



Japan's Advocacy for Human Security in Global Politics: Case Study of Japan's Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects (GGP) in the State of Sabah, Malaysia, 2000–2021

Ramli Dollah¹ · Diana Peters¹ · Wan Shawaluddin Wan Hassan¹ · Marja Azlima Omar¹ · Md Saffie Abdul Rahim² · Adi Jafar³

Received: 21 September 2022 / Accepted: 31 January 2023 / Published online: 10 February 2023
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2023

Abstract

After World War II, Japan became a major recipient of foreign aid from the USA. As Japan's economy improved in the 1960s, it played a significant role as a global aid donor in world politics through its Official Development Assistance (ODA). This commitment continued into the 1990s when Japan, as one of the leading proponents of the concept of human security, began providing humanitarian aid to more countries across the globe. To better understand the notion of human security in international politics, this paper examines Japan's endorsement of the concept in its foreign policy strategy. This paper provides an overview and critical assessment of Japan's Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects (GGP) in the state of Sabah in East Malaysia from 2000 to 2021. This paper argues that different contexts and circumstances in the state of Sabah require further study, especially for understanding Japan's focus and concern in the area of basic human security needs, as enshrined in the GGP philosophy. Despite Japan's GGP objective as part of its foreign policy to promote human development, the execution of its foreign aid in Sabah does have issues. This paper concludes that the implementation of Japan's GGP necessitates greater inclusion, particularly for other vulnerable groups and underdeveloped areas in Sabah. Despite Japan's GGP objective as part of its foreign policy to promote human development, the execution of its foreign aid in Sabah does have issues. This paper concludes that the implementation of Japan's GGP necessitates greater inclusion, particularly for other vulnerable groups and underdeveloped areas in Sabah.

Keywords Human security · Grant assistance · Japan · Sabah · Malaysia

✉ Ramli Dollah
ramlid@ums.edu.my

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Introduction

Japan entered World War II in the 1940s and occupied nearly the entire Asia–Pacific region, including Peninsular Malaya and North Borneo (Sabah). Japan pursued a harsh policy towards its occupied territories during the war. However, Japan's refusal to surrender led to the American invasion of Japanese soil. The war ended when the USA dropped the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the conclusion of the war, the USA committed to extending its foreign assistance to Japan to rebuild the country and this came with certain requirements that must be adhered to by Japan. These policies include among others, first, implementing the values of democracy by pledging that Tokyo will not threaten the world; second, the new constitution will have a provision that limits the capacity of Japan's military; and third, Japan should continue the US legacy on extending its foreign assistance on countries that are severely affected by the conquest of the Communist. As such, Japan received the largest American foreign assistance in Asia. Recognizing the repercussions of Japan's atrocities and its position as one of the beneficiaries of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in post-World War II, Japan bears responsibility for various problems affecting the needs of other countries in this region. Therefore, since joining the Colombo Plan and establishing the ODA charter in the 1950s, Japan's foreign policy has been derived from economic orientation, emphasizing technical and economic cooperation. As such, Japan's government is committed to engaging in human security issues by providing foreign assistance to other countries to exemplify its foreign policy. Thus, this paper discusses and examines foreign aid by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) to the state of Sabah through the Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects (GGP) between 2000 and 2021. This paper contains several major sections. The first part discusses the literature review and highlights the notion of human security and how it become a pillar in Japan's foreign policy. The second part discusses the background of Japan-Sabah (Malaysia) relations, the third part explores the GGP and its contribution and its limitation in Sabah between 2000 and 2021, and finally, the conclusion.

Literature Review

From World War I (1914–1918) to the Cold War (1945–1990), most of the literature on security studies has focused on national interests and state sovereignty. As a result, security discourse in this period towards the end of the Cold War centered on war, the arms race, and nuclear weapon development [37, 85]. Despite the rule of law in most nation-states that highlights the protection of basic human rights, including the safety and security of its citizens, there have been civilian deaths, especially during wars, domestic conflict, and violence that have been taking place at an increasing pace [17, 50]. This led to the development of the idea of human security, which views the human individual, not the state, as the

primary referent object [14, 15, 88, 95]. This definition refocuses resources away from the state and towards the citizen as a referent object, while also broadening the spectrum of threats to include economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental aspects and all sectors that endanger human survival.

Japan is one of the key actors in international politics due to its role as a leading provider of overseas foreign aid (ODA). Not surprisingly, several previous studies had concentrated on the role, contribution, limitation, and development of Japanese ODA worldwide [9, 41, 51, 59, 84]. Since the UNDP introduced the notion of human security in 1994, Japan has become most committed to making this concept a pillar in the country's foreign policy. Japan's commitment and seriousness in adopting this concept have attracted the attention of numerous researchers who analyzed Japan's role in implementing the strategy. Consequently, many works have been devoted to studying human security in Japan's foreign policy. A number of these studies, among others, discussed the genesis of human security as a pillar of Japan's foreign policy and sought to understand Japan's role and contribution in implementing the concept [15, 29, 30, 53, 67, 81, 86, 89]. It also focused on analyzing the type and objective of aid, the target group (such as developing countries, especially Asia), as well as the role of key players in Japan who ensure the success of this policy [1, 33, 34, 46, 49, 80, 92].

There is, however, very few research that covered GGP worldwide. Ramzan [74] did explore Japan's GGP in Pakistan, Topias, [91] analyzed GGP in the Philippines, and Potter [72, 73] conducted a comparative study on GGP in Thailand and the Philippines. Their outcomes provide different aspects of GGP implementation in each country. Similarly, several studies in Malaysia focused on Japanese aid and ODA [5, 36, 42, 45, 97]. However, no current research has assessed GGP in Sabah until now. Although the studies on ODA in Malaysia had explored Japan's contribution to the country, the state of Sabah provides a different view of the problems it confronts, particularly concerning issues that affect human development.

Sabah is the second-largest state in Malaysia. Due to its geographical location, it is a relatively backward state in terms of infrastructure and development. As a result, many of its population fall under the vulnerable category and require assistance owing to their lack of access to health care, education, clean water, etc. [56, 82]. It is even worse when, unlike other states in Malaysia, Sabah is the area most severely affected by the influx of migrants from neighboring countries, leading to the existence of various categories of non-citizen groups such as stateless people, refugees, and the undocumented [27, 71]. Most live in extreme poverty and lack access to basic daily necessities. The different contexts and circumstances will require various approaches, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Therefore, this paper addresses the gap in Japan's foreign assistance in Malaysia, especially in Sabah. We provide an overview and critical assessment of Japan's Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects (GGP) in the state of Sabah from 2000 to 2021. The focus is on Japan's GGP and how it benefited the state and its people and identifies the project's limitations. The main contribution of this study is to discuss how GGP is implemented in the state of Sabah and the limitations of such assistance. As previously mentioned, this study is crucial since the population of the state of Sabah faces different situations and problems, either due to

lack of development or basic infrastructure or due to the existence of other types of vulnerable groups who also face various threats of human insecurity in their everyday lives. For this purpose, this paper asks several research questions: How is GGP implemented in Sabah? How does Sabah's population benefit from GGP? What is the limitation of GGP in the context of the state of Sabah?

Concept of Human Security

Human security is a normative concept that suggests a shift from a state- to a human-centric approach. Despite the fact that the phrase human security was introduced in 1896, it was due to the efforts of the International Red Cross that this term was then universally adopted as one of the fundamental goals enshrined in the United Nations Charter in 1945. However, during the Cold War (1945–1990), the focus of the debate on international relations and global security was heavily centralized on the ideological and military conflicts of liberal democracy propelled by the USA vis-a-vis communism by the Soviet Union [37]. As a result, the discourse on human security received little scholarly attention. Human insecurity-related issues such as safety and welfare have been perceived as peripheral as nation-states emphasized territorial borders and focused on state survival through wars and/or alliances [21]. Despite the international conventions and international laws on conflict and war such as the Geneva Convention and the Hague Convention, these conventions are ill-suited to address the multi-faceted human security concern. For example, both conventions do not address how the international framework can be used effectively in the case of state-sponsored terrorism where the state regimes are prosecuting the population through the use of military actions [26, 60, 61, 76].

