

Transforming Empire: Japanese technical assistance and education in postwar Asia

Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus, Modern History of Japan & East Asia

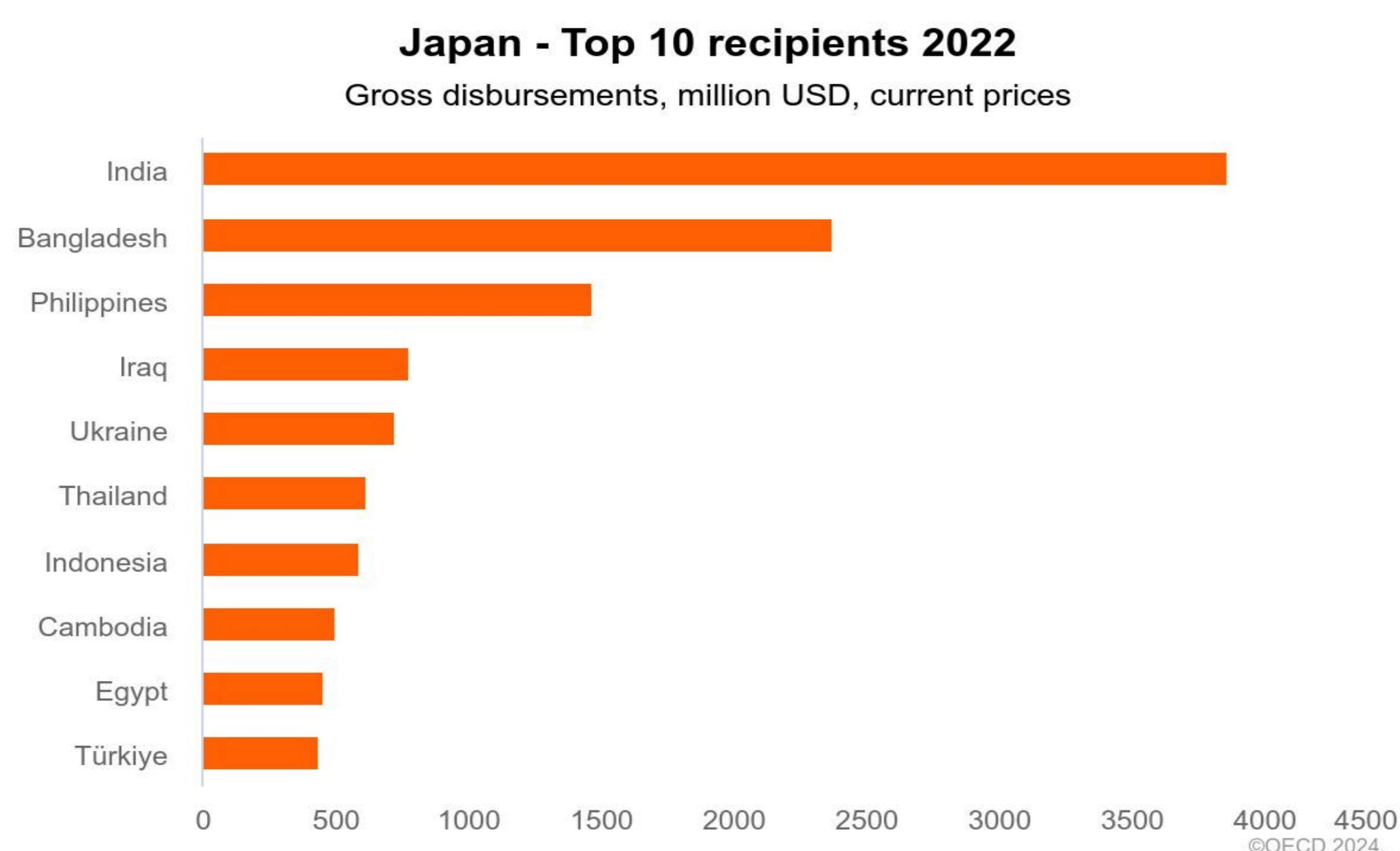
Drawing on prewar and wartime colonial engagements, bilateral technical and economic assistance quickly emerged as a key element of Japan's foreign policy towards the fledgling nation-states of Asia in the early postwar period. Gradually integrated into institutionalized frameworks such as **Official Development Assistance (ODA)**, these aid programs have helped to foster industrial and educational development whilst simultaneously advancing economic and diplomatic objectives of the donor nation. Japan's ODA policy towards Asian countries has often prioritized initiatives focused on technical education and the development of educational infrastructure.



Port of Colombo, Sri Lanka, site of the "Colombo Plan". Japan assisted the port's expansion and improvement through yen loans and various other measures (Source: JICA)

ODA and technical assistance

According to **OECD data**, almost 60 percent of Japan's gross bilateral ODA was allocated to countries in Asia in 2022, highlighting the importance of the region for Japan. Political aims and methods of practical implementation have constantly evolved since the inception of technical assistance in the 1950s, reflecting the shifting dynamics of the international landscape. At the same time, the Japanese discourse on developmental aid has consistently been tied to Japan's self-perception and self-positioning vis-à-vis a decolonizing Asia and the United States during the global Cold War.



Research objectives

The project focuses on the fundamental role of educational programs and infrastructures within the context of Japanese development aid and their broader socio-political implications:

- Challenging traditional historical narratives that often demarcate prewar colonial policies from post-war developmental strategies.
- Exploring how educational and developmental initiatives could crucially support the economic and social advancement of recipient nations and at the same time serve as a tool for consolidating and perpetuating Japan's transregional influence in Asia.
- Analyzing the reciprocal impacts of Japan's developmental assistance on its own society and self-perception as a donor country, particularly in light of recent shifts in the balance of global economic power in Asia.

Case studies



Nonthaburi Telecommunication Training Center, Thailand, 1960 (Source: JICA)



Kumoh Technical High School (금오공업고등학교), South Korea, 1972 (Source: KTHS)

Based on these case studies the project examines the dissemination, implementation, and adaption of Japanese technical assistance and education by various stakeholders including public and private actors and organizations in both, recipient countries and Japan.

Introduction of Neighborhood Police Posts in Singapore modelled after Japanese *kōban* during the 1980s with the help of JICA (Source: JICA)



Selected bibliography

- Shigeru Akita, Gerold Krozewski, and Shoichi Watanabe, eds., *The Transformation of the International Order of Asia: Decolonization, the Cold War, and the Colombo Plan* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
- Nobuko Kayashima, Kazuo Kuroda, Yuto Kitamura, eds., *Japan's International Cooperation in Education. History and prospects* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2023).
- Hiromi Mizuno, Aaron S. Moore, and John DiMoia, eds., *Engineering Asia: Technology, Colonial Development and the Cold War Order* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
- Akihiko Tanaka, *Japan in Asia. Post-Cold-War Diplomacy*. Transl. by Jean Connell Hoff (Tōkyō: JPIC, 2017).
- Benjamin R. Young, *Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

