## The Trinity

## The Reemergence of the Japanese-style Development Concept as China Rises

Muyun Wang

oumakiunn@gmail.com

This paper will examine the history behind the use of “the Trinity” (*Sanmiittai* in Japanese) as a concept to represent connections between Japan and China in the context of cooperative development. By examining the processes that have formed and transformed this term, and that have led to its reemergence in changing eras, I will shed light on the main factors that affect the conceptual trajectory of development cooperation.

**1. A term transcending the borders between the West, China, and Japan**

There are four-character expressions in both Japanese and Chinese that are translations for the English term “the Trinity.” Although it does not actually appear in the Bible, “the Trinity” is a well-known Christian expression describing the manifestation of a single god in three forms: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Historically, missionaries are thought to have been responsible for the origin of the term. The first mention of the Trinity can be traced back to 1623, when Giulio Aleni, an Italian missionary active around the end of China’s Ming dynasty, used the term in his work *General Outline of Western Knowledge* *(Xixuefan)*, written in Chinese.[[1]](#endnote-1) According to the Japanese history of religion researcher Norihisa Suzuki, works on Christianity written in Chinese by authors such as Aleni had a profound impact on the Japanese language from the nineteenth century onward (Suzuki 2006). *The* *General Outline of Western Knowledge* was specifically banned by the Edo Shogunate, but still performed an important role in exposing Japanese intellectuals to Western thought and knowledge (Koso 1974). This context gives rise to the inference that the term the Trinity arrived in Japan via the works of missionaries written in Chinese. For example, the Japanese expression *Sanmiittai*, used, as in Chinese, to describe Christian doctrine, first appeared in Masanao Nakamura’s Japanese translation of *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill, published in 1872 under the title *Jiyu no Kotowari* (De Wolf 2010:114).

However, in Japan and China today, the term the Trinity is often used in fields unrelated to religion, one of which is development cooperation, the subject of this paper. The Trinity, in the context of Japan’s development cooperation, is a policy originally developed by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI; now renamed the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry: MEIT) in 1987 to promote industrialization in developing countries. It refers to comprehensive economic cooperation through three measures: technological and financial aid, direct investment, and imports into Japan (MITI 1987)

In Japan, the Trinity soon fell out of use as a term to describe this policy, gaining popularity again since the 2000s in the context of development research as a term to describe connections and similarities in development cooperation between Japan and China. For example, the international political scientist Ping Wang argues that China’s development cooperation today is accomplished through the same linkage of aid, trade, and investment as found in Japan’s Trinity (Wang 2012: 89). Moreover, it has been pointed out that as the scale of development cooperation by China grows, it may come to be seen as the “Asian aid model” (Shimomura & Ohashi 2013:270). This is because the combination of government and private sector funding represented by the Trinity, now implemented not only by Japan but also by emerging aid donors such as China and India, has already proven to be an effective policy for encouraging the autonomy of recipient nations (Saidi & Wolf 2011, Shimomura & Ohashi 2013).[[2]](#endnote-2) This approach contrasts with the approach of aid donors in Europe and the United States that clearly distinguish between government assistance and private investment.

As described in detail below, while the meaning of the Trinity in more recent research differs significantly from that attributed to it when it was first used in the context of development cooperation in the 1980s, the transformation in the meaning of the term is rarely discussed in the literature. However, examining how the term the Trinity has changed in meaning can lead to a deeper understanding of the differences in development cooperation between Japan and China that have resulted in different approaches to the subject, as well as better clarify the significance of the Trinity today.

In this paper I seek to tackle the question of how the concept of the Trinity was created and how it has changed over time. First, I will focus on government statements and official documents to describe the nature of the policy of the Trinity formulated in Japan at the end of the 1980s. Second, I will use the literature in Chinese to reveal how the concept of the Trinity was introduced into China from Japan and how China reacted at the time. Third, I will describe the process whereby researchers came to focus on the Trinity and use it to describe connections between Japan and China, and analyze the reasons for this. My conclusion is that, while attracting little attention in Japan in the 1980s when it was first used, the term the Trinity became a focus for debate with the rise of China as an emerging aid donor. In the process, the Trinity evolved into a term for the simultaneous implementation of aid, investment, and trade measures aimed at achieving a win-win relationship between the providers and recipients of development cooperation.

## 2. The birth of the Trinity at MITI

In 1987, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) released *The Present Status and Issues in Economic Cooperation (Keizai Kyoryoku no Genjo to Mondaiten)*,[[3]](#endnote-3) presenting the Trinity as a term for comprehensive economic cooperation comprising “aid, investment, and trade” (MITI 1987:2). This document (hereinafter, the “1987 White Paper”) is considered the first official document related to the concept of the Trinity (Shimomura 2020:137, Maruyama 2018).

The concepts underlying the Trinity did not suddenly appear out of nowhere in 1987. In editions of *The Present Status and Issues in Economic Cooperation* published before 1987, trade involving the government, private sector, and partner country was invariably a component of economic development as presented by MITI.[[4]](#endnote-4) Moreover, the concept of “comprehensive economic cooperation” organically integrating multiple forms of economic cooperation, such as government development assistance, trade, and investment, had been emphasized from the late 1970s (MITI 1978–1986:1–2). It is clear from the similarities in language that the Trinity is an extension of this concept.

The basic idea of the Trinity changed in 1987, however, with the scope of “trade” limited to “imports” from the partner country as the result of demands from developing countries—especially ASEAN countries—from the second half of the 1980s. At the time, players such as South Korea and Taiwan were actively participating in the international division of labor, their export of labor-intensive products attracting interest in industrialization. ASEAN countries, meanwhile, were facing not only a temporary slump in product prices and the burden of accumulated debt, which had been exacerbated due to oil shocks from the late 1970s onward, but also a persistently unfavorable trade balance with Japan (MITI 1986, Shimomura 2020). In this context, Thailand and other ASEAN countries demanded the radical revision of Japan’s industrialization support and trade relationships. These demands were focused on the three fields of “exports to Japan, including improved market access,” “direct foreign investment,” and “technology transfer,” (MITI 1986:87–90), and formed the prototype for the Trinity.

MITI responded to these demands from the ASEAN countries with internal deliberations about the New Asian Industrial Development Plan (hereinafter, the “New AID Plan”)[[5]](#endnote-5) aimed at fostering export-based industries in developing countries that could attract foreign capital.[[6]](#endnote-6) In January 1987, Hajime Tamura, then Minister of International Trade and Industry, embarked on a tour of the ASEAN countries. He regretfully concluded that conventional economic cooperation prioritizing development (irrigation facilities, power plants, and the like) was not adequately contributing to progress in the ASEAN region. Not surprisingly, then, in Thailand, his final stop on the tour, he is said to have announced the New AID Plan “in splendid style, greeted with great anticipation from each country.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

In the 1987 White Paper mentioned above, Minister of International Trade and Industry Hajime Tamura characterized this New AID Plan as “designed to achieve cooperation in the Trinity of aid, investment, and trade.” This represented the first appearance of the term the Trinity. (MITI 1987:2); apparently, Minister Tamura was largely responsible for this choice of the expression the Trinity in this context.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The New AID Plan designated three phases for achieving the Trinity: (1) the selection of suitable regions and promising industries based on industrialization strategies appropriate to the characteristics of each country; (2) surveys of the selected regions or industries and proposals for specific cooperation measures involving factors such as the industry base, locations, markets, and the investment and loan environment; and (3) the implementation of multifaceted, concrete cooperation across a range of elements, including infrastructure, and human capital and financial capital. These steps aimed to develop local industries that could attract foreign currency and to encourage direct Japanese investment in supporting growth in local export industries in anticipation of future imports into Japan. The underlying premise was that the partner country would encourage autonomous efforts to establish and improve its investment environment (MITI 1988: 165–166). This background indicates that the Trinity was an initiative aimed at supporting efficient industrialization in developing countries through the expansion of the Japanese approach into ASEAN countries; that is, applying the technological cooperation that had been part of previous ODA initiatives to achieve economic growth by implementing measures to support potential export industries (Abe ed. 2013:781).