In several instances, state regimes in developing countries fail to protect their citizens against atrocities caused by internal or external threats, as is common in Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, South America, and some parts of Eastern Europe [16, 17, 20, 75, 98]. In most extreme cases, the ruling party or regime that governs the mass population used coercion and force to control the citizens as in the case of Burma (Myanmar), Stalin's Soviet, Mugabe's Zimbabwe, or almost any other dictatorship [17, p 25]. Whether the root of the conflict stemmed from the clashes between the majority and minority of certain ethno-religious groups or inflicted by the rise of dissent and opposition movements, state regimes are apt to use their security apparatus or military force to manage their domestic crisis.

As a result, scholars and the international community governed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) began to rethink and reconsider a better framework for human security that can be better regulated, particularly in extreme cases where state regimes failed to provide the fundamental role of ensuring the safety and security of their citizens. The Commission on Human Security stated, "The state remains the fundamental purveyor of security. Yet it often fails to fulfill its security obligations.... That is why attention must now shift from the security of the state to the security of the people—to human security" [22].

Apparently, various security concerns cannot be answered by the concept of national security that dominated international political discourse during the Cold

War [50, 58]. These include those threats to human survival including starvation, contagious illnesses, human rights violation, and genocide, as well as religious and ethnic conflicts [58, 68, 77, 87]. In Asia, environmental issues, public health issues, and human trafficking are also prevalent [18, 69]. This becomes even more evident in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic erupts, and various new types of threats continue to threaten human survival [45, 47, 68, 71]. The complexity of the issues mentioned above necessitates a different lens through which security is to be defined and scrutinized, especially one that moves away from the traditional state-military focus. Therefore, the emergence of the concept of human security is important in explaining the post-Cold War international security [8, 90, 98].

However, only in the aftermath of the Cold War did the idea of human security begin to be recognized as one of the concepts to understand international events [8, 58, 87]. The UNDP in 1994 posits that;

For too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential for conflict between states. For too long, security has been equated with threats to a country's borders. For too long, nations have sought arms to protect their security. For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, health security, environmental security, security from crime, these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world' [95, p. 3]

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of new security threats in the early 1990s have prompted a rethinking of the concept of international security [37, 54, 58]. As such, the UNDP began to shift the emphasis of security from nuclear deterrence to human security;

With the dark shadows of the cold war receding, one can now see that many conflicts are within nations rather than between nations. For most people, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Will they and their families have enough to eat? Will they lose their jobs? Will their streets and neighborhoods be safe from crime? Will they be tortured by a repressive state? Will they become a victim of violence because of their gender? Will their religion or ethnic origin target them for persecution? In the final analysis, human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons, it is concerned with human life and dignity. [95, p. 22]

Therefore, the UNDP adopted the principle of human security in 1994, which includes seven types of threats to human insecurity, namely economic, food, health, environmental, individual, community, and political security. In this regard, UNDP defines human security as "first, safety from such chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression. And second protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life whether in homes, in jobs

or communities” [95, p. 23]. The report emphasizes that human security is a universal concept as various security threats to human life exist beyond state borders. This, of course, requires the international community to cooperate beyond the state-centric to address pertinent issues related to human security. Following the development of the discourse on human security, several commissions have been established by the international community to address the multi-faceted issues of human security. Under the UNDP, the Brundtland Commission’s concept of sustainable development and the UNDP’s concept of human development laid the foundation for the emergence of the concept of human security [22, 35]. Several other independent commissions, such as the Brandt Commission and the Commission on Global Governance, also played a role in advancing this definition [6]. Thus, by the end of the Cold War, the concept of human security was established. This is closely linked to changes in the international political context, where internal conflict or domestic crises become more apparent than external conflicts [50].

Following the initial report on human security, published in 1994, the UNDP has sought to redefine the concept of Human Security [58]. For example, the UNDP published a report in 1997 on the distinction between income poverty and human poverty, with income poverty defined as a daily income of USD\$1 or less, and human poverty defined as variables such as a person’s life expectancy and literacy rate. International organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF, and several governments worldwide also subscribed to this definition. Canada and Japan were the first countries to include this concept in their foreign policy. These middle-power states have found the concept attractive and useful as they try to be more visible players in the international system but lack or are restrained in their military powers [55, p.145]. Canada pays closer attention to attempts to reduce threats to the people from both military and non-military sources. This includes interstate wars, small arms proliferation, and other domestic crises. One of the examples that Canada established to protect the regulation on land as part and parcel of protecting the interests of its citizens is through the support of the prohibition of landmines and the establishment of the International Criminal Court to prosecute those who exploit the landmine activities [11, 15, 39].

Since the emergence of the human security debate, Asian nations have exhibited ambivalence and skepticism towards the notion, as it may be used by the Western powers to spread liberal democracy and capitalism in Asia [6, 77]. However, Japan posed a different case than any other Asian country as the country seeks to broaden the scope of human security. From the Japanese government’s point of view, human security encompasses not just the security from the threat of aggression in wars but also the fundamental needs of citizens. The Japanese government takes a more comprehensive view of the UNDP’s definition of human security as it believes human security should be safeguarded even during the absence of conflict. Thus, for Japan, human security comprehensively covers all the measures that threaten human survival, daily life, and human dignity, such as environmental degradation, human rights violation, transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, refugees, poverty, anti-personnel landmines, and infectious diseases [65]. Consequently, Japan stands out differently from Western countries like Norway and Canada, which

have concentrated solely on issues of arms control while overlooking the security of human life during peace time [6]. Both ideas of “freedom from want” (as initiated by Japan and UNDP) and “freedom from fear” (as affirmed by Canada and Norway) mutually constitute the understanding of the concept.

As it stands out, Japan and other Asian countries have adopted the UNDP understanding of human security, focusing on comprehensive security. Japan sees conflicts in Asia coupled with humanitarian concerns such as human trafficking, illegal immigration, poverty, and environmental problems should be the focus of its foreign policy. Furthermore, the Japan government emphasized the aspect of freedom from want, which aims to minimize problems that may hinder individuals from achieving their self-actualization and innate potential. In this manner, the GGP is an extension of Japan’s initiative to promote human security in global politics, as further explored in this study.

Human Security in Japan’s Foreign Policy

As Japan prospered and became an economic power in the 1980s and 1990s, it began searching for a more permanent international role that would be commensurate with its economic standing [30, p. 9]. A year after the 1994 UNDP report was released, then Japan’s Prime Minister (PM) Tomiichi Murayama (1994–1996) was the first to endorse and offer Japan’s human security commitment. During his speech at the UN, he pressed that Japan is committed to ensuring vulnerable groups or individuals will be able to materialize their potential akin to the Japanese society. The Japanese government believes that public health concerns should be a key priority to guarantee all individuals are safely protected, and the state actor can assist their full potential. As a result, Japan introduced the practice of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” to symbolize its dedication to addressing global challenges, particularly in the public health crisis. Furthermore, Japan implemented the ODA to promote Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which aims to ensure that the global population will have basic access to healthcare facilities and medical care [65, p. 12–13].

As a result, the notion of human security is well-received among the Japanese people. Regardless of any changes in political settings in Japan, the concept remains a fundamental value in defining Japan’s foreign policy [88, p. 239]. For example, Japan became the first country in the world to appoint a special ambassador to look after the affairs of human security. In Japan’s education system, human security is introduced as a course in its higher learning institutions with the availability of students’ scholarships for this program. The extension of this educational initiative resulted in establishing an academic consortium known as the Japan Academic Society on Human Security Studies in September 2011 with a membership of 12 universities. Here, human security is broadly described as a global initiative to resolve issues such as poverty, infectious diseases, conflict, terrorism, crime, environmental concerns, refugees, and human rights violations, many of which are focused on threats to individuals’ lives and their dignity.

