

Transforming Empire: Japanese Technical Assistance and Education in Postwar Asia

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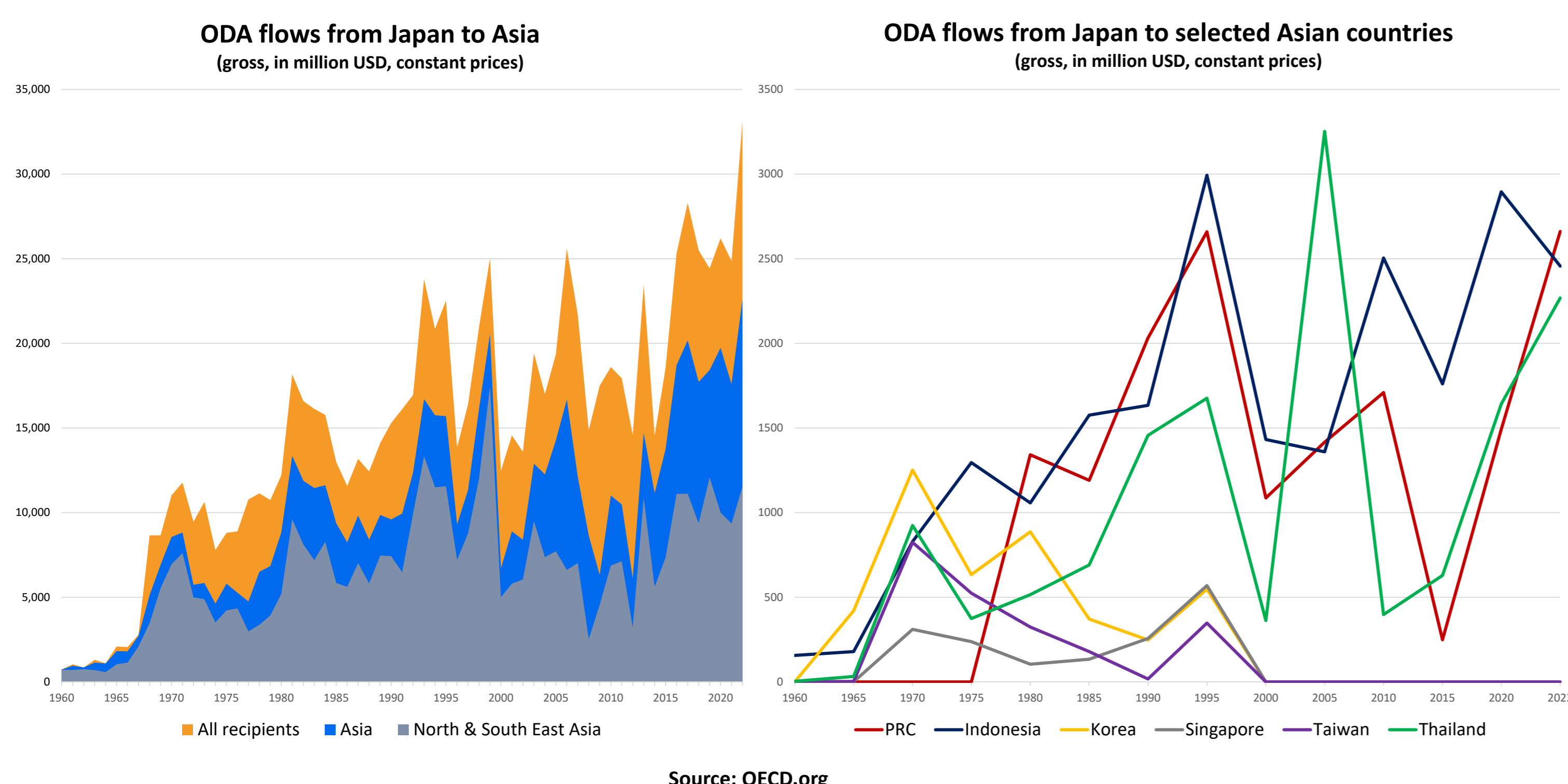
Drawing on prewar and wartime colonial engagements, bilateral technical and economic assistance quickly emerged as a key element of Japan's foreign policy towards the fledgling nation-states of Asia in the early postwar period. Gradually integrated into institutionalized frameworks such as **Official 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" (1950). 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 postwar 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



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



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

The project explores 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 — based on case studies in South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and elsewhere.

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



Selected bibliography

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