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The Ties That Bind: Part 1 (1950s-1990s) Japan–South Asia Relations and Decades of Development Cooperation Partnership

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The Ties That Bind: Part 1 (1950s-1990s)

Japan–South Asia Relations and Decades of Development Cooperation Partnership

Purnendra Jain*

Abstract

Considering Japan–South Asia relations through Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA), this first paper of a two-part series contributes significantly to the literature on Japan's ODA, which has largely overlooked South Asian nations. Japan began providing aid to the region in 1954, with its first yen loan to India disbursed in 1958 and to Pakistan in the early 1960s. Although South Asia has remained a consistent recipient of Japan's loans and other types of aid throughout the twentieth century, Tokyo shifted its attention more to Southeast Asia and China in the 1970s, reducing South Asia's relative importance for several decades. Its historical, economic, and strategic importance was also viewed as less significant for Tokyo compared to other regions in Asia. The paper argues that aid, or ODA, nevertheless served as a continuing channel for Japan's engagement with South Asian nations. These aid ties, however, were not without challenges. For instance, relations deteriorated in 1998 when Japan strongly condemned India and Pakistan for conducting nuclear weapons tests. However, from the early twenty-first century, changing economic and strategic dynamics in Asia prompted a refocusing of Japan's attention, and relations improved significantly along with Japan's aid, aspects that will be discussed in Part 2.

Keywords: Japan, South Asia, Post-war, ODA Literature, Aid History, Socio-economic and Technical Cooperation, Nuclear Weapons Testing

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1. Introduction

In the context of Japan–South Asia relations, this study explores Japan's foreign aid—or Official Development Assistance (ODA)—to South Asian nations. It explains how and why Japan has used aid as a key instrument to engage with the region, examining the nature, scale, destination, and timing of that aid. Japan initially targeted parts of South Asia to begin its aid program in the 1950s but switched its focus to Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and embraced China from the 1970s (Araki 2007). Tokyo maintained a continuous aid relationship with South Asian nations even as Japan's bilateral and multilateral relations with the region remained low-key through the rest of the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, however, Japan has come to recognize the South Asian region as increasingly important, with India and Bangladesh now its top two aid recipients.

The strategic significance of these developments in Japan's aid to the region has hitherto received little careful analysis. This study seeks to address this shortcoming by offering a broad overview to identify key trends. It shows how shifts in Japan's national objectives, alongside major changes in power relationships across regional and global orders, have been instrumental in shaping Japan's aid policy toward South Asian nations. Aid has been Japan's most significant diplomatic tool in the region, not only to foster socio-economic development but also to advance its economic and strategic objectives, particularly as the rise of China—and to some extent India—reconfigures the regional and global strategic landscape.

The paper begins by contextualizing our discussion with a brief literature review that follows Japan's foreign aid policy over the past seven decades. It then situates South Asia within Japan's broader aid landscape, considering the political, economic, and strategic circumstances that have either drawn Japan toward the region or diverted its attention elsewhere. A relatively brief period of mutual goodwill in the immediate post-war period was followed by a prolonged lull from the 1970s until the end of the century, as historical, economic, and politico-strategic dynamics-oriented Japan away from the region.

The discussion in Part 2 then moves into the twenty-first century, exploring Japan's renewed closer engagement with South Asia, which has accelerated noticeably since the 2010s—especially during Shinzo Abe's second administration from 2012 to 2020.[1] It considers key cases of large infrastructure projects to demonstrate Japan's substantial injection of ODA into India and Bangladesh. A short section explores Japan's move beyond bilateral ODA to a regional approach, noting bottlenecks and limited progress in early efforts to connect some South Asian countries through interstate projects or to link South Asia with the Southeast Asian region transregionally.

[1] Discussion in the later part of the paper often refers to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe because he was the longest-serving Japanese prime minister. No other Japanese prime ministers have maintained such a strong focus on South Asia and India, in particular. His contribution and popularity in India are acknowledged in two recently published books. See Baru (2023) and Choudhury (2025).

The final section draws together key points from this discussion, briefly considering the future of Japan's aid to the region, highlighting the ongoing importance of the region and noting possible challenges ahead, especially in the wake of a "revolutionary" change in Bangladeshi politics: the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the installation of a new student-led interim government under Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus.

2. Why this Research Now? Literature Survey

A survey of Japan's ODA literature indicates that the South Asian region has consistently been included among Japan's aid recipients. Indeed, South Asia served as a proving ground for Japan's early aid initiatives in other parts of Asia where, unlike South Asia, many countries still held serious reservations about Japan due to memories of wartime atrocities suffered at the hands of the Japanese military (Sato 2005). Rix (1993) noted that Japan began major aid payments to South Asia motivated by its huge population in need of aid and its potential as a market for Japanese exports. Despite this, Japan's ODA in this region has attracted little scholarly interest. Most edited books on Japan's ODA focus on other regions and countries, and existing materials are often fragmented, focus on a single country or do not provide an overall picture of South Asia. A comprehensive, up-to-date analysis is notably lacking.

In their edited volume, for example, Koppel and Orr (1993) consider ASEAN members, China, the Republic of Korea, Pacific Island states, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. The book contains a chapter on Bangladesh, a latecomer on the aid scene in South Asia, but lacks studies on the other two major and early recipients of Japanese aid in South Asia: India and Pakistan. Similarly, Marie Soderberg's *The Business of Japanese Foreign Aid: Five Cases from Asia* (1996) mirrors Japan's policymakers' psychological map of Asia, including her case studies of Southeast Asian countries and China, while also omitting South Asian countries. The collected work on Japan's aid by Arase (2005) includes a chapter on Pakistan and another containing a comparative analysis of Japan's aid to South and Southeast Asia, including recipients' perspectives; however, its technical analyses are now, perhaps inevitably, somewhat dated.

