Through examples from the construction of several large-scale hydropower projects in Burma, South Vietnam, and South Korea, my talk will trace the formation of post-colonial power relationships within Japan’s post-World War II technical aid system in Asia. Kubota Yutaka and his colleagues at Nippon Köei, the development consultancy which planned and supervised the projects, had long careers constructing dams and other infrastructure throughout Japan’s former empire in Asia. I examine how the visions, policies, expertise, and networks from their colonial experiences were reconfigured in the 1950s and 1960s through large-scale infrastructure projects into a new, postcolonial technical aid network linking the United States, Japan, and Asia during the Cold War. Challenging a US-centered narrative of the Cold War in Asia, this talk focuses on how Japan’s aid relations with newly independent Asian nations configured the Cold War system in Asia.

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(Image: Kubota Yutaka, builder of dams in Korea for Japan Nitrogenous Fertilizer Company (Nihon Chisso) in the colonial era, inspecting his company's construction of Soyanggang Dam in South Korea (1970).)

Funding for the Japan seminars in the series has been generously provided by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation