which took place in Port Vila last August, the Japanese representative, Ambassador Takehiro Togo, carried it one step further and said that cooperation with the SPF forms the 'main pillar' of Japan's policy toward the South Pacific.

The second is the increasing interest among the Forum member countries in promoting their relations with countries outside the region. Japan believes that to foster active, organic relations between the South Pacific and the other areas of the Asia–Pacific region, of which it forms an integral part, would be greatly beneficial to all, contributing to the further development of the Asia–Pacific region which is undergoing the most energetic economic expansion anywhere.

The third concerns the vital importance of mutual communication and understanding.

The Tarawa Declaration in July 1989 calling for the banning of pelagic driftnet fishing in the South Pacific underlined the need to reconcile the profound concern of the island states over the future of their fisheries resources, on which their economies depend heavily, and the Japanese approach to seek to utilize these resources on a permanent basis while ensuring their conservation in an appropriate manner. Japan reduced the size of its driftnet fishing fleet in the South Pacific from sixty vessels to twenty in September 1989, and subscribed to the consensus United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/225 which stated in its operative paragraph 4(b): 'immediate action should be taken to reduce progressively large-scale pelagic driftnet fishing activities in the South Pacific region with a view to the cessation of such activities by 1 July 1991, as an interim measure, until appropriate conservation and management arrangements for South Pacific albacore tuna resources are entered into by the parties concerned'.

Then in July 1990 Japan announced its decision to suspend its driftnet fishing in the South Pacific, one year in advance of the date of cessation called for in the UN resolution. The Communique of the Twenty-First South Pacific Forum issued on 1 August 1990 welcomed this decision by Japan. Japan will continue to participate actively in the on-going consultation with the South Pacific and other interested countries for the preservation and management of albacore tuna resources.

We have learned from this experience the vital importance of mutual communication and understanding in dealing with those issues on which the interests of the island states and of Japan may be in conflict. As to the issue of a possible multilateral fisheries access arrangement between the Forum Fisheries Agency and Japan, Japan will continue to engage in dialogue with a view to exploring areas where the interests and views of both sides converge.

The fourth point in the political context is the growing recognition on the part of Japan of the diversity of issues of concern to the island states. A quick perusal of the Forum Communique of August 1990 indicates that their concerns range from economic development, fisheries, energy, and tourism, to environment, disaster relief and political problems such as New Caledonia and chemical weapons destruction. In putting the principles of the Kuranari doctrine into practice, Japan is increasingly cognizant of the need to be

sensitive and respond flexibly to these multi-faceted concerns of the island states. How this is being reflected in Japan's policies in economic cooperation and other areas is examined below.

Economic cooperation

Japan has set up and is now working toward the target of increasing its overseas development assistance (ODA) over the five years from 1988 to 1992 to US$50 billion, more than double the total for the preceding five years. As a result, Japan's ODA in 1989 reached US$8.96 billion, making it the world's largest aid donor.

In this global ODA program, bilateral ODA to Pacific island countries increased by 3.7 times during the last five years, from US$25.10 million in 1984 to US$93.07 million in 1988 (Table 1).

Table 1 **Japan's ODA to Pacific countries, 1984 to 1988**
(net disbursement, US$million)

	Calendar year				
	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Grant	11.51	12.30	32.20	36.09	46.06
(% of total grant)	(2.1)	(1.9)	(3.8)	(3.1)	(2.6)
Technological cooperation	8.37	10.31	16.39	20.05	28.98
(% of total)	(1.6)	(1.9)	(1.9)	(1.9)	(2.5)
Loans	5.22	1.48	6.10	11.87	18.03
(% of total loans)	(0.4)	(0.1)	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.5)
ODA total	25.10	24.09	54.69	68.02	93.07
(% of total ODA)	(1.0)	(0.9)	(1.4)	(1.3)	(1.5)

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.

It is arguably still a small percentage (1.5 per cent) of Japan's total ODA, but the steady increase is significant given the need to tailor the program carefully to the absorptive capacity of the recipient nations.

In the context of the changing global situation, what is important is the intention of the Japanese government, as expressed by Ambassador Togo in the dialogue with the South Pacific Forum in August 1990, to ensure that Japan's economic cooperation to the South Pacific will on the whole not be affected by the channelling of a part of Japan's financial resources to assist Eastern Europe.