Even the literature specifically concerning South Asia is fragmented. Few books address aid directly, and none appear to be available in Japanese, based on my search and correspondence with scholars in Japan. The Jain-edited book (1996) on Japan and South Asia relations overall has chapters on each of the seven South Asian nations. Yet, its discussion of Japan's aid to those countries is cursory. The edited book by Kesavan and Varma (2000) has chapters on aid to individual nations of South Asia, but the analysis is dated and not provided in a comparative context. Choudhury's edited book (2014) on Japan's SAARC partnership includes a chapter on Japan's contribution to Bangladesh's economic development (Mozumder, Kashem and Al-Mamun 2014), but no other chapters specifically analyze Japan's aid relationships. There are also some articles on Japan and

South Asia (Jain 1991; 1997; 2000a and 2000b; Varma 2011; and Chansoria 2022) that refer to ODA in discussing the overall relationship, but they do not provide a detailed analysis.

Books on India–Japan relations abound in English and Japanese, and their number continues to grow. At least nine books were published in English between 2018 and 2024. This includes a volume edited by Alam (2018), as well as books by Panda (2019), Centre for Public Policy Research (2019), Choudhury, Thankachan, and Bakshi (2022), Murayama, Hazarika and Gill (2022), Kapoor and John (2024), Narasimhan and Bakshi (2024), Pant and Ghosh (2024), and Shaw and Choudhary (2024). However, edited books on India-Japan relations seldom address aid issues in detail, such as the two books published in the 2010s by Horimoto and Varma (2013) and Mukherjee and Yazaki (2016). Nor is there a detailed discussion on aid, even in Japanese-language publications regarding Japan-India relations.[2] One exception is a chapter in a seven-volume series on Japan's development cooperation. A chapter in Volume 5 on "infrastructure cooperation" examines seven Asian countries, with five from Southeast Asia, China and India (Yamada 2021: 169–98). Some project-specific publications are available through the JICA Ogata Research Institute under its 'Project History' series (for example, Kamei 2016; Abe 2018; Kano 2021; Ohashi 2021). Although they offer valuable insights through case studies, they are not written within the context of Japan's overall relationships with the nations of South Asia.

Articles and chapters on Japan's aid to India are available, although there are no dedicated monographs. Sahoo's article (n. d.) looks specifically at ODA's impact on infrastructure projects. Mishra (1997), Balatchandrine (2002), and Varma (2009) each provide a broad-brushed picture and are helpful as background references, but these analyses cover developments only until the early 2000s. Jain's 2017 and 2019 research papers are two substantial additions to Japan's aid to India.

Books on Japan's relations with other South Asian countries remain few and far between.[3] Malik (2009) on Pakistan, Alam (2022a and 2022b) and Khatun et al. (2023) on Bangladesh deal in some detail with Japan's bilateral aid to those countries. Karunaratne (2022), acknowledging the 70th anniversary of Japan–Sri Lanka diplomatic relations, has a chapter on Japan's ODA to Sri Lanka, among many other topics.

3. Japan's Foreign Aid: Background

Japan began its ODA program in a modest way in the mid-1950s. As its national economy grew, the aid budget increased rapidly, making Japan an aid superpower. After securing its status as the world's number one ODA donor in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japan's aid budget began to

[2] For example, see Yamazaki and Takahashi (1993) and Okata (1978).

[3] A list of books and articles compiled in the volume by Horimoto and Varma (2013) indicates the growing literature on Japan and India, while there was still not much on ODA. See also Tamari and Prasad (2017).

shrink as the national economy slowed and entered the so-called "lost decades" phase. Even so, Japan maintained its aid power. In 2024, the OECD reported that Japan ranked number three among global donor nations, spending over $19 billion in 2023 behind the US and Germany.[4]

Asia has always been the main recipient of Japan's aid for various reasons. Geography aside, historical, political, economic and strategic factors have played key roles. However, Japan's vision of Asia focused not so much on South Asia but mainly on Southeast and East Asia, especially after the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Japan's economy and ODA budget grew rapidly through *sanmi-ittai,* a trinity model of trade, aid and investment. This model posits that there is an integration of aid, trade and investment. Even today, Japan directs more than 60 percent of its aid to Asia, significantly less than it provided in the 1970s when it was close to 95 percent (MOFA 2022).

Over the seven decades of Japan's aid journey—from its modest start in 1954 to being the world's number one donor in the late 1980s/early1990s (Yasutomo 1989–90) and its current status today as number three—Japan's ODA has undergone several transformations in policy and in the geographical spread of recipients.[5] At the end of the Cold War, in 1992, Tokyo issued its first ODA charter, setting out its principles of aid-giving. Since then, Japan has issued three revised charters in 2003, 2015, and 2023.[6] Each introduced changes in the direction of aid policy. Japan also expanded its geographical reach beyond Asia to other continents, particularly Africa. Importantly, Tokyo has aligned its aid directions with the National Security Strategy (NSS), first issued in 2013 and revised in 2022, giving aid an explicitly strategic orientation and linking it to Japan's national interest and broad strategic objectives of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

While Japan's aid supports UN Sustainable Development Goals such as human development, poverty reduction and climate management, it also aids physical infrastructure improvements in developing countries through its loan programs, which are often tied to Japan's politico-strategic interests.[7] Japan has even established a new type of foreign assistance program called Official Security Assistance (OSA), implementing it for the first time in 2023 (Jain 2024). This program expanded in fiscal 2024 and is likely to grow further in future years (Takahashi 2023, MOFA 2025).

