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Research Note

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## Soft Power and the Role of Higher Education in Shaping of Nepal-Japan Relations

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### Abstract

Nowadays, many countries regard that higher education as the best way to promote their national interests in contemporary international politics. Especially big powers started to pay special attention and importance to the use of education as an effective instrument/source of soft power. The foreign students after returning to their home country, often become “*third party*” or “*effective transmitters*” of the culture of their host countries, as well as they contribute their advanced knowledge and ideas which they gained from other countries on their nation’s development. This paper explores the relationship between soft power and higher education; unique characteristics of Japanese foreign policy for internationalization of higher educations and then, its contributions in shaping the bilateral relations between Japan and Nepal and hence further enhancing Japan’s soft power and public diplomacy. In this manner, it aims to contribute to broader research and policy discussions on the internationalization of higher education. Japan has also been contributing paramountcy in Nepal’s socio-economic development through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the forms of grant and technical and loan assistance. As financial engagement is known as a tool of Hard Power, however, Japan through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)’s technical training, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Monbukagakushō), also known as MEXT or *Monbushō* Scholarship, the Project for Human Resources Development Scholarship by Japanese Grant Aid (JDS), and Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) fellowship programs and the Japan Foundation exchange programs has been amassing a quite big number of human resources for Nepal, which is known as Soft Power of Japan through Hard Power investment. And those Nepalese who have become acquainted with Japanese society and culture, become members of JICA Alumni Association Nepal (JAAN) and Japanese Universities Alumni Association Nepal (JUAAN) after returning to Nepal and have played a vital role in promoting cultural tides and developing mutual understanding between the people of the two countries.

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## Introduction

As being one of the international students and especially awarded with MEXT or *Monbushō* scholarship,<sup>1)</sup> these questions always come to my mind: have all the students who have been honored with this special scholarship award returned to their home country after pursuing their higher education or not; and nowadays what are they doing? It is not possible to find actual numbers of all returnees but somehow, to meet this curiosity, I would like to find the answer to these questions: how many of them (the person who has received higher education from top universities and training in Japan) and in which sectors they are involved in Nepal's developments after returning to Nepal? How they function and perform their activities to foster soft power to strengthen the bilateral relationship between Japan and Nepal? To highlight the contributions, I have prepared a research paper on Japan's higher education as the center of "attraction" and its role in shaping Japan and Nepal's bilateral relations and with the references of those Nepalese who have studied in Japan and returned to Nepal. I attempt to write this paper, not because the relevant information and data are available, but this type of study should be initiated to discuss and motivate further studies on the subject in future. 20 years ago, in 2002, B.P Shrestha in his short paper had mentioned that even if there were necessary information and data, it was not easy to make a precise assessment of the contribution to Nepal's development by those Nepalese who have received higher education and training in Japan under different government and non-government scholarship programs such as JICA and the Japanese government (MEXT) scholarships programs<sup>2)</sup> and in which one more program, JDS scholarship has been added from 2015. However, I attempted to prepare some discussion based on whatever information is available.

Countries form close relationships based on economic and cultural tides and indeed engage in conflict also through economic means such as via sanctions or exclusion from trading alliances [Andressen 2016]. As regard to Nepal-Japan relations, it is unique. The relationship between Nepal and Japan was established at people-to-people level. Long before diplomatic relations were established between Japan and Nepal on September 1, 1956, the people of these two countries established connections and friendship a century ago when the Zen Buddhist scholar

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1) Since 1954, the Government of Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has been providing grant in a form of scholarship to foreign students, which sponsors the whole study period of Research, Teacher Training, Undergraduate/Graduate, Japanese studies, College of Technology, and Special Training in Japan. It is known as *Monbushō* or *Monbukagakushō* ( 文部科学省 ) or MEXT.

2) Retrieved from URL <[https://www.np.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_ja/11\\_000001\\_00409.html](https://www.np.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00409.html)> (September 9, 2022).

Ekai Kawaguchi arrived in Nepal on January 26, 1899 and stayed for two and a half years to study the sacred place Lumbini where Lord Buddha was born and to collect Buddhist manuscripts [Thapa 2018: 100]. After his visit, eight Nepalese students visited Japan in 1902 for the first time to study agriculture, mining, papermaking, and mechanical engineering. Since their return to Nepal, there was a long gap during which Nepali students did not travel to Japan, but this practice was revived in 1958 with the Japanese government's MEXT Scholarship [Barua 2002]. Even former late King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev encouraged Nepali students by studying at Tokyo University of Japan. It shows that despite the language barrier, since the early years of the 20th century when every country including Japan was looking to the West for advanced studies and training in modern technology, Nepali students were attracted by Japan's education system and hence adapted "Look East Policy".<sup>3)</sup> Today as well, Japan has emerged as the top destinations preferred by Nepali students to further their higher education like that of Australia, the US, India, New Zealand, and Germany.<sup>4)</sup> *The Kathmandu Post* mentioned that a lot of scholarship schemes are available for deserving students in Japan. Japan also allows students to work up to 28 hours per week. However, students should complete at least 1.3 to 2 years of language classes before they can enroll in Japanese universities. As well as Japan offers government scholarship programs for Nepali students under three different categories – postgraduate and research, undergraduate and specialized training which are provided through open competition.<sup>5)</sup> These are the reasons, why the number of Nepali students preferred Japan for higher education. In 1987, 62 were students out of a total of 248 Nepali nationals; in 2006 there were 1,138 students out of a total of 7,844; likewise, there were 6,466 students in 2013 out of a total of 28,005 which dramatically increased from 2016 (out of total 67,470 students were 22,967)<sup>6)</sup> and reached 29,417 out of a total of 99,866 Nepali nationals in recent year (Statistics Bureau, as of December 2019).

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3) Because Japan's education system played a central role in enabling the country to meet challenges presented by the need of quick absorption of western ideas, science and technology in Meiji Period (1868–1912) and was a factor that Japan built her economy on the solid foundation of education. Japanese development after Meiji Restoration (1868) and also after World War II impressed the then rulers and government of Nepal (Prime Minister Dev Shumsher Rana) to adopt a policy to send Nepali youths to Japan for studies, though a closed – door policy was adopted during that (Rana) regime which is known as Edo period. For more information, see [Barua 2002; Kishimoto 1997].

4) "Most Preferred Destinations," in *The Kathmandu Post* (October 22, 2020). (<<https://kathmandupost.com/miscellaneous/2016/06/10/most-preferred-destinations>>)

5) *The Kathmandu Post* (October 22, 2020). (<<https://kathmandupost.com/miscellaneous/2016/06/10/most-preferred-destinations>>)

6) Data refers from Professor Tanaka Masako's lecture paper which was presented in the Embassy of Japan in Kathmandu on March 23, 2018.

In recent years, the number of students going abroad for further education and accepting foreign students has proliferated. As globalization makes travel easier, ever-increasing students are picking colleges and universities abroad to further higher educations. This pressure gives challenges to every state's foreign policy to the internationalization of their higher education including Japan. According to the survey of McClory's global soft power ranking 2019, Japan is still left behind to internationalize their higher education in the top list due to the language barrier. But we can't ignore that, Japanese higher education also produces significant soft power for Japan as does by American higher education for the United State of America [Nye 2005: 13]. Japan's higher education and training has contributed to the development of the socio-economic and human resources of many developing countries like Nepal. In most of the works of literature, this shed hasn't been covered. Therefore, to highlight this part, with a reference to Nepal, this paper explores the relationship between soft power and higher education; Japanese foreign policy for internationalization of higher educations and then, its contributions in shaping the bilateral relations between Japan and Nepal and hence further enhancing Japan's soft power and public diplomacy. In this manner, it aims to contribute to broader research and policy discussions on the internationalization of higher education.

### 1. Soft Power and Higher Education

As we know that due to globalization and the communication revolutions, any state aims to strengthen its position and prestige in the international arena, as well as to create favorable conditions for its long-term socio-economic development. And to maintain its position, the state uses a variety of foreign policy tools of both hard and soft power [Nye 2009: 7]. However, it is observed that after the Cold War, an increase of interdependence among states tend to use soft power aiming to *achieve* their foreign policy *objectives*. In this context, if we consider the role that *soft power* and *education* play in the foreign policy of the state, it is important to note that soft power is a concept developed in 1990 by political theorist Joseph Nye of Harvard University.

Culture and education have become one of the most effective soft power instruments in achieving their foreign policy goals. Soft power is the "ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the co-operative means of framing the agenda, persuasion and positive attraction" [Nye 2011: 19]. Soft power is a "pull" factor because soft power strategies affect the preferences of other actors by using networks, negotiating and building coalitions on complicated matters, establishing international norms, and drawing on the key resources that attract one another [Nye

2011]. Nye [2004] argues that when a country's culture promotes universal values that other nations can readily identify with, it makes them naturally "attractive" to others. In another work, he said that culture is a "set of practices that create meaning for a society" [Nye 2008: 96] that includes high culture like literature, art and education that appeals to elites as well as television, film, and music aimed at mass entertainment markets. But based on Nye's three pillars<sup>7)</sup> as a foundation, McClory [2019] has expanded them into different categories (like culture, government, engagement, education, enterprise and digital) to understand the meaning of these categories, what they include and why they are relevant to understanding soft power.

Miller [2006] and Phillips and Brooks [2008], argues that the ability of a country to attract foreign students or facilitate exchanges is a powerful tool of public diplomacy that delivers returns well into the long term. Even for states carrying hatred bilateral relations, there is a positive understanding and strong bonding when people study abroad. For example, the large numbers of Chinese students in Japan shows that they have positive and strong bonding at people level of both countries. Although, in more recent years, there has been lack of good official government relations between Japan and China. However, the relationship between local governments and non-state actors between two countries have increased largely in numbers and used for informal diplomacy [Vyas 2011: 4]. Adding to this point, Atkinson [2010] said that educational exchanges give empirical evidence that confirms the positive impact on perceptions of a host country when foreign students return to their home country. Similarly, international student exchanges have also been shown to have positive indirect "ripple effects" [Olberding, J. and D. Olberding 2010] because after going back to their country they often become the third party to advocate people as well as they are expected to become effective transmitters of the language and culture of their host country. These students can gain valuable social capital as well as status after completing their study abroad. As a result, the effectiveness of exposure to the outside world with the help of national education as an instrument of foreign policy is much higher than by military force or other [Amirbek and Ydyrys 2014]. In this sense, education aims to capture these factors as well as the contribution that countries make to global scholarship and the advancement of human knowledge. And it includes a measure of the number of international students in a country, the relative quality of its universities, and the academic output of higher education institutions [McClory 2011, 2019].

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7) Nye's three pillars: The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). See [Nye 2004, 2008].

Nye says higher education leaders can enhance their soft power by less restrictive students visa policies and increasing international students and cultural exchange programs [Nye 2005: 11–14]. As a result, we can see Japan has started a variety of scholarship programs since 1954, cultural exchange programs and less restrictive student visa policies in enhancing Japan's soft power and hence, influence on democratization, peace process, socio-economic and human resources development especially of the developing countries. For example, the Government of Japan dispatched Mr. Yasuhisa Shiozaki, Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Nepal in July 2006. The purpose of the envoy was to express Japan's support to the Government of Nepal in its efforts to push forward the peace process to consolidate democracy and realize permanent peace, as a result of people's movement toward democracy in April 2006 [Tanaka 2006]. Likewise, the late Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister of Japan and former Chairman of Japan-Nepal Parliamentarians' Friendship League as well as President of Cooperation Committee for 50th Anniversary of Japan-Nepal Diplomatic Relations, was a true lover of Nepal who left a positive image as Japanese educated leaders in Nepal.<sup>8)</sup> He has played an enormous role in developing bilateral relations between Japan and Nepal. From the above literature, now we can say that colleges and universities can help raise the level of discussion and advance nations foreign policy by cultivating a better understanding of power and its importance in changing global society. Thus, "*internationalization of higher education*" is necessary for every country in shaping the bilateral relations of a country.

## 2. Education Policy for Internationalization of Higher Education in Japan

Today, many countries regard education as the best way to promote their national interests in a globalized society. Thus, the countries such as China, Germany, Russia, the US, Australia and many developed European countries including Japan have implemented a variety of higher education programs for competent and promising young people from different countries. Especially big powers for the first time in history started to pay special attention and importance to the educational system of their universities by investing huge amount of money which is the soft tool of hard power [Nye 2004; Yang 2010; Watanabe and McConnell 2008; Trilokekar 2010]. Japan is also paying attention to the role of higher education in projecting Japan's soft power by investing heavily in its top universities, scholarships programs and cultural exchange

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8) "Exhibition of Ryutaro Hashimoto Photo Collection: Memories of Nepal" (November 23, 2006). Retrieved from (<https://www.np.emb-japan.go.jp/ann/231106.html>) (May 1, 2021).

programs.<sup>9)</sup> In such a case, the national government can exert soft power to promote their country's image directly or indirectly by creating an environment where cultural, educational and other exchange links with other countries are made easily [Vyas 2011].

Government of Japan includes education in its Development Cooperation Charter, noting it as a prerequisite for quality growth and poverty eradication. Japan has more recently expanded upon this framing in its education strategy '*Learning Strategy for Peace and Growth: Achieving Quality Education through Mutual Learning*,' developed in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The three priority areas identified are: inclusive, equitable and quality learning; human resource development for industry, science, and technology as well as sustainable socio-economic development; and establishing an international/regional network for educational cooperation.

Some countries including Japan report the costs of scholarships and other costs of hosting students from low-income countries as bilateral ODA.<sup>10)</sup> Japan ranked fifth (following Germany, United States, United Kingdom and France) among the 29 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donor countries, which disbursed over half its bilateral education ODA (59%) for such scholarships and tuition costs. Japan's spending on scholarships and hosting students has increased since 2016, representing 30% of its bilateral education ODA in 2018. Total spending by Japan in the education sector has declined over time, from a peak of US\$1.0 billion in 2011 to US\$748 million in 2016, a decrease of 28%. Because it was reported that Japan's increasing focus is on developing human resources in industrial, scientific, or technological settings, which can be categorized under other sectors such as infrastructure or health.<sup>11)</sup> For this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) sets priorities for education, in consultation with other ministries. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) manages most of the costs associated with students from developing

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9) According to data available from MEXT 2018, out of nation's entire budget, 5.4% was allocated for Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology. In order to internationalization of higher education, out of total MEXT budget, 2.1% was for scholarship programs and 0.7% for exchange students' expenses. The data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that Japan was the fifth-largest donor country to education in 2016 (the latest year for which multilateral and bilateral data is available), contributing US\$748 million (in 2018 prices) in education ODA.

10) Bilateral education ODA makes up a large majority of Japan's total education ODA. It stood at US\$577 million in 2018, its highest level since 2013. In 2016, bilateral education ODA made up 73% of Japan's total education ODA, slightly above the OECD Development Assistance Committee average of 70%. As Japan has made relatively few large commitments to education multilateral in recent years, it is expected that this distribution will continue.

11) (<<https://donortracker.org/japan/education>>)

countries studying in Japan and JICA's department for Human Development (led by Senior Vice President Nobuko Kayashima) is also involved in education project formulation, especially related to bilateral funding.<sup>12)</sup>

Since the 1990s, the Japanese government started hosting foreign students in large numbers in national, local/public and private institutes. In 1999, the total numbers of international students were more than 9 times larger than that of 1978 (5,849). In 2003, it reached 109,508. 2003 onwards, the number have been increasing year by year which reached 141,774 including national (10,349), local/public (3,505) and private (127,920). To solve Japan's two main problems: shrinking economy and ageing of the population, the Japanese government amended the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 2009 [Menju 2012; Chi 2020]. This is an extremely controversial topic in Japan, but as time goes on, it becomes an economic necessity, for the population to survive, and Japanese leaders need to increase foreign workers, even if it's starting at the bottom with low skilled workers.<sup>13)</sup> So, the government set a goal to receive 300,000 international students by 2020. This revised immigration policy allows hosting more foreign students officially as Japanese language students since 2011 which dramatically increased the total number of international students and met the government's goal. According to the annual report of Japan Students Services Organization (JASSO) as of May 2019, only the number of foreign students in Japan hit a record high of 312,214 including 228,403 students from higher education institutes and 83,811 students from Japanese language institutes (see Figure 1). To see how impressive this data is, one can refer to the article "Abe vows to bring in more foreign workers" by *the Nikkei Asian Review*, which states that the former Prime Minister Abe has set a goal to issue a new work permit to attract 500,000 people by 2025. The government plans to create a new type of work permit next April for five severely undermanned sectors, including construction, agriculture and nursing care. Tokyo envisions two paths for foreign workers to acquire the new permit. First, they can complete the Technical Intern Training Program, which lasts up to five years and the other route is to pass an exam on technical and Japanese language skills.<sup>14)</sup>

According to *the Yomiuri Shimbun* (November 2, 2020), the education ministry plans to

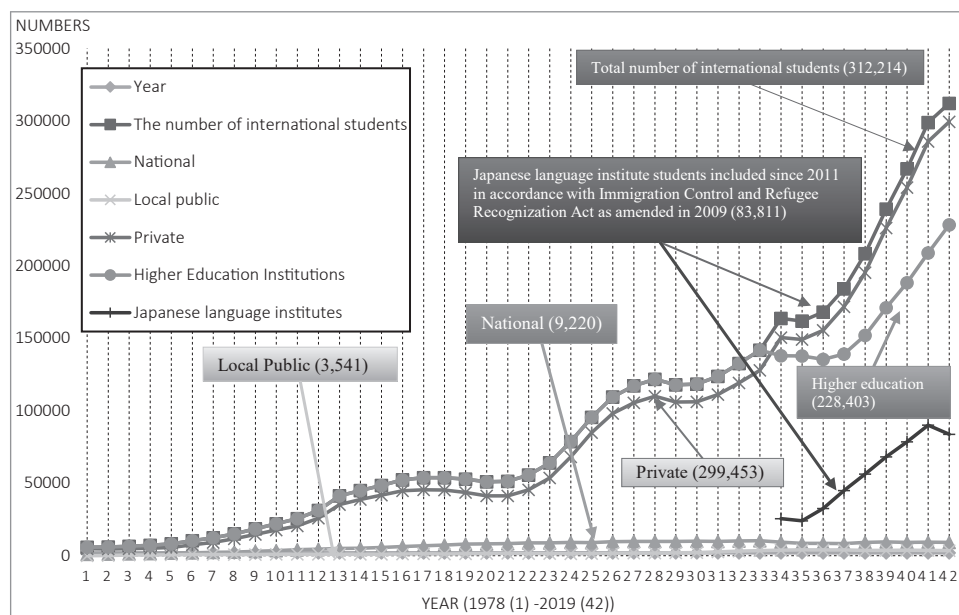
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12) <<https://donortracker.org/japan/education>>

13) "New Age, New Era: Japan is Accepting More Foreign Workers" (June 2018), SchoolLynk / MEDIA by Blink. Retrieved from <<https://schoollynk.com/media/articles/0249e127-afdc-4c71-868f-49afe9bd5363>> (Accessed on January 15, 2020).

14) Retrieved from <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Abe-vows-to-bring-in-more-foreign-workers>> (Accessed on May 18, 2021).





**Fig. 1. Trends in Number of International Students by Source of Funds (as of May 1, 2019)**  
 Source: [Japan Student Services Organization 2020]

allow an increase in the number of foreign students studying at national universities from the 2022 academic year, which is aimed at attracting more talented foreign students to improve university’s research capabilities and garner international recognition. 13,070 foreign students were studying at national universities in the academic year 2019, about 3% of the total number of students. The ratio was lower than that for private universities, which stands at 3.7%. It is argued that when the population of 18-year-olds started to decline since the 1990s, the ministry has maintained the stance not to increase the number of foreign students in national universities because it would place a burden on the finances of competing for private universities. Due to which only two universities in Japan ranked in the top 200 — the University of Tokyo at 36th and Kyoto University at 54th (based on the World University Ranking 2021 which is released by British education magazine publisher Times Higher Education in September). The government has set a goal of having at least 10 universities in the top 100 by 2023, but this is considered difficult to achieve.<sup>15)</sup> Expensive tuition fees, language barriers and Covid-19 pandemic are the

15) See “More international students to be admitted to Japan’s national universities,” the Japan News by *The Yomiuri Shimbun* (3: 53 pm, November 2, 2020). <<https://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0006900930>> (Accessed on April 29, 2021)

factors that make it difficult to achieve this goal. Cultural integration is a difficult task, especially when language barriers are present. To ease this difference, Japanese governments are running larger numbers of language institutes inside Japan and abroad through the Japan Foundation. Among the foreign students studying at universities in Japan in the 2019 academic year, the largest segment — 39.9% came from China. This was followed by Vietnam at 23.5%, Nepal at 8.4%, South Korea at 5.9%, Taiwan at 3.1% and Sri Lanka at 2.3% [Annual Report of Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) 2020]. Hence, the provision of educational opportunities for foreign students is one of the most important tools of soft power to promote both the receiver and the host countries' socio-economic development.

Table 1 shows the numbers of international students in Japan by their major fields. The total number of international students is 312,214 as of May 2019. Of these, 42.6% are majoring in Humanities, 27.1% are majoring in Social Science and 12.9% in Engineering. The number of students in the social science and engineering field has been increased than that of 2018. The number of students in humanities has been decreased. Likewise, Table 1 also shows that there are some numbers of international students in other subjects too. 1.4% are majoring in Science, 1.3% in Agriculture, 1.8% in Health Care, 1.7% in Home Economics, 1.1% in Education, 3.8% in Arts and 6.3% in miscellaneous subjects.

From the literature above, it becomes clear that education is a powerful tool of public diplomacy that delivers returns well into the long term. Likewise, the foreign students who have majored in different subjects (like humanities, engineering, agriculture, education, etc.) after

**Table 1. Number of International Students by Major Fields (as of May 2019)**

Major field	Number of students		Total (%)	
Humanities	133,061	(140,200)	42.6	(46.9)
Social Science	84,714	(74,037)	27.1	(24.8)
Science	4,305	(3,981)	1.4	(1.3)
Engineering	40,145	(35,463)	12.9	(11.9)
Agriculture	4,059	(3,984)	1.3	(1.3)
Health Care	5,466	(5,027)	1.8	(1.7)
Home Economics	5,460	(5,083)	1.7	(1.7)
Education	3,536	(3,541)	1.1	(1.2)
Arts	11,901	(10,219)	3.8	(3.4)
Others	19,567	(17,445)	6.3	(5.8)
Total	312,214	(298,980)	100.0%	(100.0)

\* ( ) indicates figures as of May 1, 2018.

Source: [Japan Student Services Organization 2020]

returning to their home country, often become “third party” or “effective transmitters” of the language and culture of their host countries, as well as they, contribute their advanced knowledge and ideas which they gained from other countries on their nation’s development in different sectors like agriculture, academic, technology, literature and arts, politics, health, etc. Let’s see how this will happen in actual practice by taking an example from those Nepali nationals who were trained and educated in Japan and applied their knowledge in home country.

### 3. Training and Scholarship Programs in Japan for Nepali Nationals

#### 3.1 Training

As a development partner, the Japanese government has been involved in the socio-economic development of Nepal by providing loans, grants and technical assistance since 1954. The overall contribution of Japan’s Official Development Assistance to Nepal up to 2019 amounted to 153 billion JPY for Grant Aid, 121 billion JPY for Yen Loan and 76 billion JPY for Technical Cooperation. For the human resources development, under the technical cooperation program, Japan has dispatched 3,556 technical experts and 1,230 Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV). Dispatching of Senior Volunteers (SV) to Nepal started in 1995 and so far, 184 of them have served in different areas in Nepal [The Embassy of Japan in Nepal 2017]. Similarly, the number of Nepalese trainees accepted in Japan and third countries in various subjects and for varying periods. The data from Table 2, indicates the expansion of training in recent years. JICA trainees were almost entirely from government service. Until the 1980s, only 621 Nepali were trained, which was increased to 1,427 in the 1990s. The numbers of trainees in the 2000s were high with a total of 2,024 compared to before and after 2010 onwards.

