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Reorienting Foreign Policy: Caribbean-Japan Relations*

Kavita Johnson**

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the 2000s, Caribbean states have been experiencing several challenges to economic growth and development, such as the loss of preferential market access and reduction in US aid. As a result, they have been trying to reposition themselves in the changing international relations sphere by reorienting their foreign policy strategies. This article posits that Caribbean states have been placing more emphasis on diversifying their relationships with non-Western powers, such as Japan, as an economic adjustment strategy. In particular, the article examines how Caribbean states have been pursuing “unorthodox” foreign policies due to their limited resource base. As a result, they have been creatively using their value-based resources such as votes and quality advocacy in international fora, in

exchange for economic assistance from Japan. In the context of small states in the international system, the article argues that having acknowledged their vulnerabilities due to their smallness, Caribbean states have shown resilience and resourcefulness in crafting these strategies as they seek to reposition themselves.

Key words: Caribbean; Caricom; Japan; Foreign Policy; Small States.

Reorientando la política exterior: las relaciones entre el Caribe y Japón

RESUMEN

Desde principios de la década de 2000, los Estados del Caribe han experimentado varios desafíos frente al crecimiento económico y el

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desarrollo como la pérdida del acceso preferencial al mercado y la reducción de la ayuda estadounidense. Como resultado, han intentado reposicionarse en la cambiante esfera de las relaciones internacionales reorientando sus estrategias de política exterior. Este artículo argumenta que los Estados del Caribe han puesto más énfasis en diversificar sus relaciones con potencias no occidentales, como Japón, como una estrategia de ajuste económico. En particular, el artículo examina cómo los Estados caribeños han seguido políticas exteriores “poco ortodoxas” debido a su limitada base de recursos y, como resultado, han estado usando creativamente sus recursos basados en valores, tales como votos y participación de calidad en foros internacionales, a cambio de ayuda económica de Japón. En el contexto de los pequeños Estados en el sistema internacional, el artículo argumenta que habiendo reconocido sus vulnerabilidades debido a su pequeño tamaño, los Estados caribeños han demostrado resiliencia e ingenio en la elaboración de estas estrategias, mientras buscan reposicionarse.

Palabras clave: Caribe; Caricom; Japón; política exterior; Estados pequeños.

INTRODUCTION

Caribbean states have, historically, practiced foreign policy strategies pursuant to the premise that, due to their small size, they are in a disadvantaged position in the international system and, therefore, need special consideration. Their foreign policies have typically been focused on receiving concessions and

economic preferences on account of their smallness and hence, a dependence on external assistance. However, since the 1990s, Caribbean states have experienced challenges to economic growth and development including the loss of preferential market access and a reduction in aid. To cope with these challenges, they have tried to reorient their foreign policy strategies towards strengthening and expanding their relationship with non-Western powers like Japan.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Caribbean's growing relations with Japan has been integral to its economic adjustment strategy as the region copes with the changes in the international system. Japan has been providing Caribbean states with economic assistance in the form of grants, loans and technical cooperation. From 2015-2019, Official Development Assistance (ODA) in grants and technical cooperation to the Caribbean Community (Caricom) was approximately US\$123 million (see Table). There has been an increase in the number of high-level visits from Caribbean governments to Japan and vice versa. Japan has even augmented its efforts to strengthen its relations with Caribbean states by pledging to assist them with financial and technical assistance. This is despite the regional countries being graduated to middle-income countries and therefore no longer eligible for concessionary loans on the basis of per capita income. During his tour of Latin America and the Caribbean in July 2014, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Trinidad and Tobago and held the first Japan-Caricom

Summit Meeting with other Caribbean leaders, indicating the intention to revise this basis and outlined the three pillars of Japan's Caricom foreign policies (MOFA, 2014). The following year, in September 2015, he also visited Jamaica where he pledged support of JMD\$57million in cultural grant funding. He discussed a new technical cooperation project in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy which would benefit other Caricom countries (Bryan, 2015). Abe's visits to the Caribbean are indicative of the region's importance especially as it was on the heels of China's President XI Jinping visit to the region.

The Caribbean stands thousands of miles from East Asia, yet this distance has not deterred Japan's interest in these small island states. Over the years, Japan has been primarily focused on countries in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America. Why is Japan interested in Caricom states? According to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), interest in the region is derived from the existing commonalities and shared fundamental values that they have with Caribbean states, such as democracy, and the market economy. They also have in common vulnerabilities, for example, natural disasters, faced by island states (MOFA, 2012). Additionally, Japan's foreign policy towards CARICOM member states is purported to be geared towards the strengthening of economic relations, supporting the stable development of the region, and advancing cooperation in the international arena (MOFA, 2012). While there are indeed economic motivations, other factors include Japan's aspirations to become a rule shaper and to garner political support.

This article hypothesises that Caribbean states have been placing more emphasis on diversifying their relationships with non-Western powers, such as Japan, as an economic adjustment strategy. The first section provides a background outlining the changes in the international system that have precipitated the need for Caribbean states to refocus their foreign policies. This paper will provide an examination of Caribbean-Japan's relations since the 2000s showing how Caribbean states, due to their limited resource base, have been pursuing "unorthodox" foreign policies strategies, creatively using their value-based resources, such as votes and quality advocacy in international fora, in exchange for economic assistance from Japan. In doing this, the motivations behind Japan's interest in the region will also be highlighted.

Definitions of the Caribbean are many and varied and so it is important at this juncture to note what is meant by "Caribbean" in this article. The most useful definition for this paper is by Payne and Sutton (1993) who define the region as being characterized by a combination of geography and history, closely linked to the US by geography, language and culture, while still being tied to European history and sentiment. This definition is the most practicable as it includes the islands in the Caribbean Sea, as well as Guyana and Belize, which share a similar political and economic history. Therefore, the countries which are included in this analysis are those which have a similar history, culture, political system, identity, and population size and which are also members of the regional organization

representing the Caricom.¹ Whenever the terms “Caribbean”, “Caribbean states” and “Caricom” are used in this article, it is only in reference to these English-speaking independent states.

The academic literature on the Caribbean’s relationship with Japan is limited. Most studies speak of Latin America and the Caribbean as one group with very few references to CARICOM or English-speaking Caribbean states. Lumsden (2016) has documented this relationship in his article in which he provides details on Japan’s relationship with Caribbean States since the mid-2000s. According to Lumsden (2016), Japan’s recovery from its economic downturn in the 1990s has resulted in re-engagement with Caribbean states. He opines that Japan’s “unique, bottom-up approach to investment that Japan brings to the table opens up new possibilities for growth and development in the region” (para. 3). This paper examines the Caribbean’s relationship with Japan, arguing that Caribbean small states have shown resilience and resourcefulness in crafting strategies to reposition themselves in the international system. The paper helps to fill the lacunae in the literature on the Caribbean’s engagement with Japan as well as to add to the existing literature on the foreign policies of Caribbean states. In the context of small states in the international system, the article argues that having acknowledged their vulnerabilities

due to their smallness, Caribbean states have shown resilience and resourcefulness in crafting these strategies as they seek to reposition themselves in the international system.

BACKGROUND

Stemming from their history of colonialism, the economic survival of Caribbean states has been tied to their relationship with Britain for which they have relied on for aid, investments, and special concessions. Caribbean states share a long history of British rule, under which they specialized in the production of sugar and bananas for export primarily to the European markets. Even after decolonization, they remained heavily dependent on their agricultural sectors despite numerous attempts to diversify their economies and the steep competition they faced from producers in Central American countries. Under the Lomé Conventions, for example, Caribbean states used to enjoy preferential treatment and access to the former European Economic Community (EEC) markets for most of their exports, as well as various development aid programs. This one-way preferential system, however, was gradually replaced by two-way free trade agreements which resulted in a loss of preferential market access treatment for Caribbean states. Consequently, they faced some difficulties in readjusting themselves into the current

¹ Caricom comprises Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago; as well as Montserrat which will be excluded since it is a British Overseas Territory; and Haiti and Suriname which are not English-speaking countries.

international economic arena compounded by the fact that most of their economies were heavily dependent on the agricultural sector and their products lacked competitiveness in an open market.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the region started to lose its once important strategic value to the US as security concerns changed dramatically to focus on countries in the Middle East, for example. During the Cold War period, the Caribbean region marked an area of great geopolitical importance to the US, who feared “growing leftist” threats to the prevailing pro-Western ideological order in the region at that time. Notably, in an effort to counter and contain this growing threat, the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) was conceived by the US administration in 1983. There was, however, a significant reduction in US aid. During the 1980s, US aid to the region amounted to US\$5.5 billion but by the 1990s it declined to about US\$3 billion, which continued to decline throughout the 1990s to 2000s (Meyer & Sullivan, 2012). This dwindling lack of attention and interest from the US and other traditional trading partners left Caribbean states facing harsher economic realities.

Given the economic predicament that Caribbean countries began to face, they had to find new ways of securing economic assistance. They directed their attention towards developing new partnerships with countries who were willing to fill the void left by traditional

partners and sources of aid. Notably, China’s presence in the region has presented numerous opportunities in areas of investment and infrastructural development. It is estimated that over the last two decades, China has invested an estimated US\$8.25 billion in the Caribbean (Bridglal *et al.*, 2019). China has provided Caribbean states with much needed assistance that their status as middle-income countries makes it difficult for them to access. During the period of 2005-2018, accumulated loans from Chinese banks to Latin America and the Caribbean region were more than US\$140 million and, of that, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica accessed US\$4.7 billion (Bridglal *et al.*, 2019). China’s aid comprises mostly concessional loans which predominantly focus on infrastructural development projects.² As will be discussed later, Japan’s aid to the region, though far less than that of China’s, tends to be wider ranging in terms of areas of development such as energy efficiency, poverty reduction, and environmental, among others. Against this backdrop, the Japanese have consistently tried to maintain relations with CARICOM as a reminder that they are formidable partners not to be forgotten under China’s glamour.

Caribbean states have also argued that their classification as middle-income countries, has rendered the region relatively stable and not poor enough in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, when compared

² Some examples of concessional loans are US \$58 million and US \$41 million to Jamaica; US \$950 million to Trinidad and Tobago; US\$130 million and US \$45 million to Guyana which were directed to infrastructural development projects.

to other developing countries. As a result of this, Caribbean countries have seen a reduction in the allocation of aid which is mostly directed to low-income countries and increased stringent conditions attached to loans from international funding agencies. This has also prevented them from benefitting from international debt relief. Caribbean leaders have argued that “per capita income was the wrong way to measure development” as it obscures the many challenges faced by Caribbean small states (UNGA, 2013, para. 67). Among these challenges are environmental vulnerabilities such as frequent threats from hurricanes which impact infrastructure, tourism, and agriculture.

China’s growing influence in the Caribbean has been perceived as a hegemonic challenge to the US. As a result of this recalibration of power, there are opportunities for countries like Japan to position themselves in order to play a more influential role and to strengthen the relationship with Caribbean countries. This relationship is one which spans areas of investments, trade, ODA and cooperation in international fora. Japan has been trying to play a more active role in world affairs and global governance which aligns with its aspirations for a permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council. The Caribbean region, therefore, represents an area for mutually beneficial exchange and to garner political support from Caricom’s voting bloc. For Caribbean states, the relationship with Japan is an opportunity to cooperate and receive assistance on a wider range of areas directly related to their vulnerabilities as small states, such as climate change and sustainable

development. Caricom states are cognizant of the political capital they hold as an important bloc of fifteen votes in international bodies.

CARIBBEAN-JAPAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The 20th anniversary of Japan-Caricom Consultations was commemorated in 2014. The Japanese government designated the year as “Japan-Caricom year” and asserted that this was a demonstration of its commitment to the cooperation and development of its relationship with the Caribbean region. As of 2022, there have been seven (7) Ministerial Conferences and fifteen (15) Japan-Caricom Consultation meetings which inter alia demonstrates Japan’s commitment to deepen its relationship with the Caribbean region in international fora such as the United Nations (UN).

At the first Japan-Caricom Ministerial-Level Conference held in Tokyo, “A New Framework for Japan-Caricom Cooperation for the Twenty-first Century” was adopted on November 8, 2000 (MOFA Japan, 2010). The framework outlined a number of political, economic and social areas of collaboration, placing emphasis on cooperation

1. for the economic and social development of Caricom member states; and
2. for integration into the global economy; active economic interaction and exchanges between member states and Japan.

Following this, the Japan-Caricom Friendship Cooperation Fund was established to strengthen friendly and cooperative relations between Japan and Caricom countries. It is

made up of a contribution from the Government of Japan's fiscal budget as well as donations from the private sector.³ A scheme for the management and operation of the Fund was proposed to the Caricom Secretariat, for which all Caricom member countries were consulted, and the proposal accepted in November 2001. The program has supported development in agriculture, tourism promotion, waste management, export promotion, support to small and medium enterprises, education, and health. Up to 2012, under the program, over US\$500 million in technical assistance and ODA had been disbursed. More recently, during the pandemic, US \$300,000 was donated to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (Carpha) for COVID-19 PCR test collection kits (Embassy of Japan in Trinidad and Tobago, 2021).

During his visit to Latin America in 2004, Japan's former Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi proposed a "Vision for a New Japan-Latin America and Caribbean Partnership (the Koizumi Vision)", which called for the creation of a new, future-oriented relationship between Japan and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (MOFA, 2004). This address would have marked a key moment in the reactivation of Japan's general foreign policy with developing countries. It would have represented the move to strengthen ties with the developing world, and hence, with Latin America and Caribbean states. The

timing of Koizumi's vision was in line with China's growing ascendancy not only in Asia but in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this vein, the "renewal" of Japan's diplomacy aligns with the need to maintain its regional and global status.

In keeping with the Japan-Caricom framework, a "Partnership for Peace, Development and Prosperity between Japan and the Member States of the Caribbean Community (Caricom)" document was prepared in September 2010. It was asserted to give further direction to future Japan-Caricom relations (MOFA, 2010). Since then, there have been regionally implemented projects in thematic areas of poverty reduction, disaster management, information technology, trade and investment promotion, development of small and medium enterprises, agriculture and fisheries, and tourism and culture. Support was also given for the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the construction of the headquarters of the Caricom Secretariat in Georgetown, Guyana (Caricom Secretariat, 2002).

The three pillars of Japan's Caricom policies are as follows:

1. Cooperation towards sustainable development, including overcoming the vulnerabilities particular to small island states.
2. Deepening and expanding fraternal bonds of cooperation and friendship.

³ The contribution from the 2001 fiscal budget amounted to US\$100,000.

3. Cooperation in addressing challenges of the international community (MOFA, 2014).

This first pillar is particularly significant because it proposes that Japan, in considering the vulnerabilities particular to small island states that Caricom member states face. It highlights the importance of providing support other than on per-capita income basis. As a result, it (Japan) will conduct field surveys on future cooperation.