During his speech at the UN World Summit for Social Development on his vision of Japan as a “human-centered society” in March 1995, Murayama said:

...as head of the Japanese government, I seek the creation of a ‘human-centered society,’ a vision of Japan in which each individual citizen is treated equally, endowed with the opportunity of fully develop his or her potential, and enabled to utilize fully his or her capacity through employment and participation in society.... Japan gives priority to the human-centered social development. [Murayama quoted from 53, p. 181]

However, though Murayama’s speech in support of human security would make him one of the first heads of state to endorse the idea, no amendments to Japan’s foreign aid policy were initiated under his leadership. Instead, the implementation of Japanese foreign assistance for human security was first executed by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi (1998–2000). Obuchi pressed the importance of human security based on his traveling experience to 38 countries in Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Africa as an undergraduate student. Yamamoto [101] identifies two factors, all of which are related to the origins of human security in Japan’s foreign policy. First, Obuchi brought the importance of human security as no other prime minister had been as consistently supportive. Secondly, throughout his tenure, Obuchi received active support from the proponents of human security. When Obuchi was a Japanese Foreign Minister in Ryutaro Hashimoto’s Cabinet, he was assisted by Yoichi Funabashi (an Asahi Shimbun columnist and journalist), Makato Ionike and Akihiko Tanaka (both professors from Kobe University and Tokyo University), and Takemi Keizo (Secretary of State) who was responsible preparing policy proposals. Korkietpitak posits, “Obuchi took it as his baby... since this concept was in line with his idea” [53, p. 181]. Under Obuchi’s leadership, Japan also signed the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines to illuminate Japan’s commitment to human security.

Obuchi prioritized the need for human security in Japanese foreign policy in his two speeches in Tokyo and Hanoi, considering the Asian economic turmoil in the mid-1990s. According to Obuchi,

...I believe that we must deal with difficulties with due consideration for the socially vulnerable segments of population, in the light of Human Security, and that we must seek new strategies for economic development which attach importance to human security with a view to enhancing the long term development of our region. [15, p. 94]

The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis catalyzed Japan’s leadership to address the crisis and improves Tokyo’s cooperation with countries badly affected by the crisis, especially Malaysia and Indonesia. Under Obuchi, Japan extended its foreign assistance to the badly affected Asian countries through the Miyazawa New Initiative announced in October 1998 with an allocation of USD30 billion [53]. In addition, Obuchi addressed the issue of human security for the first time in his speech at the UN University in Tokyo on April 27, 1998, as part of the international symposium entitled “Health Initiative in Asian Economic Crisis: Human-Centered Approach”. Through international cooperation, Obuchi emphasized the importance of paying attention to social safety nets.

Consequently, Japan officially introduced human security as a pillar of its foreign policy through its “Diplomatic Blue Book” in 1999 [24, 62]. Japan also promoted the concept of human security by incorporating the concept of “freedom from want” into its ODA and reforming its ODA strategy to be more “people-centered” [40, p. 101]. Furthermore, Tokyo showed its commitment to human security through projects implemented by international organizations to support vulnerable groups and individuals across the globe [55, p.148]. Through the UN Trust Fund for Human Security established in 1999, Tokyo provided \$9 billion for projects in Thailand, Kosovo, and East Timor in less than 18 months. Tokyo also continued to make yearly contributions after that. By 2011, Tokyo had donated US\$346 million to 190 projects in 60 countries, benefiting civil society, local entities, and NGOs [88]. The projects include health care, primary education, extreme poverty, economic recession, natural disasters, refugees, and the displaced, the discriminated, and national peace [88, p. 241].

In addition, Japan also assisted the creation of the UN Commission on Human Security. This was a follow-up to Tokyo’s fully funded International Symposium on Human Security. Intellectuals such as Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen and former Director of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata were among the attendees. They concluded that human security is not an abstract but a practical concept, which propelled Tokyo to consider developing a shared definition and formulating a policy framework for all stakeholders. Following that, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (2000–2001) announced Japan’s intention to endorse the creation of an international commission on human security in September 2000, with participation from leading world leaders, at the Millennium Summit. In addition, Mori said that Japan is willing to make human security a pillar of its foreign policy.

In a speech during the Diet in 2003, Japan’s Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001 to 2006) said that “ODA would be applied strategically in the area of human security.” Following this, in August 2003, the Japanese government revised the ODA charter through the ODA’s strategic value, flexibility, transparency, and efficiency [24]. In this new ODA charter, Japan encapsulated the value of human security to address threats such as human conflicts, natural disasters, and public health care (such as infectious diseases). Through this new initiative, the ODA introduced numerous critical policies and priorities, including poverty reduction, sustainable growth, tackling global concerns, and peacebuilding [65]. It was also noted in Tokyo’s 2004 Diplomatic Bluebook that the concept of human security was taken up at various forums, including the Tokyo Declaration for the Dynamic and Enduring Japan-ASEAN Partnership in the New Millennium, held in December 2003 (Lam, 2004;148). This initiative symbolizes Japan’s readiness to embrace the UNDP Report 1994 as the foundation of its Human Security strategy [24]. According to Edström,

It made human security a matter of ODA policy and no longer a key concern for foreign policy as Obuchi and Mori had seen it. [30, p. 13]

To accomplish this goal, the Japanese cabinet reviewed and approved the Development of Cooperation Charter in February 2015. Under this charter, Japan effectively seeks to contribute to three major policy foundations: first, contribute to peace

and prosperity through non-military cooperation; second, promote “human security”; and third, cooperate with relevant stakeholders to cultivate “self-reliant development” based on Japan’s experience and expertise [65, p. 223].

Japan demonstrated its commitment to various human security issues to achieve this goal. For example, Japan initiated the negotiation process and campaigned to promote children’s rights in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council. Japan also joined the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014. With the participation, Japan’s attempted to introduce and enact the Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities, which was passed in 2016, and the attempts have been successful [65, p. 3]. In addition, the UN Human Security Trust Fund and the GGP were established on the initiative of the Japanese government to achieve this goal. As a result, Japan’s 2030 Agenda is based on the ideology of “people-centered” and “leave no one behind” as the primary foundation for the idea of human security [65, p. 234]. Japan hopes that providing basic human resources will create an environment that protects vulnerable individuals while empowering them to cope with global challenges and show their abilities and potentials.

Through close collaboration with the UN, Japan’s foreign assistance policy with an emphasis on human security had concurrently positioned Tokyo as a committed country and a major player in advocating human security on the international politics. Japan’s foreign assistance was donated exclusively in the interest of human security to restore Japan’s image around the world. As Japan fought for human security for so long, the country has become a significant donor of global funds for development. In 2021 for instance, Japan contributed US\$307,829,256 and became the second-largest UNDP fund contributor [94].

Background of Japan-Sabah (Malaysia) Relations

Before the Japanese occupation of North Borneo (later known as Sabah located in East Malaysia) in 1942, Japan had started investments in the state sometime after 1890. The Japanese economic activities in Sabah were highlighted by several authors including Shimomoto [79], Osman [70], and Abdul Rahim [3]. This began after the British North Borneo Company sought investors and endured laborers to work in the state [83, p. 63]. Japan under the Meiji government (1867–1912) also encouraged their large capitalist enterprises or *zaibatsu* to invest outside of Japan. Compared to the colonial British, the Japanese in Sabah had managed to set up very successful enterprises in various economic sectors making a more substantial impact on economic development in the state [70, p. 43]. Japan was also among the first countries to have opened an embassy in Kuala Lumpur when Malaya achieved independence in 1957. To facilitate the increasing number of investors opening companies in Sabah, the Japanese government also opened a consulate office in Sabah’s capital city, Jesselton, on March 2, 1965. The name of Jesselton would later be changed to Kota Kinabalu in 1967, and the name remains until today. On July 1, 1997, the Japanese government upgraded the “Consulate of Japan at Kota Kinabalu” status to “Consulate General of Japan at Kota Kinabalu” due to closer relations and Japan’s

recognition of the state of Sabah's importance. However, due to several reasons, the Japanese government agreed on January 1, 2011, to downsize the Consulate General's operations and rename it "Consular Office of Japan at Kota Kinabalu." The status of this Consular Office remains until today [48].

Historically, Sabah's economy was based on fisheries, forestry, and minerals, which provided natural resources for overseas investors and companies, including Japan. Before WWII, Japanese foreign companies invested in various industries in North Borneo. Immediately after WWI, Japanese companies had identified Sabah as a suitable place of investment, with firms such as Nissan and Mitsubishi venturing into plantations and fisheries [70, p. 42]. For example, the rubber plantation sector witnessed the presence of Japanese companies as evidenced in Kuhara Tawau Rubber Estate (KTRE), Tawau Estate Limited (TEL), and Tengah Nipah Estate (TNE). However, the investors in the plantation sector changed with the end of WWII. In 1951, the British Colonial Development Corporation took over Japanese ownership, renaming the plantation Borneo Abaca Limited (BAL) [5]. During British colonial rule, the Japanese investors controlled the forestry industry in North Borneo. For agricultural purposes, Tokyo Pulp Company and Itochu Corporation, for example, had leased over 800 to 1000 acres of land in Sandakan and Tawau.

