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# Commonwealth Manoeuvres Behind Japan's 1954 Inclusion in the Colombo Plan: The Case of Australia and Canada

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## [Abstract]

In early 1952, the possibility of Japan joining the Commonwealth-initiated Colombo Plan was first raised. This attempt was blocked by Australian concerns that, due to Japan's precarious balance-of-payments situation, Colombo Plan capital aid would flow into Japan rather than Japanese capital flowing into the Southeast Asian recipient members. However, with increasing pressure from the United States to allow Japan to join, the Canadian government came up with a compromise in the summer of 1954 whereby Japan would join the Plan as a member of the Council for Technical Co-operation but would only be given 'observer status' at the Consultative Committee and therefore have limited access to Plan capital. Although the major donor members were in agreement with this compromise, Japan's sudden request to remove herself entirely from the Consultative Committee in effect jeopardised this agreement amongst the donors, and was of sufficient impact for them to discard the compromise altogether and to grant Japan full membership at the Ottawa Consultative

Committee in October 1954.

**Key Words: Colombo Plan, Commonwealth, Australia, Canada, Japan**

## I. Introduction

In early January 1950, the foreign ministers of eight member states of the British Commonwealth—Australia, Britain, Canada, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), India, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa—met in the Ceylonese city of Colombo, following a proposal made the year before by the Indian ambassador to China, Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, to the British and Australian ambassadors in Beijing concerning the establishment of a multilateral fund which would help the Southeast Asian states in their struggle against Communist movements within their borders (Van Bilzen 127). Based on a memorandum initiated by the Australian government and sponsored by the New Zealand and Ceylonese governments, the meeting endeavoured to “provide a framework within which an international co-operative effort could be promoted to assist the countries of the [South and Southeast Asian] area to raise their living standards” (Department of State, 1126). To that end, the ‘Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia—which would be officially launched in July 1951—called on the Commonwealth “to contribute to the UN’s Technical Assistance Program, to provide aid to Asia on a bilateral basis, to coordinate the aid delivery with other Commonwealth governments, and for Asian nations to make submissions detailing their development needs, and for the conference to establish a [Commonwealth] consultative committee to oversee the logistics of delivering aid to the region” (Oakman 40). As such, aid that was

provided to the recipients under the Colombo Plan would be arranged on a bilateral basis, would largely take the form of grants, loans and technical assistance, and would be used to promote “large-scale national projects in all fields of infrastructure, notably irrigation, energy supplies, transport communications (railroads), insurance, education and housing” (Akita et al. 1). In February 1951 the United States—despite her confessed dislike of empire—allowed herself to be formally admitted into what was essentially a Commonwealth project, albeit with the proviso that the Americans would retain “a large measure of independence from the Commonwealth organization in order to meet their own strategic and economic objectives, and maintain congressional approval,” and that the word ‘Commonwealth’ be removed from the Commonwealth Consultative Committee’s official title for good measure (Oakman, 60). But for the cash-strapped nations of the Commonwealth, this certainly was a price worth paying: aid requests submitted by countries such as India, Pakistan and Ceylon—which cost over £1 billion pounds for the first six years of the project—could never be met without American participation, and it was only thanks to Washington’s financial muscle that the Colombo Plan became “undoubtedly the first, most significant multilateral effort aimed at promoting economic development in any part of the world” (Ocran et al. 142).

While it was no great surprise that the Commonwealth nations did their utmost to woo and cajole the United States into joining this expensive remnant of empire, the admission of another donor country to this cosy fraternity in October 1954 was somewhat unexpected. Japan—the erstwhile enemy of the Allies that had demonstrated almost incomprehensible savagery and resilience against her foes until the dropping of two atomic bombs barely nine years before—was admitted into the Colombo Plan at the 6<sup>th</sup> Consultative Committee meeting in Ottawa, 22 months after the Tokyo government made its first overtures for participation to the American and