However, this original meaning of the Trinity formulated in 1987 had entirely disappeared from the policy debate in Japan by the early 1990s, possibly because the Trinity had proven extremely difficult to realize. Measures to achieve the Trinity were implemented in Thailand (1987), Indonesia (1988), the Philippines (1988), and China (1989), but the actual business initiatives were limited to technological cooperation, such as surveys of industrial sites and development plans, and dispatching and training specialists (MITI 1989:81).

According to the explanation given by MITI, these difficulties arose from the system used to manage financial aid—yen-denominated loans—from the Japanese government (Abe ed. 2013). Yen-denominated loans were necessary to establish and improve the investment environment in the partner country, including economic and social infrastructure (power, transport, communications, etc.), and to encourage direct investment by Japanese companies. However, at the time, yen-denominated loans were discussed mainly through the so-called “four ministry/agency structure” comprising the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, MITI, and the Economic Planning Agency. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly objected to “the use of yen-denominated loans to encourage investment by Japanese companies being publicly proclaimed as Japanese government policy.” Undoubtably, the U.S.-Japan trade conflict of the 1980s was behind this opposition by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan, as of the late 1980s, had not yet opened its domestic markets to products from developing countries, and the United States had expressed concerns that U.S. markets might effectively be left with the burden of importing these products after production increases resulting from Japan’s New AID Plan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs feared that the Trinity would be perceived as a Japanese government policy to promote the foreign expansion of private sector companies, and further fan the flames of U.S. discontent (Shimomura & Wang 2012:124–125).

For this reason, the focus of the Trinity formulated by MITI eventually shifted to technological cooperation with maximum utilization of special corporations and public utility foundations under MITI control, such as the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and the Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS) (Abe 2013:808–809).[[9]](#endnote-9) Beginning in the 1990s, MITI attempted to promote industrialization in Asia primarily through “policy cooperation” rather than cooperation measures revolving around the use of ODA, such as the New AID Plan. Policy cooperation refers to measures designed to enhance the ability of the government of a developing country to formulate and implement medium and long-term development strategies through long-term dialogue between MITI and the developing country government (Abe ed. 2013:782).

With the phasing out of the New AID Plan, from the 1990s, the concept of the Trinity outlined in the 1987 White Paper virtually vanished from Japan’s official documents. Moreover, MITI began to discuss the environmental issues associated with industrialization (MITI 1991, 1992), frequently advocating a completely different kind of Trinity: “environment, energy, and economic growth.”[[10]](#endnote-10) In this way, “the Trinity” fell into disuse as a term to describe development cooperation policies.

How, then, was the concept of “the Trinity” transferred to China? I will consider this process in the next section.

## 3. The arrival of the Trinity in China

After the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1972, there was frequent correspondence between public officials in each country’s central governments, as well as among intellectuals and businesspeople. At the end of the 1970s, the Chinese government switched to an agenda of “reform and opening-up.” It was thought that the experience of Japan—“belonging to the Eastern cultural sphere, with many common cultural aspects and cultural similarities” —would provide the best reference point for this agenda (Ito 2020:13). Thus, during this 1980s “honeymoon” period of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations, Japan, having just experienced a period of rapid economic growth, became a benchmark for policymaking across all aspects of economic growth and industrial development within China.

At the end of January 1987, in the context of this active exchange between the two countries, Japan introduced the New AID Plan to China. At this time, the Chinese government was in the process of introducing foreign capital into the 14 coastal cities that had been designated for stage one National Economic and Technological Development Zones in 1984. Of these, Qingdao City in Shandong Province, where construction of the zone had begun in 1985, was selected as the location for the New AID Plan in April 1987 through discussions between Japan and China at the senior official level.[[11]](#endnote-11) In March 1989, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) announced the results of the Survey of the Development Plans for the Qingdao Export Processing Zone. The agency assessed Qingdao City as having conditions suitable for investment by foreign companies, and approved efforts by the Qingdao City government to further improve aspects such as communications and transport (JICA 1989:39). As already mentioned, the implementation of the Trinity policy in China focused mostly on surveys of the investment environment.