Japanese investors can also be found in the fisheries industry before WWII until Sabah gained independence. After WWII, the North Borneo Fishing Company (NBFC) Joint Venture Company has been operating in Sandakan. The joint venture group, which owns two ships, the Kagawa Maru I and Kagawa Maru II, was engaged in research work from Marudu Bay to Cowie Bay. Another company, Nobuichi Kikuoka's Taiyo Fishing Company (TFC), was authorized and allowed to begin operations in 1960. The TLC has administrative offices in Tawau and Jesselton districts and was allowed to operate throughout Sabah [5, 66]. The company exported the catch to several other countries including Japan, the UK, and Hong Kong. TFC's operations, however, ended after a piracy attack on its factory in 1962 [28].

Meanwhile, the Kaya Pearl Company (KPC) invested in pearl farming in Pulau Bohey Dulang, Semporna. The KPC began producing yields in 1964, with a peak of 40,000 seeds in 1967. However, due to fish bombing, theft, and the threat of piracy, production declined and eventually ceased in 1986, resulting in the cessation of Japanese pearl farming in Semporna [5, 66]. A year after that, two Japanese managers were killed in a piracy attack on a pearl factory on Bohey Dulang Island which forced the permanent closure of the pearl factory in 1987 [2].

Japanese investors were also interested in the logging industry, especially after 1963. The Japanese investors began to look for investment opportunities with Sabah state government agencies such as the Sabah Economic Development Corporation (SEDCO) and other branches of the Sabah Foundation. The Yuasa Trading Co. Ltd., which large-scale Japanese capitalists support, entered a partnership with Rakyat Bersatu Co. Ltd. (a subsidiary of the Sabah Foundation) in June 1973 and formed the company, Sinora Co. Ltd. This co-joint venture in two major districts, Sandakan and Tawau, supplied timber to Japan. Meanwhile, Yuasa Trading Co. Ltd. offered its expertise in the production, management, marketing, and training of local manpower. The factory began its operation in 1979 and became the first large-scale wood processing facility in Sabah. However, little information was known to the public

about the interests of Japanese investors in agricultural activities such as paddy, banana, and pulp production, information on their activities.

In the mining sector, a partnership agreement was signed in February 1973 between a Japanese investor, the Japanese Mitsubishi Metal Corporation (JMMC), and the Sabah State Government Corporation Mamut Copper Mining Co. Ltd. by the Overseas Mineral Resources Development Sabah Co. Ltd. (OMRDS). Although the 4800-acre bauxite mining concession was extended until 2003, production only lasted from 1975 until 1985. Copper was the third most lucrative resource for the Japanese in Sabah after timber and petroleum in terms of revenue. According to Abdul Rahim [4], until March 1984, the overall amount of Sabah's copper exports was RM100 million per year, with the Sabah state government profiting 40 percent in revenue. However, the decline in world copper prices greatly affected copper mining in Mamut, which caused the permanent closure of mining activities in the late 1980s. Japanese investors also attempted to invest in the oil and gas sector. In 1966, the Sabah Teiseki Oil Company (STOC) began oil and gas exploration in Sabah, but no discoveries were made. In the 1970s, however, Petronas, a local Malaysian oil company, discovered oil in the state.

Meanwhile, in the field of human resources, the flow of Japanese capital into certain sectors was often accompanied by Japanese experts coming into the state as part of their technological and educational transfer. In the fisheries sector, for example, the industry employed 198 fishermen (75 Japanese and 123 Okinawan) and 9 management personnel from Japan. At the beginning of the process, the NBFC insisted on having Japanese professional laborers monitoring operations before switching to local laborers two years later [4]. In terms of technology transfer, Japanese investors began using modern technology in the fisheries field in Sabah after 1955. In this case, the TFC used the trawl method to catch shrimp and the method of “*muroami*,” fishing rod, “*rawai*,” and trawl to catch fish. An ice storage, ice factory, processing plant, and canning plant are all part of the TFC factory in Si-Amil Island in Semporna [66]. The NBFC also used ships that were built in Hong Kong as they were large, modern, and sophisticated. In the case of the OMRDSB, which includes bauxite mining, the local laborers were trained in Japan for 8 weeks to enhance their skills in mining. The training was primarily to ensure that local staff could take on the duties and emulate the performance of the Japanese workers. The mining drilling equipment from OMRDSB was also shipped in from Japan. It was reported that OMRD had spent RM300 million on mining equipment and machinery [52].

Meanwhile, Japan continues to be a significant player in the investment sector in Sabah's development. Until 2015, more than 35 Japanese companies had been operating and active in a variety of industries in Sabah such as fisheries and tourism [48]. Japanese investment in Sabah is not new, as the state's history reveals Japan has been involved in many economic sectors. This, for example, includes fishing and oyster farming in Si Amil and Banggi Island. In addition, two Japanese companies such as Manila Hemp and Rubber Plantations in Sabah have attracted many migrant workers, mainly from Indonesia and the Philippines [28]. Before WWII, the overall Japanese population in Sabah was about 2000 people [83, p. 573]. The Japanese presence in Sabah can be seen through kinship ties such as marrying the local population, and involvement in educational activities, businesses, and social services.

However, in recent years, the number of Japanese in Sabah has increased gradually. In 2001, for example, only 264 Japanese people were living in Sabah. In 2010, this number rose to 378 people, and in 2015, it reached 467 people [48].

The Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects (GGP)

Several other countries and regions around the globe have people living in difficult conditions. Limited access to healthcare and education and lack of clean drinking water are among the various threats that people face in their daily lives. To meet the diverse needs of local communities at the grass-roots level, it is crucial to directly support the activities run by NGOs or community-based groups working at such level. Moreover, supporting local governments rather than national (central) governments will help provide the people with what they genuinely need. Consequently, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) implemented GGP, a program specifically developed to achieve this objective.

The GGP, previously known as the Small Scale Grant Assistance, was established in 1989 to assist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local authorities in developing countries requiring prompt Japanese government intervention in the field of Basic Human Needs and Human Security. In 1995, it changed its name to GGP [32, 64]. It is commonly referred to as “KUSANONE” in Japan. “Kusa” means “grass” and “Ne” means “roots” in Japanese [31]. This assistance relies on the contract negotiated by the Japanese Diplomatic Mission and the recipient organization in the recipient (host) country. While the available assistance is limited, financial assistance is aimed at supporting the local population in dire need [48].

The GGP focuses on non-profit organizations that implement grass-roots projects, especially in eligible countries for assistance. This covers multinational organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local governments, educational institutions such as primary and secondary schools, hospitals, and medical institutions directly supporting this aid in developing countries. Governments and international organizations are not eligible for assistance under the GGP scheme, except for matters relating to conflict resolution and natural disasters. MOFA further stipulates that profit-seeking individuals or organizations are not eligible for the GGP.

In this regard, GGP’s key focus is to enhance basic needs, or basic human needs (BHN), especially projects that support grass-roots organizations as well as humanitarian assistance organizations. Building schools, improving hospital health equipment, digging wells, vocational training, and seminars related to poverty alleviation are common projects under the GGP scheme. The MOFA specifies that it does not provide financial assistance for (1) projects that do not provide any benefit for the target group (grass-roots) such as financial assistance to conduct research, especially by institutions of higher learning, and also capacity building by an organization; (2) projects that are restricted to commercial activities and implemented to create jobs for only certain individuals and specific organizations, at the expense of the target groups; (3) projects involving culture, literature, and sports that place less emphasis on aspects of economic and social development; and (4) projects intended for political or missionary purposes or intended for military interests [63].