In terms of country distribution, there has been a relative concentration of Japan's ODA during the past three or four years to Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Western Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau, with considerable increase of aid to the Solomon Islands in 1988 (Table 2).

Table 2 **Country distribution of Japan's bilateral ODA to Pacific countries, 1984–88**
(net disbursement, US$million)

	Calendar year				
	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Papua New Guinea	6.18	3.95	10.43	17.65	41.16
Fiji	3.44	8.15	10.98	10.34	9.07
Solomon Islands	0.91	0.81	0.97	4.67	13.84
Western Samoa	2.01	1.82	9.16	6.93	7.67
Vanuatu	0.05	0.75	1.13	5.57	3.74
Tonga	3.26	1.33	3.57	5.14	3.54
Kiribati	2.60	2.80	4.31	6.50	5.25
Tuvalu	0.03	0.07	0.06	0.20	0.34
Cook Islands	—	0.34	2.12	0.32	0.18
Nauru	0.01	—	—	0.01	0.03
Pacific Islands (US)	6.27	3.74	11.29	9.17	7.52
Niue	—	0.01	—	0.01	0.05
French Polynesia	0.13	0.12	0.18	0.32	0.04
New Caledonia	0.01	—	0.05	0.02	0.04
Other	0.20	0.20	0.45	1.17	0.60
Total	25.10	24.09	54.69	68.02	93.07

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.

Priorities

Through the findings of the project-finding mission dispatched to the region in March and April 1987 and subsequent exchanges with the island states, Japan has come to place priorities in its economic cooperation in the region on: human resources development including education, which is essential for nation-building; primary industries such as fisheries, which provide important sources of subsistence to these states; basic human needs including medical care; and transport and telecommunications which will help the states overcome the problem of distance and dispersion.

At the same time, it is important to take account of the diversity of the states in the region in terms of size, population, resource endowment, social and cultural traditions, etc., which give rise to individual and specific development needs for each state. Thus the task for Japan is to reflect the overall priorities and, at the same time, to devise a flexible approach as a response to the special needs and situation of each recipient.

Modalities

Given the nature of island economies with limited demands for large-scale infrastructure projects and low capacity to service loans, the bulk of Japan's aid to the South Pacific is in the form of grants and technical cooperation. Loans have been provided so far only to Papua New Guinea (for power generation, road, airport and rural development projects), though the possibility of loans to Fiji may be contemplated in the future.

Grants are being provided at a pace of roughly one project per year per recipient, while the sectors for which grants are provided vary according to the needs of the recipients. Fisheries-related projects figure in almost all island states. Education projects such as building schools or classrooms and providing audio-visual material; health projects such as building hospitals or nursing schools and providing medical equipment; communications works such as building radio stations; and transport works such as building roads; as well as emergency relief aid for cyclones are also areas commonly covered.

One of the problems encountered is how to reconcile the existing framework of Japan's grant assistance, which is provided in response to a sizeable request by the recipient government, with the particular needs of the countries or even some communities which are too small to be covered by the scheme. In Fiscal Year 1989, Japan started a program of Small-Scale Grant Assistance which enables flexible, quick and well-targeted responses to relatively small-scale projects (less than Y5 million in principle) handled by local government bodies, research institute, hospitals, and non-government organizations. Such grass-roots needs as local housing, a rehabilitation centre and sports promotion in Papua New Guinea and a hanging bridge and a media centre in Fiji have been covered under the scheme.

Technical cooperation can, either singly or in conjunction with grant assistance, complement the human as well as material needs of development. The human element is particularly significant. In Fiscal Year 1988, for example, there were 268 trainees from the island states received in Japan, 53 Japanese experts dispatched to these states, 246 Japanese personnel taking part in survey teams, and 266 members of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers helping the local communities in Papua New Guinea, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Western Samoa and Vanuatu. Y2.6 million worth of equipment was also provided under the rubric of technical cooperation.

Cooperation with regional organizations or projects

Cooperation with regional organizations or projects also forms an important part of Japan's economic cooperation in the South Pacific. It may not be widely understood, however, that this cooperation can take various forms.