Indian representatives at the general meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East in Bandung (Koyabashi 521). It was of course evident that the West was seeking to normalise relations with the former Axis power during this time: the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, along with the US-Japan Security Treaty, “essentially rehabilitated Japan as a sovereign state and US ally within international society and the regional order” against the backdrop of Communist aggression in Asia in the form of the Korean War (Buzan et al. 148). The Australians, who in addition to battling Japanese soldiers in areas such as New Guinea, New Britain and Borneo also had to endure heavy Japanese bombing on their mainland between February 1942 and November 1943 (Aszkielowicz 31), also re-established formal diplomatic relations with the Japanese in April 1952 with the coming into force of the Peace Treaty (Rix 70). Both countries were in no doubt that the amelioration of relations between them was beneficial and necessary in the new postwar global order. Japan in particular wanted to improve relations with her Asiatic neighbours via measures such as providing technical and capital assistance and joining international associations, and Australian support was considered important in order for Tokyo to achieve this objective (Oakman 99). But ‘old wounds die hard’, as the saying goes, and “[m]emories of the Second World War and il-feeling towards Japan were still strong in Australia and these impeded political and economic co-operation” (Kobayashi 518). While Australia did not—and probably could not—explicitly oppose Japan’s admission to bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, having a former enemy come into a “congenial” organisation made up of blood allies such as the Colombo Plan was “likely to be more problematic” (Oakman 100). Indeed, Australia flexed her muscles at the 5<sup>th</sup> Consultative Committee in New Delhi in October 1953 and thwarted Japan’s hopes of joining the Colombo Plan by resolutely

opposing Tokyo's application for admission and thus effectively ensuring that no other member state would go the extra mile to sponsor Japan's entry into the club (Kobayashi 518). So it was all the more surprising that barely one year later, Australia would do a complete about-face and sponsor Japan's admission to the Plan as a donor nation.

This sudden and dramatic change in Australia's policy towards relations with Japan at the time has rendered the story of Japan's 1954 admission to the Colombo Plan as a notable and significant episode in the history of Australian foreign policy-making. As such, Japan's entry into the Colombo Plan has been scrutinised by various academics in the field of postwar Asia-Pacific diplomacy. In a relatively short 2002 article, Ademola Adeleke gives a very brief outline of the positions of the various major Colombo Plan members such as Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States concerning the question of Japanese admission with particular emphasis on the role of Washington (Adeleke 1-14). In a more extensive 2014 study, Ai Kobayashi attempts to observe the admission process from Tokyo's point of view by delving into Japan's intentions behind her application to join the Plan and focusing on the Japanese government's analysis of Australian intentions and actions vis-à-vis Tokyo's admission request, and of the Japanese government's perception of the change in the dynamics of Japanese-Australian relations as a result of Canberra's eventual sponsorship of Japanese entry (Kobayashi 518-33). Daniel Oakman, in his seminal work on the history of Australian involvement in the Colombo Plan, does devote a certain amount of content on Australia's attitude towards Japanese admission. But the sub-chapter somewhat lacks a substantial chronological narrative which could help to explain in more satisfactory detail the change in Canberra's thought process during the momentous period in question (Oakman 98-111).

Therefore this study, after a brief overview of the state of immediate postwar Australia-Japan relations, will draw from declassified Australian foreign policy documents in an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of Australia's reasons for her shift in position concerning Japan's admission to the Colombo Plan by delving into the minute discussions that took place amongst the relevant officials in Canberra as well as between Australia and the interested member states. Also, by consulting relevant Canadian foreign policy documents, this study seeks to look deeper into the role that Canada - the host nation of the 6<sup>th</sup> Consultative Committee that allowed Japanese admission - played in the negotiation process and to determine how much, if any, credit should be given to the Ottawa government for Japan's diplomatic success in 1954.

## II. Immediate Postwar Australia-Japan Relations

Whereas Adolf Hitler tended to evoke "anger" and Benito Mussolini "derision" amongst the Australians during and after the Second World War, the image of Japanese militarism "stimulated a reaction approximating to hatred" (Watt 206). There were several reasons for the particularly hostile Australian attitude towards Japan. It was after all the Japanese who had threatened the survival of the Australian metropolitan territory for the first time in the former British colony's history, and the Japanese treatment of Western prisoners of war—including those who had worked in the construction of the Burma-Siam railway—was regarded as "brutal and unforgivable" (Watt 206). As such, no other nation "was as rigid as Australia in [her] efforts to ensure that Japan should never again have the capacity to commit another act of aggression" (Watt 211). To that end the Australian government, led by

Prime Minister Ben Chifley and External Affairs Minister Herbert Evatt, insisted on taking part “in the armistice with Japan, the Occupation of Japan, the Tokyo war crimes trials and the governance of Japan via the Allied Council of Japan”, the latter being an advisory body to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Douglas MacArthur (Rix 3).