What, then, of the concept of the Trinity? The Trinity of the 1987 White Paper was promptly introduced into China in a paper, “The New State of Japanese Foreign Direct Investment” (Ling 1988), describing the context and characteristics of the spread of Japan’s foreign direct investment, and introducing the Trinity as the approach and policy behind it. Ling summarizes the content of the Trinity as measures to improve the quality and increase the quantity of economic cooperation by the Japanese government, increase the amount of foreign direct investment, increase the amount of industrial products imported from developing countries, and related measures. Ling singled out direct investment as the core of the Trinity, arguing that it boosts productivity and technical and management capabilities in developing countries, increases the effectiveness of Japan’s economic aid, and is a necessary condition for Japanese consumers to accept industrial products manufactured in developing countries (Ling 1998:24).

In July 1988, the Trinity was also presented in the *People’s Daily*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China. In the article, the Trinity is characterized as a new foreign economic cooperation strategy implemented by Japan to promote economic growth in developing countries, especially in the Asia Pacific region. The specific components of the strategy are described as: (1) the quantitative increase and qualitative improvement of Japan’s ODA; (2) the establishment of investment and insurance schemes to promote foreign direct investment by Japanese private-sector companies; (3) support for developing countries to export and capture foreign currency through trade surpluses; and (4) support for developing countries to formulate industrialization strategies focused on export. This description by the *People’s Daily* is not so much an explanation of the concept of the Trinity itself, but rather a brief summary of the contents of the 1987 White Paper.

What is especially noteworthy is that both the paper mentioned above and the *People’s Daily* article were authored by the same person: Professor Emeritus of Fukui Prefectural University Xingguang Ling. Ling, born in Japan in 1933, worked as an academic interpreter and Japanese economic specialist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of World Economy during the 1980s. He also participated in meetings of the Japan-China Working Group for Exchange of Economic Information (1981–), an organization that significantly influenced China’s “reform and opening-up” policy from the time of its inauguration (Ito 2020). According to Ling, the interaction between Japan and China in the 1980s, while balancing the roles of the government and market economy, was focused on policies to address all facets of China’s domestic trade, corporate management, and industry. He recalls that, despite writing several academic papers and newspaper articles discussing the Trinity, he never regarded it as an important concept in development cooperation.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Consequently, the Trinity, as an initiative and concept of “aid, investment, and trade” made very little impression on China in the 1980s. The reason for this becomes clearer when considering the historical backdrop. First, there was a low level of direct investment in China by Japan. While the levels of Japanese foreign direct investment increased rapidly during the 1980s, it was directed mainly toward the NIEs and ASEAN countries. From 1979 to 1990, direct investment in China accounted for no more than 1.1% of all Japanese foreign direct investment (Guo 1999:84). Direct investment in China from countries around the world, including Japan, began to rise rapidly only from the 1990s, encouraged by policies to promote the introduction of foreign capital and economic reform (reform and opening-up) resulting from Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 southern tour. As a result, only in the 1990s, long after the arrival of the concept of the Trinity in 1987, did China begin to profit from Japanese direct investment and expand imports into Japan,.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Secondly, it is thought that learning from the development cooperation experience of foreign countries was not a priority for the Chinese government at the time. From the 1960s to the 2010s, China’s development cooperation was invariably directed by government departments related to the economy and trade, with a policy formulation perspective similar in some respects to that of Japan’s MITI (Huang & Hu 2009, Zhou 2008). In that sense, it would have been structurally possible for China to adopt the concept of the Trinity presented in the 1987 White Paper for its own development cooperation initiatives. However, in the 1980s, the Chinese government, in response to what it considered the over-expansion of Chinese foreign cooperation during the previous decade, had shifted direction in an effort to balance the demands of internationalism with its domestic capacity. As part of this effort, the Chinese government had diminished the scope of foreign assistance it provided, while emphasizing equality and reciprocity with its partners. Moreover, in 1982, it had downgraded the Ministry of Foreign Economic Liaison, responsible for foreign assistance, to the level of a bureau (Xue & Xiao 2011, Ma 2007). As a result, although the concept of the Trinity was introduced to China soon after it first appeared in Japan in 1987, it garnered little attention there.