The duration of training and seminar used to be for less than one month to above 6 months.

Table 2. Number of Nepalese Trainees in Japan under Technical Cooperation

Period	Number of trainees	Percentage
Up to 81	621	10.4
1980s	625	10.5
1990s	1,427	23.8
2000s	2,024	33.9
2010 – 2017	1,282	21.4
Total	5,979*	100

\* Includes third-country training as well.

Source: [The Embassy of Japan in Nepal 2017]

**Table 3. Fields and Numbers of Trainees under JICA Technical Cooperation (until 2017)**

Subjects /Fields	Numbers of Trainees by fields	Percentage
Science, Technology and Engineering	143	25.49
Agriculture and Allied subjects (including urban and rural development)	99	17.64
Health and Education (Medicine, Environment, etc.)	80	14.26
Administration and Management (including legal, taxations, water, sewage, local governance and others)	111	19.78
Others (Gender, City Planning, dress designing, youth invitation program, etc.)	128	22.81
Total	561	100.0

\* The total numbers of trainees shown in Table 3 did not cover all the returnee trainees; this is the numbers of those Nepal returnees' trainees who took membership in JAAN after completing their training.

Source: The data is compiled from [JICA Alumni Association Nepal 2019]

Table 3 shows only the records of 561 trainees who were trained in Japan from 1974 to 2017 in the various fields. Among the total trainees, 561 are members of JICA Alumni Association Nepal (JAAN) which become easy to know their current situations. Out of the total of 561 trainees, 143 (25.49%) were trained in the fields of science, technology and engineering, 99 (17.64%) in agricultural sectors, 80 (14.26%) in education and health; and 128 (22.81%) were related to other subjects' including city planning, gender-related -subject, dress design, youth invitation programs etc.

Most of the volunteers who have returned to Japan after completing their duties in Nepal, somehow are connected to Nepal directly or indirectly. They are working as a trainer or managing director and so on. They knew about the problems that Nepal was/is facing. So, keeping these things in their mind, they make a project and handover it to the government of Japan. Besides these, as social worker, some of them are providing their service to certain communities in Nepal.<sup>16)</sup> It is also assumed that many of them are still in service, contributing directly or indirectly to the development process with their training and exposure to the Japanese society from which they have learned a positive attitude to work and responsibility.

16) I came to know this after having talk (via email conversations) to ex-volunteers who worked in Nepal for a long time. Due COVID-19 pandemic, I could not visit field. However, I made effort to connect with them through email and collect some information. I had conversation with the ex-volunteers who are working in Komagane Training Center and Nepal Exchange for Citizens Association which are located in Komagane, Japan.

### **3.2 Japanese Government Monbukagakushō (MEXT) Scholarship Program in Nepal**

Since 1954, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been providing a grant in forms of scholarship known as *Monbukagakushō* (文部科学省) to foreign students, which sponsors the whole study period of Research, Teacher Training, Undergraduate/Graduate, Japanese studies, College of Technology, and Special Training in Japan.

As we know the relation between Nepali students and Japan is over a century old. “*Higher Educational Exchange*” is not new practice between Nepal and Japan. It is believed that Nepal adopted the “*Look East Policy*” in 1902. Rev. Ekai Kawaguchi, a Buddhist monk was the first recorded Japanese nationals to visit Nepal in 1899. He visited Nepal four times to pursue his research and studies in Tibetan Buddhism. During his stay in Nepal, he met Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana several times and discussed their respective nations. Prime Minister of Nepal was impressed with the progress of Japan in Meiji Era (that time Japan had used western technology and knowledge was acquired at his own; and carried out his own policy) and therefore, he had sent 8 Nepali students for higher education related to the training in mining, mechanical engineering, arms technology, agriculture and sericulture in 1902 and became the first Nepalese nationals to land in Japan as a student visa. They were also the first government-sponsored students to go overseas for higher education as well as it was the first time that Nepalese rulers looked abroad upon an external world that offered promises [The Embassy of Japan in Nepal 2003: 2–3]. In 1905, Rev. Ekai Kawaguchi also wrote seventy-five pages long letter to PM Chandra Shumsher about how to develop Nepal by suggesting the importance of education for all, improvement of admirations, the establishment of industries, banking system, the building of socio-economic infrastructure and also raised about the possibility of Japanese cooperation for implements of these programs [Barua 2002]. After studying for three years in Japan, they returned to Nepal in 1905 with seeds of Chestnut, Chrysanthemum, Persimmon and Wisteria, and planted for the first time in Kathmandu as the symbol of friendship as well as all of them found employment. In between 1899–1913, several Japanese scholars visited Nepal, including famous Buddhist scholar Junjiro Takakusu [Hidaka and Kawakita 1967]. They had established a direct friendship at the people's level with Japan.

That first attempt became the gateway for educational exchange for Japanese researchers as well as Nepalese researcher. In 1907, Jaya Prithvi Bahadur Singh, King of Bajhang and 1st Editor-In-Chief of *Gorkhapatra*, published a book “*Siksha Darpan*” (mirror of education) about the progress of Japan. In the same way, many Japanese anthropologists like Mr. Hitoshi Kihara

wrote the first article on “*Fauna and Flora of Nepal Himalaya*” in 1952 and edited books like *Fauna and Flora of Nepal Himalaya* in 1955, *Land and Crops of Nepal Himalaya* in 1956 and *People of Nepal Himalaya* in 1957; and also Professor Jiro Kawakita has written many articles related to ethnic people and culture of Pokhara and Tukche areas in the 1960s [Hidaka and Kawakita 1967: 4–13 (Guidelines)]. Likewise, from the 1970s to now, along with Professor Hiroshi Ishii (Kyushu University), Professor Katsuo Nawa (Tokyo University), Tatsuro Fujikura (Kyoto University) and many others have been contributing to enrich the intellectual history and culture of Nepal in Japan.