[4] Flourish (2024, April). "Preliminary Figures." https://public.flourish.studio/story/2315218/

[5] Research findings on Japan's aid began to appear in the 1970s and 1980s. Rix (1980) provided a pioneering study of Japan's aid in its early years. Since then, many books have appeared. Although a little dated now, for a comprehensive survey, see Kato, Page and Shimomura. (2016), and MOFA's (2023) *White Paper on Development Cooperation* 2021, Chart III Japan's Bilateral ODA by Region (2020).

[6] The 2015 charter was called the Development Cooperation Charter (DCC) instead of ODA charters issued in 1992 and 2003.

[7] One of the recent and comprehensive overviews of Japan's ODA policy is Shiga 2023.

Institutional arrangements were also shaken up to make it easier for recipients to request projects and streamline aid delivery. In 2008, the "new" JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) was created, expanding the role of this central aid agency beyond grant projects to incorporate all three key areas of bilateral aid—grants, technical assistance and loans.[8] Today, JICA administers most of Japan's bilateral aid and has become a significant agency, with networks of offices both within Japan and around the globe. Japan provides aid to multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and UN agencies but gives a significantly larger share through bilateral aid. Overall, the share of loans has always been much more significant than the other two types combined. Between 1954 and 2019, for example, Japan provided ODA to 190 countries and regions around the globe. The total aid budget for those 65 years was US$550bn, of which $440bn was bilateral aid: grants $120bn, technical aid $70bn, and loan aid $250bn (MOFA 2020).

The nature and makeup of Japan's ODA have also changed. Japan's aid initially took the form of reparations, technical assistance, and some yen loans, all within Asia. It embedded its ODA program in the larger global context after gaining membership in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the OECD in the early 1960s. For many years, Japan was Asia's sole DAC member. Japan's ODA program has some distinctive features. Although a member of the Western Club of aid donors, Japan followed its own distinctive aid trajectory. Apart from its concentration in Asia, Japanese-style aid emphasized principles of "self-help" (recipient nations take responsibility for their projects) and "request-based" (recipient nations request aid for projects they see as a priority within their development plans) (Sato 2023). Moreover, long-term low-interest loans were offered instead of outright grants only, as practiced by many European donors.

The Japanese budget system and funding sources make ODA budgets very complex. Apart from the annual budget for each fiscal year beginning on April 1, the Japanese government also allocates money for aid in its supplementary budgets, and this is often missed in some aid analyses. Most commentaries provide their analysis using the preliminary budget allocation, making them confusing and incomplete. Another complexity associated with funding sources arises because the government's annual and supplementary budgets are not the only sources of ODA. The highly concessional yen loan projects for infrastructure development, which comprise a huge component of Japan's ODA, come from different sources. These sources have undergone many institutional changes in the past decades with the restructuring of aid administration.[9] The external sources include bond issuance and government borrowings, as well as JICA's own funds and repayments received from the borrower countries. While technical assistance and grants come from the general and supplementary budgets, loans are funded through non-tax sources administered by JICA (Ministry of Finance 2023; JICA 2023).

[8] For the structural changes to the aid administration, see Jain 2016

[9] For details of these changes, see (Jain 2016).

4. South Asia as a sub-region of Asia

For Japan's aid purposes, the Asian continent is broadly classified into three sub-regions: East or Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. The boundary between South and Southeast Asia was blurred in the immediate post-war period. The Japanese Prime Minister Kishi toured India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as part of his Southeast Asia tour in 1957. South Asian countries appeared less frequently on Japan's foreign policy radar around the late 1960s, regarded as "distant" or even "the other" Asia. Today, the picture has changed substantially. South Asia is now a separate category. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a Southwest Asia Division comprising the seven countries of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives. JICA's South Asia Department includes Afghanistan and the above seven countries. Today, there seems to be greater recognition of Southwest *[Nansei Ajia]* or South Asia *[Minami Ajia]* in Japan's political class and bureaucratic circles, as well as business and media groups.

Post-war Peace Settlement and South Asia

South Asian countries viewed Japan generally favorably following the end of the Second World War. At the 1951 San Francisco peace conference, the Sri Lankan representative, J. R. Jayewardene, made a historic speech quoting Buddha's teaching, "Hatred ceases not by hatred but by love," urging other nations to forego reparations and allow Japan to rejoin the international community (Embassy of Japan in Sri Lanka 2021). When Jayewardene became Sri Lanka's president in 1979, Japanese Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira invited him on a state visit to Japan and provided a warm reception. In 1991, Japan erected a statue of Jayewardene in a temple in Kamakura, the city of temples in Kanagawa Prefecture near Tokyo. Pakistan's unequivocal support for Japan was also significant at the Peace Treaty signing in 1951. Pakistan's representative to the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Chaudhury Zafrullah Khan, quoted from the Holy Quran that "peace is best**."**[10] Sri Lanka and Pakistan also strongly supported Japan's case for participating in the Bandung Conference 1955 (Wijayasiri 1996: 164). Japanese leaders appreciated South Asian representatives' support for Japan in these relatively early post-war years when it was still difficult for Japan to engage internationally. This support is likely to have influenced Japan's policymakers in their initial focus on South Asian nations when commencing its ODA program.