Why then, has the Trinity now become discussed among researchers as a common thread in Japan and China’s development cooperation policies? (See Wang 2013 and Shimomura & Wang 2015, for example.) It should be noted that this renewed attention was sparked by the series of development cooperation reforms carried out in China from the mid-1990s, along with an increase in interest in Japan’s development cooperation among Chinese researchers. The next section describes how this attention from researchers breathed new life into the concept of the Trinity in the context of historical change.

**4. The reemergence of the Trinity among emerging donors**

The 1990s was a decade of transition for China’s foreign trade and development cooperation. The Chinese government engaged in various structural reforms, including the privatization of state-run enterprises (1993) and the establishment of The Export-Import Bank of China (1994). At the end of 1994, Wu Yi, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, developed the Grand Strategy of Economy and Trade, indicating the direction of China’s foreign trade and economic relations for the second half of the 1990s: encouraging domestic economic growth based on international trade (Li 1995). A system of preferential loans, introduced in 1995 as an extension of this series of reforms, now became an important component of China’s development cooperation. China emerged from the structural reforms of the 1990s with stronger links between international aid, investment, and trade. Development cooperation had become a means of economic growth.

In this context, the 1990s saw an increase in Chinese researchers’ investigations into the Japanese government’s overseas development assistance (ODA). According to Ping Wang, who has reviewed several representative research papers of this type, Chinese researchers regarded the Trinity as an important characteristic of Japanese ODA, distinguishing Japan from European countries and the United States, which clearly differentiated assistance and trade (Wang 2013).

However, the Trinity studied in China was already far different from the Trinity of the 1987 White Paper, with a new concept substituted for the original “trade” concept. As described above, in the 1987 White Paper, trade referred exclusively to “import” into Japan. However, almost all Chinese researchers looked to Japan’s post-war economic cooperation for the meaning of the Trinity with almost no mention of the 1987 White Paper. For example, Xide Jin, a pioneering researcher into Japan’s ODA, defined the Trinity as “an official Japanese concept used up to the mid-1980s, referring to economic cooperation integrating trade, investment, and aid” (Jin 2000:85). Baogen Zhou, a well-known economist at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, indicated that the Trinity of “aid, investment, and trade” was the key that enabled post-war Japan to achieve rapid economic growth, particularly in the years from 1954 to 1972. Essentially, for Chinese scholars, the term referred to the use of yen-denominated loans by Japan for economic infrastructure, targeting cheap labor in developing countries while Japanese companies invested in high-profit manufacturing industries (Baogen Zhou 2010:53). While this concept of the Trinity is considered to reflect Japan’s traditional characteristics of development cooperation until the 1980s, from the 1990s, Japan is seen as abandoning the traditional approach of the Trinity by leaning toward the acquisition of political rather than economic power. (See, for example, Yuyuan Zhou 2010 and Zhang:80.)

In this way, the meaning of the Trinity was redefined by researchers to refer to the promotion of domestic growth and foreign development through the simultaneous implementation of aid, investment, and trade (Yuyuan Zhou 2010). The opinions of Chinese researchers are divided regarding this redefined concept of the Trinity. Some criticize it as excessively focused on Japan’s own national interests, thereby using the ODA to advance Japan’s national interests. (See, for example, Lin 2003). This is similar to the criticism leveled at the commercial characteristics of Japan’s development cooperation by European and U.S. researchers (Shimomura & Wang 2012).

In contrast, some researchers perceive the effects of the Trinity in a positive light, focusing on the similarities between Japan and China’s development cooperation since the 1990s. Ping Wang points out that present-day China “is engaged in securing the supply of resources and actively pursuing trade and investment to open-up markets for Chinese goods even as it provides economic aid, in an identical approach” to Japan’s concept of the Trinity (Wang 2013: 169). Wang characterizes the policies of the Trinity as the “priming” that eventually led to win-win relationships between Japan and the recipient countries, with financial aid from the Japanese government encouraging direct investment by private sector companies (Wang 2007). Based on this perception, the experience of the Trinity is seen as a useful basis for China’s current efforts to use overseas expansion by Chinese companies to further not only its own interests but also those of its partners (Huang & Zhang 2016).

