

Normality of International Norms:
Power, Interests, and Knowledge in Japan's ODA Politics

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Abstract

Abe Administration declared “Development Cooperation that Contributes to National Interests” as Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017 and the promotion of “Quality Infrastructure” investment for the policy. Abe Prime Minister has explained the importance of “Quality Infrastructure” to Presidents, Prime Ministers and high-ranking officers of countries at the international conferences, such as G7, G20 and the United Nations, and made it up consensus to promote international cooperation for quality infrastructure investment. This is the campaign for making the idea of “Quality Infrastructure” into an international norm.

There are pros and cons for the policy of foregrounding national interests and promotion of quality infrastructure investment in Abe Administration. Some consider it as an appropriate one to address the explosive increase in demand for infrastructure investment. Others wonder if Abe Administration could prioritize national interests of Japan in a narrow sense. Meanwhile, we have not evaluated it not as a foreign policy but as an international development cooperation policy enough.

There are international development norms, which encourage actors to provide ODA according to the standard of appropriate behavior in the international community. International development norms have changed repeatedly with times. The idea A emerges, gradually diffuses to the many actors and turns to be a norm. Then, the idea B emerges, obsoletes A, and turns to be a new norm. Norms can tell us the direction in which we should go at that time. We need to consider the trend of international norms to lead us to the appropriate direction. How can we evaluate the policy of Abe administration from the perspective of trend of international development norms? Can the idea, “Quality Infrastructure,” become a norm in the near future? Can it contribute to meet the needs of developing countries and solve the problems of serious poverty?

This article examines the policy of making “Quality Infrastructure” into an international norm by Abe Administration from the perspective of the dynamics of international development norm. First, it provides an overview of the dynamics of international development norm. Second, it argues the stance of Japanese government toward it. Third, it describes why and how Japan has changed its stance, tried to become a norm entrepreneur, and made it into an international norm. Then, it evaluates the Abe Administration's activities and “Quality Infrastructure” norm and shows some findings on Japan's ODA and international development norms in the future.