India did not participate in the conference, citing the punitive terms and harsh conditions imposed on Japan. It signed a separate peace treaty with Japan in 1952, offering much more generous terms to Japan than the San Francisco Treaty. Salooja (n. d., 9) noted Japan's tortuous occupation of the Andamans from March 1942 to the end of the Second World War, claiming, "No nation teaches such acts of brutality that were followed by the Japanese in Andamans." But when the issue of compensation for damages caused by Japan's occupation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

[10] Quoted in Malik (2009: 36).

was raised in the Indian parliament, Nehru dismissed the matter, responding that India did not plan "to take any further steps for recovery of compensation from the Government of Japan" (Mukherjee and Yazaki 2016, 180).

5. Japan's ODA and South Asia: Early Post-war and Cold War Years

With the background of liberal and supportive statements and actions at the time of the peace settlement, three South Asian countries became most significant for Japan in the first part of this period (1950s and 1960s): India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Aid connections with smaller nations grew later. Another significant recipient was Bangladesh, which entered the aid-recipient landscape in the 1970s upon gaining nationhood after separating from Pakistan in 1971.

Japan gave its first-ever yen loan to India in 1958 when the "nation was then regarded in many countries as the cornerstone of stability in Asia" (Rix 1980, 25). Pakistan also received yen loans, along with some other countries, such as South Vietnam. While these were the early days of Japan's foreign aid—with a small budget and policy still under development—South Asia figured prominently for political and economic reasons. Between 1957 and 1964, 16 of Japan's 21 loan agreements were to India and Pakistan, all from the Export-Import Bank of Japan at a not-too-low interest rate (5.75 to 6 percent). Moreover, these loans were all firmly tied to purchases from Japan (Rix 1993, 136).

Japan's Aid Relations with India

Sato (2005) explains that India's acceptance of Japanese loans early in the post-war period served a political purpose for Japan. Aid to South Asia provided a model for the delivery of Japanese aid and thus became an entry point for Japan into other regions of Asia where the memory of Japan's colonial history and wartime incursions remained strong. Sato argues that India's choice to waive reparations served as a model for Southeast Asian nations to consider "scaling down" their reparations demand (Sato 2005, 12). Sato observed that although Japan phased out aid to India after the 1950s as Tokyo shifted its economic focus to Southeast Asia, India's goodwill remained strong and was often invoked whenever Japan wanted to revitalize relations with India to extend its diplomatic reach beyond Southeast Asia (Sato 2005, 14).

Similarly, Tuke (2011, 208) observed that while India welcomed Japan's generous aid, it also strategically benefited Japan by serving as a model for its development assistance program. Southeast Asian nations were still concerned about Japan's wartime concept of a "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere." They viewed Japan's aid with suspicion, seeing it as another attempt by Japan to gain dominance over them (Shiga 2013, 161). The rhetoric of Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda during his official visit to India in 1961—that Tokyo and Delhi were the "natural pegs" of a security system in Asia— clearly demonstrated India's diplomatic and strategic significance to Japan in that period (Gupta 2014, 47), even though Ikeda regarded India as undeveloped, poor,

with little economic attraction for Japan.

Japan had provided "official" financial assistance to India in other ways before the first yen loan in 1958, with various types of financial support provided almost from the start of the 1950s. In 1951, Japan made its first "official" credit to India by offering deferred payment facilities for specific projects. The first project involved iron ore mines in Goa, with funding provided by Japan's Export-Import (Exim) Bank. At the time, this financial support was termed "economic cooperation" *[keizai kyoryoku]*, not "aid" *[enjo]* (Jain 2016, 56). Economic cooperation was much broader than aid in scope, including reparations, technical cooperation, and government assistance to private businesses, undertaken through the Exim Bank, as acknowledged in the first foreign policy review of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1957 (Rix 1980, 24). Beyond financial support, Japan started to give technical aid to India in the agricultural and small business sectors after joining the Colombo Plan in 1954 (Shiga 2013, 161).

The first yen loan to India in 1958 was akin to export credit and was once again arranged through the Exim Bank of Japan. This time, however, it was a bilateral loan issued directly between the two governments, not to the private sector as in the first credit, which was provided to an Indian company via Japan's Kokan Mining Company. The company had signed a contract with a local company in Goa for iron ore development and export to Japan (Ozawa 1986, 605). The contract for this "official" credit provision—or the first yen loan—included purchasing 540 million yen worth of mining machinery, equipment, and technical assistance from Japan in return for supplying iron ore to Japan, as mutually agreed over a three-year period. Iron ore was a key raw material for Japan in post-war reconstruction and industrial recovery. Japan could no longer get supplies from the neighboring states it had relied on before and during the war. Goa was thus a welcome alternative as a guaranteed source of iron ore for Japan's industrial needs.

This first yen loan was formalized during the visit of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Japan in October 1957 (Kajima 1973, 41). The request for yen loans from the Indian side, presented during the visit of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi to India in May of that year, was to assist India in implementing the policy of industrialization in its Second Five-Year plan (1956–61). The Japanese government agreed to offer a total loan of 1,800 million yen (equivalent to US$500,000) in three tranches over three years starting in April 1958. These loans, provided with a low interest rate over a long term, were specifically for mining, steel production, power generation, shipbuilding, and telecommunications. Thus, India was the first place for Japan to define and demonstrate the objectives of its yen loans program in practice while also signifying the close affinity and economic relationship between Japan and another Asian nation. Here, we observe the precedent-setting utility of this bilateral aid program for Japan (Nagano and Kondo 1999, 205).