This debate regarding the similarities between Japanese and Chinese development cooperation was not limited to China. Since the 2000s, an increasing body of research has sought to compare China’s expanding development cooperation with that of traditional donor countries, and characteristics shared by the Japanese and Chinese approaches have been widely discussed. Specifically, the concept of the Trinity, while characteristic of Japan’s development assistance, has been used to help understand China’s expanding development cooperation. (See, for example, Bräutigam 2011 and Johnston & Rudyak 2017.) In fact, the rise of China as an emerging donor is thought to be the catalyst responsible for the reemergence of the concept of the Trinity in Japan.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Japanese researchers studying the Trinity concept generally make a comparison with Chinese development cooperation. While some researchers discuss the differences between Chinese and Japanese development cooperation based on the Trinity, others focus on common characteristics. The former includes researchers who claim that China’s development cooperation is based not on “the Trinity” but rather on a “Quaternity.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

A representative example of researchers finding similarities between the Japanese and Chinese approaches can be found in the work of Yasutami Shimomura, who has continually sought universal value in the concept of the Trinity (Shimomura 2020, Shimomura & Ohashi ed. 2013, Shimomura & Wang 2012, Shimomura & Wang 2015), with these studies focusing on changes in the concept over time. For example, while Shimomura & Ohashi (2013) emphasize the common aspects between Japanese and Chinese concepts of the Trinity, Shimomura & Wang (2015) highlight the creation of knowledge based on the experience of China. Japan’s concept of the Trinity is not seen to refer to the Chinese model itself: rather, its significance is that it “furnished the Chinese foreign aid experts with the opportunities to reexamine and improve China’s own economic cooperation strategy” (Shimomura & Wang 2015:15). Shimomura (2020) analyzes the “external pressures” that forced MITI to formulate the concept of the Trinity—including the previously-described demands by ASEAN countries to expand imports into Japan—before considering the universality of the concept of the Trinity (Shimomura 2020:130–141). He describes the way the Trinity of the 1987 White Paper, as a result of reflecting the concerns of the ASEAN countries, provided a model for progressively moving from “infrastructure construction” to “attracting direct investment” and to “export-based industrialization.” He suggests that it was precisely because the perspectives of developing countries were incorporated into the concept that the Trinity resonated with China and other Asian countries (Shimomura 2020).

Thus, the debate on the significance of the Trinity has changed over time and is still evolving today. This diversity in interpretations of the Trinity illustrates how Japanese and Chinese researchers each sought to affirm the value of their own country’s development cooperation, with an acute awareness of the efforts at development cooperation by the other country. However, only a limited amount of research traces the concept of the Trinity back to the 1987 White Paper, and even this is usually used to denote some form of abstract relationship between aid, investment, and trade in general. Of course, the specific policies to achieve the Trinity set forth in the 1980s New AID Plan eventually went no further than technological cooperation by MITI, due to opposition from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and concerns from the U.S. side, but this fact was effectively relegated to the background.

**5. Development cooperation as seen through the changing concept of the Trinity**

In this paper, I have attempted to elucidate the processes whereby the concept of the Trinity set forth in the 1987 White Paper changed over time and was evaluated within the different contexts of Japanese and Chinese research. The reemergence of debate on the Trinity in the context of Japan’s development cooperation was due to a renewed focus by researchers on the relationship between aid, investment, and trade within the context of the rise of China.

Unlike concepts such as “Kaizen” and “personnel development,” the Trinity had a short “use-by date” as a policy concept for Japan’s development cooperation. However, the history of the Trinity illustrates how the fact that a concept may fall out of usage does not necessarily mean that it is not significant. In fact, during the second half of the 1980s, the prominent increase in Japanese direct investment and the transfer of production bases to Thailand and Malaysia, compared to other countries, significantly eased local discontent in those countries (Shimomura 2020). In this sense, even if the policies of the Trinity were not implemented as originally planned, they may have actually performed their intended role of resolving issues in developing countries by emphasizing Japanese government’s policies to Japanese companies.