In providing this assistance, MOFA stressed that the maximum amount of assistance provided for each project is around JPY\$10 million. Exceptions will be given for improvement projects and managing projects such as the construction of infrastructure facilities. In addition, some projects require greater financial assistance to overcome issues related to human security, particularly trans-boundary challenges, including infectious diseases, environmental pollution as well as issues of refugees, and internal conflicts within conflict zones. The GGP has been granted in 141 developing countries and regions and has earned an outstanding reputation for delivering flexible and timely assistance to grass-roots development projects. Until March 2022, 158 projects in Malaysia have received GGP grants totaling around RM 19.7 million [32].

GGP in Sabah, 2000–2021

Despite the impressive economic development experienced in Malaysia, Sabah still suffers from poverty and lack of basic infrastructure in many districts despite being a resource-rich state [82]. Sabah recorded the highest poverty rate of 19.5 percent. Based on the 2019 statistics, two districts recorded more than fifty percent poverty levels; Tongod at 56.6 percent and Pitas at 53.6 percent [38]. Almost two in five rural households in Sabah (or 37.4%) live more than 9 km from the nearest secondary school, a distance seven times the national average [78]. Forty-five percent (589) of the 1296 schools in the state was categorized as dilapidated [19]. And despite the state being close to obtaining universal enrolment rates (95%), almost 1 in 10 children in Sabah do not attend lower secondary school [96]. Other basic infrastructures such as accessible and paved roads, clean tap water, and stable electricity supply are also lacking in many districts.

To deal with the issue, the MOFA has funded roughly 30 projects in Sabah under the GGP program, with a cumulative allocation of RM3,622,157.90 between 2000 and 2021. This represents almost 20 percent of the total number of GGP projects in Malaysia [57]. This demonstrates MOFA's commitment to ensuring the campaign's success to assist these grass-roots organizations in Sabah. During this period, MOFA was actively involved in a number of major programs in the areas of education, health, and essential amenities for vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, based on the priorities of the GGP demonstrate that projects involving water supply and treatment were the main focus of Japanese aid provided through the GGP in Sabah. Over the period 2000–2021, 16 of the total 30 projects that were awarded and required GGP financial and technical support involved water supply and infrastructure. This demonstrates that access to clean water is one of the states of Sabah's most pressing issues, especially in the rural area. Simultaneously, the Japan's GGP program of the state of Sabah also prioritized and supported a number of other crucial projects, including upgrading electrical amenities projects to enhance training center facilities, buying cars for welfare houses, increasing health standards, particularly for women, providing mobile toilet facilities, transportation, and purchasing vehicles to support several organizations in the state [23, 32, 48].

On the basis of the location of the project, the majority of the 30 completed projects were in the Sabah West Coast region. The projects undertaken on the West Coast of Sabah comprise nine GGP projects in the Kota Kinabalu district, 4 projects (Pitas), 4 projects (Kota Belud), and 2 projects (Keningau), 4 projects (Kota Marudu), and 3 projects (Tuaran). Although the west coast of Sabah received the highest aid, areas on the east coast of Sabah have remained lagging, and the development can be leveraged from the GGP projects [23, 32, 48]. Statistic demonstrates that just four projects have been channeled on Sabah's east coast, namely 2 GGP projects in Telupid, and one each in Semporna and Sandakan districts.

Moreover, in terms of the number of projects awarded, the year 2000 had the highest number of projects approved in a single year, with six projects being approved with the project's cumulative value of RM984,744.19. In contrast, the years 2006, 2007, 2015, 2016, and 2021 had the least number of projects approved, with only a single project receiving funding each year. In 2006, for instance, MOFA granted RM156,537 to Kota Kinabalu's St. John Ambulance in order to offer ambulance services in the state of Sabah. Prior to it, the St. John Ambulance in Kota Kinabalu only had two ambulance vans accessible for volunteer service. Three ambulances had been sent for use by St. John Ambulance branches in Sandakan, Tawau, and Lahad Datu [93]. The MOFA has set aside money to purchase 4 refurbished ambulance vehicles for in an effort to solve the issue of a lack of ambulances in the state. Meanwhile, in 2007, MOFA provided RM275,326 in assistance to the Montfort Youth Training Center to rebuild a training center in Kinarut. This assistance is used to purchase vehicles, furniture, and machinery for training purposes. Aside from that, in 2015, the government funded the Sabah Family Planning Association to rebuild women's health clinics in Kota Kinabalu. That year's cumulative assistance totaled RM187,079 and was used to purchase equipment such as vehicles, ultrasound scanners, and other products. Additionally, the state of Sabah received three projects each year in 2001, 2004, and 2009, while the Sabah state received two separate projects each year in 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. It must be pointed out that there has been a period where MOFA did not provide any assistance in the following years; 2003, 2005, 2010, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020. [23, 32, 48].

Meanwhile, among the organizations that have received the most funding from this program were the Sandakan Regional Forestry Reserve, Pingan-Pingan Village Development Committee, St. John Ambulance, Malaysia (Sabah), Sabah Society for the Blind, Sabah Family Planning Association, Sabah Cheshire Home, and several other organizations. The smallest amount of assistance was provided to the Montfort Youth Training Center in Kota Kinabalu in 2011, with a project value of RM29,000 to purchase used engines for training purposes in the Automotive Department training center in Kinarut, Kota Kinabalu. GGP also helped the Minonun Village Community Development Committee in the Kota Belud district construct the Minonun-Kelawat Gravity Water System project in 2000. The overall amount of assistance received to purchase a water treatment facility was RM37,490.81. Meanwhile, the highest amount of funds from this project between 2000 and 2021 was about RM356, 985 in 2000, when it supported the Sandakan Regional Forestry Office in Sandakan to execute a forest fire prevention and control system project by acquiring three vehicles that serve as fire engines and four fire pumps. There are three

programs worth RM250,000 or more: projects to provide vocational opportunities to underprivileged youngsters, projects to address fire issues, and youth training centers. Meanwhile, there are six projects worth more than RM150,000, six projects worth around RM100,000 and above, twelve projects worth RM50,000 and above, and the remainder worth less than RM50,000 [23, 32, 48].

GGP Contribution to Sabah

These figures discussed above demonstrate that the GGP is a significant initiative in enhancing relations between the Malaysian government and advanced countries, such as Japan as they have the leverage to assist Malaysia through financial and technological assistance. Therefore, this Japan–Malaysia smart partnership through GGP is important especially in areas that the Malaysian government does not give much attention to. In this regard, it was found that the Malaysian government and the state in particular have different priorities in meeting the needs of the people in the state of Sabah. Compared to the other states in the Peninsula, Sabah is a state that is comparatively lagging in all aspects of development. As the second-largest state in Malaysia, behind Sarawak, the government faces numerous challenges in ensuring the state is as developed as and compared to other states in Peninsular Malaysia [82]. Apart from its size, geographic isolation, and poor infrastructure, the central government in Putrajaya faces significant challenges in tackling the state's development issue. In the current setting, for instance, the state's leader in Kota Kinabalu and the federal governments' top priority is to ensure the building of a good road system that would be accessible to all districts. To materialize this objective, the federal government had committed to spending more than RM13 billion on constructing 1236 km of roads across Sabah as part of the Pan-Borneo project, which was announced on April 6, 2013 [10, 12, 43]. It is hoped that this road construction will minimize the divide between the urban and rural areas, allowing for further growth in the state. Thus, the government's financial focus on enhancing the road systems in Sabah requires participation from other agencies to address other sectors (and areas) that receive less priority from the government. In this regard, despite its small scale in the value of the funding, the GGP has contributed to improving the conditions of its target groups in Sabah.

In addition, the GGP program has supported government efforts in sectors such as education, where the Malaysian government has yet to fully develop the domain. Even though the government of Malaysia places a significant emphasis on expanding and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET), however participation among Malaysians remains low [13]. As a result, the government has several obstacles in assuring this program's long-term viability, as achieving this objective would require considerable effort. Apparently, the Malaysia's government's inability to meet the overall demand for vocational education in all Malaysian states can now be mitigated through external assistance, especially from the Japanese government through GGP. In other words, the involvement of foreign organizations really contributes to the Malaysian government's effectiveness in executing a number of policies in the country's educational system, especially in TVET. In this

regard, Japan's MOFA support through GGP is considered one of the measures to assure the efficacy of government policy.