Murthy, a distinguished Indian scholar of India–Japan relations, pointed out that "the granting of

a Yen 18.0 billion loan, therefore, was a major step taken by Japan and it was prompted by its growing need for markets and sources of raw material supply" (Murthy 1993, 334). When Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda toured South Asia in 1961, Japan's interest in India was cooling. The Ikeda government at the time was focusing Japan's goals on economic growth, and India was not critical to Japan's economic development as an industrial producer dependent on imports and exports. Even so, Japan continued providing loans to India, which received some 40 percent of Japan's yen loans between 1958 and 1965 (Yamada 2021, 174). These loans were not for infrastructure projects but mainly for purchasing equipment supplies from Japan and for some industrial development projects (Yamada 2021, 175).

India maintained in this relationship of economic complementarity through ODA to the mid-1960s, continuing to be the top recipient of Japan's yen loans. However, by then, the complementarity had diminished considerably. For Japan, the relationship no longer satisfied its symbolic or practical economic purposes. Japan's focus was now firmly on economic relations, making Southeast Asia much more important for Japan. Symbolically, Japan's need to build trust and goodwill was even greater. It sought to use generous ODA as a means of developing stronger economic relations with Southeast Asia. However, during the Cold War years, India's lean towards the then Soviet Union (now Russia) also positioned it at diplomatic odds with Japan's primary strategic partnership with the United States. Economically, Japan had established other suppliers of the resources it badly needed. In the early 1960s, Japan imported over 27 percent of its iron ore supplies from India, but by the 1970s, this share had been reduced, making India the number three supplier after Australia and Brazil (Chang 1994, 89).

Japan's Aid Relations with Pakistan

A similar trend occurred in Japan's economic cooperation and aid to Pakistan in the early postwar years. Japan began assistance to Pakistan in 1954, and Pakistan was one of Japan's most prominent aid recipients in the 1960s (Malik 2009, 1). Pakistani Prime Minister Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy was the first Asian leader in the post-war period to address the national Diet during a visit to Japan in April 1957 (Malik 2009, 42–44), six months before Indian Prime Minister Nehru's visit to Japan in October.

Pakistan-Japan ties were strong in this period, particularly in trade. Malik (2009, 55) observed that "Japan offered loans, credits, and assistance to Pakistan throughout the 1960s, even in preference to other East Asian countries, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)." Before Ikeda visited Pakistan in 1961, Japan offered Pakistan a loan worth $20 million to support Pakistan's second five-year plan. Pakistan and Japan viewed China differently, but this did not become a barrier between the two. When the Pakistan-India war broke out in 1965, Japan temporarily stopped aid to both India and Pakistan but resumed it soon after the Tashkent Accord ended fighting in 1966.

In the 1960s, Japan's economic assistance to Pakistan was for such projects as agriculture and fisheries, technical know-how and training facilities under the Colombo Plan. Until 1970, Japan was Pakistan's third largest donor. Malik (2009, 68–69) claims that Japan preferred Pakistan as an aid recipient over India, which could not repay its debt. However, Malik's observation is not supported by evidence, as Yamada's charts of aid recipients make clear (Yamada 2021, 175, 177). In fact, India continued receiving Japan's yen loans throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

During 1961–70, Japan's total official loans amounted to $1456.6 million, of which Pakistan received $264.4 million. Its share of accumulated Japanese ODA for the period was 18.1 percent. After Japan extended its first loan to Pakistan of $20 million in 1961, Pakistan's share of loans increased gradually until 1964, reaching 80 percent in that year. This indicates that Pakistan figured prominently in Japan's economic assistance programs during the early 1960s. However, as Malik notes, this upward trend reversed in the latter half of the 1960s as the shadow of the 1965 war with India and President Ayub Khan's resignation in March 1969 ended Pakistan's "Decade of Development."[11]

Loans to Pakistan between 1961 and 1970 were for 18 developmental projects, including developing natural resources and establishing industries. Japan's first official loan to Pakistan was directed toward the development of key industrial facilities in both regions of the then-divided country. In East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the funding supported the construction of the Chittagong Steel Mill and the Ghorasal urea fertilizer plant, among other projects. In West Pakistan (now Pakistan), it contributed to the establishment of a rayon manufacturing plant, a sugar refinery, a PVC production facility, and several chemical plants including those for ammonium sulfate and caustic soda. Additional initiatives included the development of a television broadcasting station, microwave and telecommunications infrastructure, the Chittagong fishing port, and improvements to the national railway system. Out of the total loan amount of $255 million, approximately $155 million (61%) was allocated to East Pakistan, while $100 million (39%) was invested in West Pakistan. Japan's approach to aid distribution was widely appreciated in Pakistan, as it was seen as the only international donor committed to a balanced allocation of financial resources, technical training, and industrial development across both regions of the country.
(Malik 2009, 78).

Japan's Aid Relations with Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka (Ceylon until 1972) was another important South Asian country for Japan in the post-war years. As noted earlier, the country displayed a friendly and liberal view of the San Francisco Treaty and a friendly attitude towards the defeated Japan. When Japan joined the Colombo Plan

[11] All aid figures are drawn here from Malik (2009: 69).

in 1954, six Sri Lankans were offered technical training in Japan. In 1965, Japan began loan assistance to Sri Lanka. It offered loan-based projects for Telecom Network Expansion and the construction of Inginimitya Dam in 1977. A former Sri Lankan ambassador to Japan, Wijayasiri (1996, 166), claimed Japan was one of the prominent members of the Aid Sri Lanka Consortium since its inception in 1966 and subsequently became Sri Lanka's largest donor country. Ratnayake and Amaratunge (2022) discuss Japan's aid to Sri Lanka in detail, advising that Sri Lanka received its first yen loan from Japan in 1965 as commodity aid under the label of technical cooperation and its first grant aid in 1969. Grants and loans increased substantially in subsequent years, making Japan Sri Lanka's top donor for twenty years from 1989 to 2009 (44, 264).