The MacArthur–Northcott Agreement of December 1945 allowed for a British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) to participate in the occupation of Japan under the command of an Australian Commander-in-Chief who had the right of direct access to MacArthur, and the very first Australian components began arriving in Japan in February 1946 (Grey 49). The most important objective of the occupation forces was “to ensure the implementation of the terms of [Japan’s] unconditional surrender that ended the war in September 1945”, and to that end the BCOF was required “to maintain military control and to supervise the demilitarisation and disposal of the remnants of the Japanese war machine” in its area of responsibility (Klintworth 22). Sir William Webb, a justice of the High Court of Australia who from 1943 to 1945 had already been commissioned to report on the atrocities or breaches of warfare committed by Japanese military forces, was sent out to serve as Canberra’s representative on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East—better known as the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal—and would ultimately be appointed by MacArthur to serve as President of the Tribunal in April 1946 despite his ability to be impartial being called into question (Futamura 60–61). Furthermore, Macmahon Ball, a prominent Australian political scientist and diplomat, represented the entire British Commonwealth in the Allied Council. Although Ball often found himself caught in the middle between British and American policy for the occupation and having to mediate amongst bickering Commonwealth governments, his prestigious position at least projected an outward appearance that it was a “significant

opportunity for Australia to exert influence from within upon the future of Japan” (Aszkielowicz 21).

Whilst it was evident from the beginning that the Allied occupation of Japan would in effect be dominated by the United States, Ben Chifley’s Labor administration nevertheless endeavored to impose its own agenda concerning the direction of postwar Japanese politics and society – often at the expense of incurring the wrath of Washington. Australia’s main objective in her role as an occupying power was, as mentioned above, “to ensure [her own] national security, particularly against the emergence of a resurgent Japan” (Wood 33). To that end, Canberra vigorously argued for the abolition of the position of emperor (Wood 33), insisted that the Japanese people be given the right to review their new Constitution of 1947 and fiercely objected to MacArthur’s ban on labour strikes (Dunn 82). Much of the Australian demands was firmly brushed off by the Supreme Commander and his Washington masters—MacArthur felt that Emperor Hirohito’s continued presence would provide stability and help avoid social turmoil, while a politicized labour movement sounded just a little too socialist for his liking—and it would take a change in the Australian government for Canberra and Washington to heal the rifts and to see things more eye-to-eye.

The Harry Truman administration, from 1947, adopted a ‘reverse course’ on Japan by implementing “a more politically and economically conservative program designed to stabilize the Japanese political economy [which would] set the stage for increased Japanese military strength and burden-sharing” as fears of the threat from the Soviet Union grew in Washington (Christensen 35). The Chifley government had been strongly opposed to this sudden change in American policy towards Japan for fear that this shift would stoke reactionary sentiments in Japan. However, Robert Menzies—the leader of the conservative Liberal Party who succeeded Chifley as Australian



Prime Minister in 1949—was more sympathetic to the American position and therefore could be persuaded to “fall into line and assist the economic rehabilitation of Japan” (Kersten 288). But even a staunch anti-Communist like Menzies could not but balk at Truman’s proposal to negotiate with the Japanese to prepare for a peace treaty in October 1950 in the wake of the outbreak of the Korean War in June. Truman’s peace treaty envisioned the international recognition of Japan as an independent sovereign state with military capabilities—an issue that would irk many Australians fearful of a revival of Japanese militarism. Therefore Menzies and his External Affairs Minister, Percy Spender, put forward the position in their talks with Washington that “without a security arrangement with the US they could not agree to the acceptance of the proposed Japanese peace treaty” (Cotton 46). The United States needed Australian cooperation to ensure the successful progression of her Japan policy, not least because the agreement of a two-thirds majority of the signatories to the Japanese instruments of surrender was needed to end the occupation and restore Japanese independence. Moreover, Mao Zedong’s Communist takeover of China in October 1949 persuaded Washington of the “desirability of accelerating the integration of the Japanese economy with that of South and Southeast Asia” in order to facilitate Tokyo’s future economic expansion (Dower 400), and Canberra’s regional influence would be pivotal for this to be accomplished. As such, the United States offered Australia and New Zealand—another deeply sceptical signatory—a collective security agreement designed “to assuage Australian anxieties about a remilitarized Japan” (Patience 161). The Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty—better known as the ANZUS Pact which was signed on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1951—would serve to smooth the way for the signing of the San Francisco Treaty on the 8<sup>th</sup> of the same month and the consequent establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the signatories and Japan in April 1952.