Today, the Trinity’s originally meaning has been transformed into a means of comparing Japan and China, and exploring the characteristics of Asian-style development cooperation. The relationship between the term “the Trinity” and the measures it evaluates is like that between a container and its contents: the shape of the container has not changed, but different contents have been poured into it with each changing era. Reviewing the “current contents” of the Trinity in each era enables us to discover the conception of development cooperation in that era. Today, for example, the Trinity has become a term used to advocate the effectiveness of development cooperation integrating “aid, investment, and trade,” and the resulting win-win relationships. By contrast, the concept of the Trinity presented in the 1987 White Paper was not so much aimed at the active pursuit of mutual interest, but represented the outcome of a reluctant “response” to the demands of partners, including the opening-up of Japan’s markets. “We will not be able to achieve long-term prosperity unless we respond to our partners’ demands.” Despite appearing at first glance to present a defensive view of national interests, this response eventually led to effective development cooperation. This concept of the Trinity from the 1980s is meaningful as a perspective from which to consider perceptions of national interest in development cooperation today.

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1. Searched on the Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books （http://server.wenzibase.com）. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Also see Kobayashi (2007), Maruyama (2007), Dole, D et al. (2021), etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Commonly known as a White Paper on Economic Cooperation, this was one of a series published every year from 1958 to 2001. Without the official status of White Papers reported to cabinet meetings, they were used as PR materials to announce the approach taken by MITI officials themselves (Abe ed. 2013: 771). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In editions of *The Present Status and Issues in Economic Cooperation* published from 1970 onward, the status of Japan’s economic cooperation was described in terms of three general categories: “economic cooperation directed at the capital base (both government and private sector),” “economic cooperation through technology,” and “economic cooperation through trade.” [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In negotiations to revive the budget for fiscal 1986, the New AID Plan was allotted a total of nine trillion yen in research project expenses, etc. (*Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 1986). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The importance of fostering export industries in developing countries was recognized by MITI from the mid-1980s (MITI 1985:211）. The awareness of dissatisfaction and pressure from ASEAN countries can be seen as responsible for the formulation of specific measures in the New AID Plan. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 13, 1987, February 14, 1987. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Records of debate in the Diet around 1987 indicate that “the Trinity” was a favorite expression of Hajime Tamura across a number of different contexts, including “the Trinity of the Ministry of Finance, MITI, and the Ministry of Labour” (1986) and “the Trinity of the ruling party, the opposition, and the government” (1988). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Actually, transforming the results of surveys conducted under the New AID Plan into reality in the investment environment proved to be a long and arduous road, as exemplified in the case of Malaysia’s high-tech industrial zone, which began production in 1996 (*Asahi Shimbun* April 5, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. No. 16, Committee on the Budget, House of Representatives, 120th Plenary Session of the Diet, February 22, 1991. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Nikkei Sangyo Shimbun* May 7, 1987. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Interview with Xingguang Ling (October 22, 2021 at the Japan China Science, Technology and Culture Center, Tokyo). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. That being said, the role of Japan’s suggestions on industrial policy in the 1980s cannot be disregarded. For example, at the Japan-China Working Group for Exchange of Economic Information in 1988, Japanese industry specialists and businesspersons explained that it was a cycle of capital investment, profit retention and reinvestment that had supported Japan’s remarkable development. They further urged the Chinese government to utilize the advantages of a planned economy to focus on textiles, light industrial products, and the food industry, while actively fostering industries with the potential to provide the next generation of export products (Ito 2020:69−70). These policy proposals likely contributed to the development of China’s manufacturing industries from the 1990s onward. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Yasutami Shimomura, a leading researcher into the Trinity, describes how he first became interested in the concept in the 1980s, when he was working in Thailand as a member of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF). He experienced for himself how the proposal of the Trinity had sparked an increase in direct investment in Thailand by Japanese companies, leading to the amelioration of diplomatic tensions between Japan and Thailand. However, it was not until the 2000s, when Shimomura learned that the Trinity had become a focus of attention in China as well, that he commenced full-scale research into the concept (from an interview with Yasutami Shimomura on February 8, 2022, at the JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Even among those who argue that China’s approach is based on the concept of “the Quaternity,” Inada (2013:108) sees this as the existing concept of the Trinity with the addition of the “dispatch of laborers,” while Enomoto adds “economic cooperation”—comprising “construction contracting, the provision of labor, and design consulting services” (Enomoto 2017:24). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)