Changing Focus of Japan's Aid in Asia

Japan's aid in the early post-war years was in a development stage and somewhat opaque. It was largely mercantilist (Arase 1995), but even then, it was used to convey strategic signals, as noted above, in line with some of Japan's strategic objectives in Asia. Japan regarded both India and Pakistan as important Asian nations in the 1950s. However, on shifting its focus to Southeast Asia in the late 1960s and incorporating China as an aid recipient in the late 1970s, South Asia's economic and politico-strategic importance to Japan reduced relatively. The amount of Japan's aid to South Asia from the late 1960s onwards became relatively much smaller than to other regions of Asia. Yet aid remained important as the primary reason for Japan's engagement with South Asia and, as we see here, the perennial "connector."

6. Aid as a Connector Amid Low-Key Bilateral Ties (late-1960s to end of 1990s)

During these three long decades, most South Asian countries were officially categorized as "developing" or "least developed countries" and therefore qualified for Japan's foreign aid. Of the seven LDCs (least developed countries) in the Asian region in the early 1990s, five were in South Asia (if Afghanistan is included, plus Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, and Bhutan) (Rix 1993,137). The economic appeal and strategic significance that Japan recognized in parts of South Asia in the early post-war decades, particularly India, as noted earlier, had largely dissipated. South Asia became 'distant' in Japan's overall politico-security and economic vision of Asia (Jain 1996).

This period was marked by Japan's apathy and mutual low-level interaction (Yamazaki and Takahashi 1993; Hirose 1996) in most fields of bilateral ties. Tokyo saw in the subcontinent's largest country, India, neither economic opportunity nor strategic value, and Japan tended to disregard New Delhi in its regional vision during this period (Izuyama 2020). However, Japan's aid/ODA served as a key connector to its South Asia engagement.

Flow of Aid to South Asia

Japan's aid to India: Politico-diplomatic and economic interactions were low across this period, and twice, Japan briefly suspended aid to India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. Nevertheless, Japan continued its aid engagement with India and other South Asian nations. Murthy (1993, 320–362) presents a very detailed study of Japan's aid to India during this period. Japan's aid projects were for agriculture, irrigation, rural development, small industries and health and welfare. Yen loans increased but not significantly, and since they were subject to Japan's yearly budget cycles, they remained "highly erratic" (325). During the 1980s and 1990s, funds were provided to install gas pipelines, fertilizer plants, hydroelectric schemes and telecommunications networks (341). As a key feature, Murthy recognizes that although these projects were small and the level of aid money was modest, "no aid friction nor controversy" occurred (358). Similarly, Arase (1995, 114-16) noted that around this period, reports appeared of corruption, scandals, and Japanese aid money flowing into the hands of some Asian leaders and their private bank accounts, but no such incidents were noted in the case of South Asia.

Yet the picture here was not entirely rosy. A major exception to smooth operations was the Japan-World Bank co-financing of a large irrigation and power-generation blueprint, the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Dam Project in the mid-1980s, which was withdrawn due to opposition in India over environmental concerns. Questions about the project's impact on the environment were raised in the Japanese Diet (Schoenberger 1990). With the economic liberalization process set in place in India in the early 1990s, this period of low-key politico-economic relationships with India was nearing its end when India and Pakistan both tested nuclear bombs in 1998. In response, Japan imposed tough sanctions on both nations, including temporarily halting some aid programs. The move plunged Japan's relationship with India to its lowest post-war point, right as the 20th century was coming to a close. Such decisions are made at the highest political level; however, Japan's first ODA Charter, which contained strict guidelines on military expenditures and weapons development, may also have influenced this stance (MOFA1992). Even before these guidelines were formalized, Japan had responded strongly to India's 1974 nuclear test (Langdon 1975).

Japan–Pakistan aid: Unlike India, which had declared itself a non-aligned country, Pakistan remained a key recipient of Japan's aid because of its close ties with the United States, Japan's key security ally. Until 1970, Japan was Pakistan's third-largest source of economic assistance (Malik 2009, 9). However, between 1971 and 1977, Japan reduced its ODA to Pakistan substantially because of the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto administration's (1971–77) nationalization policy, which negatively impacted Pakistan's economy. Many of the companies in which Japan had made investments were nationalized without adequate compensation, shattering Japan's confidence in Pakistan's economy and capacity for economic management (Malik 2009, 87). Politico-diplomatic tensions between Japan and Pakistan deepened further as Japan leaned towards Bangladesh, inspiring Pakistan to refuse to pay back a loan from Japan that had been invested in

East Pakistan.

In the late 1970s, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan led Japan to inject foreign aid into Pakistan under pressure from the US in the name of strategic responsibility and burden sharing. Yasutomo (1986, 4) notes that in the 1980s, in the wake of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan was considered critical to the security interests of the Western alliance. Malik (2009, 10) claims that "Japan's support to Pakistan largely contributed to ending the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan." Later in that publication (Table 5.1; 100), Malik advises, "In March 1980, Japan increased its ODA to Pakistan by 230 percent from the previous year, thus making it the largest recipient of ODA [of any country]. In the following year, 27.9 percent of Japan's ODA was extended to Pakistan." In the 1980s, Japan gave Pakistan more aid than any other Western country. During the 1990s, Japan was Pakistan's top donor and focused its cooperation on the social sectors, economic infrastructure, agriculture and the environment.