However, this in no way meant that Australia-Japan relations had become all fine and dandy post-1952: after all, the exchanging of ambassadors was hardly a magic wand which could instantly wipe out the Australian people's lingering feeling of anger and bitterness towards the Japanese. Also, Australia's pre-1952 trade and commercial policies based upon her hostility to her former enemy ensured that there was a considerable number of issues that remained outstanding after the resumption of diplomatic relations. Upon joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948, Australia had "specifically excluded Japan from consideration", and when Canberra announced universal import restrictions in March 1952, it was made clear that the restrictions "applied equally to all countries except Japan, against which even stricter controls operated than had been the case in the later 1930s" (Bowles 80). When Japan applied to join the GATT in July 1952, Australia objected on the grounds that if Japanese entry were to be allowed, the discriminatory import restrictions that Canberra had placed on Japanese goods would have to be removed—something that the Australians would not be able to tolerate, either politically or economically (Capling 48). Furthermore, a more practical problem concerning trade and commerce emerged between the two countries as soon as diplomatic relations were restored. Since the 1930s, Japanese fishermen had been engaged in pearl fisheries in the Arafura Sea, situated between Australia's Arnhem Land and Dutch New Guinea (Peattie 141). After World War II Australia, in line with other members of the international community with maritime boundaries, declared her sovereign rights over her continental shelf and thereby excluded Japanese fishermen from this highly lucrative area (Kojima 35). Tokyo argued that "pearl fisheries belong to the high sea fisheries and should be subject to the freedom of fishing by all States" (Kojima 35), but Canberra insisted on restricting Japanese operations in the region (Kobayashi 523). The situation was not helped by the fact that while the two sides

were in negotiations on the issue shortly after the resumption of diplomatic relations, the Japanese unilaterally recommenced pearling operations in areas such as the coast of Darwin—which had been the target of heavy Japanese bombing during the war (Oakman 103). Negotiations could not but be broken off at this point, which led to an Australian Member of Parliament, Edward Ward, referring to the abrupt Japanese resumption of pearling as Australia's very own "Pearl Harbour" (cf. Kobayashi 523). This, then, was the tense and antagonistic Australian frame of mind against which Japan found herself in her endeavour to join the Colombo Plan.

### III. Explaining the Shift in Australia's Japan Policy

Even before the official resumption of diplomatic relations between Australia and Japan in April 1952, Australia was under some pressure from Commonwealth nations such as Britain to lend her support to "any proposal directed towards participation of Japan in the Colombo Plan [as there] is a distinct possibility that the Asians will suggest Japanese participation which it may be argued would have advantages of ... increasing the flow of scarce capital goods and raw materials to Colombo Plan recipients and] increasing attractiveness of Colombo Plan to recipient governments at a time when their interest in the plan may be diminishing" (NAA: A1838, 3013/9/3/3, 8 Mar 1952). In addition to the reasons mentioned above, the Australian government wanted to prevent Japanese admission due to the fact that "the likely reaction in Australia to any idea that Japan is a source of financial assistance to South and South East Asia would be met by argument that Japan should first meet justifiable reparation claims [for the war]" (NAA: A1838, 3013/9/3/3, 8 Mar 1952). Nevertheless, Australia was aware that in the long run Japanese participation would

be “a further method of binding Japan to the democratic camp and still further enable her to resent the blandishments of communism. This would seem to be a logical step to the line taken throughout the Peace Treaty negotiations [and in the case of an outright Australian opposition] Asian governments may well ask whether Australia is able to compensate for loss of benefits potentially available from Japan” (NAA: A1838, 3013/9/3/3, 10 Mar 1952). Therefore, in preparation for deliberations at the 4<sup>th</sup> Consultative Committee in Karachi in March 1952, it was decided that the Australian position would be to adhere herself to “a scheme whereby the issue can be shelved for the immediate future with an assurance of consideration when the time is more favourable” (NAA: A1838, 3013/9/3/3, 10 Mar 1952). As such, Canberra asked its representative at the Committee, Donald Munro, to fudge the Japan agenda by informing the Asian representatives that any consideration of participation of Japan would be “premature” because “there is a case for considering participation of France before Japan [and there] might be justifiable protests from Philippines and Indonesia at any move to encourage Japanese aid to other Asian countries while reparation claims are unsettled” (NAA: A10299, C13, 14 Mar 1952). Due to such efforts on the part of the Australians, no formal discussion on Japanese admission took place in Karachi (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 26 Aug 1953).