Over the last two decades, Japan has cooperated with Caricom in many areas of development including cultural and educational exchanges, financial and technical cooperation, trade and investments, sustainable development and on addressing other issues in international fora. Cultural diplomacy has been an important feature of Japan's foreign policy. The most visible and successful example has been the Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) programme. The JET programme was proposed in the 1980s to improve Japan's global image through the promotion of international exchange and foreign language education. Assistant language teachers from English-speaking countries are invited to Japan to teach English in secondary schools and to further promote cultural exchange. Of the 40 participating countries, six are from the Caribbean. Similarly, the Japanese government has provided fully funded scholarships through MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) annually to students who wish to study in graduate courses

at Japanese universities as Research Students.⁴ To facilitate further educational cooperation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed between The University of the West Indies and Sophia University.

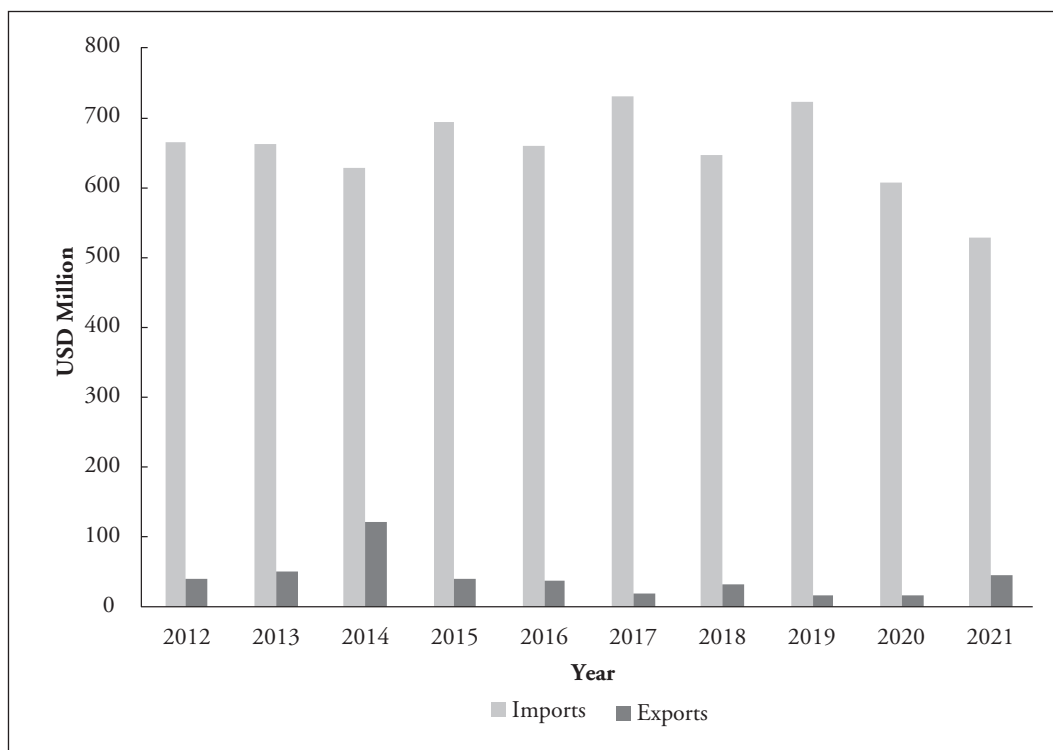
In the area of private sector investments, Marubeni Corporation, a Japanese owned company, became a major shareholder of the Jamaica Public Service (JPS) in 2007 when it purchased 80 percent of the shares. In 2011, it sold shares to Korea East-West Power and so currently retains 40 percent of the shares in the Jamaica's sole electricity provider. In 2020, three Mitsubishi companies (Mitsubishi Gas Chemical, Mitsubishi Corporation, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries) joined with the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago (NGC) and Massy Holdings (Massy) to launch a methanol and dimethyl ether manufacturing plant for Caribbean Gas Chemical Limited (CGCL). The three Japanese companies hold 70 percent of the shares in the CGCL representing a total investment of one billion US dollars (Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, 2021).

TRADE

There is an overwhelming trade imbalance between Caricom member states and Japan, where the value of imports exceeds the value of exports (see Figure 1). Imports have been consistent since 2012 which largely comprise motor vehicles. Japan offers an extremely large market with a population of approximately 125.8 million, yet Caribbean states are still

⁴ Students are required six months of Japanese language training.

