

Japanese Approaches to Development Communication

by Karin Gwinn WILKINS*

Abstract

Development communication literature neglects attention to Japanese approaches to development practice as a prominent donor institution. Based on a series of interviews and document reviews, this analysis characterizes how Japanese development projects use communication technologies to address a variety of development goals. Moreover, this research explores how this development discourse constructs social problems, beneficiaries, and appropriate solutions. Japan's development communication approaches can be seen as resonating with a modernization paradigm, emphasizing the importance of the private sector, along with attention to national development strategies, national identity, and technological innovation. However, there are some important distinctions between Japanese and western approaches: Japanese approaches tend to privilege process over outcomes in development practices, to consider structural and social over individual issues in addressing social problems, and to resist social marketing and other campaign strategies in communication projects. If development communication as a field is to extend beyond its limited origins, it is imperative that scholars attempt to understand how other donors and communities are engaging in strategic intervention.

Although development communication may be well ensconced in western communication literature, this field appears much more amorphous in other cultural contexts. Currently conceived in English-language publications as the intentional use of communication technologies and processes in strategic social change, development communication carries with it the historical experiences of western ventures into foreign aid. The disjuncture between western definitions and alternative approaches seems ironic in a field purportedly designed to

* Karin G. WILKINS is Associate Professor and Graduate Adviser, Department of Radio-TV-Film, University of Texas at Austin.

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foster international goodwill. If development communication as a field is to extend beyond its limited origins, it is imperative that scholars attempt to understand how other donors and communities are engaging in strategic intervention.

As the largest overseas development donor for more than a decade (JICA, 2002a), Japan clearly deserves more attention in the development communication literature. Previous discussions of development communication in Japan, published in western languages, have been more likely to focus on national communication strategies within the country (Takeichi, 1991) than on its practices as a donor institution. Publications concerning Japan's overseas communication practices, or donor activities in general are few (Raffer & Singer, 1996), tending to focus on population strategies (Urata & Utsumi, 1994) or new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Discussions of development communication in the western literature would benefit greatly from learning about Japanese approaches as a donor.

In this study, I explore the work of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), as the central bilateral organization that allocates grant aid and technical assistance to developing countries. In this study, I focus on JICA's approach to development communication through its overseas development assistance (ODA). In keeping with emerging conceptions of the field (Wilkins & Mody, 2001) delineating how development institutions "develop communication" strategies from how their discourse "communicates development," this analysis addresses two broad research questions. First, how is JICA using communications in its ODA projects? More specifically, what kinds of communications technologies are being used and how are they conceptualized within the development process?

Second, analyses consider how JICA "communicates development" through its discourse. This approach builds on recent critiques of the development industry, as legitimizing interventions through particular constructions of the "helping" process. In this regard, I explore JICA's discourse in terms of the assumptions made about development problems, appropriate beneficiaries, and possibilities for social change advanced through communications technologies.

Development Communication through western eyes

In this section I briefly review some of the central tenets of the field in order to situate this research within the development communication literature. Clearly, the literature reviewed here suits a historical view of international practice grounded in western perspectives. It is hoped that this study might help us to think through how this literature might need to change in order to incorporate attention to Japanese development practice.

Throughout history, nations and other organized communities have attempted to use a variety of communicative tools, including oral and written persuasion, to guide, or as some would say control, social change. Yet, the western narrative generally opens this story with the events following World War II, when the US initiated the Marshall Plan in order to reconstruct the economies of western Europe, to contain communism in the Cold War period, and to some extent, to offer humanitarian aid in post-conflict societies.

Daniel Lerner's (1958) quintessential treatise on the "passing of traditional society" in the Middle East established a dominant framework for understanding the relationship between media and modernization. Lerner proposed that media exposure would create more empathic individuals, who would be able to imagine themselves beyond their local conditions, thus enabling them to participate in more democratic forms of political governance and more entrepreneurial economic activities. His parable of a grocer and a chief in a Turkish village depicts a stringent dichotomization between modern and traditional cultures.

The literature of this historical period promoted a version of modernity that highlighted free-market capitalism, democratic governance, strong national identity (transcending cultural and ethnic differences), and faith in science and technology (e.g. Rogers, 1976; Schramm, 1963). In other words, the characteristics of the US at the time were proposed as a universal model for all other societies. Summing up this position, Lerner writes that what the US is, "the modernizing Middle East seeks to become" (1958: 79).

By the 1970s, Asian and Latin American scholars began to critique the ethnocentric nature of this dominant approach. Critical scholars also recognized the limitations of seeing development as an isolated national pursuit, drawing attention to the constraints in the global sphere that shaped development processes. As victims of cultural imperialism and dependency on wealthier nations, poor nations found it difficult to set autonomous development policies, in accordance with their own cultural histories and societal interests. These and other critiques (e.g. Rogers, 1976) helped to open discussion in the field to considering alternative approaches to development.

In response to a critique that the dominant model generally assumed a top-down flow of information, participatory approaches emphasized the importance of working at the level of local communities, with information generated at a local level disseminated to government agencies. Participatory approaches argue for local agency in defining both the social problems to be addressed as well as determining appropriate solutions (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

Liberation and social movement strategies, integrated into the development communication literature more recently (Huesca, 2002), advocate moving a step beyond incorporating local concerns into larger development strategies, toward focusing on social movements' use of communications strategies to fight existing power structures. While the participatory approach attempts to incorporate

local concerns into an existing development process, some liberation and social movement strategies¹ take a somewhat more radical approach, questioning the very process and goals of development. For instance, some of these groups argue that dominant approaches focus too much on national economic growth, at the expense of spiritual and other non-material concerns, such as cultural identity.

Another avenue of critique calls attention to the very power structures within which development processes are situated (Wilkins, 2000). Power structures may be conceptualized in a variety of ways, such as through political-economic contexts, normative climates, or elite networks. This approach often takes the form of challenging development discourse as a site of struggle over the representation of problems, communities, and solutions (e.g. Crush, 1995; Escobar, 1995; Moore, 1995). Powerful development institutions conceptualize social problems in ways that benefit their own institutional and political-economic interests. For example, sustainable development becomes defined over time as a process through which we can control our environment, in ways that are not antithetical to corporate interests (Escobar, 1995; Waters & Wilkins, 2002).

Building on this approach, the second part of this analysis questions what assumptions are made about communications strategies in the development process. Are communications technologies seen as integral to economic or political development? Are media seen as having a direct effect on audiences, or as contributing to social context? This more philosophical discussion of the underlying theories of JICA's development discourse needs to be grounded in an understanding of JICA's practice.

In order to engage in this exploration of JICA's discourse more broadly, the first part of this analysis considers how JICA uses communication strategies more specifically. The western literature on development communication strategies tends to focus on media interventions, typically in the areas of health, nutrition, population, agriculture, and education. Many of these summarize media effects studies, evaluating media campaigns following social marketing models of intervention, popular in children's health (Hornik et. al., 2002) or population programs (Snyder, 2002). Another popular strategy employs an "entertainment-education" model (Singhal & Rogers, 1999), incorporating socially beneficial messages into popular culture formats, such as television and radio dramas or music. While social marketing and entertainment-education strategies may dominate current discussions in western literature in the field, their relevance to the Japanese context needs to be questioned. This research then begins with a more open question concerning how JICA uses communication technologies in its development interventions. These trends need to be understood within the unique context of Japan's historical experience as a recipient and as a donor of ODA.

The Context of Japanese ODA

Since World War II, Japan has made a remarkable transformation from its experience as a recipient of foreign aid to its dominance as a bilateral donor. Japan's initial foray as a donor began with its war reparation payments in 1954 when it joined the Colombo Plan (JICA, 2002a). In some ways, Japanese development approaches still recognize aid as compensation for past colonial and military experience, such as the exploitation of comfort women in Asia. Given Japan's history of military conquest and attempts toward regional appeasement, its ODA still tends to focus on allocations to the Asian region (63 %; JICA, 2002a), in a more reactive than proactive manner, in an attempt to avoid appearing interventionist in the affairs of regional neighbors.

Japan's concern with not wanting to appear to dominate within the Asian region posed some tension against its emergence as a global economic leader. By 1989 Japan had passed the United States as the largest bilateral donor in the world. In the 1990s, Japan's contributions accounted for almost one-quarter of all bilateral aid in the world. This decade marked tremendous growth, as the ODA budget increased by about 50 percent. Recent budget cuts (another 10 % on top of last year's 10 %), concomitant with the recent increase in the United States' budget for foreign aid, have led to Japan becoming the second largest donor in 2001 (US\$9.7 billion). Although Japan's overall allocation may have dropped relative to its previous contributions, its ODA is still quite high relative to most other bilateral donors.

Economic interests tend to dominate Japan's ODA at the expense of more humanitarian concerns, according to some observers (e.g. Arase, 1995, 2000; Hook, 1996; Raffer & Singer, 1996; Rix, 1995). For example, a recent study (Tuman, Emmert & Sterken, 2001) of Japanese ODA in Latin America confirms that economic issues outweigh concerns with democracy and human rights, among other issues. Japan is also critiqued, along with the US, by the donor community for allocating a low proportion of its GNP to ODA, and for devoting a low proportion of this funding for humanitarian concerns.

This ODA is dispersed through a decentralized authority structure, involving all national ministries as well as many diverse government bureaus, agencies, and other organizations (Arase, 1995, 2000). The central ministry dispersing grant aid is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); JBIC distributes loans; and JICA allocates grant aid and delivers technical cooperation services and projects in a variety of areas. The status of these agencies will be changing in the next few years, as all public agencies, including universities, are transitioning to a more autonomous status.

Established in 1974 as the new version of the former Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, JICA supports a variety of activities, emphasizing technical cooperation (defined as those activities that include training, expert dispatch,

equipment provision, and/or development studies) and grant aid, but also including programs to send Japanese volunteers overseas, to support Japanese Emigrants and Ethnic Japanese in other countries, and to offer emergency disaster relief (JICA, 2002b). In its 1992 Charter, JICA specifies its concerns as humanitarian considerations; recognition of interdependence among nations; environmental conservation; and support for self-help efforts of recipient countries (JICA, 2002a).

Although the highest percentage of JICA's funding is directed toward the Asian region (43 %; JICA, 2002b), the proportion devoted to this region is lower than that allocated for JBIC loans. Following Asia, JICA's work seems more evenly distributed among Latin American (20 %), African (15 %), and Middle Eastern (10 %) regions, followed by Oceania (3 %), Europe (3 %) and other areas (6 %).

Research Approach

In order to explore Japanese approaches to development communication, I focused on JICA as a selected case study. This research approach builds on an understanding of a development institution as a critical actor in guiding social intervention. Donor institutions need to be examined given the tremendous power their rhetoric and practices wield in shaping global debates and influencing recipient nations and communities (Wilkins, 2000).

In this study, I focused on those projects that specifically used communication technologies. In order to learn about these projects, I interviewed 39 JICA staff and consultants, and reviewed roughly 150 official reports and 5 videotapes. Informants were selected through a snowball sampling procedure, initiated through direct contacts with JICA directors in Washington DC and in Tokyo headquarters offices. With informants' explicit permission, all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Confidentiality was assured each participant.

All informants were given a choice regarding the language of the interview; only three requested that the interview be conducted in Japanese, which was facilitated through a hired interpreter. Those documents that were in Japanese were translated and/or summarized by hired translators. Most documents did not require translation, however, being written in English, French, or Spanish, since they were designed to document plans and assessments with recipient countries.

In the course of the interviews, I asked informants to describe their approaches and their projects, and to suggest documents or videos they thought reflected their work. I also used the electronic database within the JICA library system to identify all reports describing projects that used television, radio, telecommunications, telephones, information and communication technologies, print,

educational materials, film, video, multi-media and computers.

Based on these interviews and texts, I gathered information on 198 projects. Most of these projects had been implemented quite recently, more than half (55 %) since 2000 and another third (34 %) in the 1990s. The earliest projects were implemented in the 1960s, but these only constitute 1 percent of the sample.

This particular sample of communication projects spans those that were incorporated into technical cooperation strategies (32 %), grant aid (29 %), and training programs (39 %). Technically, training projects were considered part of overall technical cooperation strategies within JICA; in this sample though, it was important to distinguish those programs that focused exclusively on training in order to characterize this development strategy more concretely. For instance, almost one-third (31 %) of these projects were situated within Japan, as training courses for overseas participants. Other training programs, grant aid, and technical cooperation programs were implemented in Asia (32 %), Africa (18 %), Latin America (10.5 %), the Middle East (5.5 %), Oceania (2.5 %), and Eastern Europe (.5 %).

Developing Communication

In this section I chronicle how communications technologies are used in development programs overseas. This descriptive section helps inform subsequent analyses considering development communication approaches.

A wide variety of media and communication technologies are used in JICA projects, and many project use more than one medium in their approach. Clearly the most dominant channels include the more interactive technologies, such as computers (28 %) or telephones (18 %). Other projects refer more broadly to telecom strategies (13 %) or IT (5 %). Some of the more classic media channels are also employed, such as television (15 %), radio (9 %), video/ film (9 %) and multi-media (7 %). Among the 14 percent of the projects that use print, about one-quarter of these refer to the same maternal-child handbook that has been distributed in many of JICA's population projects.

The question then becomes how these communication technologies are used. First, it is important to recognize that there is no one single approach to development communication within JICA. Although communication technologies are used in a variety of substantive areas, there is no integrated strategy, overarching theoretical framework, or even shared terminology. Among those working in health and population, these strategies are referred to as IEC (information, education, and communication), a phrase made popular through many of the UN and other bilateral donor programs. Within agriculture, similar efforts are categorized as "extension" efforts and within education, as educational media.

Although there may be a lack of cohesion across substantive areas, current overseas strategies are well grounded within Japan's historical experiences. To illustrate, current health education strategies have been developed based on expertise gained through addressing severe parasite infestations following WWII (Kunii, 1985). In another case, the maternal-child health handbook that has been distributed to pregnant women within Japan served as the basis for similar replications overseas (programs in Indonesia and Mexico, for example), adapting the text and format to fit other cultural contexts. Although these strategies in health, population, agriculture, education and other humanitarian sectors clearly use communication technologies in their efforts, there are few "experts" able to serve as senior consultants on these projects, and few university programs training professionals to serve in this capacity.

In contrast, attention to ICTs dominates JICA strategies, with a plethora of experts and an abundance of funding. JICA professionals readily acknowledge that framing communication strategies under this rubric makes it "easier to get a budget!" These projects largely involve grant aid for infrastructure and training programs. Having been prioritized as a central development strategy at the Okinawa Summit in 2000 (MOFA, 2002), attention to ICTs provokes considerable debate within the organization. Those supporting JICA's investment in ICTs overseas believe that these technologies are essential tools for national development, necessary to advance economic growth. In a recent report, information, delivered through ICTs, was described as "an essential element in people's lives, almost like food and water" (JICA, 2001: 1). Moreover, ICTs are assumed to have a beneficial, revolutionary impact on economic growth.

Although the overwhelming chorus proclaims the virtues of ICTs with great enthusiasm, a few voices register concerns with these development programs. Their chief concern is that it may not be necessary to support ICTs through ODA, since many of the recipient countries can invest in these on their own or work through the private sector. What does not get questioned, however, are the key assumptions, that these technologies are inevitable and essential components of national development; that their impacts are strong and quick; and that economic goals are paramount.

One of the proposed ICT programs, referred to internally as J-net,² attempts to integrate ICTs into JICA's own administrative practices. The manifest purpose of this endeavor is to strengthen the computer capacity of the organization and its training centers to improve the efficiency of their technical assistance and training programs. Clearly there are also latent benefits, particularly to the domestic IT industry, as noted in the Okinawa Summit (MOFA, 2002), in part through using the local NTT satellite network. JICA informants also hope that enhanced web-sites might help to make their work more appealing to the Japanese public, support which is being seen as more important in a time of falling budgets. Other aspects of the program, such as enabling video conferencing and

distance learning across training centers and JICA offices, seem to be attracting higher budget allocations while the organization as a whole is losing money. This situation is bound to foster internal tension, particularly when many feel they are uncertain how to use J-net, whether as a replacement or as a complement to expert dispatch and direct training strategies. This technology can be seen as attempting to enhance the capacity of JICA to engage in efficient and effective ODA.

Apart from its own internal use, JICA privileges communications technologies as enhancing capacities in many developing countries. In this regard, many JICA projects conceptualize communication capacity as an end in itself, in contrast to other intervention strategies that envision communication as a tool to achieve other goals.

This capacity building strategy dominates JICA's development communication programs (76 %). These programs tend to use grant aid (36 %) to build television, radio, telephone, and other telecommunication infrastructures, or technical assistance (37 %) to train staff to maintain these new facilities. A small proportion (3 %) direct their attention to policy considerations, calling for the privatization of communications industries (e.g., JICA, 1993d).

Apart from these capacity building enterprises, JICA's communication interventions employ media technologies in the service of achieving other goals, typically in the fields of health and population, but also to a lesser degree in agriculture and education. Although there are proportionately fewer communication interventions (24 %) than capacity building programs, these projects appear to be slowly gaining in popularity.

Communication campaigns have a variety of goals, tending to prioritize informing, educating or persuading a targeted community. JICA's strategies are far more likely to attempt to inform (9 %) a well defined group of direct recipients, increasing their knowledge and skills, or to educate (14 %) a community, more broadly conceived, about a particular set of issues, than to attempt to persuade. A recent medical education project in China illustrates this informing approach: magazines, books, and videos were used to update skills and increase knowledge among medical professionals. While the medical staff were direct beneficiaries of the training project, in other programs media were used to educate a more broadly defined community, such as a population program in the Philippines attempting to improve the "welfare of the nation" or a sex education in Thailand attempting to prevent the spread of HIV.

Very few projects (1 %) are designed to change behavior, following the persuasion approach. One of these projects developed its social marketing approach in collaboration with USAID, working with JICA on a malaria prevention program in Zambia. Social marketing has dominated US communication interventions since the 1980s (Wilkins, 1999), particularly in the population,

health, and nutrition sectors, according to a USAID official at a recent meeting with JICA (JICA, 2002c).

Although considered standard practice within USAID, social marketing has not been widely accepted within JICA. One might speculate that a social marketing approach would resonate well with Japan's domestic private sector strength and corporate mentality. However, as a more interventionist strategy, attempting to prescribe behavior change, this approach contradicts Japan's historical interest in engaging in more reactive than proactive development assistance.

At the heart of this clash between JICA and USAID reactions to social marketing strategies, we find critical differences in assumptions regarding appropriate strategies for engaging in social change, and in assessments of successful projects. Whereas the social marketing approach would advocate individual behavior change, inspired through media exposure, another approach might see the value of media as enhancing knowledge and skills without regard to particular behavioral consequences. For those engaged in social marketing, a successful project would be one in which changes in individuals' actions could be documented; in contrast, many JICA projects describe their success through monitoring devices, such as the number of people trained, the number of experts sent, or the general response of the recipients to the development project.

Communicating Development

In this section, I explore how JICA's discourse communicates assumptions concerning development, by articulating those groups constructed as needing "help"; the development problem to be addressed; and appropriate solutions advanced through the use of communications technologies.

Development intervention directs its attention toward particular groups of people, designated as potentially benefiting from the "help" offered through the project. These groups may be those defined in terms of their official capacities, such as government officials, professional status, such as medical or computer experts, demographic categorization, such as gender, or through some other identity, such as a citizen of a nation or region. Some projects referred to more than one group in their descriptions.

Many JICA communication projects, corresponding with their focus on capacity building, tend to focus on direct recipients, typically defined in terms of their professional or official responsibilities (47 %). The remaining projects focus on indirect beneficiaries, though how they are defined is quite varied. Some refer loosely to the beneficiaries within the geographical area of the project (13 %). Resonating with a modernization paradigm, some of these projects (18 %) focus on the benefits a project brings to the citizens of a "nation": one telecommunications project report describes, for example, the "indirect benefits" accu-

ing to the “the entire country owing to the increased efficiency of administration and promotion of rural industries” (JICA, 1993a: 75).

Demographic categories are typically used to define beneficiaries in many donors’ development projects (Wilkins, 1999). These distinctions are also used in JICA, though not frequently (13 %). Demographic descriptions are most likely to focus on age (projects targeting young people), geography (projects in rural areas) and gender (projects for women), and less so on socio-economic distinctions. Defining communities in ways that emphasize younger populations, women, and rural settings fits a marketing orientation, which bases communication intervention design on audience segmentation, without attending to the more humanitarian concerns like poverty.

Connected with a focus on a designated beneficiary, development discourse also communicates assumptions regarding the nature of the development problem to be addressed. Development programs may focus on political, economic, social, or cultural issues, or even more narrowly defined technological or administrative aspects of development. In the latter group, projects are justified in terms of the technological merits of the communication technologies (27 %) or their ability to improve administrative efficiency (10 %), without reference to broader development goals. Many projects referred to more than one type of development problem in their justification.

Almost half (44 %) of these projects address social issues, mostly within the health and population sector. Some of these also include education, agriculture, and emergency relief projects. Based on Japan’s domestic experience with natural disasters, ODA is given to support telecommunications infrastructures that would help to monitor and predict emergency situations. In Western Samoa, for example, telecommunications systems are supported to foster emergency communications. As this project report explains: “cyclones hit every year in the raining season, resulting in severe damage. People are still suffering from after-effects. The lack of communication media fosters this kind of damage” (JICA, 1993a: 74).

About one-quarter of the projects (28 %) specifically focus on economic issues. Investments in telecommunications and other media facilities are seen as integrally related to capitalist economic development. In essence, “the modernization of the telecommunications, including this Project, is requisite to achieve the reconstruction of the national economy” (JICA, 1991a: 3). These economic justifications are also tied to discussions of foreign investment and tourism issues in some of these discussions.

About one-fifth (17 %) of the projects address political issues, emphasizing national development concerns, such as mapping and military strategies. Political interests are also manifest in discussions of the “friendship and good will” established through collaborations on these projects.

Only a few projects (6 %) consider cultural aspects of development, mostly in relation to issues of national identity. Indonesian projects, for example, conceive of broadcast communications as enabling the spread of a “single national language across the country” (MMTC, 1997: 11).

Other projects describing cultural issues focus on either the value or the threat of foreign television within developing countries. On one side, a study proposing support for an educational television broadcasting network in Paraguay justifies the project as being able to “dispel and eliminate the fear that constant viewing of foreign programs will cause the Paraguayan people to lose their traditional culture” (JICA, 1993b: S-8). On the other side, a report concerning a satellite communications system in Mongolia explains that the “INTELSAT earth station is essential for establishing reliable direct circuit with Western countries through the INTELSAT. In addition, it enables reception of international television program” (JICA, 1991b: 2).

Development discourse communicates assumptions concerning the nature of the problem to be addressed, the type of community with that problem, as well as appropriate strategies for resolving that problem. With this particular set of projects, I focus on the role of communications technologies as a particular strategy for addressing development problems. Next, I consider what this discourse suggests about the role of communications in the development process.

Given previous analyses characterizing JICA’s approach as more focused on capacity building than on intervention, building communication facilities and skills is more likely to be characterized as an end in itself than as a tool toward other goals. These discussions suggest that by establishing communications infrastructures, such as in the areas of telecommunications or information and communication technologies, modernization will be accelerated, just as Schramm had proposed in his early descriptions of development strategies (1963). These discussions focus on the importance of building national infrastructures, circumscribing development as a national process.

Concomitant with this linking of communications technologies with modernization, this discourse strongly encourages the privatization of communication industries. Several reports describing telecommunications projects call for such policy reform in recipient countries (e.g., JICA, 1987; JICA, 1993c; JICA, 1995a; JICA 1996). For example, a study proposing a telecommunications network in Zambia encourages the government to “create environments attractive for private sector investments” (JICA, 1993c: 1). Similarly, a proposal to enhance the educational broadcasting system in Syria encourages Japanese support given that: “the economic liberalization policy using various deregulatory measures has been under way, and as a result, a bright outlook has been opening up” (JICA, 1994: 23).

The role of the private sector appears to be strong in the implementation of these projects as well. Japanese corporations sell communications equipment,

including a wide variety of technologies including cameras, computers, and television equipment, for use in overseas projects as well as in Japanese training centers. These transactions cover more than just the purchase of equipment. These companies are also contracted to maintain that equipment, and their staff hired to serve as expert consultants in feasibility studies and to train others in the use of their equipment.

Communication strategies are not only tied to domestic economic conditions within recipient countries, in calls for privatization, and within Japan, designing strategies that benefit local Japanese industry, but also to global economic conditions. In one case, a discussion of a satellite communication system in Lao justifies Japanese support in terms of building “international telecommunications for nationals, [and] economic development by foreign investment promotion by improving the international communications infrastructure” (JICA, 1995a: 1). Similarly, a feasibility study proposing a telecommunications project in Cambodia justifies this intervention as benefiting global interaction: “The profitable fields in the basic telecommunications service of Cambodia are international telephone and long distance call markets” (JICA, 1995b: 81).

This strong emphasis on economic conditions within national and global spheres suggests the dominance of a modernization approach in guiding communication projects. In an early characterization of the field, Lerner (1958) suggested that media would move individuals from traditional to modern ways of thinking through their exposure to worlds outside their local communities. Similarly, some of the projects described in this body of work assume media exposure will open new worlds to audiences, teaching them not to rely on interpersonal explanations (Ishikawa, 1982: 86). This supports a dominant view of development that values media and technology as superior to oral traditions.

Distinct from this dominant approach however, Japanese discussions of communications strategies are more likely to focus on collective rather than individual experiences. Conceptualizing development as a more structural (when focusing on policy or infrastructure issues) and social phenomena than on individual practice corresponds with participatory approaches to social change. For example, audio-visual materials are believed to influence “the enhancement of consciousness, and thus a greater ability to think, judge and solve problems collectively” (Kunii, 1985: 1). In another case, a project is considered a success when villagers talked more in meetings, and then requested government to give them road repairs and telephone lines (Ishikawa, 1982: 56).

Linking collective processes to political action implies a more activist, or liberation stance. In this particular instance, however, the example just described comes from a project within Japan that was described by informants as influencing subsequent practice. Moreover, neither within this discussion, nor in any others, is there any suggestion that these processes represent “power” struggles against “oppression.” The frameworks implied by “post-development” and so-

cial movement strategies (Escobar, 2000; Wilkins, 2002), positioning social change within power structures, are largely ignored.

Discussion

Japanese approaches to development communication suggest that western literature on the topic is limited. In terms of developing communication strategies, JICA uses a variety of communication technologies in its approaches, guided by a wide range of semantic and conceptual frameworks. Development communication does not appear to attract a cohesive set of approaches or experts. This finding suggests that the term “development communication” itself is fairly limited in its appeal outside of certain dominant development institutions and western academic communities.

Much of the western literature on this topic also focuses on the development of communication strategies as a means toward achieving other goals, as in social marketing or communication campaign strategies. More attention could be given to capacity building as a strategy, clearly favored in Japanese development schemes. Also, a relatively unquestioned value of social marketing may need to be questioned. Japan’s hesitance in engaging in this more interventionist approach needs to be recognized and taken seriously in western development circles.

Although Japanese strategies toward using communications strategies reflect some distinct patterns, for the most part its development discourse bears a striking resemblance to the dominant modernization approaches advocated by many other prominent development institutions. The focus on economic conditions, emphasizing the importance of the private sector, along with attention to national development strategies, national identity, and technological innovation, fits the modernization model advocated in western approaches to development.

Differentiating itself from the dominant development model typically conceived in western literatures, JICA’s conceptualizations of development communication privilege structural and social conditions over individual characteristics, and appear to value process over outcomes. By advocating development strategies that offer skills and equipment, without specifying how they should be used, JICA demonstrates a clear preference for facilitating a process of social change that does not dictate the ultimate goals of the project. The success of the project would then be seen in terms of the number of people trained, the completion of development studies proposing projects, or the transfer of technology. This vision contrasts with a more outcomes-focused social marketing strategy, assessing project success in terms of individual behavioral change.

Hesitance to engage in more outcomes-driven development practice may reflect Japan’s political history, as a recipient-turned-donor intending to com-

pensate for past military conquests, as well as Japan's cultural context. In life-long learning programs designed for older Japanese, for example, the content appears to matter less than the active participation in the educational process (Traphagan, 2000). This attention to collective process suggests a more circular social change model than the linear path prescribed in more psychologically-oriented models popular in western literatures. In addition, Japan's emphasis in social science on more longitudinal social research implies more interest in historical processes than on isolated events, as may be more commonly explored in western social science research (Ito, 2000). These examples illustrate overarching distinctions across western and Japanese approaches toward conceptualizing social change processes.

Although this study highlights the importance of political history and cultural context in understanding development practice, economic conditions are still critical. Given the recent recession within Japan, many government officials and local citizens are beginning to question ODA, leading to serious discussion within JICA concerning the strengthening of evaluation routines. JICA's transition to a more independent status may also contribute to a growing concern in accountability, which might be addressed through more summative, outcomes-based evaluation research.

Japan engages development communication in ways that are distinct from many other large bilateral and even multilateral donors, grounded in its own political-economic structures, social contexts and cultural histories. If development communication is to merit some validity as an international field, recognizing a variety of perspectives and practices is imperative.

NOTES

- 1 It should be noted that there are a wide variety of social movement organizations, with varying degrees of power and resources, using many different strategies to engage in social change.
- 2 This name is subject to change as the program becomes more established.

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