But this movement on the part of Britain and other Asian Commonwealth members to try and bring Japan into the Colombo Plan in early 1952 prompted Australian officials to clarify their own position on how Australia’s future relationship with Japan, and how Southeast Asia’s future relationship with Japan, should develop. Despite the heavy historical baggage and the ongoing arguments on trade and commerce that existed between the two countries, there is little doubt of Canberra’s awareness that Tokyo’s admission to the Colombo Plan would in principle be beneficial and worthwhile. While the “tendency on the part of the Australian

public to limit contacts with Japan and some resistance to any positive programme of cultivated close relations with Japan” was undoubtedly a hindrance, Canberra was mindful of the necessity “that the attitude of Australia should be one not of grudging concessions, or reluctant dealings with a former enemy, but of positive co-operation ... despite the deep-rooted and legitimate distrust of Japanese intentions and the memory of Japanese aggression and atrocities, [Australia’s] national interest would seem to require substitution of a calculated co-operation with Japan rather than sentimental aloofness” (NAA: A1838, 3004/11 Part 1, 1 Aug 1952). In any case, the possibility of Japan’s political domination of Asia via her contribution to the Colombo Plan could not be used as legitimate grounds with which to declare Canberra’s opposition: after all, such logic “might imply that existing contributing countries [like Australia herself] could do the same” (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 3 Sep 1953). Australia also appreciated Japan’s “technical knowledge and experience needed by the underdeveloped Asian countries [and her] industrial capacity to provide the technical equipment and capital goods needed throughout South and South-East Asia” (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952).

However, a pressing dilemma for the Australian government in the summer of 1952 concerning Japanese admission seems to have been Canberra’s doubts about Tokyo’s ability to finance such assistance. Australian domestic opinion would never allow “Australian aid finding its way, however devious the route, to Japan” (NAA: A1838, 3013/9/3/3, 10 Mar 1952), and therefore Japan’s participation could be “justified only—or in any event mainly—by her capacity and willingness to extend aid” (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952). The dilemma for Australian officials was that previous Japanese declarations of her “readiness to make some contribution” had been, in their own assessment, “only in vague, general terms, involving no firm, precise commitment” (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952). And with good reason, in

the view of Canberra: Japan's balance-of-payments position seemed "to be somewhat precarious, because its strength is dependent on the continuance of factors which are essentially impermanent" such as her "distorted" accumulation of "very large holdings of sterling and exceptional dollar earning arising especially from the Korean War" (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952). The Australians therefore were unwilling to take this risk as long as it was "impossible to say conclusively that Japan would be able to make substantial financial contributions to the Colombo Plan between [1952] and 1957" (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952). However, Australia was not keen to emphasise any sort of economic argument to prevent Japan from entering since it could "invite the conclusion that [Australia's] opposition is in the interests of [Australia's] own welfare and the not the welfare of South and South-East Asia" (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952). As such, Canberra deemed it prudent to keep the Japanese admission issue "under review" until Japan could provide "concrete evidence of her willingness" to make a "substantial contribution" to the Plan (NAA: A4311, 145/1, August 1952).

No great change in the Australian attitude could be detected a year later, barely two months before the 5<sup>th</sup> Consultative Committee was to gather in New Delhi in October 1953. On being asked by its diplomats in Tokyo in the summer of 1953 as to what Australia's position on Japanese admission would be at the India meeting, the Canberra government replied that it was "not aware of any Japanese moves to revive the issue since the Karachi meeting was held, nor to our knowledge has such a suggestion been made from any other quarter" (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 3 Sep 1953). But the government nevertheless issued almost the exact same advice that it had formulated a year before. Not that the advice was any less relevant than it had been back then: with the Korean War having come to an end with an armistice in July 1953, Japan was now so short of sterling that it seemed necessary for sterling

aid *to be sent to Japan* rather than for Japan to send aid abroad (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, *circa* late 1953). With no real change in circumstances for Australia to change her mind for New Delhi, the Indian government advised Tokyo to withdraw the request it had made to attend the meeting “in view of opposition from certain quarter[s]” (NAA: A1838, 3013/9/3/3, 1 Oct 1953). In the end, the Japanese application was “side-tracked on the procedural grounds that the application should have been made to the Consultative Committee itself” rather than to the host government—an action “taken out of deference to [Australia’s] known views on the question” (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 28 Jul 1954).

The next in-depth debate on Japanese admission to the Colombo Plan took place two months before the 6<sup>th</sup> Consultative Committee was to meet in Ottawa in October 1954. The Australian government, working with the same advice that had been advanced by its officials for at least the past two-and-a-half years, was once again under pressure from members such as Britain to agree to Japanese participation this time round (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 28 Jul 1954). But with Japan’s balance-of-payments dilemma not yet having been satisfactorily resolved (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 28 Jul 1954), some of Australia’s own diplomats posted in Southeast Asia began to rail against the possibility of Japan receiving financial benefits as a Plan member which, in their opinion, would “amount to encouraging future aggression and more so when Japan aims to be the leader of all the regions of South-East Asia. History will be meaningless if a country does not learn by the happenings in the past and model her actions by past events and experience” (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 2 Aug 1954).