Figure.
Value of Trade with Japan 2010-2021



Source: Compiled by author based on data collected from CARICOM Regional Trading Information System, <http://www.caricomstats.info/tradysyonline>

unable to penetrate the Japanese market. This implies that there is still work to be done on trade strategies. To date, there is no Caricom-Japan free trade agreement in place as with the case of Economic Partnership Agreements shared with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In 2019, the value of goods imported was US\$723 million compared to US\$15million that was exported. Of that US\$15million, Jamaica exported US\$7 million in Blue Moun-

tain coffee for which Japan is the main market and has purchased an average of 85 percent of the island's coffee for the last 10 years (Jackson, 2020). By 2021, the value of exports to Japan increased to US\$45 million, of which 75 per cent is attributed to exports from Trinidad and Tobago. Methanol, valued at USD\$26 million, was exported following the launch of the manufacturing plant at the CGCL due to Japanese investments (Office of the Prime Minister Trinidad and Tobago, 2022).

The CARICOM market is small in comparison to other regions like Latin America. However, it has been growing which shows an economic motivation behind Japan's cooperation in the region. Additionally, the following sections will show that motivations are tied to attracting political support and maintaining global status.

ODA: GRANTS, TECHNICAL COOPERATION, LOANS

ODA is classified into bilateral aid and multilateral aid. Japan's ODA to Caribbean states is largely bilateral and is provided in grant aid, technical cooperation, and loan aid among others including the dispatch of volunteers. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is the agency in charge of administering Japan's ODA and supports socioeconomic development in developing countries like the Caribbean, through various types of assistance methods mentioned earlier. JICA offices have been established in three Caricom countries: Belize, Jamaica, and St. Lucia. The Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) program, operated by JICA, dispatches volunteers to developing countries to work in various areas of technical and social development as part of Japan's ODA. Under this program, volunteers have been dispatched to the region since as early as the late 1980s.⁵ In February 2022, JOCVs were dispatched to St. Lucia, after all had been recalled worldwide in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, Japan's ODA to Caricom states was approximately US\$23.93 million in grant aid and technical cooperation, an increase from US\$15.76 million in 2019 (see Table 1). From 2017-2019, grants amounting to US\$435 million were given to projects for the rehabilitation of fishery buildings in Dominica, and the reconstruction of bridges in Cul-De-Sac Basin in St. Lucia. Also, for the introduction of renewable energy and the improvement of the power system in Guyana and the improvement of the emergency communication system in Jamaica. In 2017, Jamaica received an ODA loan of approximately US\$15 million for an "Energy Management and Efficiency" program.

In 2019, the total value of JICA programs to Caricom was JPY2.3 billion (US\$ 16.5 million) which accounted for 10.5% of the portfolio to Central America and the Caribbean.

Bilateral ODA has been used as a critical and important tool in advancing Japan's political interests, such as to cultivate friendly relations with developing countries to garner support in international bodies. In a January 2006 speech, then Minister of MOFA, Taro Aso, declared Japan's ODA as a political policy measure. He asserted that it should be used abundantly in the future for the objectives of enhancing and expanding ties between Japan and countries with the same interests and aspirations as Japan. Tarte (2008) opines that policymakers have sought to use ODA to bolster diplomatic support for Japan's position and, thereby, project its domestic norms as be-

⁵ The first set of volunteers were dispatched to Jamaica in 1989, St. Lucia in 1995 and Belize in 2000.

Table.
ODA Grant Aid and Technical Cooperation 2015-2020

Countries	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		Total
	Grants	TC	Grants	TC	Grants	TC	Grants	TC	Grants	TC	Grants	TC	
Antigua	1.14	0.37	4.93	0.21	1.78	0.43	1.99	0.2	1.19	0.02	0.09	0	12.37
The Bahamas	0	0.03	1.84	0.06	0	0.02	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	2
Barbados	0	0.02	0	0.04	0.89	0.04	0	0	0	0.04	0	0	1.06
Belize	0.99	0.88	0.99	1.09	0.17	1.25	0	0.9	0	0.92	0.21	0.6	7.95
Dominica	0.37	0.08	2.9	0.01	0	0.16	2.06	0.3	0.06	0.48	0.47	0.2	7.03
Grenada	1.09	0.09	4.25	0.08	0.09	0.12	0.09	0.1	0.07	0.05	1.87	0	7.86
Guyana	0.39	0.7	0.08	0.58		1.13	0.27	1.4	2.7	0.13	9.7	0.2	17.25
Jamaica	1.36	2.21	0.55	2.56	1.21	4.49	1.04	2.1	0.48	1.86	5.69	1.3	24.8
St. Kitts & Nevis	0.97	0.61	1.59	0.08	2.18	0.09	0	0.1	0.16	0.02	1.87	0.1	7.71
St. Lucia	2.53	0.51	4.16	1.42	1.96	2.24	0.28	1.6	1.83	1.68	0.15	1.1	19.39
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	3.2	0.29	3.43	0.32	1.78	0.45	0	0.3	3.7	0.34	0	0.5	14.28
Trinidad & Tobago	0	0.04	0.46	0.02	0.04	0	0.21	0	0	0.03	0	0	0.84
Total	17.87		31.65		20.52		12.79		15.76		23.93		122.5

Source: Compiled by author based on data collected from Annual JICA Reports 2016-2021.

ing in common interests with the interests of developing states.