The Japanese government's assistance through the GGP, provided by smart partnerships with NGOs and non-profit organizations in the state, exemplifies a win–win relationship. This partnership assists and addresses the needs of the less fortunate population. The Malaysian government has encountered obstacles in addressing the needs of the rural community immediately and effectively as shown in the case of Sabah [56]. This smart partnership and collaboration enable the non-governmental organization to carry out and fulfill a portion of the Malaysia's government's duties, allowing it to respond to the needs of the people of this state especially when the population is in a dire need of assistance. Since some part of the government's functions and responsibilities have been executed by NGOs through the coordination of the Japanese government, this situation has an indirect positive effect on the country's growth, allowing state and federal governments to continue with the development agenda in the state.

In addition, the Japanese government's contribution through the GGP is a form of assistance not only to meet the key objectives of human security, which is at the central pillar of Japan's foreign policy to enhance its self-confidence and international recognition [89], but more importantly, it is the responsibility of the Japanese government in returning what they have earned in the form of aid, particularly in countries that were occupied during the WW2 [3]. Therefore, it was not surprising that monetary considerations mostly drove Japan's first involvement in Sabah. Only after the atrocities of the Sandakan Death March were uncovered did Japan offer ODA for human security as payment for war reparations as well as economic and technical cooperation to Asian countries it formerly colonized [42, p.14]. This demonstrates that the Japanese government is cognizant of the country's social responsibilities, particularly in assisting populations in dire need in response to the destruction caused by the Japanese Army to the victims of WW2 in the state.

Limitations of Japan's GGP in Sabah

The Japanese government's GGP has made significant contributions to human development in Sabah as the programs have assisted vulnerable groups in Sabah that require assistance. However, despite the GGP providing a significant contribution, there are flaws in this program's strategy and implementation. The major limitation stemmed from the unbalanced terms of assistance in fund allocation, and the distribution of districts involved. In terms of project distribution, for instance, one of the most noticeable features of the GGP project is its emphasis on specific projects. In this regard, basic infrastructures such as the supply of clean drinking water to rural populations have been given considerable attention in the program. It is not surprising that, according to statistics from 2000 to 2015, around sixty percent of all completed projects involved providing clean water to rural areas. However, the GGP implementation in the state of Sabah should be more diversified, addressing other concerns such as access to basic needs such as healthcare, education, and sanitation. These issues will constitute an existential threat to human insecurity, if these issues

are not addressed. For instance, low literacy rates among vulnerable groups such as children in rural areas, refugees, or stateless people in Sabah make them unable to break away from the cycle of poverty [7]. This occurrence is clearly visible in several areas especially in rural, coastal, and islands of the state of Sabah.

In addition, based on the list of GGPs implemented in Sabah during the period 2000–2021, it was found that one of the main criticisms of the project is due to the unequal distribution of projects by districts. In this regard, most of the projects implemented are concentrated in the west coast of Sabah, either on the northwest or the southwest. These regions are established because they are located in areas with large towns, administrative centers, and a well-developed road network and service system as well as infrastructure. However, several areas and districts in the state of Sabah, including those in the interior and on the East Coast of Sabah, still need to be developed. [44]. Therefore, Japan's GGP projects should also include areas away from major towns, especially on the east coast or interior. In this sense, many believed that the most profitable economic sectors such as oil palm companies are concentrated in several districts such as Sook, Nabawan, Kinabatangan, Telupid, Kalabakan, and Lahad Datu owned these sectors were responsible for providing the basic and necessary facilities to the population in that area. Unfortunately, in reality, the company only offers this sort of thing to its employees, not to the locals, who reside primarily in rural areas in Sabah's east coast and interior. As a result, the local population in these areas, which lag in terms of development, continues to suffer.

Along with the districts mentioned earlier, several undeveloped areas warrant further attention particularly on the islands. Based on observations in the field, the islands in Sabah for instance remain the most vulnerable areas that require attention and assistance. Community groups living in the islands, including Mantanani, Gaya, and Banggi islands, among others, in the South China Sea; Tigabu, Malawali, Jambongan, Denawan, Bum-Bum and several other islands in the Sulu Sea; and Sebatik island in the Celebes Sea, were identified as areas that received little government attention, causing these islands to continue to be left behind in term of development, leaving the communities without access to their basic daily needs, not only clean drinking water but also access to health or education, thus threatening human development [23, 48]. These areas require more assistance and support and where the Japanese government can fulfill its advocacy for human security objectives through these potential projects. Apart from that, another major criticism of Japan's GGP is that the project focuses more on areas where Japan has strategic economic and military interests, either before, during, or after PD2. For instance, GGP primarily targets districts such as Kota Kinabalu, Keningau, Kota Belud, and Sandakan. These districts were formerly the cornerstones of the Japanese imperial army in North Borneo during WW2 or they were major hubs of Japanese investment in North Borneo (later Sabah). Keningau, for instance, was the administrative center of the Japanese army in the interior during WW2. Kudat and Pitas were the centers of Japanese investment in North Borneo before WW2. The Kota Belud district was the main port for transporting minerals from the Mamut copper mine in Ranau to Japan since 1963. This demonstrates that Japan exclusively focuses on areas that have a historical connection to national interest, either in the form of military or investment interests in the state of Sabah. By executing the GGP project, Japan should focus

more on other areas that require assistance rather than on sectors that carry certain previous interests.

Finally, the relatively small amount of aid compared to the actual capacity of the Japanese government to develop projects for this vulnerable group is also a critical issue that needs serious attention. In 2016 alone, Japan's GDP was reported to be at \$4.9 trillion, accounting for nearly 6% of the global GDP [100]. This simultaneously makes Japan the world's most industrialized Asian nation, the third largest economic power after China and the USA [99], and unquestionably, the key player in the global economy and one of the world's wealthiest nations. Nevertheless, its allocation for GGP represents a minuscule fraction of Japan's revenue. Japan could play a greater significant role if it was willing to contribute more to human security projects, particularly in the Asian region [97]. Despite the existence of larger projects by major Japanese agencies such as Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) [53] and the Malaysian government's ability to meet the needs of its citizens, Tokyo however as a crucial player in global politics has a responsibility to ensure that "no one (groups or area) left behind" in today's increasingly challenging world.

Conclusion

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the notion of human security is one of the pillars of Japanese foreign policy. Japan's contribution to GGP in Sabah demonstrates that it is one of the most significant players in advancing the idea of human security in global politics. This assistance has shown that the Japanese government succeeded in proving that even though such projects involve small funds, they greatly benefit the community, especially vulnerable groups in Sabah. These projects certainly assist less fortunate groups and poorly developed areas, providing equal opportunities and development similar to their more fortunate counterparts. At present, a comprehensive study on GGP in Sabah remains lacking, which may distort the overall assessment of the program's effectiveness. Since research on the post-implementation of GGP remains scarce, evaluating the program's efficacy is impossible. Although limitations in the project's implementation are present, broader inclusiveness can still be arranged in support of human security initiatives.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to extend enormous gratitude to the Japanese Consulate in Sabah, Malaysia, and all the parties involved in this research. A special acknowledgement is also to the UMS which provides a research grant for this study.

Author Contribution Conceptualization, RD, WSWH; formal analysis, AJ, MSAR; funding acquisition, RD, WSWH; investigation, DP, MAO, AJ; methodology, RD, AJ, MSAR; project administration, WSWH, DP, MAO, validation, RD, AJ, MSAR; writing—original draft, RD, WSWH.

Funding This paper is part of the finding of a study funded by the Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) [SDN013-2019].

Data Availability The authors declare that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Declarations

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Consent to Participate Not applicable.

Consent for Publication Not applicable.