According to the information given by Mr. H. B. Baruwa, “MEXT scholarship program in Nepal was started from 1957, since after Nepal-Japan diplomatic relationship started on September 1, 1956. Late Siddhi Nath Regmi was the first student to receive the *Monbukagakushō scholarship*. He did his Agricultural Engineering from *Todai* (Tokyo University) and designed the first *Rice Thresher* machine which is still used all over Nepal. Myself is the second MEXT student in 1959. That time travel expenses were self. Currently, Nepali student ranked 3rd among all foreign students which are about 3 lakhs.”<sup>17)</sup>

As of May 2018, 9,423 international students received government-funded scholarships, 3.2% of the total of 298,980 international students in Japan (see Table 4). Although, technically MEXT scholarship is eligible for a country that established diplomatic relations with Japan, a great number of its recipients’ hail from the countries in Asia. Thailand and Indonesia hold first and second place respectively for the ratio of their international students who receive MEXT scholarships to its total number of students in Japan. Of these, 77 Nepalese students are honoured with MEXT national scholarships among 24,331 Nepali students. The total number of international students by country and the percentage of nationally-sponsored international students is 0.3% in Nepal, which is too low than the overall average (3.2%). This data shows that *Monbushō* scholarships granted to the Nepalese for higher education in Japan are very limited. Baruwa has mentioned that in 2012, 2,451 Nepalese students were studying in Japanese Universities [Nepal - Japan Academic Forum 2014].

### **3.3 Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS)Program**

In Nepal, the JDS Scholarship program was started in 2015. The JDS program aims to

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17) This information is based on the conversation on October 16, 2020 via email between an author and Mr. Harendra Bikas Baruwa who is recognised as Nepal – Japan Expert and still works as Special Advisor at Embassy of Japan in Nepal. He is also a life time member of Japanese Universities Alumni Association of Nepal (JUAAN).

Table 4. Number of International Students in Japan (as of May 1, 2018)

Country	Total number of international students (A)	Of which, number of government-sponsored international students (B)	Ratio (B/A)
China	114,950	1,018	0.9%
Vietnam	72,354	660	0.9%
Nepal	24,331	77	0.3%
Korea	17,012	573	3.4%
Sri Lanka	8,329	117	1.4%
Indonesia	6,277	897	14.3%
Myanmar	5,928	238	4.0%
Thailand	3,962	723	18.2%
Malaysia	3,094	214	6.9%
USA	2,932	140	4.8%
Bangladesh	3,640	509	14.0%
Mongolia	3,124	233	7.5%
Other	33,047	4,024	12.2%
Total	298,980	9,423	3.2%

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Retrieved from [https://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1338568.htm](https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1338568.htm) (January 15, 2020).

strengthen the government's administrative capacities in Nepal and to strengthen partnerships between recipient countries and Japan with trained human resources. It has offered opportunities to government officials for two years' master degree course and 3 years' doctoral course (only offered from 2nd phase from 2019) to contribute to the development of the country. According to the plan chart total of 80 fellows will have a master's degree in English from eight different universities of Japan by the end of the program in 2021 (Phase 1) (see Table 5). Out of 80, 40 fellows (1st 2016 & 2nd batch 2017) have already returned to Nepal after successful completion of their 2 years' master degree [The Embassy of Japan in Nepal 2018].

JDS program consists of five sub-components with a focus on two areas. Initial planning for the next phase of the JDS program for the fiscal year 2019, has already begun. JDS fellows further are expected to contribute to the enhanced bilateral relations between Nepal and Japan with the knowledge and skill that they gain from Japan.

In addition to the *Monbushō* scholarship, through the JDS fellowship and JICA technical program, many Nepalese students have managed to receive training and scholarship under non-governmental programs and individual sponsorships on which the information about them is not available. Likewise, the number of trainees and students (mostly from private sectors) who did not return to Nepal on completion of their training and studies, is unknown.

Table 5. Admission Plan for 2016–2019 (JDS PHASE 1)

1. Infrastructure and institutional development for sustainable economic growth	1.1 Economic Policy	International University of Japan	12
		Hiroshima University	8
	1.2 Industrial Development Policy	International University of Japan	8
		Rikkyo University	8
2. Consolidation of peace and steady transition to a democratic state	2.1 Development of Human Resources and Administrative Capacity of Civil Servants	Meji University	8
		International Christian University	8
		Yamaguchi University	8
	2.2 Building of International Relations	Ritsumeikan University	12
	2.3 Improvement of Legal and Judicial System	Kyushu University	8
Total			80

Source: [JICA 2017]

But, among the students who completed their graduation from Japanese universities with the help of government-sponsored scholarship and self-payment, some of them have returned to their home country and are contributing to the development of Nepal. And also, they have been working as a third party or as a transmitter to advocate for other students to choose Japan (host country) for further study. As I said in the starting that I am curious to know about those Nepali student's engagements in Nepal who completed their graduation under the MEXT scholarship. Before I came here, I already knew that JUAAN is an association where Nepali MEXT scholars come together, take membership and contribute their learning as well as some earning for the social welfare of the people of both Japan and Nepal, collaborating with the Japanese governments, Embassy of Japan in Nepal, Japan- Nepal Friendships Society, etc. So, for me, it becomes easy to collect data and information about those scholars from different fields. In total there are 335 registered members and out of the 48 members has not mentioned the major area of their studies. From the official data provided by JUAAN, I have mentioned the educational background of 287 members only. Out of them, 21.3% are from a science background, 21.3% from engineering, 18.5% from humanities, 12.9% in medicine, law and policy 10.8%, agriculture 7.3%, health science 5.2% and 2.8% from language (see Table 6). Although, it was not a complete list of those students who have had higher education in Japan and Nepal returnees. Some of these graduated students from Japanese universities are now working in academic sectors, some are employed in different hospitals, some are running Japanese language



**Table 6. JUAAN Members (general and life) by Major Areas of Study in Japanese Universities (until 2019)**

S. N	Major areas of study in Japanese universities	Number	Percentage
1.	Science (S)	61	21.3
2.	Agriculture (A)	21	7.3
3.	Engineering (E)	61	21.3
4.	Humanities (H)	53	18.5
5.	Health Sciences (HS)	15	5.2
6.	Language (L)	8	2.8
7.	Law/Policy (La)	31	10.8
8.	Medicine (M)	37	12.9
Total		287	100.0

\* The total numbers of members shown in Table 6 did not cover all graduated students from Japan; this is the numbers of those Nepal returnees' scholars who took membership in JUAAN after completing their graduation in Japanese universities.