The situation was further complicated by the United States—who had hitherto been somewhat ambivalent on the issue owing to her reluctance to antagonise Australia—now deciding to weigh in more explicitly on the side of the pro-Japan camp after

Tokyo's approach to Washington on the subject (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954). In a hastily organised meeting in Washington attended by representatives of the major Colombo Plan donor members, the Americans put forward the suggestion that Japanese association with the Plan "in some feasible manner" should now be considered since her exclusion constituted "logical inconsistency" against the "background of generous policies pursued toward her" by the United States and the Commonwealth and also "prevented practical co-operation between Japan and South East Asia" (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954). In response, the Australians referred to Japan's "continuing economic difficulties which seemed to stand in the way of tangible contribution" and to the inevitable necessity, "even at this [late] stage", in having a "clearer role envisaged for [Japan] in relation to the Plan" (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954). The Americans admitted that the Japanese had not "gone beyond generalities" when explaining how they were planning to finance their aid contributions and, possibly out of reluctance to take responsibility for any potential fallout that may come about as a consequence of Japanese admission, made it clear that they "did not want to appear as primary sponsors" for Japan and that the initiative should come from the Asians (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954).

With Canberra and Washington seemingly at an impasse over the suitability of Japanese financial strength to merit membership of the Colombo Plan, a compromise was suggested: that Japan should be "brought into the technical co-operation scheme alone" at this time and not into the capital aid scheme (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954). This would provide Japan with the justification for joining the Plan while at the same time minimising any need for movement of Plan capital between Tokyo and the other member governments. The Americans at that point accepted that American "ideas would be met" with this compromise and agreed that "only this limited idea need be considered at present" (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954).



In addition to this novel approach, one other American argument for Japanese admittance seems to have helped soothe Australian anxieties to some extent. Washington was of the opinion that it “might be easier to influence Japan against undue commercial exploitation in the area if she were associated with the rest of us in the Plan” (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 12 Aug 1954)—in other words, to paraphrase the immortal observations of Lyndon Johnson, it would be better to have Japan inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in. It was not an entirely unpersuasive argument. As mentioned above, Tokyo’s main reason for wanting to join the Colombo Plan was to improve relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours and to dampen white member nations’ suspicions about future Japanese practices within an international framework (cf. Yoichi 104). The possibility of an exasperated Japan pursuing her own policy towards the Asian nations in a unilateral manner—as she had proved herself capable of doing in the pearl fisheries debacle with Australia—could not be ruled out. Moreover, the idea of Japan being allowed only to join the technical cooperation element of the Colombo Plan had its supporters high up within the Australian government—one such being the External Affairs Minister, Richard Casey, who described the situation as “rather like taking two bites at a cherry” and put forward the logic that allowing Tokyo in as a member of the Colombo Plan in any capacity would be Australia’s “first step” towards helping Japan out of its current economic difficulty—which was after all the root cause of Australia’s opposition—by helping her expand her export trade (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 16 Aug 1954). As Japan’s admission not only seemed inevitable but also practical, Casey urged his cabinet to get as much “political capital out of our being willing to allow Japan into the Colombo Plan”: it was, in his words, a “heaven-sent opportunity” through which Australia would be able to formulate a “new deal” with Japan (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 16 Aug 1954).

After mulling over such arguments in favour of Japanese admission, the Australian cabinet officially decided on 27 August 1954 to support Japan's entry into the Colombo Plan as a donor nation with the proviso that a majority of members including Britain and the United States were in favour and that the Asian countries did not oppose (NAA: A8411, 112/2/1/2, 28 Aug 1954). The Australians then suggested to the Canadian government—as the host of the 1954 Consultative Committee—that the Japanese be informed of the option of starting their association with the Plan “by means of membership of the technical side and not, for the time being, [concerning] themselves with the economic aid side” (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 1 Sep 1954). Canberra also emphasised its desire not to take the lead in proposing Japan for membership, instead assuring the Canadians that Australia would be happy to support and second a proposal that would come from the host government (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 1 Sep 1954). It looked as if it would now fall on the Ottawa government to tie up the loose ends of a successful Japanese application.

