**Economic Cooperation for Japan’s own Self-Reliance**

What were the origins of Japan’s foreign economic assistance? Works on international cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ public information on ODA mention postwar reparations. Yet delving further fails to provide a clear answer as to whether reparations were in any way the source of present-day development cooperation and aid. Clarifying this aspect should bring into sharp relief the trajectory from the economic cooperation of the 1950s to today’s ODA.

Why in the first place did Japan, struggling as it was in the early postwar years to get its own economy back on its feet, venture into Southeast Asia in the form of providing economic cooperation? For several years after the end of World War II, Japan was far too destitute to give aid to other nations. The national income per capita in 1949 has been estimated as equivalent to US$100—one-fourteenth of that of the United States in the same year and even below that of nations such as Argentina, Mexico, and Turkey (Kindleberger 1965: 12). The average lifespan in 1952, when Japan began to make moves to join the Colombo Plan, was finally just edging past 60, and there were even fears of being regarded as a “semi-developed” country. In other words, Japan punched above its weight to participate in international operations providing aid to developing countries, as is evident from the fact that many aid recipients had higher income levels than Japan at that time (1954–60) (Kajima Institute of International Peace 1973: 8).