Source: Compiled data from the member's list of Japanese Universities Alumni Association of Nepal (JUAAN), 2019.

institutes and consultancies, some of them are government officials, some are retired from their jobs and some are working in private sectors.<sup>18)</sup> However, they are involved in different occupations, but when it comes to connecting between Nepal and Japan they all come and put hands together to advocate about Japanese culture and societies to Nepali citizens.

#### 4. JAAN and JUAAN as a Bridge to Connect Nepal and Japan

##### 4.1 JICA - Alumni Association Nepal (JAAN)

JAAN is established by the Nepal trainers and students who obtained various training and academic education under JICA Program in Japan. At first, it was established as Japan-Student and Trainee Alumni Club in 1973, then the club was re-organized as Nepal-Japan Students and Trainees Club in 1982. And, finally after the opening of the JICA Nepal office in Kathmandu in 1978, on 5th November 1999, it was renamed as JAAN. Under the guidance and in collaboration with parent organization JICA Nepal, the Embassy of Japan and other governmental and non-governmental organizations, JAAN conduct and also engaged in various educational, cultural, social, environmental and development activities to nurture and nourish

18) By 2001, almost half of them reported as working in universities, institutions of higher learning and language. Another 30% in private sectors which is Nepal's growing and larger segment of its economy. And 9% as working with government. See [Shrestha 2002].

the relation in people of both countries. It enhances the social fellowship and get together time and often among its members and diplomatic and development support organizations as well as citizens of Japan residing in Nepal [The Embassy of Japan in Nepal 2017]. It also updates and exchanges the knowledge and skill that acquired in Japan and work as the center of experts to sharpen the knowledge of its members. It also published an annual magazine called “*Milan*” and gives more information about the Japanese society and culture.

#### 4.2. *Japanese Universities Alumni Association of Nepal (JUAAN)*

Primarily, this association was established in 1973 as Japan University Student Association, Nepal (JUSAN) and reorganized as JUAAN in 1994. It is the alumni association of Nepali scholars who were graduated from various Japanese Universities. It has actively been involved in fostering the cultural and academic relationship between people of Japan and Nepal by organizing seminar, conferences and symposium. Also organizes regular *Benkyōkai*, *Kangeikai*, orientation program for MEXT students and JASSO Education Fair [Nepal - Japan Academic Forum 2014]. To observe the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relation between Nepal and Japan, JUAAN organized the symposium on “A Journey in Harmony 60 Years of Nepal - Japan Diplomatic Relations” in 2016. Previously, it had organized its first symposium on “A Century of Nepali Students in Japan and its Prospective” in 2002, the second on “Study in Japan: Opportunities and Challenges” in 2006 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relation between Nepal and Japan. Likewise, to mark the 40th Anniversary of JUAAN, it organized the symposium on the “Nepal - Japan Academic Forum” in cooperation with the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan on September 6, 2014. It also manages both the Sakai Lion’s Club and the *Imanishi*<sup>19)</sup> Memorial Fellowship Trust, an annual cash award given for writing an excellent article on Japanese affairs or Nepal-Japan relations [Sharma 2010: 38]. The trust is sponsored by the Sakai Lion’s Club, Kansai.

Such a symposium and discussion are beneficial for the participants, who were government officials and intellectuals from universities and academic institutions. They are also involved in the social welfare of the people by providing fund to the health, education and environmental sectors. Because these activities are helping the promotion of Japanese understanding in Nepal and enhancing friendship between Nepal and Japan. Also, their contribution through such event help to promote Nepal-Japan relationships, develop mutual trust and understanding to maintain healthy relations.

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19) Late *Imanishi* was a veteran alpinist who successfully led the Japanese expedition team to Annapurna in 1956.

### Observations/Conclusion

From the above discussion, what I observed are: for evaluation of the impact of Japanese contribution towards human resources development in Nepal by those Nepalese who have had training and higher education in Japan, reliable data is a necessary pre-condition but due to the absence of adequate and reliable data I could not include all of them. I argued that no external economic cooperation can maintain the process of development, until and unless the manpower of the recipient country is capable of sustaining such externally supported development. It would be more effective if the both governments of Nepal and Japan invest and gives priority to manpower (human resources) development with high-quality modern skill. Trained and skilled manpower equally can benefit both offering country (Japan) and receiving country (Nepal). While higher education in Japan for a longer period is constrained by the relatively limited number (5–6 numbers every year) of *Monbushō* and JDS scholarships, and the duration of technical training by the very nature of technical cooperation remains very short. Also, comparing Table 1 and Table 6, one can raise the question that why there is discrepancy in the numbers between the total number international students and Nepali students by major fields. First of all, Table 6 only shows the number of registered members who are graduated from Japanese universities under *Monbushō* or non-monbushō scholarship. Then, second it depends upon screening pattern of MEXT scholarship procedure. The students from science and technology, and engineering background are given more priorities than other fields. Because, Japan focused on technology and it has not much political sphere of influence in global affairs compare to USA, China and India. However, since the Japan has started JDS programs in Nepal, seeing the pattern of scholarship scheme (Table 5) there is hoped for increment in number of students in humanities and policy sectors in future. Likewise, in the field of language, for special Japanese language studies, every year only one student will be selected for MEXT scholarship. But, overall if we observed the total number of Nepali students in Japan, most of them are language students who come Japan by self-payment or privately-sponsored by non-government organizations such as language institutions, consultancies, NGOs, etc.