POLITICAL SUPPORT AND QUALITY ADVOCACY

Over the years, Caribbean states have displayed strong diplomatic power not only in their numbers as a voting bloc but also in the quality of their advocacy. Leaders have an outstanding track record of taking leading and long-serving roles in international fora, which can be observed from as early as the 1970s in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the New International Economic Order (NIEO). Today,

Caribbean states continue to occupy spaces institutionally by displaying a high level of participation in key international organizations.

According to Maki Kobayashi, director of the Division of the Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean, MOFA, Caribbean representatives have proven to be quite eloquent in their speech and decorum. As a result, they show a higher ability to advocate in English (Kobayashi, 2014). Moreover, Ken Shimamashi, Advisor for Japan-Caricom Friendship Year Committee and former director of the LA Bureau, MOFA asserts that there is a growing importance of Caribbean states in the international community as evidenced in the partici-

pation of nations in the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (Cofcor). Caricom representatives, he opines, play a strong role in international advocacy (Shimanashi, 2014). This is undoubtedly important to Japan's moves to increase cooperation in promoting issues such as Climate Change and reform of the UN Security Council.

IWC Membership and Voting

Whaling is a widely controversial issue which generates mostly negative sentiment in the international community. Japan has consistently maintained a pro-whaling stance, arguing that the act is necessary for scientific research purposes.⁶ Consequently, Japan has faced strong opposition for its stance and has had to contend with strict anti-whaling regulations by the International Whaling Commission (IWC).⁷ In 1986, the IWC implemented a moratorium on commercial whaling, allowing an exception for aboriginal groups and researchers. The anti-whaling bloc within the IWC, consisting of countries such as the UK and the USA, oppose whaling altogether and have condemned

Japan's consistent claim to whaling rights in the name of science.⁸ Despite this strong opposition, the Japanese government continued to focus its efforts on capturing a large number of whales through its scientific research program (Hirata, 2008).

Japan has consistently sponsored proposals aimed directly and indirectly at ending the moratorium. From the 1980s onwards, both the pro and anti-whaling camps within the IWC began to inveigle other countries to join the organization in a bid to seek sympathizers for their cause. The pro-whaling camp led by Japan, for example, began luring countries from the Caribbean and Pacific Islands. Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines are members of the IWC.⁹ Over the years, these countries have been the subject of great criticism for trading their voting power to maintain good relations with Japan, and subsequently, secure economic assistance. Allegations have also been made that IWC membership is funded by Japan (Browne, 2001).

⁶ Japan began scientific whaling research in 1987, carrying out its program in the Antarctic under the Japanese Antarctic Research Program (Jarpa). (Hirata, 2008).

⁷ The IWC is the major international forum on whaling and was established to ensure the proper conservation of whale stocks and, hence, see to the orderly development of the whaling industry. It was established under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which was signed in Washington D.C. on December 2, 1946. See International Whaling Commission, <http://www.iwc.int>.

⁸ The Pro-whaling camp in the IWC is led by Japan, Iceland and Norway.

⁹ Antigua and Barbuda joined in 1982; Dominica and St. Kitts and Nevis in 1992; Grenada became a member in 1993; St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1981. Jamaica was a member 1981-1984. See International Whaling Commission, <http://www.iwc.int>.

In 2006, Japan and the pro-whaling camp succeeded in passing a nonbinding resolution to oppose the moratorium on commercial whaling. The St. Kitts and Nevis Declaration, sponsored by the Caribbean member states, was passed by 33-32 votes and stated that the moratorium on commercial whaling was unnecessary as the IWC's scientific committee identified many species as abundant (Hirata, 2008). All Caribbean member states voted in favor of the resolution. Furthermore, Japan hosted the Conference for the Normalization of the International Whaling Commission in 2007 to promote the anti-moratorium campaign. However, notably, while most anti-whaling members of the IWC did not attend, representatives from the six Caribbean member countries were present.

Following, the passing of the St. Kitts and Nevis Declaration, Caribbean member countries were criticized for selling their votes in the IWC in exchange for loans and grants from Japan. This criticism was not unfounded and derives from the fact that these Caribbean countries stand to benefit from whale watching and not whaling activities. Taking into consideration that tourism is the leading industry in terms of employment, revenues, and source of foreign exchange, there is no clear line of reasoning as to why they would adopt a pro-whaling stance.

Over the years, Japan has sent experts in the field of fisheries to Caribbean states and additionally, instituted a Development Study for the Formulation of a Master Plan for Development and Management of Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Caribbean. This has led to a general perception that the ODA giving loans

and grants to the Caribbean bloc in the IWC is aimed at influencing votes. To further exacerbate the situation, in 2001, a senior official of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, Maseyuku Komatsu, openly expressed that a number of countries had accepted aid in return for backing Japan's efforts to get commercial whaling restarted and described aid as "a major tool" (Sanders, 2009). This was corroborated by the statements of Prime Minister Lester Bird of Antigua and Barbuda pertaining to aid in exchange for voting with Japan on whaling issues at the IWC. According to Bird, "if we are able to support the Japanese and the quid pro quo is that they are going to give us some assistance" (CNN, 2001, para. 9). In 2008, after having voted with Japan in support of ending the moratorium, Dominica announced that going forward, they would be abstaining on the issue. This was also following reports in 2000 by the then Minister of Environment and Fisheries who claimed that Japan secured its vote by threatening to withdraw support for a local fisheries project.