#### IV. Canada's Role in Japanese Admission

The Canadian government's position concerning Japanese admission into the Colombo Plan was slightly more complicated than that of its Australian counterpart. Ottawa was more inclined to “regard the United States view with respect to the closer association of Japan with the Colombo Plan favourably” (DCER, 20-402, 21 Jul 1954), had “no desire to close the door on the question of Japanese participation in the Colombo Plan” and agreed that Canada “should not be unduly influenced by the prejudices of other countries” (DCER, 20-401, 31 May 1954). However, that is not to say that Canada had no reservations about Japanese entry. As was the case

with Australia, Canada regarded Japan as a potential recipient nation of Colombo Plan aid—which lead the Ottawa government to suppose that granting Tokyo membership might “lead to expansion of the accepted area of the Plan and ultimately raise the possibility of applications for admission from Korea or Nationalist China. In view of relations between Japan and Korea, and the attitude of many existing members towards Nationalist China, such developments might imperil the co-operative nature of the Colombo Plan [and Canada is] anxious to avoid submitting the Plan to stresses which might lessen its present effective basis of co-operation” (DCER, 20-405, 9 Sep 1954).

The American position in 1954 was that consultations with the Canadians on Japanese membership had to have priority as Canada was hosting that year's Consultative Committee. Washington wanted Ottawa's “early consideration on the subject since, in the event that [Canada] might look favourably on Japanese participation in the forthcoming Committee meetings, the time for additional consultations with other Colombo Plan countries would be relatively short” (DCER, 20-402, 21 Jul 1954). In other words, as long as Canada was on board with American plans to bring Japan in, the United States would not find it too difficult to bend the opinions of the other member nations to her will.

Not wishing to go against the intentions of the United States but at the same time being sympathetic to the concerns of Australia, it was none other than the Canadians who had first come up with the compromise suggestion mentioned above limiting Japan's membership to the technical cooperation side of the Plan (DCER, 20-402, 21 Jul 1954). Canada proposed that Japan be granted full membership of the Plan's Council for Technical Co-operation, but be only given ‘observer status’ in the Consultative Committee—the highest decision-making body in the Plan with the ultimate authority to oversee financial aid matters. As mentioned above, this irregular

but expedient arrangement was deemed acceptable by all the major donor nations, and Australia—who now was “anxious to derive ‘full credit’ for the [changed] attitude which [she had] now taken with respect to Japanese membership”—volunteered to take soundings from the Asian members of the Colombo Plan as to what they thought of this arrangement (DCER, 20-406, 3 Sep 1954).

However, an unexpected and extraordinary act of diplomatic brinkmanship from the Japanese side flabbergasted the Canadian hosts and immediately changed the dynamics of the member states’ position on Japanese admission. Just a few weeks before the Ottawa Consultative Committee was due to meet, the Japanese government suddenly submitted an inquiry to the Canadians as to whether it would be possible for Tokyo to join the Council for Technical Co-operation *without* joining the Consultative Committee in any form, adding that Japan would be interested in joining the Consultative Committee only if this was necessary to allow membership of the Technical Co-operation Council (DCER, 20-407, 15 Sep 1954).

There is no doubt that Ottawa was taken aback by this unexpected turn of events, especially as this inquiry had been made apparently “without [Japan’s] knowledge of the favourable reactions Australia has received from several Asian countries” concerning full membership for Japan (DCER, 20-407, 15 Sep 1954). Whilst, as this article has demonstrated above, some donor members wanted to remove the possibility of Japan receiving financial aid from the Plan, there was never any consideration of Japan as a member being completely excluded from the Consultative Committee: indeed, only granting Japan ‘observer status’ in the Committee was in itself an exceptional compromise agreed upon under unusual circumstances.

There is no evidence to suggest that the donor members huddled together for an in-depth analysis as to why Japan made such an inquiry: the lack of time before the opening of the Ottawa Consultative Committee probably made any meaningful

discussion of this impractical (cf. DCER, 20-407, 15 Sep 1954). The official Japanese reason for the inquiry was that, as a member of the Consultative Committee, Tokyo had “not yet decided whether ... it would wish to be a donor or recipient” (DCER, 20-407, 15 Sep 1954). Whether the major donors believed this explanation is unclear, but what is clear is that offering Tokyo an unsatisfactory ‘observer status’ at this stage would have been unrealistic as Japan had now demonstrated her readiness to forgo a position within the Consultative Committee. If Japan’s request were to have been allowed, on the other hand, it would have meant setting up a precedent whereby a donor state providing much-needed technical know-how to underdeveloped members would be prohibited from going anywhere near the top decision-making body. This to the outside world could seem petty and unreasonable, especially as there was “no formal distinction” between donor and recipient countries within the Consultative Committee—although steps were obviously taken to “avoid any misunderstanding as to whether particular countries expect to give or receive aid” (cf. DCER, 20-407, 15 Sep 1954). Therefore, an outsider could very well have been given the impression that a donor nation had been left out of the Committee without good reason. In effect Tokyo had, intentionally or otherwise, forced the hand of the major donor members: either Japan had to be granted full membership of the Plan, or Japan would make herself look like a donor member who had been discriminated against by the powerful white Consultative Committee members.