Direct grant assistance to regional organizations such as the South Pacific Forum does not lend itself to the existing scheme of Japan's grant assistance which is based on bilateral government-to-government requests. Thus it is not possible under the current scheme to provide a direct grant to the Forum Secretariat for a comprehensive coverage of a certain regional project. It is possible, however, to respond to bilateral requests from a government participating in a regional project, if the project is accorded a high priority by the government and is deemed to be good and feasible. This point may need to be thrashed out further in the dialogue between Japan and the Forum.

However, significant cooperation with regional organizations or projects can be effected through donation of funds to regional organizations, the dispatching of Japanese experts and other means. Some examples are given below:

South Pacific Forum (SPF)

The donation of $US400,000 in each Fiscal Year 1988 and 1989 is being used for the small-scale energy, regional petroleum unit training and small-scale industry development projects. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) experts were dispatched for two years from August 1989 for the Maritime Transport Project and from July 1989 for the Civil Aviation Project. In September 1989 Forum Secretariat staff participated in the JICA seminar of Japanese aid procedures. Trade promotion is an area where private sector initiatives may be complemented by government or semi-government agencies; consideration is being given to the holding of a South Pacific trade fair/seminar in Japan with cooperation from the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and to the participation of a Forum Secretariat staff in the JICA trade promotion seminar.

United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

In 1987 US$2 million was donated to the UNDP as the Special Fund for Pacific Islands out of which $800,000 have been channelled to the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation's Tuvalu Satellite Ground Station and US$300,000 is being contributed to the Industrial Development Advisory Service Plan through the UNDP Human Resources Cost Sharing Program.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Contributions of US$260,000 in 1989 and US$120,000 in 1990 (as of June) were made to the ESCAP projects for the South Pacific island region.

International Finance Corporation (IFC)

US$350,000 will be contributed to the South Pacific Project Facility of IFC, which is designed to help the development of private sectors in the IFC member states.

There have also been Japanese contributions to the South Pacific Commission (SPC). These have included the provision of small-scale equipment to the media centre Project in 1989 and the provision of US$100,000 from the abovementioned UNDP Fund to the Coconut Processing Training Project. If invited by consensus of the SPC members, Japan may seriously consider joining the organization.

Consultation and cooperation with other donors

Consultation with other donor countries is important to avoid duplication of efforts or waste of limited resources and, where possible and appropriate, to effect harnessing of experiences, expertise and resources. Japan is now engaged in annual aid policy consultations with major donor countries such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand, in which the South Pacific is an important item on the agenda.

Further, Japan and other donor countries have worked or are working together to make up the following projects.

Faleolo International Airport in Western Samoa

- Japan—grant (Fiscal Years 1985 and 1986) for expansion of the terminal;
- Australia—runway expansion and improvement;
- New Zealand—airport lights and electricity supply system;
- Canada—light maintenance vehicles.

Bauerfield International Air Terminal Building in Vanuatu

- Japan—grant (Fiscal Year 1989) for the new terminal and aviation aid facilities, etc.;
- Australia—runway expansion;
- New Zealand, France, United Kingdom and EC are also involved.

Airport Terminal in fua-Amotu in Tonga

- Japan—grant (Fiscal Year 1989) for the terminal, feeder runways and aprons;
- Australia—runway expansion and instrumental landing equipment;
- New Zealand—control tower and automatic control equipment;
- European Community—communication facilities.

Schools in Tonga and Western Samoa

For primary schools in Tonga and middle schools in Western Samoa, Japan constructed the school building and the Japan Overseas Volunteers and the US Peace Corps sent the teachers.

As an outcome of the Japan–Australia annual aid policy consultation held in August 1989, the two governments are now actively engaged in the preparation of a joint study mission, to be dispatched in the first instance to Papua New Guinea and Fiji. The mission is designed to identify the possibilities for Japan–Australia joint aid activities in the South Pacific, while paying full respect to the priorities of the recipient governments.

Natural disasters and environment

Natural disasters such as cyclones and environmental problems such as global warming pose particularly acute challenges to the development efforts of the Pacific island states. They also constitute new and evolving dimensions of Japan's cooperation with the region.