UNSC Reform and other Candidatures

Reference is made to cooperation in international fora, by addressing issues such as environmental and climate change, nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, and reform of the UN. In this context, Japanese foreign ministers have given particular attention to the need for an early realization of the UN Security Council through expansion in both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership. In the case of Jamaica, Japan's economic assistance is also tied to the recog-

dition of the Caribbean country's diplomatic power and the leading role it assumes on the regional and international level. According to former Prime Minister Simpson-Miller, her visit to Tokyo in 2013 "helped to cement the position of Jamaica in the eyes of Japan as the leader of the Caribbean region" (Office of the Prime Minister Jamaica, 2013). In other international fora, both Japan and Jamaica, have for example, supported each other's bids to be included in Unesco's World Heritage site list.

Koizumi's Vision called for enhanced co-operation in tackling a variety of issues in the international community, including reform of the United Nations and the Security Council. The Japanese government has consistently reiterated the need to realize the reform of the UN Security Council with the expansion of permanent and nonpermanent membership and has made coordinated efforts with Caricom. In speeches, government ministers have voiced their appreciation to Caricom states for the importance which it attaches to reform especially. They also specifically highlighted the directive of Caricom Heads of State and Government in February 2013 which called for "greater urgency in achieving lasting Security Council Reform". They also requested for the initiative of Caricom to reinvigorate the Intergovernmental Negotiation process (Caricom Secretariat, 2013). During Simpson-Miller's visit, along with Prime Minister Abe, she af-

firmed the role and importance of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security and stressed the need for Security Council reform in order to improve its effectiveness, transparency and representativeness. Similarly, at the 6th Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (Cofcor) in Trinidad and Tobago, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Minoru Kiuchi had discussions with Caricom Foreign Ministers on how to further advance Japan-Caricom relations, in particular on Security Council reform. In the meeting, the Vice Minister echoed Japan's appreciation for the active efforts of Caricom toward early reform of the Security Council, based on the expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories.¹⁰ In 2022, Japan was elected to serve its 12th term as a non-permanent member on the UN Security Council, having last been elected in 2015. At that time, the appointment of Jamaica's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Courtenay Rattray, as chairman of the UN Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council reform, had seemingly amplified the importance of Caribbean states to Japan's bid.

In the past, Japan has also asked for the support of Caricom Member States for its candidature at other elections, such as the UN Economic and Social Council (Ecosoc) in 2008, the Human Rights Council in 2008, and the Advisory Committee on Adminis-

¹⁰ See statement by H.E. Mr. Tsuneo Nishida, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nation at the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform on June 27, 2013. <http://www.un.emb-japan.go.jp/statements/nishida062713.html>.

trative and Budgetary Questions (Acabq) in November 2007. Support is not one-sided; Caricom, has in the past, similarly sought Japan's support for the candidature of Jamaica for a seat on the Council of the International Maritime Organization in November 2007. They have also received support from Trinidad and Tobago for election to the Council of the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) in 2007, for St. Lucia's candidature for membership to the UN Ecosoc for 2008-2010, and for the candidature of Guyana to the International Criminal Court in 2009.

ASSESSMENT

The reorientation of the Caribbean's foreign policies towards Japan is largely rooted in their need for economic adjustment. Caribbean states have consistently felt that they are dependent on some form of external assistance, whether it is in terms of aid or preferential trade agreements. Due to the perceived vulnerabilities of Caribbean states, they have been forced to find ways of adapting to changes brought on from globalization and trade liberalization. Their resilience is shown in the way in which having acknowledged their vulnerabilities, they have been utilizing their positive attributes to devise ingenious strategies to help them adjust and survive in changing international relations. As discussed previously, they have been using their value-based resources in their foreign policy towards Japan.

Braveboy-Wagner (2018) posits that Caribbean states, in responding to being buffeted by global changes at the economic level in the 1990s, intensified their focus on "eco-

nommic diplomacy as their central strategy". This paper asserts that Caribbean states have maintained that focus on economic survival as a key component of their foreign policy strategies. Caricom governments are eager to diversify and strengthen diplomatic relations with countries that are potential sources of economic assistance and trade in this current economic climate. Japan has stepped up its engagement with the region over the last two decades. Hence, it represents one such source and partner for trade and investments. Japan continues to provide access to less expensive imports, for example, motor vehicles which are more attractive to Caricom states because of their relatively low prices when compared to traditional partners. It has also consistently provided a market for Jamaica's Blue Mountain coffee over the years, for which Jamaica has become dependent, having almost 85 percent of its produce exported there. Interestingly, in discussing the future of Caricom in a changing global environment, Brewster (2012) was of the view that the region needed to stop neglecting the potential opportunities for formalizing economic relations with Japan. He argued that there could be substantial advantages of such relationships and, apart from filling the attention void of Europe and America, it could provide competition for the region.