Having no precedent to which she could refer for dealing with the Japanese inquiry, Canada could only answer that it was her “understanding that [Japan’s request] is possible but that the Canadian government would not ... wish to give a positive answer on this point without consultation with other member states” (DCER, 20-407, 15 Sep 1954). Ottawa then proceeded to hand the dilemma over to Canberra

for its opinion, indicating that Canada was now “disposed to think more favourably about full membership of Consultative Committee” for Japan (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 14 Sep 1954). Having been made aware of Canada’s response to the Japanese request and of Canada’s own change of heart concerning Japan’s position vis-a-vis the Consultative Committee, Australia finally bowed to the inevitable. The Japanese ambassador to Canberra was summoned by the Australian government on 16 September and was informed that while it was possible for Japan to be a member of the Council for Technical Co-operation and not to be associated with the Consultative Committee, “from [Australia’s] point of view it seemed simpler for Japan to apply for full membership of the Consultative Committee and full membership of the Technical Council” (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 16 Sep 1954). The Ottawa government also affirmed its willingness to “sponsor or co-sponsor” Japanese admission, and advised that the Tokyo government should immediately make clear as to whether it wished to apply as suggested (NAA: A1838, 2080/13, 16 Sep 1954). The following day, the Japanese ambassador to Ottawa formally notified the Canadian government of Japan’s intention to participate as a full member of the Colombo Plan (DCER, 20-408, 27 Sep 1954).

## V. Conclusion

Japan’s admission to the Colombo Plan marked the beginning of Tokyo’s provision of government-to-government economic assistance to developing countries with the creation of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) office in 1954. 45 years later, in 2019, Japan would allocate USD 9.1 billion of bilateral ODA to Asia, which accounted for 62% of her then gross bilateral ODA (OECD 2021). In addition,

Japanese government agencies, as well as private Japanese companies, have also invested heavily in major Southeast Asian ventures: Japan remains the biggest investor to date in Southeast Asia's infrastructure projects with USD 259 billion invested in unfinished projects in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (The Economist 2021).

Politics—or international politics, in this case—has been described as the 'art of the possible', and few political machinations demonstrate the validity of this dictum more effectively than the diplomatic process of Japan's admission to the Colombo Plan. In 1952, Japan's chances of joining the regional organisation seemed remote: Australian concerns of an old enemy getting her hands on Colombo Plan money looked immovable. However, this fear was neutralised and a consensus to allow Japanese admission was established by a Canadian compromise – inspired in part by American pressure - which would allow Japan to become a Plan member but to have limited access to Plan capital. Furthermore, Japan's stated willingness to remove herself entirely from the Consultative Committee was in the end of sufficient impact for the major donor members to discard the compromise altogether and to grant Japan full membership in 1954. Painstaking as the process might have been, it was nevertheless a continuation of endeavours by all the Colombo members involved striving to achieve the 'possible' one step at a time.

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## 국문초록

# 일본의 1954년 콜롬보 계획 가입에 대한 영연방의 대응

## - 오스트레일리아와 캐나다의 사례 분석

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영연방이 주도하는 콜롬보 계획에 일본이 가입할 가능성이 1952년 초에 처음 제기되었다. 이러한 일본의 가입 시도는 일본의 국제수지 상태가 양호하지 않아 콜롬보 계획의 재정 지원금이 일본으로 흘러들어갈 것을 우려한 오스트레일리아의 반대로 실패하였다. 그러나 일본을 가입시켜야 한다는 미국의 압박이 커지면서, 1954년 여름에 캐나다 정부는 일본을 콜롬보 계획의 기술지원위원회에만 정식회원으로 가입시키고 콜롬보 계획의 최고 의사결정기구인 조정위원회에는 옵저버 자격만 부여하자는 타협안을 제시하였다. 콜롬보 플랜의 주요 원조공여국들은 이 타협안을 수용하였으나, 일본이 갑작스럽게 조정위원회와는 어떠한 관계도 갖지 않겠다는 의지를 피력함으로써 타협안은 사실상 무용지물이 되었다. 원조공여국으로 활동할 가능성이 큰 국가가 조정위원회에 전혀 참여하지 않는 상황이 부담스러울 수밖에 없었던 주요 회원국들은 결국 일본이 콜롬보 계획의 조정위원회에 정식 회원국으로 참여하는 방침으로 뜻을 바꾸어 일본의 콜롬보 계획 가입을 1954년 10월에 승인하였다.

**주제어:** 콜롬보 계획, 영연방, 오스트레일리아, 캐나다, 일본

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