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

References

1. Abbasi, I. A. (2008). Japan's human-centred assistance to Pakistan. *Journal of Far East & South-East Asia*, 26, 27–47.
2. Abdul Hamid, A. R. & Dollah, R. (2020). Dari 'Mundu' ke Penculikan Untuk Tebusan: Evolusi ancaman keselamatan maritim di Pantai Timur Sabah [From Mundu to Kidnapping for Ransom: Evolution of maritime security threat in the East Coast of Sabah]. *Jurnal Kinabalu*, 26(1), 1–22
3. Abdul Rahim, M. S. (2007). *Jepun di Borneo Utara: Migrasi dan kegiatan ekonomi 1884–1941 [Japan in North Borneo: Migration and economic activities 1884–1941]*. UMS Press
4. Abdul Rahim, M. S. (2016). Kegiatan ekonomi Jepun di Sabah, 1950an hingga 1980an: Peranan dan sumbangan dalam pembangunan ekonomi [Japanese economic activities in Sabah, 1950s to 1980s: Its Role and Contributions towards economic development] *Kemanusiaan*, 23(1), 97–119.
5. Abdul Rahim, M. S. (2019). *100 Tahun Jepun dalam pembangunan ekonomi Sabah, 1880–1980 [100 years of Japan in Sabah's economic development, 1880–1980]*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
6. Acharya, A. (2001). Human security East versus West. *International Journal*, 56(3), 442–460
7. Ali, I., Ariff, M. R. M. (2011). Since birth till death, what is their status: A case study of the Sea Bajau in Pulau Mabul, Semporna. *Borneo Research Journal*, 5, 71–86
8. Andersen-Rodgers, D. & Crawford, K. F. (2018). *Human security: Theory and action*. Rowman & Littlefield
9. Araki, M. (2007). Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA): The Japan ODA model that began life in Southeast Asia. *Asia-Pacific Review*. 14(2), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439000701733218>
10. Aruna, P. (2016, August 8). Will the mega contracts translate to huge profits?, *The Star*, Malaysia
11. Axworthy, L. (1997). Canada and human security: The need for leadership. *International Journal*. 52(2), 183–196
12. Barrock, J. (2016, July 19). Funding issues for Pan Borneo Highway. *The Edge Malaysia*. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/funding-issues-pan-borneo-highway>
13. Bassah, N. A. S. H. (2022). The issues and challenges of TVET in Malaysia: from the perspective of industry experts. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from https://tvnet-online.asia/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Issue18_Halil-Bassah_et_al.pdf
14. Booth, K. (2007). *Theory of world security*. Cambridge University Press
15. Bosold, D & Werthes, S. (2005). Human security in practice: Canadian & Japanese Experiences, *IPG*, 1, 84–101
16. Breede, H. C. (2017). *The idea of Failed States: Community, society, nation, and patterns of cohesion*. Routledge
17. Buzan, B. & Hansen, L. (2009). *The evolution of international security studies*. Cambridge University Press
18. Caballero-Anthony, M. (2018). Health and human security challenges in Asia: New agendas for strengthening regional health governance, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 72(6), 602–616

19. Chan, N. (2020, April 23). 589 dilapidated schools in Sabah unsafe. *Daily Express*. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/151317/589-dilapidated-schools-in-sabah-unsafe/>.
20. Chesterman, S., Ignatieff, M., & Thakur, T. (Eds.). (2005). *Making states work: Failure and the crisis of governance*. United Nations University Press.
21. Collins, A. (Ed.). (2019). *Contemporary security studies*. Oxford University Press
22. Commission on Human Security. (2003). *Human Security now*. United Nations
23. Consular Office of Japan Kota Kinabalu. (2022). Kota Kinabalu, Retrieved March 23, 2022, from https://www.kotakinabalu.my.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/index.html.
24. Dewy, K. U. (2014). Addressing Human Security in Japan's foreign policy towards the developing countries. *Global South Review*. 1(2), 139-152
25. Di Liddo, M. (2021). The impact of Covid-19 on human security. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Human_security_covid_CeSI-MAECI_May_2021_1.pdf
26. Diamond, L. (2008). The Democratic Rollback: The resurgence of the predatory state. *Foreign Affairs*. 87(2), 36-48
27. Dollah, R. & Abdullah, K. (2018). The securitization of migrant workers in Sabah, Malaysia. *Journal of International Migration & Integration*. 19(3), 717–735.
28. Dollah, R. (2004). 'Lanun' atau 'Mundu' di Sabah? [Pirates or 'Mundu' in Sabah], *Jati*. 9, 171-188.
29. Edström, B. (2003) Japan's foreign policy and human security. *Japan Forum*, 15(2), 209-225
30. Edström, B. (2011). *Japan and Human Security: The derailing of a foreign policy vision*, Institute for Security and Development Policy.
31. Embassy of Japan in Armenia. (2022). Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP). Retrieved January 2, 2023, from https://www.am.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/b_000195.html
32. Embassy of Japan in Malaysia (2023). Japanese Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Project (GGP) 2023, Retrieved January 17, 2023, from https://www.my.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/ggp2022.html
33. Er, L. P (2004). Japan's peacebuilding diplomacy in Aceh. *Asian Ethnicity*, 5(3), 354-366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1463136042000259798>
34. Er, L. P. (2006). Japan's human security role in Southeast Asia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 28(1), 141-159.
35. Fierke, K. M. (2007). *Critical approaches to international security*. Polity Press
36. Furuoka, F., Lo, M. C. and Kato, I. (2007). Japan's foreign aid policy towards Malaysia: Case studies of the New Miyazawa Initiative and the Kelau Dam Construction. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*. Retrieved January 18, 2023, from <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2007/FuruokaLoKato.html>
37. George, J. (1994). *Discourses of global politics: A critical (re)introduction to international relations critical perspectives on world politics*. Lynne Rienner
38. Geraldine, A. (2020, 19 September). Sabah ranks as Malaysia's poorest state, again, *New Straits Times*, Retrieved September 7, 2022, from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/09/625711/sabah-ranks-malaysias-poorest-state-again>)
39. Heinbecker, P. (2008). the concept of human security: A Canadian view. *The Rusi Journal*. 145(6), 27-31
40. Ho, S. (2008). Japan's Human Security policy: A critical review of its limits and failures. *Japanese Studies*, 28(1), 101-112.
41. Hoshiro, H. (2022). Japan's foreign aid policy: Has it changed? Thirty years of ODA charter. *Social Science Japan Journal*. 25(2), 297-329.
42. Huda, M. I. M (2016). Evolution of Japanese ODS 1945-2015: An Analysis. *Wilayah: International Journal of East Asian Studies*, 5(1), 14-28
43. Human Habitats Highways. (2021). Improving outcomes of major infrastructural development in Sabah: Findings from a case study of the Pan Borneo Highway. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5f363cb99bbed6fd75557ce3/60da9667267c525876539a18_\(D%20v.5%2029.6\)%20HHH%20FINDINGS%20REPORT_compressed.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5f363cb99bbed6fd75557ce3/60da9667267c525876539a18_(D%20v.5%2029.6)%20HHH%20FINDINGS%20REPORT_compressed.pdf)
44. Idris, A. & Mohamad, S. (2014) Kelangsungan Dominasi Barisan Nasional di Sabah dalam Pilihan Raya Umum Ke-13. [The continuation of Barisan Nasional dominance in Sabah in the 13th General Election] *Kajian Malaysia*. 32(2), 171-206.
45. Ismail, M. T., Ichihara, M., Ismail, A. S. (2020). Japan's democracy support as a regime stabilizer: The case of Malaysia. *Pertanika: Journal of Social Science*, 28(4), 2879-2896.