As presented earlier, there is an overwhelming trade imbalance as Caricom states have not been adequately exploiting their opportunities to export products to Japanese markets. Despite the unimpressive value of exports, there are opportunities for Caricom to consider its supply strategy and a free trade agreement in goods and even services. Products

such as coffee and rum which are considered high quality goods in the region need to be marketed better, so that they can penetrate these markets to a greater extent. There are also prospects for increasing the export of raw materials, such as bauxite and natural gas, but this also depends on how well Caricom states push this agenda.

At the first Japan-Caricom summit, in outlining the three pillars of Japan-Caricom foreign policies, the Japanese Prime Minister indicated the intention to revise the basis for which aid is allocated. Maki Kobayashi-Terada, the director of the Caribbean Division, Latin American and Caribbean Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reiterated this promise following the Prime Minister's trip stating that "we promised that we are going to extend cooperation and we have already increased six-fold compared to the past few years. We are going to work together in order to have meaningful cooperation even though some of the Caribbean countries have a higher standard of living in terms of per capita income" (Jamaica Observer, 2014, para. 3). As mentioned earlier, the classification of Caricom member states as middle-income countries has put them at a disadvantage in receiving assistance. Owing to this classification, Caribbean leaders have actively argued that the allocation of aid should not be considered according to a per capita basis. Therefore, willingness to reconsider this basis shows the importance of the region to Japan. Its interest is consistent with Brautigam's (2009) argument that foreign aid is fundamentally a tool of foreign policy and that all donors give aid for a variety of political, commercial and moral reasons.

Abe's visit to the Caribbean in 2014, just one year after Chinese President Xi Jinping, generated much attention in the media both locally and internationally. In 2015, Abe would have returned to the region, prompting even further discussions regarding Japan's underlying motives. From the Japanese perspective, having shared a "long-standing and time-honoured friendship", the visits were indicative of Japan's intention to maintain its presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. The timing of Abe's visits should not be glossed over, however. Having seen a lull in US dominance in the region and China's growing presence in the region, the visits served as a reminder to Caricom that Japan should not be counted out of the game. Further, Abe did not come to the region empty handed as he presented his partnership framework along with economic support, and the promise to reconsider the basis of aid given to developing countries. This implies that Japan has taken the necessary steps to not only maintain its presence but as a strategy to counter check China's activity in the region. As China's economic and diplomatic presence deepens, Japan, though struggling to match, is determined to stay in the game.

Caribbean states, having acknowledged this and recognizing the value of their bargaining currency have been using it to their advantage. One of the primary arguments of this paper is that Caribbean states use their value-based resources for economic gain. According to Cooper and Shaw (2009, p. 2), "what small states lack in structural clout they can make up through creative agency". As we have seen, Caribbean countries have been using their political clout in exchange for economic as-

sistance. Prasad (2009) argues that small states are more prone to using this strategy given their lack of other natural resources. Most of the Eastern Caribbean countries are not endowed with natural resources. It is, therefore, this lack of natural resources that leads smaller states in the Caribbean to be more creative. As noted before, this creative use of value-based resources includes their votes in bodies like the IWC. Political support is not one-sided as Caribbean states grapple daily with environmental vulnerabilities. They have taken an active role in UN climate change negotiations and have been strident in their calls for help in dealing with the impact on Small Island Developing States. Therefore, support from Japan on these matters is important. Japan has recently declared the aim to be 'Carbon Neutral by 2050' and outlined targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. It has made a commitment to disburse US\$60 billion over a five-year period (2021-2025) to climate change assistance, and US\$3 billion to Green Climate Fund for climate change projects in developing countries. Caribbean states are also cognizant of the fact that Japan can represent their interests in international organizations for which they do not have access, such as the G7 and G20. More recently at the 7th Caricom-Japan ministerial meeting, Caricom representatives reiterated this in their request for support in advancing the work being done under the Financing for Development Initiative to help SIDS. This is particularly important during this post Covid-19 period where Caribbean states are trying to rebuild their economies and livelihoods.

Despite concerns about the trade imbalance and "vote-buying", the relationship

between Caricom and Japan is a mutually beneficial one whereby, Japan, in exchange for political support and global status provides the region with well needed investments, aid and technical cooperation. To maximize the benefits to be gained from this relationship and, moreover, to ensure that it remains mutually beneficial, Caribbean states need to strengthen regional integration efforts and work more actively as Caricom rather than as members of Caricom. There is scope for expansion of trade and opportunities for investments in environmental protection, sustainable development and energy efficiency – all areas for which Japan places emphasis. With China's ascendancy and the US' decline in the region, Japan represents another partner for Caribbean states to deepen their relations and explore new avenues for economic development. Caribbean states are mindful of this and have shown resourcefulness in their relationship with Japan. In this current economic predicament, Caribbean states should not count out potential opportunities for economic growth and development especially those that are presented as sustainable and in response to the vulnerabilities of SIDS.

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