According to Pakistani scholar Malik, "the Japanese government adopted an unambiguous policy to support the *Mujahideen* (holy warriors) against Soviet forces and the Soviet-backed Kabul forces' (Malik 2009, 93). Malik further notes that, together with Japan, the United States and Western allies fought a proxy war through Pakistan, which for Japan meant through its aid (94). However, as Rix (1993 163) notes, Japanese policymakers referred to this as Japan's "international contribution" *[kokusai koken]* or even "peace aid" *[heiwa enjo]*. Regardless of the official language, in the 1980s, Japanese planners made the national aid program more strategic and in alignment with the US objectives. Yasutomo (1986) clearly identifies the strategic aspect of Japan's aid in the 1980s. Besides Pakistan, other strategically located countries such as Thailand, Turkey and Egypt also received increased aid from Japan to help them maintain the status quo in their regions.

Japan and Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka received Japanese aid consistently during this period and was the highest recipient of Japanese aid in South Asia per capita, at almost double that of Bangladesh and 20 times more than that of India (Jain 1991, 51). Some observers felt that President Jayewardene had cashed in on Japan's goodwill. When asked by a Japanese interlocutor about a gift during his visit to Japan, Jayewardene responded, "What's the biggest hospital you've built?" "A 1000-bed" was the reply, to which Jayewardene responded, "Then build a 1,001-bed hospital and keep one bed for me."[12] Wijayasiri (1996, 167–68) details Japan's aid and the sectors that received it. These include grants for hospitals and television broadcasting facilities, as well as concessionary loans for infrastructure projects, such as telecommunications, Colombo Port, and airport extensions. Ratnayake and Amaratunge's (2022, 266) study supports these findings. The Sri Lankan economy was more open during this period, but the civil war from 1983 to 2009 adversely impacted the country's economy. However, Japan's aid flowed to Sri Lanka, as

[12] *Far Eastern Economic Review,* 24 January 1991 (quoted in Jain 1991).

displayed in Table 15:1 in Ratnayake and Amaratunge's 2022 study (265).

Japan and Bangladesh: The most notable story of this period is the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971 and Japan's support for its development. Japan had developed sympathy for Bengali nationalism and self-determination. Japan–Bengal connections reach far back to such influential figures as Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose to Justice Radha Binod Pal, who had played crucial roles in forging a strong India-Japan relationship since the 19th century (Panda 2021). Pal was especially known among Japan's political class because of his role as a member of the Tokyo Tribunal and for his dissenting voice favoring the acquittal of all Japanese defendants. To support the "liberation war" in East Pakistan, civil society groups raised funds in Tokyo in 1971, particularly to support East Pakistan's citizens. The Pakistan government declared such Japanese funding and support were unacceptable, perceiving Japan's action towards East Pakistan as interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs. After war broke out, Japan abruptly closed its Consulate-General in Dhaka (then East Pakistan), which also displeased Pakistan.

Even before Bangladesh became an independent nation, Japan provided aid for projects in East and West Pakistan, as noted earlier. A disastrous cyclone in 1970 that affected East Pakistan caught the attention of the Japanese people. Takashi Hayakawa, an LDP parliamentarian who later became known as 'Mr Bangladesh', was a key figure in raising funds for civic groups, which raised a sizeable amount to support relief work. Yet the Japanese people also gained the strong impression that the Pakistani government neglected the people of East Pakistan, which led to Japan's support for the independence of Bangladesh. When Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, Japan was one of the few countries to quickly recognize the new nation and establish an embassy in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Up to 2021, Japan provided over $16 billion in foreign aid to Bangladesh (Khatun et.al. 2023, 28; Mozumder and Al-Mamun 2014 178–79).

Bangladesh emerged as a significant recipient of Japan's aid soon after Japan's diplomatic recognition of it in early 1972. Aid was initially mainly humanitarian, on the understanding that Bangladesh was a poor and helpless *[kawaiso]* country that deserved Japan's support on humanitarian grounds (Jain 1991, 51). Some have argued that goodwill and a sense of international responsibility for poverty alleviation guided Japan's aid to Bangladesh. Yanagihara (1993, 190), for example, argued that beyond supporting poverty alleviation and social development, Japan saw Bangladesh had little strategic importance for either Japan's military or economic security. At the invitation of the Japanese government, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, visited Japan in October 1973, after which Japan committed US$18 million in economic assistance to Bangladesh for relief and rehabilitation.

Following this, Bangladesh emerged as one of the top recipients of Japan's aid in the 1970s,

positioned after China and Southeast Asia, where Japan's aid was concentrated. Rix (1993, 171) notes that in 1990, Japan gave one-third of its bilateral aid to only three countries (Indonesia, China and the Philippines) while giving just under one-half to only five countries (the above three plus Thailand and Bangladesh). Yanagihara (1993, 189) claims Japan was alone in providing loan aid to Bangladesh. Still, most of these loans were subsequently converted into grants through the debt relief grant system, a practice Japan also applied in the case of Nepal (Gyawali 1996).

Japan provided various kinds of grants for food and agriculture, as well as other project support for energy, power generation, transport, and communication. The issue of liabilities was complex since Pakistan had refused to repay the loans invested in erstwhile East Pakistan. When the issue was resolved, Bangladesh signed two agreements assuming a debt liability of $125 million (Kalam 1996, 114–15). The amount of Japan's aid was small for the first five years after Bangladesh's independence, but this changed in the mid-1970s as the country's need for development aid became more obvious. Japan became Bangladesh's number one donor in most years, overtaking the US. However, the flow was inconsistent and slowed, to some extent, because of delays in some projects and perhaps because of Japan's increased attention toward China (116).