The first-ever cohort of Nepali students who had studied in Japan (1902–1905) and transferred technology in mining and agriculture and a book about Progress of Japan which was authorized by social reformist Jaya PB Singh is the best shreds of evidence of then Nepali rulers and intellectuals' priorities and rationale of pioneering in "*Look East Policy*," which many of the ASEAN countries' followed only after in the 1970s and 1980s. It is noted that Japanese

anthropologist Kawakita in the 1960s, Professor Ishii from the 1970s till now, Professor Nawa (*Todai*) and Professor Fujikura (*Kyodai*) and many others in the post-1990s have been contributing to enrich intellectual history, politics and culture of Nepal in Japan, which are also known as *Soft Power* of Japan in Nepali knowledge society.

Japan has also been contributing paramourcy in Nepal's socio-economic development through its ODA in the forms of grant and technical assistance and loan aid. From 1954 to 2019, as a development partner, the Japanese government has been providing 153 billion JPY for grant aid, 121 billion JPY for yen loan and 76 billion JPY for technical cooperation. For the human resources development, under the technical cooperation programs, Japan has dispatched 3,556 technical experts and 1,414 volunteers to Nepal and have served in different areas and sectors. As well as 5,979 Nepali was trained in Japan and third countries in various subject and for varying periods. Out of these, only 561 trainee's contribution is visible because they wanted to connect with both Japanese and trainees by becoming the member of JAAN. It means not that rest of others are not interested in coordinating between host country and home country; they are indirectly contributing in Nepal's development as well as they have become mediators between the people and government of Nepal and Japan. Likewise, every year large numbers of Nepali students graduate from Japanese universities. Some of them stayed in Japan, some are found going to third countries (such as the United States, United Kingdom, European countries, etc.) and some of them returned to Nepal (especially those who already have secured jobs). After returning, they have become the third party to advocate for other students to choose Japan for their higher education and also become effective transmitters of the language and culture of their host country in Nepal. JUAAN's official data shows that only 287 scholars, who obtained higher education from Japanese universities through government-sponsored scholarship and also some non-government sponsored scholars who are contributing to shaping strong bilateral relations between Nepal-Japan with their involvement in different Japanese cultural activities. They are not only shaping Nepal-Japan bilateral relations but at the same time they are contributing in Nepal's development through the knowledge and skills that they obtained from Japanese universities in different fields. This is how Japanese government is using its hard power tool that is ODA in a soft attractive manner to internationalize their higher education. And, this financial engagement in human resources development seems to be the best investment to make their image good in international community. Therefore, Japan through JICA's technical training, MEXT, JDS, and JSPS scholarship programs in higher education and training and as well as the Japan Foundation cultural exchange programs has been amassing a quite big number of human

resources for developing countries including Nepal, which is known as *Soft Power* of Japan through *Hard Power* but soft attractiveness investment.

It has been still pointed out that high-quality international students' flow to Europe and the United States and do not choose to pursue their higher education in Japan. It is believed that the language barrier has become the main reason due to which Japan could not attract more talented foreign students to improve the university's research capabilities and garner international recognition. However, with the amendment of the Immigration Control and Recognition Act in 2009, the number of international students belonging to Japanese language institutes and the number of Japanese language institutes have been increased since 2011 (see Figure 1). The annual survey done by the JASSO and the Japan Foundation shows that to alleviate the language problem, Japanese governments and private sectors are sponsoring Japanese language classes in home country and overseas too. It helped in the internationalization of higher education by attracting greater numbers of foreign students to Japanese universities. In 1978, there were only 5,849 international students which have dramatically increased and reached 163,697 in 2011. As of December 2020, there are 345,800 international students in Japan, including higher education institutions (includes graduate school, university/undergraduate, junior college, college of technology, professional training college and university preparatory course) and Japanese language institutes. In 1987, 62 were Nepali students out of a total of 22,154 international students which dramatically increased from 2016 (22,967 Nepali students out of total Nepali nationals in 2016) and recently reached 29,417 students out of a total of 99,866 Nepali nationals. Varieties of scholarship schemes, advanced studies and training in modern technology, allowance of work permit for students up to 28 hours per week, satisfying wage and security are the main reasons to increase in the numbers of foreigners in Japan including Nepali. Among the foreign students studying in Japanese universities and language schools, Nepal ranked 3rd position covering 8.4% after China and Vietnam. Everything has pros and cons. On the one hand, Nepali youths would get chance to explore Japan's advance technology, learn Japanese culture and society. On the other hand, the increasing number of Nepali diasporas has been creating counterproductive images of Nepal in Japan that is huge asylum seekers and crime involvement which should be downsizing through more public discourse, awareness and knowledge-based partnership between our two countries.

Realizing the fact that human resources development is important for the self-supporting development of Nepal, the Government of Japan continuously has been providing technical training and dispatching volunteers and experts to Nepal, *Monbushō* Scholarship and recently

JDS Fellowships. As a result, every year much Nepalese return home after completing their study, research and JICA's technical training in Japan. And, those Nepalese who have become acquainted with Japanese society and culture, become members of JAAN and JUAAN and have played a vital role in promoting mutual understanding between the people of the two countries. As well these organizations helped to update and exchange the knowledge and skill acquired in Japan and work as the center of experts. These associations which is established by ex-students and ex-trainees has become a "bridge" to connect Nepal and Japan. Through development cooperation, cultural exchange and scholarship programs Japan has succeeded to make a good image in Nepal. This is why, higher education is the best instrument of soft power for both countries, receiving country (Nepal) and the transmitting/hosting country (Japan). The contribution of Japanese higher education is not only effective for enhancing their soft power and public diplomacy but also effective on the socio-economic development and human resources development of developing countries including Nepal. It plays a greater role in shaping the diplomatic and bilateral relations with foreign countries both at the government level and at on people -to -people level. Proudly, ODA has been recognized as the foundation of Japanese internationalization for making it distinct from several countries such as the US, UK, Canada and Germany. Both international development assistance and internationalization of higher education are the two foundation pillars of Japan's international relations, as it's soft power and public diplomacy.

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