Natural disasters

Emergency grant aid for cyclone relief was extended to Fiji in 1984, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Cook Islands in 1986, and Western Samoa and Tonga in 1989. Most recently, in view of the grave human and material damage inflicted by the large-scale cyclone Ofa in February this year, Japan provided a total of US$150,000 as emergency grant aid to Western Samoa and Tonga.

Since September 1987, Japan has had in place its International Emergency Assistance Team, to be dispatched overseas in times of

disasters to assess the damage, provide necessary equipment and medical care, etc. Members of the teams were dispatched to Vanuatu in 1987, Western Samoa in 1989, and to Western Samoa in February 1990 when cyclones hit these countries.

The South Pacific Disaster Mitigation Program of the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) is designed to build a disaster mitigation network with its centre in Nadi, Fiji. From Fiscal Year 1987 through 1989, Japan has contributed a total of US$150,000 to this program.

Further, Japan has been providing assistance with regard to the forecasting of cyclones through the use of observational data from its stationary weather satellite 'Himawari (Sunflower)'. The expansion and upgrading of the warning network is being contemplated as World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNDP projects, and Japan will give positive consideration to requests for cooperation in this regard.

Environment

Japan shares the ever-growing concern of the Pacific island countries over environmental issues, particularly global warming and the rise in sea level and waste disposal at sea. Through its own experience of tackling serious pollution problems through legislation, technological development, energy-saving measures and development of alternative energy sources, Japan feels that it should be possible to protect the environment without diminishing economic growth provided that appropriate measures are taken.

With respect to global warming, Japan's carbon dioxide emission per GNP is now among the lowest in the developed countries. While participating actively in international deliberations on the problem by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and elsewhere, Japan is now drawing up an Action Program to Arrest Global Warming with a view to stabilizing the level of carbon dioxide effusion at the lowest possible level by the year 2000. Further, Japan is advocating the need to draw up internationally a long-term and integrated vision, the 'New Earth 21', to invigorate the earth over the next 100 years by developing new environmental technologies and increasing on a large scale the absorbents of gases giving rise to the greenhouse effect.

Tropical forests in the Pacific are important as absorbents of carbon dioxide. Japan extended US$20 million to the International Tropical Timbers Organization (ITTO) in March 1990 to achieve the sustained utilization of tropical forests by harmonizing the needs of protection with those of economic development.

Aid and technology transfer also play an important part in the joint efforts of developing and developed economies to tackle environmental issues. Japan is now in the process of expanding its environmentally-related ODA, with a target of providing approximately Y300 billion (US$2.2 billion) for the three fiscal years beginning with Fiscal Year 1989. It is also hoped that the Centre of Global Environmental Technology of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) will be established in Japan as the central organization for the transfer of technology to the developing economies.

With respect to the ocean dumping of low-level radioactive wastes, Japan considers it essential to secure the safety and understanding of the countries concerned, and has no intention of disposing of such wastes in disregard of concerns expressed by the communities of the region.

Japan shares with the Pacific island countries the desire for the early conclusion of an international convention to ban chemical weapons, and hopes that the chemical weapons destruction at the Johnston Atoll facility will be conducted with full consideration given to possible environmental impacts.

Conclusion—human dimension

It is evident from the foregoing that Japan is making efforts to develop its relations of friendship and cooperation with the Pacific island states, in a wide range of fields, some of which may go beyond the confines of traditional or existing relations. Underlying all these is the human dimension, the factor which cannot be translated into money or goods, but is vital in fostering a habit of communication and a network of cooperation and dialogue.

The stereotyped perceptions referred to at the outset of this article will not disappear by simply declaring them invalid. The 'Pacific way' of human contacts needs to be developed further between Japan and the countries in the region.

There has been an encouraging increase of human exchange especially in terms of high level officials, middle-level leaders, youth groups and technical cooperation trainees from the region going to Japan. Under the

programs sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its affiliated agencies alone, more than 270 people were invited from the South Pacific to Japan in 1987 and over 400 in 1988.

In parallel with the efforts to make the South Pacific better known to Japan, consideration should also be given to the question of how diplomatic presence (currently ambassadors in Port Moresby and Suva and charge d'affaires in Honiara) and other representations can be best reinforced to present the Japanese face(s) in the Pacific dialogue. It is an important practical element in giving further substance to the spirit of 'friendship and open-mindedness' espoused by Mr Kuranari.