As Japan's aid budget grew in the 1980s, Bangladesh's share also grew. The loan component overtook project and technical grants, signalling Japan's confidence in the Bangladeshi economy and its capacity to absorb and repay loans. The iconic Meghna Bridge, also known as the Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge, was completed in 1991, mainly with Japanese assistance and co-financed by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge was constructed in 1998, and in appreciation of Japan's assistance, the Bangladesh government arranged a picture of this bridge to appear on the nation's 100-taka bills (Embassy of Japan Bangladesh 2022).

However, the aid relationship with Bangladesh was not without challenges. The "KAFCO Affair, a fertiliser factory project in Chittagong, involving not Japan's ODA but finance through a Japanese corporation, threatened to 'disrupt Dhaka–Tokyo ties and perhaps even ruin the harmonious relations that had developed between the two countries over the years" (Kalam 1996, 129). This was noted by one analyst as "the most corrupt deal in Bangladesh's history," involving extensive bribery provided by the Japanese company Marubeni to government ministers and officials (Moni 2006, 121). After tough negotiations, the challenge was resolved to both countries' satisfaction. Kalam (1996, 132) noted that "Japan's commitment to act as a development partner of Bangladesh has remained unshaken despite the KAFCO episode."

Aid to Nepal: Japan began its aid to Nepal in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Nepal was South Asia's least developed (LDC) and poorest country, with the lowest income. Over the years since then, Japan has supported socio-economic development activities across almost all sectors

of the Nepalese economy (Malla 2014, 95). Japan provided its first yen loan in 1970 through the EXIM Bank of Japan to the Nepal Industrial Development Corporation for industrial development. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, loans were provided for developing the Kulekhani I and II hydropower projects (Shrestha 2013). From a modest start, Japan became the largest bilateral donor to Nepal in the 1990s. With Japan's 43.9 percent share of Nepal's total bilateral aid of $290 million in 1991, other OECD countries lagged; the second largest share (11.5 percent) that year came from Germany (Gyawali 1996, 181). Malla (2014, 81) has noted Japan's significant role in building roads in Nepal, such as the Banepa-Sindhuli road network, and in developing Nepal's power sector.

Japan's aid came largely in the form of grants. Some loans were eventually converted into grants under the debt relief system because of Nepal's difficulty with repayments, as well as Bangladesh's, as noted above. Balancing loans and grants became a challenge for Japan, as manifested in the controversial Arun-3 hydroelectric project involving nine donors, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Japan's share was the largest ($165 million of an estimated $1.2billion). Nepal asked Japan to provide funding as a grant-based project, but Japan advised that the amount was so large that it could not be allocated as a grant. Apart from financing, this project also became controversial on environmental grounds, with many NGOs calling it an example of bad development. This was not unusual in Nepal, where civil society and aid workers have seriously questioned many development projects (Gyawali 1996, 184–88). Because of local protests and political controversies surrounding the project, Japan and most other donors withdrew from the project (Mahat 2019).[13]

7. Japan's ODA to South Asia Perched for the New Century

The discussion above makes it amply clear that Japan has an interest in continuing its aid for South Asia, even with intra-country variations, despite its focus on foreign policy elsewhere in Asia during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, while aid remained the trusty connector throughout these roughly three decades of low-level political and economic connection, Japan emerged as the biggest donor to all South Asian countries by the end of the Cold War (Varma 2011, 232–33).

The twentieth century ended with unfortunate circumstances for two of South Asia's key players. India and Pakistan drew Japan's unprecedented sanctions in response to their testing of nuclear weapons in 1998. Both countries' bilateral relationships with Japan became so tense that normalization seemed far away. However, as the analysis in Part 2 explains, global and regional geopolitics and domestic circumstances in Japan and South Asian nations led Japan to change its

[13] The Arun 3 Hydro Energy project is currently progressing under an agreement between the governments of India and Nepal, executed by India's SJVN Arun-3 Power Development Company Pvt. Ltd. (SAPDC); see India News Network (2024).

course again. This reconsideration has given further life to Japan's geo-strategic use of ODA, as regional and global power relations, especially with the rise of China, have reconfigured the global strategic landscape into the twenty-first century.

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Abstract (in Japanese)

要　約

この二部構成のシリーズの最初の論文である本稿は、日本の政府開発援助（ODA）を通じた日-南アジア関係を検討し、南アジア諸国の事例をほとんど見過ごしてきた、日本の ODA に関する先行研究に重大な貢献をもたらすものである。日本は 1954 年に南アジア地域への援助を開始し、1958 年に初めての対インド円借款を、1960 年代初頭に対パキスタン円借款を供与した。南アジアは 20 世紀を通じて一貫して日本の借款やその他の援助の受取国であり続けたにも関わらず、日本政府は 1970 年代に東南アジアや中国への注目を高め、南アジアの相対的な重要性は数十年間にわたり低下した。また歴史的、経済的、戦略的にも、アジアの他の地域と比較して、南アジアは日本政府にとってそれほど重要ではないとみなされてきた。この論文は、援助、すなわち ODA は、それでもなお日本と南アジア諸国との関わりの継続的な手段となってきたと主張している。例えば、1998 年に日本がインドとパキスタンの核実験を強く非難したことで両国の関係は悪化した。しかし 21 世紀初頭からは、アジアにおける経済的および戦略的なダイナミクスの変化が、日本の南アジア地域に対する関心を再び集中させ、日本の援助とともに関係は大幅に改善した。この時代の側面については、本シリーズの第 2 部で議論する。

キーワード： 日本、南アジア、戦後、ODA 研究、対外援助史、社会経済・技術協力、核実験