46. Ismail, M. T., & Ismail, A. S. (2019). The role of Japanese non-state actors in democracy promotion. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 15(2), 169–194.
47. Jafar, A., Dollah, R., Dambul, R., Mittal, P., Ahmad, S. A., Sakke, N., et al. (2022). Virtual Learning during COVID-19: Exploring challenges and identifying highly vulnerable groups based on location. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17), 11108. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191711108>
48. Japanese Consular Office (2016). Unpublished Data. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia
49. Jing, L. J., Un, K. (2021). Japan passes China in the spirit to win Cambodian heart and minds. *ISEAS Perspective*, 59, Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://think-asia.org/handle/11540/13647>
50. Kaldor, M. (2001). *New and old wars: Organized violence in a global era*. Polity Press
51. Kato, H. (2017). Japan's ODA 1954–2014: Changes and continuities in a central instrumental in Japan's foreign policy. In H. Kato, J. Page, S. Yasutami (Eds.) *Japan's development assistant, foreign aid and the post-2015 agenda*. (1st ed., pp. 1–18). Palgrave Macmillan.
52. Kinabalu Sabah Times (1978, November 14). The copper mine that operates 24 hours every day, *KTS* (Malaysia)
53. Korkietpitak, W. (2012) Japan's foreign aid policy on human security: Its driving forces, and the direction of Official Development Assistance (ODA) Policy and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for Human Security. *Research Paper*, 19(2), 177–194 Retrieved January 7, 2023, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/60538177.pdf>
54. Krause, K. & Williams, M., (Eds.) (1997). *Critical security studies: Concepts and cases*. University of Minnesota Press
55. Lam, P. E. (2006). Japan's human security role in Southeast Asia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 28(4), 141–59
56. Lim, R. (2008). *Federal-state relations in Sabah, Malaysia: the Berjaya administration, 1976–85*. ISEAS
57. Lim, R. (2022, 1 January). Meaningful gift from Japan. *The Star*. Retrieved January 7, 2023, from <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2022/01/01/meaningful-gift-from-japan>
58. MacFarlane, N. S. & Khong, Y. F. (2006). *Human Security and the UN. A Critical History*. Indiana University Press
59. Menocal, A., Denney, L., Geddes, M. (2011). *Locating Japan's ODA within a crowded and shifting marketplace*. The Overseas Development Institute.
60. Migdal, J. S. (1994). *State power and social forces: Domination and transformation in the third world*. Cambridge University Press.
61. Migdal, J. S. (1998). *Strong societies and weak states: State-society relations and state capabilities in the third world*. Princeton University Press.
62. MOFA. (1999). *Diplomatic Bluebook*. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved January 23, 2021, from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1999/II-3-a.html>
63. MOFA. (2011). Guidelines for Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects (GGP). Retrieved June 25, 2020, from <https://www.moh.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/moh-files/GGPGuidelines.pdf>
64. MOFA. (2018). Spreading Smiles throughout the World: From People to People. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000071826.pdf>
65. MOFA. (2016). *Diplomatic Bluebook: Japanese diplomacy and international situation in 2015*. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs
66. Mohd. Ariff, M. R. (1995). *Dari pemungutan tripang ke penundaan udang: Sejarah perkembangan perikanan di Borneo Utara 1750-1990* [From harvesting sea cucumbers to catching prawns in North Borneo 1750-1990]. University of Malaya Press
67. Neary, I. (2003). Japan's human security agenda and its domestic human rights policies. *Japan Forum*, 15(2), 267–285
68. Newman, E. (2021). Covid-19: A Human security analysis, *Global Society*, 36(4), 431–454 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2021.2010034>
69. Okubo, S. & Shelley, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Human security, transnational crime and human trafficking: Asian and western perspectives*. Routledge
70. Osman, S. (1998). Japanese economic activities in North Borneo from the 1890s until 1941. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 29(1), 24–43
71. Peters, D. et al. (2022) Undocumented workers during Malaysia's Movement Control Order (MCO). *Migration Letters*, 19(2), 107–121 <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v19i2.1280>

72. Potter, D. M. (2015). Japan's foreign aid, human security and traditional security. *Journal of the Nanzan Academy Society Social Sciences*, 8, 45–60. Retrieved December 26, 2022, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236163864.pdf>
73. Potter, D. M. (2019). Japan's official development assistance to Thailand & the Philippines, 1955–2015. *Journal of the Nanzan Academy Society Social Sciences*, 17, 97–118. Retrieved December 26, 2022, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236165496.pdf>
74. Ramzan, M. (2019). *Japan's human security assistance to Pakistan in Post-Cold war Era*. PhD Thesis. University of Sindh, Pakistan
75. Rotberg, R. I. (2002). Failed states in a world of terror. *Foreign Affairs*, 81(4), 127–140 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033245>
76. Russell, J. (2005). Terrorists, bandits, spooks and thieves: Russian demonisation of the Chechens before and since 9/11. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(1), 101–116
77. Sewpaul, V. (2016). The West and the rest divide: Human rights, culture and social work. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1, 30–39 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-016-0003-2>
78. Sheng, A. (2021, September 16). Convergence: Convergence for Sabah and Sarawak on Malaysia Day. *The Edge Markets*. Retrieved December 26, 2022, from <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/convergence-convergence-sabah-and-sarawak-malaysia-day>
79. Shimamoto, Y. (2010). *Japanese immigrants and investments in North Borneo*. The Sabah Society
80. Shirakata, H. (2018). *The evaluation of Japanese ODA to Vietnamese farmers*. MA Thesis, Thammasat University, Thailand
81. Soeya, Y. (2006). Japanese security policy in transition: The rise of international and human security. *Asian Pacific Review*, 12(1): 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439000500108208>
82. Suffian, S., Puyok, A., Mansur, K., Majid, A.B. (2021). Political Economy of Sabah's economic development: Economic policy and Federal-State relations. E-Proceeding 8th International Conference on Public Policy and Social Science (ICoPS), 554–557, Retrieved January 12, 2023, from <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/54536/1/54536.pdf>
83. Sullivan, A. & Regis, P. (1981). Demography. In. A. Sullivan & C. Leong (Eds.), *Commemorative History of Sabah, 1881–1981*. (1st ed., pp. 545–576). Sabah State Government
84. Sunaga, K. (2004). The reshaping of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) charter. *Discussion Paper on Development Assistance*. 3. Retrieved January 1, 2023, from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/reform/paper0411.pdf>
85. Sunga, L. S. (2016). The concept of human security: Does it add anything of Value to international legal theory or practice? In. M-L. Frick & A. Oberprantacher (Eds.) *Power and Justice in International Relations: Interdisciplinary approaches to global challenges*. (1st ed., pp. 131–146). Routledge
86. Suzuki, T. (2012). Japan as a champion of human security. *Global Health Governance*, 6(1), 1–3.
87. Tadjbakhsh, S. & Chenoy, A. (2008). *Human security: Concepts and implications*. Routledge
88. Takasu, Y. (2014). Japan and networked human security. In. M. Martin & T. Owen (Eds.) *Routledge handbook of human security* (1st ed., pp. 239–250). Routledge
89. Tanke, S. (2022). Japan's narrative on human security: International norms, diplomatic identity and recognition. *Japan Forum*, 34(4), 419–442
90. Thomas, C. (2001). Global governance, development and human security: Exploring the links. *Third World Quarterly*, 22(2), 159–175
91. Topias, R. M. (2019). *Japan's official development assistance, Case Philippines & human security*. Postgraduate Thesis. University of Turku, Finland.
92. Tsukamoto, T. (2010). A survey of Japan's contribution to peacebuilding Timor-Leste as a case of international peace cooperation. *Research Papers*, Retrieved January 7, 2023, from https://www.cao.go.jp/pko/pko_j/organization/researcher/pdf/01-tukamoto.pdf
93. Tuan Ibrahim. (2017, February 25). Interview. Honorary secretary, St John Ambulance Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia
94. UNDP. (2022). *Funding compendium*. United Nations
95. 1. UNDP. (1994). *Human development report: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press.
96. UNICEF. (2019). *Children out of school. The Sabah context*. United Nations Children's Fund, Malaysia. Retrieved December 28, 2022, from [https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/921/file/Out%20of%20School%20children%20%20\(OOSCI\)%20Accessible%20version.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/921/file/Out%20of%20School%20children%20%20(OOSCI)%20Accessible%20version.pdf)

97. Uqbah, I. *et al.* (2014). Sejarah perkembangan pelaburan Jepun di Malaysia 1890-1980 [The historical development of Japanese investment in Malaysia 1890-1980]. *Jebat: Malaysia Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies*. 41(1), 57-93
98. von Einsiedel, S. (2005). Policy responses to state failure. In S. Chesterman, M. Ignatieff & R. Thakur. (Eds.), *Making states work: Failure and the crisis of governance*. United Nations University Press.
99. WEF. (2017). The world's 10 biggest economies in 2017. *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/worlds-biggest-economies-in-2017/>
100. World Bank. (2017). Japan. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/JJ>
101. Yamamoto, T. (2004). Human Security – From concept to action: A challenge for Japan. In. *Human Security in East Asia: International Conference on Human Security in East Asia*. Korean National Commission for UNESCO. Retrieved January 1, 2023, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000136506>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.

Authors and Affiliations

Ramli Dollah¹  · Diana Peters¹ · Wan Shawaluddin Wan Hassan¹ ·
Marja Azlima Omar¹ · Md Saffie Abdul Rahim² · Adi Jafar³

¹ International Relations Program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

² History Program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

³ Geography Program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia