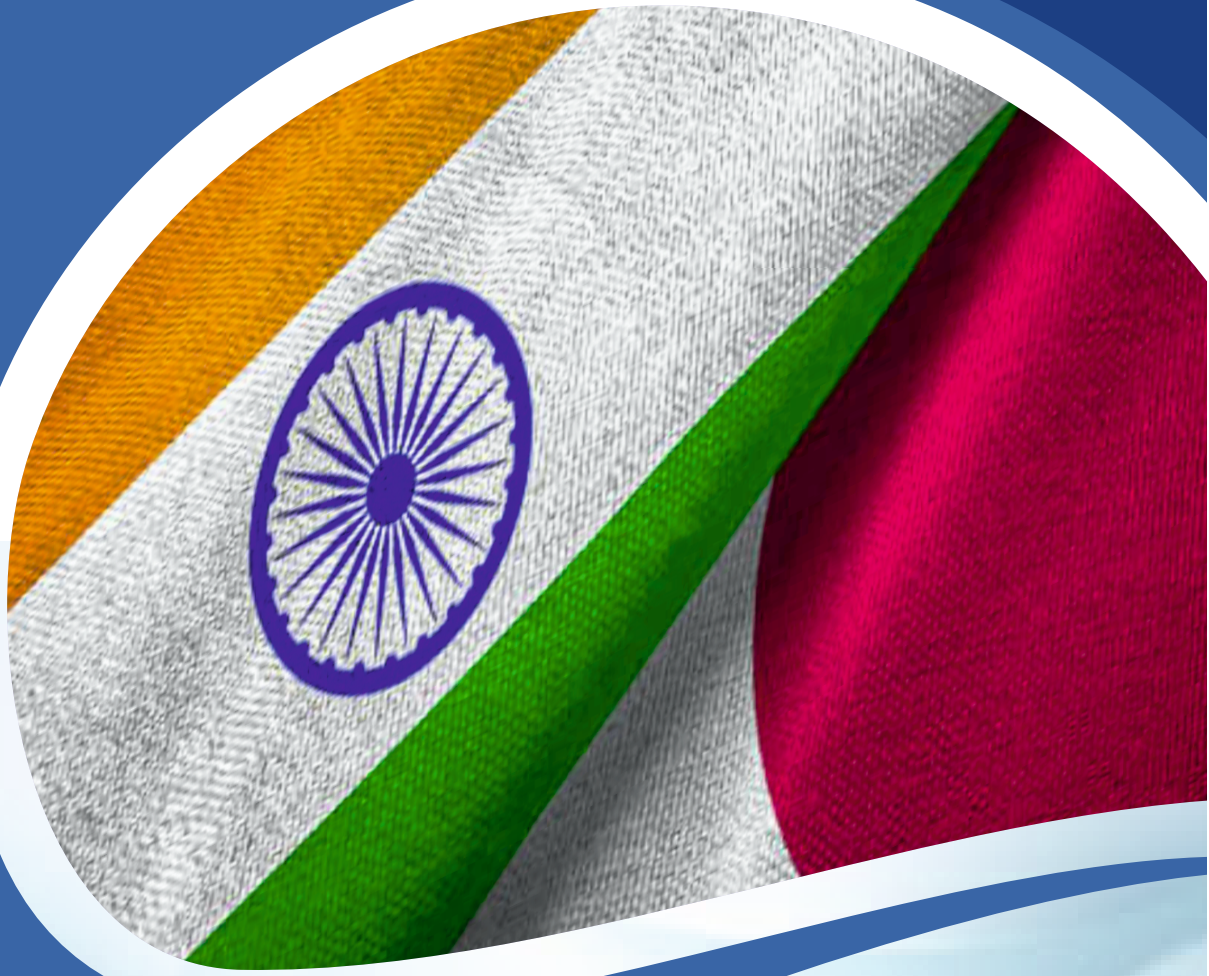
Issue Brief 9

INDIA ✦ JAPAN RELATIONS

JULY 2025



Edited by:

Chitra Shekhawat

Issue Brief 9

India-Japan Relations

India Foundation
2025

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Introduction

Rami Niranjan Desai

The relationship between India and Japan is as old as time itself. However, history traces this connection back to the 6th century, when Buddhism first arrived in Japan. In ancient times, Indian traders, along with spiritual and religious ambassadors, helped spread Buddhism throughout China and Korea, inadvertently making it an integral part of India's soft power and diplomacy. Indian philosophical influence, especially Indian Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, established the doctrinal foundations for Japanese Buddhist sects such as Tendai, Shingon, and Zen. Many Buddhist scriptures were originally written in Sanskrit and Pali, and these texts were translated into Chinese and then into Japanese.

Indian scholars, such as Kumārajīva (344 AD), played a crucial role in translating these texts into Chinese, from which Japanese Buddhism evolved. Art and sculpture in Japan were also heavily influenced by Gandhara and Mathura styles from India. Indian Buddhist deities such as Benzaiten (Saraswati) and Daikokuten (Mahākāla) became part of the Japanese pantheon. The Ashokan pillar-style architecture and lotus motifs in temples reflect Indian aesthetic and symbolic traditions. Yoga and meditation practices found their way into Japanese monastic life, particularly in Zen Buddhism. The concepts of dharma, karma, and rebirth — all central to Indian philosophical thought — have had a profound influence on Japanese religious thought.

Unfortunately, some of these civilisational connections were forgotten over time. Geographical distance and the lack of people-to-people connections played a significant role. However, it was not until after World War II, on April 28, 1952, that Japan signed a Peace Treaty with India—one of the first treaties Japan signed—

re-establishing and encouraging diplomatic relations between the two countries. Since then, the two nations have enjoyed cordial relations. Japan has valued India as a strategic and natural ally, while India has benefited from Japanese technology and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) extended by Japan. Recognising the future potential, with India as a geographical anchor and Japan as a development hub, both countries have become key actors in the Indo-Pacific region.

India and Japan's strategic diplomatic relationship is rooted in shared democratic values, mutual respect, and growing economic and security cooperation. In 2014, during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Japan, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership." This includes cooperation in defence, infrastructure, energy, regional security, and high-level dialogue. To this end, both countries conduct joint naval drills with the U.S. and sometimes Australia, known as the Malabar Exercises. Agreements have been reached on military technology transfer, logistics, and maritime security, based on shared concerns about China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, trade and commerce between India and Japan have been growing steadily over the years, driven by economic complementarities and strategic cooperation. The total bilateral trade (2023-24) was approximately $20 billion, with India’s exports to Japan comprising petroleum products, iron ore, organic chemicals, marine products, textiles and garments, gems and jewellery. India’s imports from Japan include machinery and equipment, electronic goods, iron and steel products, chemicals, transport equipment (notably hybrid and electric vehicles), and robotics and high-tech components. In 2011, the two countries signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which aims to reduce tariffs on over 90% of trade items and facilitates the movement of professionals and investments. Collaborations are also underway in AI, space research, robotics, and cybersecurity, as well as cooperation in clean energy, encompassing hydrogen, nuclear energy, and renewable resources.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi**,** India-Japan relations have significantly strengthened across strategic, economic, and cultural domains. PM Modi has

prioritised Japan as a key partner in India's rise as a global power, leading to deepened cooperation in multiple areas. His government, under his leadership, has focused on holding frequent bilateral summits between the Indian and Japanese Prime Ministers, a 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (between Foreign and Defence Ministers), and annual summits to assess and guide the partnership. While there are relevant challenges to address, such as trade imbalance in favour of Japan, complex regulations, cultural differences, and bureaucratic hurdles in India, the prospects are stronger than ever. Furthermore, strong momentum in defence, technology, and green energy, growing alignment in the Indo-Pacific vision, and deepening collaboration in semiconductors, digital economy, and resilient supply chains are fortifying the partnership. Additionally, India's need for infrastructure and technology contrasts with Japan's demand for skilled labour and consumer markets, creating mutually beneficial opportunities.

One of the areas significantly impacted by PM Modi's focus on strengthening India-Japan relations is the substantial increase in tourism in 2024. According to the Japan National Tourism Organisation's Delhi office, a record 233,000 Indian tourists visited Japan from January to December 2024, marking a 40% rise over the 166,394 visitors in 2023. In March 2024, there were 27,206 arrivals from India, an 83% year-on-year increase compared to March 2023. In May 2024, coinciding with school holidays and the end of Golden Week in Japan, the number of Indian arrivals reached a peak of 29,068, up 61.6% from May 2023. Beyond leisure travel, corporate and incentive (MICE) tourism from India expanded into regions such as Kansai and Hiroshima, not just Tokyo. Enhanced air connectivity, with more direct flights from Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai and new codeshare agreements, made travel easier and more affordable. Economically, the 233,000 visitors spent approximately ¥56.1 billion (approximately ₹3,366 crore) in Japan.[i]

Building on the upward trajectory of the India-Japan partnership, the India Foundation, New Delhi (IF), collaborated with the Kajima Institute for International Peace (KIIP) to engage in a bilateral dialogue. A high-level delegation from India, led by Shri Ram Madhav, President of the India Foundation, visited Japan from

December 13, 2023, to December 17, 2023. The delegation members included Vice Admiral Shekhar Sinha, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, India Foundation; Amb Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, a retired Indian Foreign Service officer and former ambassador to Sweden, Latvia, Qatar, Japan, and the Marshall Islands; Ms. Rami Niranjan Desai, Distinguished Fellow, India Foundation; and Dr. Srabani Roy Choudhary, a Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

During the visit, the delegation visited several leading think tanks in Japan and discussed issues of mutual concern to India and Japan, such as trade and commerce, security and defence, as well as soft power. The Nakasone Peace Institute, International Strategic Research Centre, Sasagawa Peace Foundation, and the PHP Institute invited the delegation. They also met with the India Committee of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (JBIC), which was hosted by Mr Tadashi Maeda, Committee Chairperson. Additionally, the delegation met with the India Friendship Caucus at the National Diet of Japan (the national legislature), which included various members of the House of Representatives and Ministers. The delegation was also hosted by the Indian Ambassador to Tokyo, Amb. Sibi George, at India House for a dinner to welcome them to Japan and to engage with India experts in Japan, as well as other dignitaries contributing to the India–Japan partnership. Amb. Sibi George and Dr Ram Madhav both delivered remarks on the delegation's visit.

The delegation also travelled to Kyoto. KIIP and the PHP Institute jointly organised a half-day conference to discuss the significance of Soft Power for both countries. Delegate members delivered presentations on the same. In Kyoto, the Consul General of India in Osaka, Mr. Nikhilesh Chandra Giri, hosted a dinner for the delegation. The delegation met with numerous senior academics, India experts, and members of the diaspora.

As part of the bilateral engagement, a high-level delegation from Tokyo also visited India. From 2-6 December 2024, India Foundation hosted a five-member delegation from Japan, led by Mr. Noboyuki Hiraizumi, President of the Kajima

Institute of International Peace (KIIP), in Delhi, India. This visit was reciprocal, as the India Foundation delegation of five senior members visited Japan in December 2023, hosted by KIIP. On 02 December 2024, the Japanese delegation's visit commenced with a roundtable discussion involving a select group of Japanese experts, former Indian diplomats, and scholars. The discussion was led by Dr. Ram Madhav, President of India Foundation. This was followed by an interaction with Mr. Gourangalal Das, Joint Secretary, East Asia Division, Ministry of External Affairs. During the visit, the delegation discussed mutual interests between India and Japan, including trade and commerce, security and defence, and soft power, participating in various discussions hosted by the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), FICCI, and Jindal School of International Affairs, JGU.

The Japanese Embassy in India hosted a dinner reception for delegates and members of the India Foundation. The delegation also visited Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. This issue brief is a collaborative effort based on the findings of the bilateral dialogue. It includes articles by delegation members, as well as Japanese experts and scholars. Additionally, it features a special essay from Mahesh Madhav Gogate, a researcher at Kyoto University, Japan. He is an author of Indian origin with a deep understanding of Japanese culture and heritage.

The articles in the Issue Brief are as under:

- India-Japan Relations: The People's Connection
- Religions and Their History in Japan
- Strengthening India-Japan Partnership through Infrastructure Engagement
- Our Discoveries of India
- Improving India's Investment Climate: Opportunities and the Way Forward

India- Japan Relations: The People's Connection

The article by Deepa Wadhwa examines the strategic and partnership framework between Japan and India, highlighting a wide range of areas in bilateral, plurilateral,

and multilateral contexts where both countries collaborate. She emphasises a key question: How can India and Japan strengthen their relationship by increasing people-to-people links?

Her article emphasises the unchecked growth of China's economic and military power and how it has fostered shared perceptions between Japan and India on most regional and global issues. In her piece, she highlights some problems that need to be addressed in this relationship, such as the information gap between the countries. She links Japan and India through a strong thread of Buddhism and our cultural heritage, citing examples of similar deities worshipped in both nations. She offers an analysis suggesting that the Japanese people are often unaware of both countries' cultural roots.

Furthermore, Deepa Wadhwa discusses specific shortcomings that need to be addressed in the India-Japan relationship. She begins with an area that needs attention — deepening contacts, exchanges, cooperation, and understanding between our peoples, which is vital in democracies and crucial for strengthening the foundations of our partnership. This somewhat broad area encompasses residency, tourism, cultural and educational ties, as well as the expansion of science and technology exchanges. Another shortcoming she highlights is the underutilisation of programmes like JIIMS and TITP by both sides, which require inevitable expansion.

Religions and Their History in Japan

This comprehensive article by Mahesh Madhav Gogate questions how religious traditions have shaped Japan over the years and why the Western concept of religion is considered inadequate in the Japanese context. He re-examines Japan's religious identity, arguing that standard Western categories, such as 'religious vs secular', are insufficient for understanding Japanese spiritual life. He cites several surveys, like the 2009 NHK report, where "around 49 per cent of Japanese respondents do not follow any religion. However, he juxtaposes this with the staggering number of religious sites in Japan and notes that the 2023 Religion Yearbook lists over 162

million religious adherents. He elaborates while addressing how this creates a paradox, which indicates a misunderstanding of how religion functions in Japanese society.

His essay traces the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the 6th century CE from Korea and China, which led to an intricate syncretism between Shinto and Buddhist thought. He uses examples from texts like Kojiki and Nihonshoki, which institutionalised Shinto cosmology alongside Buddhist influence. In the latter part of his essay, he mentions how Japanese spirituality absorbed Confucian and Taoist philosophies and later confronted the arrival of Christianity through Jesuit missionaries like Francis Xavier in 1549. He presents the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), which introduced State Shinto, highlighting that it separated Shinto from Buddhism. He critiques the Western conflation of modernisation with Westernisation, noting that Western observers misunderstood Shinto or failed to understand it because it lacked Christian-like dogmas.

He ultimately suggests that Japan's spiritual practices are better understood as natural rather than revealed religions, such as Christianity or Islam. He cites Toshimaro's statement: "When Japanese identify as 'non-religious,' they are often distancing themselves from Western-style doctrinal religion, not spirituality itself."

Strengthening India-Japan Partnership through Infrastructure Engagement

This article, authored by *Srabani Roy Choudhury*, explores Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision and its potential influence on the future of India-Japan cooperation in infrastructure development. Her piece highlights a key question regarding infrastructure collaboration, primarily through JICA, and its role in shaping the strategic partnership between India and Japan. She begins by outlining how a combination of rapid urbanisation, economic growth, and strategic challenges shapes India's infrastructure. These are considered within the context of the threats posed by China's assertiveness along India's borders.

The article examines Japan's historical expertise in post-war infrastructure restoration and its increasing presence in Southeast Asia, positioning it as a reliable partner to address the aforementioned challenges. The author further discusses this using the example of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), through which Japan funds and implements projects aligned with developmental and strategic objectives in India. Japan's FOIP vision, particularly the 2023 updated strategy under PM Kishida, includes four pillars: Rules for Prosperity, Addressing Challenges, Multi-layered Connectivity, and Security across Sea and Air.

As Srabani mentions in her article, Japan regards India as an "indispensable partner", which is also reflected in its substantial ODA (Official Development Assistance) loans. Amid ongoing global tensions, this strategy has proven to be an excellent move for India as it helps diversify its supply chains and counter China's Belt and Road Initiative.

There is mention of three significant corridors between India and Japan: the Kolkata–Ho Chi Minh City Corridor, which runs via northeast India and Myanmar to Thailand and Cambodia; the Chittagong–Ho Chi Minh City Corridor, involving Tripura and Bangladesh, leveraging JICA investments; and the Chennai–Dawei–Ho Chi Minh City Corridor, tapping into industrial networks in South India and connecting to Southeast Asia by land and sea. These corridors aim to link India's domestic infrastructure with the ASEAN region, facilitating integration into regional value chains. JICA has played a pivotal role with projects such as the East-West Economic Corridor, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, and connectivity improvements in Tripura, Bangladesh, and Northeast India.

The paper also highlights how India's policies—Act East, Make in India, and Act Fast for the Northeast—align with Japan's infrastructure diplomacy. Together, they reflect a convergence of strategic objectives: enhancing economic growth, establishing manufacturing hubs, and building resilient supply chains resistant to Chinese dominance.

Finally, Japan's Development Cooperation Charter (2023), aligned with its National Security Strategy (NSS 2022), emphasises quality infrastructure, inclusive growth, and debt sustainability. The PPP model and "offer-type" cooperation, where Japan proactively proposes infrastructure ideas based on strategic assessments, signal a shift towards more assertive and strategic engagement in India.

Our Discoveries of India

This article concerns the delegation's visit from the Kajima Institute of International Peace (KIIP) in December 2023. This on-ground visit enhanced their knowledge and understanding of India's socio-cultural, economic, and geopolitical landscape.

The first part of this article is written by Nobuyuki Hiraizumi, President of KIIP, who concentrates on economic and strategic convergence between India and Japan. He argues that the mutual threat from China's military rise and economic engagement becomes unequal. Japan's high-end exports face difficulties in India's lower-income market. He advocates moving Japanese production facilities from China to India to improve financial security. A unique investment opportunity he highlights is India's vast *festival economy*, especially in culturally vibrant cities like Varanasi. He suggests fostering reciprocal investments in festival-related infrastructure in both countries to generate economic ripple effects.

The second part of the article is written by Michio Matsumoto, who emphasises India's surplus labour issue and underemployment, especially in service sectors with low productivity. He observed that outdated employment structures continue to influence labour patterns. Considering Japan's ageing population and India's youth bulge, Matsumoto suggested bilateral employment integration.

Jun Osawa, Director at KIIP, shared a spiritual and philosophical reflection from his visit to Varanasi. He was struck by the similarities between Indian and Japanese

cultural perceptions of life, death, and ritual, particularly the shared symbolism of rivers and prayer beads (mala). He emphasised how Buddhism, originating in India, profoundly influenced Japanese religious practices and societal values. Despite this historical connection, Osawa was sceptical that shared philosophical foundations alone could lead to business synergy. He pointed to societal differences—Japan's collectivism versus India's segmented occupational structure—as a barrier to smooth business cooperation.

Hisa Oiwa emphasised India's demographic dividend as a solution to Japan's ageing population, proposing a mutually beneficial labour partnership. However, she pointed out weak people-to-people ties and limited cultural understanding compared to Japan's engagement with ASEAN or China. To address this, she recommended increasing educational exchanges and programmes like TITP, supported by scholarships, language training, and job integration for Indian youth.

Dr. Kazumasa Oguro praised India's 2047 vision but cautioned about challenges such as poor infrastructure, caste inequalities, and the need for reforms. He highlighted Japan's post-war development, especially in toll road infrastructure, as a model for India. He also stressed that India's rise could strategically benefit Japan by balancing China's influence.

Improving India's Investment Climate: Opportunities and the Way Forward

The final article by Chitra Shekhawat raises a fundamental question: "How can India address structural investment barriers to optimise Japanese economic engagement and secure long-term strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific?"

It offers a detailed examination of the economic aspects of the India-Japan strategic partnership, foreign direct investment (FDI), institutional collaboration, and sectoral opportunities. The article provides an in-depth analysis of how the relationship between the two countries has evolved into a modern alliance encompassing

infrastructure, technology, security, and regional cooperation under the banner of a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership". The main argument presented is that while Japan remains India's most committed and significant economic partner, with collaboration such as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the full potential between the two countries remains untapped due to persistent regulatory, bureaucratic, and operational challenges.

The article presents various figures to bolster the argument, illustrating how bilateral trade in 2023–24 reached USD 22.85 billion, with a notable trade deficit on India's side. Imports from Japan (USD 17.69 billion) significantly surpassed exports (USD 5.15 billion). Japan's expertise in electronics, machinery, and nuclear technology complements India's exports of organic chemicals, vehicles, and marine products. However, the imbalance underscores the need for deeper economic integration and improved competitiveness. The author advocates that if India can reform and streamline its investment environment, particularly for Japanese stakeholders, it could not only strengthen bilateral relations but also position itself as a vital player in resilient global supply chains and advanced manufacturing ecosystems.

Opportunities for collaboration include the India-Japan Digital Partnership (AI, IoT, semiconductors), the Clean Energy Partnership (hydrogen, LNG), defence cooperation, and space technology (LUPEX mission with ISRO-JAXA). Recommendations involve reforming CEPA to tackle non-tariff barriers, improving IP protection, broadening skill development through JIMs and JECs, and strengthening the Advance Pricing Agreement scheme. The article concludes that India must establish a stable, transparent, and predictable business environment to attract more Japanese investment, sustain long-term strategic alignment, and help shape a resilient Indo-Pacific order through joint innovation and cooperation.

The issue brief aims to provide an overview of the India-Japan partnership, focusing on the current status and potential. At the time of publication, the Quad foreign ministers' meeting unequivocally condemned the terrorist attacks in Pahalgam. In another significant move, the Quad grouping launched "Quad Critical Minerals

Initiative" to ensure the availability of critical minerals under a broader goal of strengthening economic security. The grouping, which includes Japan and India, will reach another milestone as India hosts the Quad in the latter half of 2025. This event will not only enhance Quad cooperation but also serve as an example to a chaotic world, further strengthening the India-Japan partnership.

[i] tfninternational.com+5traveltradejournal.com+5holidays.tripfactory.com+5

India-Japan Relations: The People's Connection

Deepa Wadhwa

The first quarter of the 21st century has seen India-Japan relations soar to unprecedented, and perhaps previously unimagined, heights. This development was brought about by tectonic shifts in the geopolitics of Asia, the emergence of new players threatening to disrupt the long-standing status quo in the region's power dynamics, and the growing political and economic heft of India, along with a long-overdue mutual recognition that our two countries are natural partners bound by civilisational ties. These ties manifest in modern times through shared beliefs in democracy, the rule of law, and converging complementarities of interests.

We share a Special Strategic and Global Partnership supported by a multilayered platform architecture that facilitates close collaboration across a wide spectrum of areas in bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral spheres. This has ensured policy coordination and cooperation in identified areas, with direction derived directly from the institutionalised annual summit meetings between the two countries' prime ministers, which have been held regularly for the past two decades.

The strength of this relationship rests on shared perceptions regarding most regional and global issues, particularly the threats posed by the unrestrained growth of Chinese economic and military power, the evident complementarities we must leverage to secure our respective national economic prosperity and growth, strong bipartisan support across political parties in both democracies that ensures sustainability, and, importantly, the positive public perception of each other among the peoples of the two countries.

While cooperation thus far has focused on traditional areas of political, security, and economic ties, an area that has seen some neglect is people-to-people ties. These ties

find pro forma mention as a desirable objective in the outcome statements of important meetings, especially the joint and vision statements issued at the conclusion of summit meetings. However, they have suffered from a lack of granular focus and have been accorded relatively lesser priority, perhaps due to the presumption of close historical, religious, and now political ties.

There is a realisation, however, of late, that despite all the positives in the relationship, there is an information deficit about each other at the popular level that needs to be bridged. This information deficit inhibits a better understanding and appreciation of each other, greater academic and student exchanges, deeper joint S&T explorations in cutting-edge areas, tourism, and migration for jobs, and it is a significant impediment to economic ties, whether in investment or trade. Given these wider implications, there is clearly a need to work on deepening people-to-people relations and bridging this deficit, which I feel begins with relative ignorance about our common cultural moorings and connections, knowledge of which remains restricted to a clutch of Indologists in Japan and an even smaller cohort of Japan scholars in India.

Despite the perception that Japan and India are geographically remote, which discouraged historical contact, the truth is that India's cultural influence in Japan has been considerable for over 1400 years, even if the interaction was filtered through China and Korea. This influence primarily stems from Mahayana Buddhism, which reached Japan 1000 years after Gautama Buddha via Central Asia, China, and Korea, and spread mainly due to royal patronage, principally attributed to Prince Shotoku (574-622 BCE). There is a legend that the Indian monk Bodhidharma, better known for his association with the Shaolin temple in China, visited Japan during his reign.

However, the first historical evidence of direct contact dates from the end of the Jomon period in Japan, when relations with the Tang dynasty in China were very close. An Indian monk named Bodhisena, living in China at that time, was invited to Nara, the imperial capital, by Emperor Shomu (701-756 CE). Bodhisena, said to be a

Brahmin from Southern India who chose Buddhist asceticism, arrived in Japan in 736 BCE and quickly rose in the religious hierarchy of Nara, being appointed High Priest or Sogo due to the high esteem in which Indians from the land of the Buddha were held.

When, on September 4, 752 CE, a grand ceremony was held to consecrate the 15-metre tall, gilded bronze statue of the Vairocana Buddha at the Todaiji temple in Nara, it was Bodhisena who was invited to perform the grand eye-opening ceremony called kaigen. It is said that 2.6 million citizens contributed to the building of the Todaiji temple, which represented half the population of the realm, and they must have all been aware of the preeminence of the monk from India, known as Tenjiku, meaning heavenly land in ancient Japan. Some Japanese maps, as late as the Edo era, placed India at the centre of the human world. Such a construct of the Buddhist worldview must have also indicated that the idea of India was never far from the consciousness of the Buddhist laity in Japan.

It was not only the Buddhist religion, mythology, and iconography that were popularised in Japan and spread across the country from the imperial and religious centres of Nara and later Kyoto, but several gods from the Hindu pantheon also came to be worshipped in Japan due to their association with Buddhist sutras and related beliefs. The first two Hindu goddesses to be worshipped in Japan were Sri Lakshmi (Kichiijoten) and Saraswati (Benzaiten). The worship of both goddesses for good crops is said to have begun at the Todaiji temple as early as 722 CE and has been an annual celebration ever since. A shrine to the goddess Benzaiten was built on Chikibu Island in Shiga Prefecture in 834 CE and continues to be one of the three principal shrines to her in Japan. Such was the popularity of the goddess who carries a lute, much like Saraswati with a vina, that a chronicler counted 131 shrines to Benzaiten in Edo, Tokyo, in 1832. While Benzaiten was associated with water bodies and the arts, Kichiijoten was linked to prosperity, just like in India, and served as the patron goddess of the nobility and the affluent.

The other Hindu gods worshipped in Japan, such as Ganesha, Mahakala, and Kubera, were perhaps introduced via the Shingon sect started by Kukai (also known as Kobo Daishi) (774- 835 CE), which heavily borrowed from Vajrayana Buddhism and included liturgies in Sanskrit. He is said to have interacted with a Buddhist master named Prajna from Gandhara, who had studied in Nalanda and later travelled to Xian to study Buddhism, returning as a master of Sanskrit as well. He is credited with introducing the kana phonetic syllabary to the Japanese language, which is similar in sequence to the Sanskrit alphabet. Kukai is one of the best-known Buddhist figures in Japan, having established numerous temples around the country, including the Toji temple in Kyoto, which still houses a hall with statues of most of the important gods of the Hindu pantheon, including Brahma. Although he never visited India himself, the stories associated with his life demonstrate his spiritual affinity with India. Koyasan, where he died, hosts one of the largest monasteries in the country, where one can hear Sanskrit chants.

The close connection with Hinduism has endured until modern times. It is still a tradition every New Year for the Japanese to visit and offer prayers for good luck at temples and shrines associated with the seven lucky gods of good fortune, known collectively as Shichifukujin. Of these, three are of Indian origin: Benzaiten (Saraswati), Daikokuten (Mahakala), and Bishamonten (Kubera). This practice originated in the medieval period around the 15th century but continues to this day. During my stay in Japan, I visited temples dedicated to Lord Ganesha, known in Japanese as Kangiten or Shoten, including one of the most famous in Hozanji, near Nara.

With all these connections and more, including dance (Gigaku) and music (Gagaku), as well as theatre forms (Noh and Kabuki) that have similarities to those in India, one would presume a cultural closeness between the Japanese and Indians. The truth, however, is that Buddhism in Japan was transformed and extensively assimilated, undergoing Japanification as expected. As a result, most Japanese are unaware of the Indian origins of their culture, just as Indians are ignorant of the civilisational threads that bind us. This area needs to be addressed through more

institutionalised cultural exchanges, research, and widespread dissemination to strengthen people-to-people understanding and foster a sense of closeness at a fundamental level.

A period in our histories that witnessed a rediscovery of each other coincided with the Meiji Restoration and the beginnings of India's struggle against the British colonial yoke in the latter half of the 19th century. While Japan turned in many ways to the West in its pursuit of modernisation, it viewed India as a colony of Britain in that context. Indian leaders were inspired by the success of a fellow Asian country in acquiring modern technology, establishing a navy, and achieving victory over Russia in 1904-1905. The opening up of Japan led to greater connections with British India, including trade in cotton and other products, the establishment of direct shipping lines, and a short-lived joint venture between NYK and the Tatas to break the monopoly of the British Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O). Additionally, Indians moved to work in trading houses based in Kobe and Yokohama. Japanese companies also began operations in India to facilitate trade, with Mitsui and Co. opening an office in Bombay in 1893 to buy cotton directly from production centres in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. An interesting import by Mitsui into India at the beginning of the 20th century was the 'rickshaw, 'an abbreviation of the Japanese name 'jinrikisha 'for a two-wheeler pulled by a human. Indians have since appropriated the rickshaw into our vocabulary and lives, and the connection to Japan has been forgotten in the mists of time.

Connections between our two countries began to grow at a brisk pace at the turn of the new century, with cultural and people-to-people contact also reignited thanks to ease of travel. The growing interest in India in Japan was evident when the Japan-India Association was formed in Tokyo in 1903. This was the first such organization established to promote understanding and ties with a foreign country, founded by former Prime Minister Shigenobu Okuma, Viscount Eichi Shibusawa, and Viscount Nagaoka. The JIA remains active, having completed over 120 years of fostering ties with India outside the confines of formal governmental and business structures. This period, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, was marked by the growth of

the Pan-Asian movement in Japan and its adherents, which included revolutionaries like Rash Behari Bose, who lived in exile in Tokyo from 1915 until his death in 1945. He established the Indian Independence League, which he handed over to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in 1943. The well-known narrative of Japan's support and close association with Netaji's INA, along with the Japanese army's bloody battles in India's northeast, established a special bond between Japan and this remote part of India.

Other prominent visitors to Japan during that period included Swami Vivekananda, who stopped for a few months on his way to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He was perceptive in recognising the need for closer contacts between Indians and Japanese, stating that there was much to be learnt from Japan's ability to modernise and be self-reliant while retaining its cultural heritage. He also observed that the Japanese held Indians in high regard and that Sanskrit mantras were chanted in many temples. Rabindranath Tagore visited Japan five times between 1926 and 1929, demonstrating the easy affinity he felt with the Japanese people. These visits helped foster cultural exchanges, as Japanese intellectuals like Okakura Tenshin, along with artists and musicians, became regular visitors to Calcutta and Santiniketan, where Japanese studies were introduced. The founder of the Nipponzan Myohoji, a Buddhist order known as Fujii Guriji, travelled to India in 1931 to meet Mahatma Gandhi and offer support to the independence struggle. The wood carving of the three monkeys we associate with Gandhiji, who see, hear, and speak no evil, was presented to him by Fujii Guriji. I was surprised to learn that they were images from a temple at Nikko and not Indian, as they had become such an integral part of our ethos!

The years immediately following the end of World War II were difficult ones for Japan, marked by the humiliation of defeat and occupation by Allied forces while facing the enormous challenge of rebuilding its shattered economy and infrastructure. This was also a period of exceptional warmth and special gestures of friendship from India to Japan, as we turned with empathy to an Asian brother having just earned our own independence from Britain. This period in our relations

was defining in terms of the goodwill we earned, which has endured over time. Common people told me during my time as Ambassador to Japan that when Prime Minister Nehru presented an elephant in 1949 to Ueno Zoo in Tokyo, where all the animals had been destroyed during the war, it once again brought smiles to the faces of Japanese children. Pandit Nehru also presented some relics of the Buddha to the Emperor of Japan in 1954, which were enshrined in Peace Pagodas built by Fujii Guruji's Buddhist order. One of these, located on a hill overlooking Hiroshima, embodies prayers for the souls who perished in the atomic bombing of 1945. To this day, the Indian Parliament pays homage every anniversary to the Japanese victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a gesture deeply appreciated by Japan.

India also did not participate in the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951, stating it sought no reparation from Japan, and signed a separate peace treaty in April 1952 that marked the formal establishment of diplomatic relations. This decision by PM Nehru was also deeply appreciated by Japan and may have been the reason India was the first country to receive development aid from Japan during Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi's visit to Delhi in 1958. However, in the four decades starting in the 1960s, India-Japan relations plateaued as both countries found themselves on differing sides during the Cold War. It was only in 2000, as the world changed, that we were ready to reinvigorate the relationship.

As mentioned at the beginning, while relations in most spheres have been progressing to our mutual satisfaction, the one area that requires attention is deepening contacts, exchanges, cooperation, and understanding between our people, which is vital in democracies and essential for strengthening the fundamentals of our relationship. This rather amorphous area covers residency, tourism, cultural and educational ties, and even expanding science and technology exchanges.

At the level of both governments, particularly the Indian government, enhancing people-to-people relations has become a high priority. Despite a Cultural Exchange Agreement (CEA) being signed as early as 1956, the actual showcasing of cultures in each other's countries has been sporadic, typically occurring during milestone

anniversaries of the relationship or during specific events such as the Year of Friendly Exchanges declared in 2017. This situation arises from the lack of specific annual cultural exchange programmes in defined areas, which usually follow from the enabling CEA in the case of other countries and are coordinated in India by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations under the Ministry of External Affairs. Any attempts to establish a similar mechanism between India and Japan have been hindered by bureaucratic obstacles on the Japanese side, which state that Japan has no equivalent organisation that sends and hosts cultural delegations.

However, it appears that an exception has been made in the case of China, where numerous initiatives aim to ensure regular exchanges. For example, the Japan-China 21st Century Friendship Programme includes the Chinese High School Students Long Term Exchange Program, which invites Chinese students to study in Japan for 11 months. Additionally, there are generous scholarships and exchanges of cultural troupes and museum artefacts. There are some Japanese government initiatives, such as the Jenesys programme, which targets youth from the Asia Pacific, including India, but what is needed is a much larger outreach to India. Consequently, Indian youth have limited information about educational opportunities in Japan, resulting in only around 1,300 Indian students in Japan, far fewer than those from Nepal, Bangladesh, or even Sri Lanka.

There have been recent efforts to increase cooperation and exchanges in the areas of education and skill development. Thirty-five Japanese-India Institutes of Manufacturing (JIIMs) have been established by Japanese companies in India under an agreement signed in 2016, mentored by both governments, with the aim of training 30,000 floor shop leaders over the course of 10 years. A few institutions in both countries have set up centres dedicated to promoting studies on various aspects of India-Japan relations, such as IIM Bangalore and Nagpur in India, as well as Keio and Osaka University in Japan. There is a Japan-India Universities Forum that meets regularly to discuss areas of joint research and faculty exchanges in the fields of science, technology, and innovation. These are all welcome initiatives but clearly need to be scaled up massively to create the necessary impact and leverage the vast

potential inherent in such cooperation. Indians are also eligible to go to Japan under the Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP), which seeks to impart technical skills to workers from developing countries through on-the-job training. These workers can live in Japan for 3 to 5 years, helping to address labor shortages while acquiring skills and knowledge.

There are now nearly 46,000 Indians residing in Japan and about 8000 Japanese in India. The doubling of the Indian population in the last decade is primarily due to the demand for Indian IT engineers. Indians are also applying to go to Japan under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) program, which offers residency status to address labour shortages in Japan, where there is a demand for caregivers from India because of the ageing demographic. Tourism from India to Japan has grown by almost 40% in the last year, reaching 233,000 under a more liberal visa regime and growing interest among affluent Indian travellers. These areas all contribute to expanding the connections between the people of the two countries, but they clearly underperform in potential and require more focused efforts.

We need to increase not only the range and intensity of exchanges but also the platforms for disseminating information about each other to generate knowledge and interest. Different mediums using modern technology, social media, influencers, etc., can be utilised for that. Indian films have seen growing audiences in Japan. Just as almost every Japanese student of recent history knows of the Indian Judge Justice Radha Binod Pal's dissenting judgement at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, so too should the good stories of cultural affinities between our people be part of the school curriculum in both countries. Perhaps the growing popularity of Japanese anime, manga, and cosplay among the youth in India is having some marginal impact, but lessons can be learnt from the hold of Korean sitcoms and music over Indian youth. The connections between our countries are ancient and civilizational in their content. Our bilateral relations are among the best in Asia. The benefits of deepening our strategic ties and economic engagement are uncontested. What needs equal attention is investing in greater connections between our peoples.

Religions and Their History in Japan

Mahesh Madhav Gogate

Overview

In October 2023, the Associated Press published an article titled “In secular Japan, what draws so many to temples and shrines? Stamp collecting and tradition,” by Mari Yamaguchi. The article's title epitomises the flawed understanding of Japan's religious culture and the profound impact of the Western idea of the separation of the religious and the secular. When discussing religion in Japan, we often encounter phrases like Japan being ‘the least religious ’or Japanese people being ‘not religious. ’The dominant narrative in English discourse routinely portrays Japan as a secular and atheistic country where ‘religion ’does not exist or has already ‘died out. ’This paper, therefore, revisits Japan's religious history to understand how the arrival of ‘revealed ’or monotheistic religions in the Japanese archipelago significantly transformed the religious understanding and engendered significant confusion in the Japanese mind.

The survey published in 2009, conducted by the International Social Survey Programme (NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute) on religion, revealed that around 49 per cent of Japanese respondents ‘do not follow any religion. ’A decade later, according to the Pew Research Centre surveys (2008 to 2017), only 10 per cent of the population say that ‘religion is very important in their lives. ’Another contemporary survey conducted by the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS, 2017-2018) showed that nearly 71 per cent of the respondents ‘do not practice religion.’

In the World Values Survey Wave 7 [i] (WVSV, 2017-2020), 63 per cent of respondents said they are ‘non-religious when asked about their religious

denomination.[ii] Despite whether or not they go to a church, the same survey revealed that more than 55 per cent of the respondents identified themselves as ‘not a religious person. ’About 19 per cent of respondents answered that they are ‘atheists. ’

However, the results of these surveys contradict the 29 religious sites and 44 religious structures designated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, as well as approximately 160,000 active shrines and temples that witness large gatherings of people during festivals and other annual events.

The Religion Yearbook 2023 (in Japanese)[iii] states,“ Japan is home to a wide variety of religious cultures, including Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, and various religions.” The Religion Yearbook uses the term ‘religious cultures ’and elucidates the brief history of these diverse religious traditions in Japan. When discussing the number of ‘believers ’and ‘religions ’in Japan, one peculiar fact needs to be highlighted: in 2023, Japan's total population was 124.63 million. However, according to the Religion Yearbook, the total number of ‘believers ’was about 162 million[iv], which was more than the total population of Japan.

The previous research discussed the notion of religion, measured religiosity, and conducted various social surveys, as well as the limitations and inconsistencies among their results. Roemer (2009) argued that insufficient sample size and limited access to individual data hinder the careful analysis of religion in Japan, which remains ‘under-researched. ’Roemer writes that the syncretistic nature of Japanese religiousness also helps explain why exclusive religious affiliations are uncommon in Japan. These inconsistencies, therefore, arose when strong adherence was given to monotheistic ideas and preconceived Western notions of religion and its principles.[v]

During the colonial conquests, Western parochial terms such as ‘religion ’and ‘secular ’were imposed on non-Western cultures, or rather on uncivilised nations. By the end of the twentieth century, a broad array of Western ideas and the push for modernisation flowed into Japan. This triggered significant churning and confusion in categorising and identifying the Japanese corresponding nomenclature.[vi] Sansom

(1951) provides an example of finding the most suitable counterparts for biblical terms such as ‘God’, ‘spirit’, ‘atonement’, ‘grace’, etc., and illustrates how the verbatim translation of these texts creates absurd meanings in Japanese. I therefore suggest that we need to revisit this great conundrum and perhaps uncover the genesis of making Japan a ‘non-religious ’and a ‘secular ’country.

Shinto and the introduction of Buddhism

The pottery, ceremonial artefacts, and other relics uncovered during excavations at various archaeological sites in Japan date back to the Yayoi period (400 BCE - 300 CE). During this period, rituals and practices were closely tied to rice cultivation.[vii] Japanese minds recognised and experienced the presence of divinities in their natural surroundings.[viii]

For that reason, ritual sites were located close to perennial water sources such as riverbanks and waterfalls, as well as on hills and mountains. At these sacred sites, ‘Kami’[ix] was manifested in responding to human invitations and various rituals offered[x]. Herbert (1967) refrained from translating the term Kami into the English word ‘god. ' He states that the Japanese mind does not necessarily require an explicit conceptualisation of Kami. Kami exists without form and is not visible.[xi]

The Japanese expression for Shinto is ‘Kami no michi, ’which stirs many theories and discussions about how to construe it into English. Roughly, it can be explained as ‘ways of the divinities. ’Shinto thoughts and practices are deeply connected with agriculture, fertility, and reverence for sacred nature and natural phenomena. According to Shinto, human nature is essentially pure and affirmative, which contrasts with the Christian doctrine of ‘original sin.’[xii] Yamakage (2012) argues that Shinto philosophy, lacking any founder, idols, doctrines, or commandments, has suffered the “tragedy of not-having-any,” which has led many domestic and international scholars to label Shinto as a ‘non-religion. ’

The scholars have studied and discussed two extant prominent works called ‘Kojiki’[xiii] (Records of Ancient Matters) and ‘Nihonshoki ’or ‘Nihongi ’(Chronicles

of Japan), which date to the early eighth century and conceive the Shinto cosmology, addressing both celestial and terrestrial deities. The composing period of these texts also highlights that the systematised arrangements and crystallisation of literary texts began after the introduction of Buddhism (mainly the Mahayana school of thought) from the Korean peninsula during 538 C.E. or 552 C.E. Before the arrival of Buddhism, sacred areas near nature were regarded as 'shrine'; the English term for Shinto structure, with a sacred object such as a rock or tree worshipped by the people. The introduction of highly organised Buddhism and its monastic cultures prompted many transformations in Shinto, and arguably, the title Shinto was also formally adopted.[xiv]

The development of art, architecture, rituals, and extensive scriptures in India, Central Asia, and China attracted Yamato's rulers and royal court. Despite being earnest Shinto believers and followers of Shinto, Emperor Yomei (540-587) and his son, Prince Shotoku[xv] (574-622), were regarded as the founders of Buddhism in Japan and according to the 'Nihonshoki, 'Emperor Yomei even converted to Buddhism. The propagation of Buddhist philosophy and practice continued during the reign of Emperor Shomu (701-756); during this era (termed the Nara period, 710-784), temples such as Horyu-ji and Todai-ji were constructed, and Buddhism acquired national status without abandoning the Shinto culture[xvi] and honouring the rites of Kami[xvii].

The complex relationship between Shinto and Buddhist thought also led to blurred boundaries between the two during this period. Influenced by various schools of thought, some kami came to be interpreted as manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.[xviii]

Despite the philosophical differences and rivalries between Shinto and Buddhism, the Japanese people ultimately integrated both practices into their everyday lives by worshipping Kami at Shinto shrines and conducting funeral rites at Buddhist temples.[xix]

The Japanese proverb ‘born Shinto die Buddhist ’encapsulates the cultural practices and religious composition. This phenomenon also highlights that ritual practices are among the most common manifestations of Japanese religiousness.[xx] The Kamakura period (from the end of the twelfth century through the middle of the thirteenth century) saw the emergence of prominent Buddhist scholars and eight schools of Buddhism aptly called ‘Kamakura Buddhism.’[xxi] From its introduction in the sixth century during the Kamakura period, Buddhism was gradually assimilated into Japanese culture and deeply penetrated society.

Arrival of Confucian and Tao philosophies

Along with Buddhist philosophy, Confucianism and Taoism also arrived in Japan and were later incorporated into Japanese practices. Despite differences in their ideas, the diverse Japanese mindset embraced and assimilated these varying philosophies, ultimately transforming them into a uniquely Japanese model. Both the mindful and the unwitting—including the royal court, families, and ordinary people—borrowed and adapted various practices, rituals, teachings, and ideas from different traditions over time.

Adapting the Confucian and Zen (Ch’an) teachings further established the innate Japanese reverence for nature. To expound on the syncretic nature and conscious embrace of diverse practices in Japanese culture, the Zen philosophy is worth highlighting. Masunaga (1956) has brilliantly condensed the trajectory of Zen philosophy and its profound impact on Japanese aesthetics. “Zen combined the intellectual culture of India, the pragmatic culture of China, and the emotional culture of Japan in a movement which influenced architecture, sculpture, painting, calligraphy, flower arrangement, gardening, Noh songs, poetry, music, and pottery.”[xxii] However, Earhart (2004) calls attention to this ‘borrowing ’practice, which fundamentally signifies two viewpoints: firstly, the embraced thoughts complemented the Shinto philosophy, and secondly, these ‘foreign ’concepts integrated deeply and lost their root identities.

Centuries of Isolation and Christian Missionaries

The sixteenth century was a compelling era that cannot be overlooked to understand the problems posed by the 'foreign religion, 'especially before three prominent leaders: Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616), who strived to unify Japan under their leadership. Christianity,[xxiii] chiefly Roman Catholicism, entered Japan, and this initial era was coined 'kirishitan 'in the Japanese language. In this same era, Japan was experiencing greater uncertainty due to wars and shifting loyalties. During this volatile period, in 1549, Roman Catholic Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506-1552) landed in Kagoshima, Japan, and began missionary work by baptising people and establishing a church. Francis Xavier was dejected by the missionary conditions and their progress in India, and was in search of a new territory.[xxiv] He realised that imperative political power was crucial for promoting the evangelical mission and that converting the Shogun and feudal lords of Japan would lead to success.[xxv] Oda Nobunaga sought to unify Japan and had challenging and contentious relationships with some armed Buddhist monastery factions. Many scholars believe that the ulterior favour shown by Nobunaga towards the Catholic missions was intended to curb the aggressive Buddhist monasteries.

Hideyoshi succeeded Nobunaga and initially showed a favourable attitude toward missionary activities. It is intriguing that even many high-ranking generals close to Hideyoshi were baptised. However, incidents of political interference and increasing suspicion surrounding missionary activities forced Hideyoshi to persecute the missionaries. In his reply to the letter received from the Viceroy of the Indies (the Portuguese governor of Goa, India), Toyotomi Hideyoshi expressed the core philosophy grounded in the teachings of virtues and spirituality and the intrusion of foreign religion to destroy these notions. He writes:

"Ours is the land of the Gods, and God is mind. Everything in nature comes into existence because of the mind. Without God, there can be no spirituality. Without God, there can be no way. God rules in times of prosperity as in times of decline. God is positive and negative and unfathomable. Thus, God is the root and source of all existence. This God is spoken of by Buddhism in India, Confucianism in China, and Shinto in Japan. To know Shinto is to know Buddhism as well as Confucianism."[xxvi]

This letter epitomises Japanese concepts of plurality and presents an organic process of borrowing and adapting philosophies to achieve a seamless connection. A long-time Portuguese missionary, Luís Fróis (1532-1597), who intriguingly was a contemporary of Hideyoshi, wrote in detail about the cultural differences between the Japanese and Western Europeans. Fróis, in his accounts, conveniently ignores the domestic clashes and states, "We profess only one God, one faith, one baptism and one Catholic Church; in Japan, there are thirteen sects and almost all of them disagree on worship and veneration." [xxvii] This exclusive, hidebound Western approach to compartmentalisation failed to understand the diversity of thoughts, rituals, and traditions.

Tokugawa Ieyasu, after the death of Hideyoshi, established the Tokugawa shogunate. Davis (1916) makes a compelling argument to elucidate why the persecution of missionaries continued despite the regime change. He explains that Japan listened patiently to the sermons of Roman Catholic missionaries until it made sense of the new religious teachings. However, when the Christian missionaries began to manipulate the political landscape, they started facing suppression. Davis mentions that the Dutch merchants were pragmatic and did not mix religion with trade and commerce; therefore, the Dutch were allowed to stay at Hirado and later at the artificial port called Dejima in Nagasaki. Ieyasu and his Tokugawa shogun successors suppressed missionary activities, particularly in the Kyushu region, where the Church had a strong presence. This era is referred to as the Edo period (1603-1868), which lasted for more than 260 years, during which the island nation of Japan closed all its ports (Sakoku) and exercised tight control over trade with

foreign countries, allowing trade only with the Netherlands and China. During this period of seclusion, restrictions were tightened on the spread of foreign religions in Japan. Buddha and Kami were brought into a ‘common Pantheon ’during the roughly two-hundred-year period.[xxviii]

Era of Restructuring, Restoration and Adaptation

After banning the ‘kirishitan’, the shogunate ordered all the temples to submit the ‘statement of affiliation’, and it became compulsory for all households to affiliate with a particular temple.[xxix] Buddhist schools took advantage of these opportunities and formed alliances with the regime.[xxx] However, the proximity to the shogunate had a significant impact on Buddhism's practices and spiritual standing. By the end of the Edo period, following the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate’s supremacy, Buddhist schools also lost their patronage, and Japan witnessed the revival of Shinto.

Just a few years before the Meiji era, in 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry, with his four American ships, reached Japan. In 1854, he finally succeeded in opening two ports for American vessels. The entry of American ships into Japanese waters ultimately ended Japan's self-imposed seclusion and ignited a confrontation with ‘modernisation ’and ‘Westernisation. ’During the nineteenth century, European powers and their superior culture and Christian teachings were on a mission to civilise uncivilised territories. This era witnessed the emergence of ‘International Law, ’which threatened the sovereignty of many uncivilised countries. In 1858, the United States and Japan, during the Tokugawa regime, signed the ‘Treaty of Amity and Commerce. ’Japan, categorised as an ‘uncivilised ’nation, had to terminate its policy of seclusion and was compelled to sign the unequal treaty.

It is interesting to mention that in the previous treaty of 1854, President Fillmore of the United States, cognizant of the longstanding hostility to Catholic Christian missionary activities, instructed Commodore Perry to submit to the Tokugawa regime that the US, unlike other Christian countries, did not interfere in religion[xxxi]

at home and in foreign countries; therefore, the term 'religion' was not mentioned in the treaty.[xxxii] Until then, the term ‘religion ’in diplomatic documents was never translated as ‘shukyo’,[xxxiii] the contemporary and prevailing rendering in English. After the opening of the country to the Western world, the original Buddhist ‘shukyo ’term was transformed into the Western term ‘religion’.

In 1867, at age fifteen, Mutsuhito (1852-1912) became Emperor Meiji, marking the restoration of direct imperial rule. The forty-four years from 1868 to 1912 are commonly referred to as the ‘Meiji Restoration ’era. During this time, the Meiji government established the ‘Department of Shinto ’(which was replaced by the Shinto Ministry and subsequently by the Religious Board), and Buddhism was separated from Shinto. This policy fostered an environment for Shinto to emerge as a national religion.[xxxiv] Shinto shrines were ‘nationalised ’at the beginning of this restoration era, and thus the term ‘State Shinto ’came into existence.

During the period of seclusion, Western thoughts and knowledge entered through Dutch learning (Rangaku). To compete with the growing Western powers, many scholars, political leaders, and influential individuals began advocating ‘Western learning’ and ‘Scientific education’[xxxv] in the newly opened era[xxxvi]. The leaders from Buddhism and Christianity saw this crucial time as an opportunity to strongly argue for ‘modernity, ’as it would pave the way for Japanese enlightenment and counteract Shinto dominance.

Here, it is important to revisit Kishimoto’s (1960) premise on ‘Westernisation ’and ‘modernisation, ’which he argues are fundamentally different. However, he elucidates that ‘Western culture ’is a seamless synthesis of Westernisation and modernisation. Kishimoto traces the transformation of Christianity and how it was rearranged and reintroduced as a ‘modern religion ’in Japan. This has facilitated the shaping of an initial perception that Christianity, Westernisation, and modernisation are cut from the same cloth. Some of the torchbearers of the Meiji era converted to Christianity to fulfil their aspirations of studying English and experiencing Western culture. This is evident in 1888 when the complete Bible in the Japanese language

was published. Alongside the converts, the non-Christian Japanese referred to the Bible for their English language studies and to perceive Western thoughts[xxxvii].

In his writings, Kitagawa (1966) subsequently elaborates on the failure of missionaries, who did not acknowledge that 'Christian 'and 'Western 'are two distinct values and naively wished for Christian preaching and Western Christian culture to proselytise Japanese 'pagan 'culture[xxxviii].

Even though proselytising the Japanese pagan culture never transpired, Kitagawa mentions the influence of Japan's urban elite, who distinguished 'modernity 'as the impetus behind 'Western secular civilisation. 'These urban elites noticed the similarities between the feudal rule of the Tokugawa dynasty and the monarchies of the Middle Ages, which were subservient to the Church.

Isomae (2014) discusses the contributions of notable scholars from the Meiji period, such as Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911), a religious advisor to the government, and Inoue Kowashi (1843–1895), who was part of the committee that drafted the constitution, and how both analysed the disparities among Western nations regarding religion and political systems. Many of these Japanese scholars studied in various European countries, where they closely observed differing tolerance levels and theories about the 'separation of state and religion.'

Separating Shinto and State

In 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers, marking a watershed moment. It profoundly influenced US policies and contemporary thought, particularly regarding religion and its significance. After World War II, the Allied Powers removed Shinto education from schools, eliminating the 'State Shinto 'or 'Shrine Shinto, 'as they believed that separating Shinto from the state was essential to building a 'peaceful democratic Japan.' The Religions Division and Allied Powers arguably failed to understand Shinto's diverse traditions and philosophies[xxxix].

The prejudiced views and wartime propaganda equated Shinto teachings with extreme militarism and jingoism. Immediately after the end of the war, during the occupation, missionaries began returning to Japan to rebuild their structures and resume their outreach programs. The missionaries received assistance and support from the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). Woodard (1972),[xl] in his book, investigates the dominant role of General MacArthur, who was the Supreme Commander, and reveals MacArthur's firm faith in Christianity. Woodard discusses MacArthur's views on the indigenous faith and mythological teachings in Japan and how he firmly believed evangelical work was necessary to establish democracy in Japan. In one of the cables sent to "Youth for Christ" on 24 February 1950, MacArthur writes,

> *"My often-repeated conviction remains unchanged that acceptance of the fundamental principles of Christianity would provide the surest foundation for the firm establishment of democracy in Japan. Therefore, (the) distribution of scriptures and interdenominational evangelistic rallies carried on in cooperation with established religious missions capable of providing continuing follow-up (is) highly welcome. Entry into Japan of Youth for Christ will be welcome on (the) same basis as other operating missionaries."*[xli]

It is apparent from the several speeches given by MacArthur and the policies of General Headquarters (GHQ) of the SCAP that they unfairly treated Shinto and favoured Christianity, which seriously disrupted Japanese thoughts and practices. Implementing the 'separation of state and religion 'as an essence of 'Western enlightenment 'also transformed academia, where universities and colleges began withdrawing from 'religious studies 'and relocating the contents of religious studies into the framework of 'American-style 'social sciences[xlii].

Isomae (2014) discusses the 'practice-oriented 'and 'doctrine-oriented'- two categories of the translations of the term 'religion. 'The term 'shukyo 'was doctrine-oriented and limited to academic circles. Isomae argues that the acceptance of the restricted significance of the term 'shukyo, 'which supersedes the practice-oriented

terms, marks an essential shift in Japan. According to Isomae, this translation exercise and appropriating decision were heavily influenced by European divisions of civilised, uncivilised, and primitive nations. Christianity, which is an essential part of the Western concept of religion, is significantly a belief and doctrine-oriented religion. The formalisation of the term ‘shukyo ’drifted away from the ritual and practice-oriented nature rooted in and developed in Japan.

Concluding Remarks

This paper revisits the religious history of Japan and attempts to map the trajectory of the arrival of diverse philosophies, thoughts, and practices across different eras and their impact on Japanese culture. It highlights the contrasts between thoughtful, practising, and syncretic minds against the highly organised and doctrine-based theocratic force. In Japan, distinguishing the sacred from the secular is a futile exercise. The arrival of Christian missionaries and later the penetration of Protestant ideas ‘believing ’dominated the worship practices and rituals.

Toshimaro (2005) classifies the Japanese religious culture as ‘natural ’religions, which are essentially difficult to define, as opposed to ‘revealed ’religions. Toshimaro argues that if religion is viewed through the lenses of revealed religions such as Christianity or Islam, then traditional festivals linked with Shinto fail to be recognised as a religion. According to Toshimaro, when a Japanese individual identifies as ‘non-religious’, he or she is essentially distancing himself or herself from revealed religions. Toshimaro also advises the Japanese who travel abroad to remember that ‘non-religious ’is an identification with natural religions and their rich religious sensibility.

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[i] *As per the 'WVSW 7', the second highest number (more than 6 per cent) was people who belong to the Buddhist 'religion.'*

[ii] *According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of 'non-religious' is not having a belief in a god or gods and not relating to religion.*

[iii] *Published by the Religious Affairs Division of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan.*

[iv] *The majority of the believers around 83 million were affiliated with the 'Shinto' religious culture.*

[v] *Isomae, 2014.*

[vi] *Godart, 2008.*

[vii] *Hardacre, 2017.*

[viii] *Kasahara (ed.), 2001.*

[ix] *As per the Ise Shinto canons, the term 'kami' denotes the deities in general or the two great shrines of Ise. 'Japan; land of the kami' has its genesis in the belief that the sacred land, realm, and people descended from Kami (Kuroda and Rambelli, 1996: 360, 372).*

[x] *Hardacre, 2017.*

[xi] *A Portuguese missionary named Luís Fróis (1532-1597) wrote vivid descriptions of Japan in the middle of the sixteenth century. Describing 'Kami', he writes that Kami idols are as numerous 'as the source of Ganges' (river Ganga).*

[xii] *Matsumoto, 1996.*

[xiii] *The Kojiki was the result of the work commissioned by the emperor Tenmu (673-686) to compile the genealogies and histories of the clans (Herbert, 1967).*

[xiv] *Earhart, 2004*

[xv] *Prince Shotoku was apparently an extensive reader of Confucian literature and an adopted Confucian model for government (Tsunoda, et al. eds. 1958. pp. 37-38)*

[xvi] *However, some scholars argue that Buddhism flourished during this period, overshadowing Shinto.*

[xvii] *Hardacre, 2017.*

[xviii] *Kitagawa, 1966*

[xix] *Masahide, 1991.*

[xx] *Uemura, 2020.*

[xxi] *Yamamura, 1990.*

[xxii] *Masunaga,1956. p. 347*

[xxiii] *From the 1540s to the1630s; roughly hundred years were coined as the 'Christian Century' by Western historians (Elisonas, 1991)*

[xxiv] *However, troubles continued for Francis Xavier in Japan. There was gossip that he arrived from 'India' and brought some untold teachings of Buddhism and people initially felt it was worth listening to him (Bowring, 2005)*

[xxv] *Otis, 1909*

[xxvi] *Hideyoshi's letter to the Viceroy of the Indies (English translation) appears in; Tsunoda, Theodore, and Keene (eds.). 1958. Sources of the Japanese Tradition. (p. 326)*

[xxvii] *Danford (eds.), 2014.*

[xxviii] *Isomae, 2014.*

[xxix] *Kitagawa, 1966.*

[xxx] *During the Shogunate regime, Buddhism became the 'state religion' by allying with the Tokugawa regime (Kasahara, 2001).*

[xxxi] *Here, I mention an incident, described by Francis Hawks (1856), who compiled referring to the original notes and journals of Commodore Perry and other officers. Hawks, mentions the longing*

of Japanese people to get the English books on science and medicines brought by Americans. However, the Japanese were not interested in any religious books from Americans.

[xxxii] *Sansom, 1951. p. 488.*

[xxxiii] *The term 'shukyo' is made up of two Kanji (pictograph); shu, meaning tenets or religious group, and kyo, meaning to teach or to preach. Isomae (2014) introduces a couple of earlier Japanese terms, such as 'shuho' (religious law) 'shushi' (tenets of religious teaching), and 'shinkyo' (religious belief) regularly used in diplomatic documents.*

[xxxiv] *Kitagawa, 1966.*

[xxxv] *Kitagawa, 1966.*

[xxxvi] *Beneath this desperate passion for Western culture and ideas, Japanese people also sensed the threat to their existence and defending the nation's advancement of its military equipment and strength and carving out the modern apparatus such as parliament, constitution, legal system and international trade was indispensable (Sansom, 1951)*

[xxxvii] *Sansom, 1951.*

[xxxviii] *Kitagawa, 1966.*

[xxxix] *Hardacre, 2017.*

[xl] *William Woodard (1896-1973) served as an adviser on religious and cultural resources during the Allied occupation of Japan in the aftermath of World War II.*

[xli] *Quoted in the Appendices (p. 358). Woodard, 1972. The Allied Occupation of Japan 1945–1952 and Japanese Religions.*

[xlii] *Isomae, 2014.*

Strengthening India-Japan Partnership through Infrastructure Engagement

Srabani Roy Choudhury

The turn of the century, characterised by a significant emphasis on the inevitability of globalisation, led to the incorporation of more nations into the trajectory of economic growth. As the demand for infrastructure emerged, the participation of developed nations in the connectivity agenda of developing countries became crucial, as they provided capital, machinery, and technology. Subsequently, connectivity through infrastructure acquired strategic importance, as it became apparent that the connectivity network served the dual purpose of facilitating economic growth and promoting security objectives. In the contemporary context, infrastructure investment extends beyond economic development to establish supply chain resilience, ensure political stability, and incorporate strategic considerations. Consequently, investment in infrastructure for connectivity has broadened its security and economic implications.

The imperative for infrastructure development in India arises from its distinctive confluence of rapid economic growth, urbanisation, social challenges, the exigency of sustainability, and the vulnerability of China's aggressive behaviour on the northern and northeastern border. Effectively addressing these needs necessitates coordinated efforts from governmental entities, partnerships with trusted nations, engagement of the private sector, and cooperation from civil society to ensure that infrastructure development is inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and substantially enhances our strategic stakes.

In the post-World War II era, Japan swiftly rose to join the ranks of OECD nations. The global community took note of Japan's economic transformation, particularly its exceptional infrastructure development and its strategy of contributing to Southeast Asian economic growth through the construction of transportation

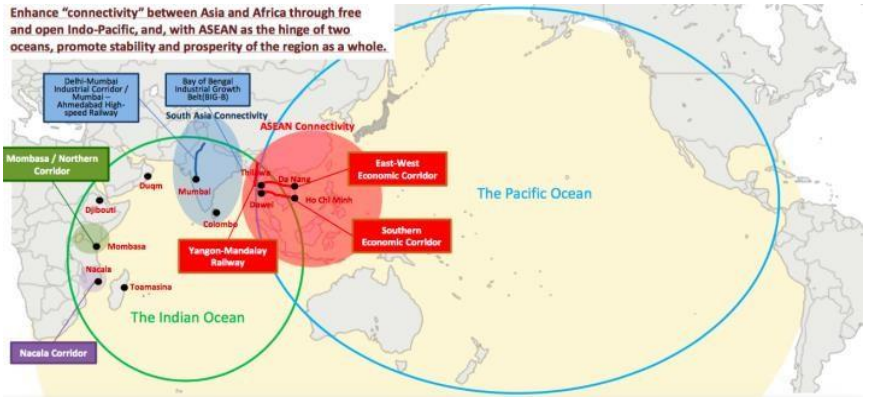
networks, roads, and ports. This approach enabled Japan to establish markets, create a more favourable environment for its businesses, and promote political stability in host countries, enhancing its national security.

As Japan gained prominence on the world stage, policymakers continued to emphasise the importance of infrastructure investment and development cooperation that offers mutual advantages. This strategy has since evolved, becoming more formalised with clearly defined goals that consider domestic requirements, national security concerns, and regional dynamics. Currently, Japan plays a significant role in developing infrastructure in South and Southeast Asian countries, improving their facilities while pursuing its national objective of ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific region, aimed at countering China's presence through the Belt and Road Initiative in this region.

This paper delineates Japan's role in India's infrastructure development through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which is instrumental in identifying projects, disbursing funds, and evaluating projects. The paper will reflect upon how Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision has constructively worked towards strengthening the India-Japan partnership through the connectivity agenda embedded in the second pillar of FOIP 2023 and its contribution to infrastructural development that links India to the Indo-Pacific production network.

Convergence of India's Agenda and Japan's Vision of FOIP

Figure 1 FOIP: Connectivity Mapping



Mofa 2022

Abe conceived the idea of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," expressing it in his 2007 address called "Confluence of the Two Seas." He dedicated significant effort to advance this concept, which became especially relevant after 2016 when India, Australia, and the United States began to formulate their own understandings of the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN also successfully established the concept of "ASEAN centrality." The disruptions caused by the pandemic, which highlighted the vulnerabilities of nations, along with the Ukraine crisis that revealed the deficiencies in safeguarding the "rule-based order," have drawn the liberal order closer together, evident in various forms of multilateral cooperation. Upon assuming leadership in Japan, Kishida emphasised that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow" [i] and that Japan must prepare itself accordingly. In addition to diplomatically engaging with countries in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, he revised Japan's National Security Strategy (NSS) in December 2022. This revision provided clear direction for Japan's future security and strategic agenda, stating that Japan intends to enhance deterrence in light of an escalating regional security situation.[ii] This principle has guided all the policies developed under Kishida's administration.

Expanding the Indo-Pacific orientation, Kishida, in March 2023[iii], revealed the New Plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"[iv] in which India is named the "Indispensable Partner." The four verticals identified are

- Principles for Peace and Rules for Prosperity;
- Addressing Challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way;
- Multi-layered Connectivity;
- Extending Efforts for Security and Safe Use of the "Sea" to the "Air".

Undoubtedly, the Ukraine crisis and China's assertiveness in the region have significantly influenced this policy and highlighted the growth in the security

dimension. Nonetheless, the third vertical, "Multi-layered Connectivity," is the pivotal pillar in Japan's strategy. It addresses developmental concerns while fulfilling strategic considerations to ensure a peaceful Indo-Pacific governed by the rule of law. The inclusion of digital connectivity, knowledge connectivity, and human connectivity, along with physical connectivity, creates a more integrated approach. Thus, "Multi-Layered Connectivity" demonstrates Japan's unique approach to providing aid compared to other countries. For Japan, fostering connections between South and Southeast Asia would lead to a stronger economic region, reinforcing the Indo-Pacific's stability. Following this, the Development Charter[v] was announced in 2023.

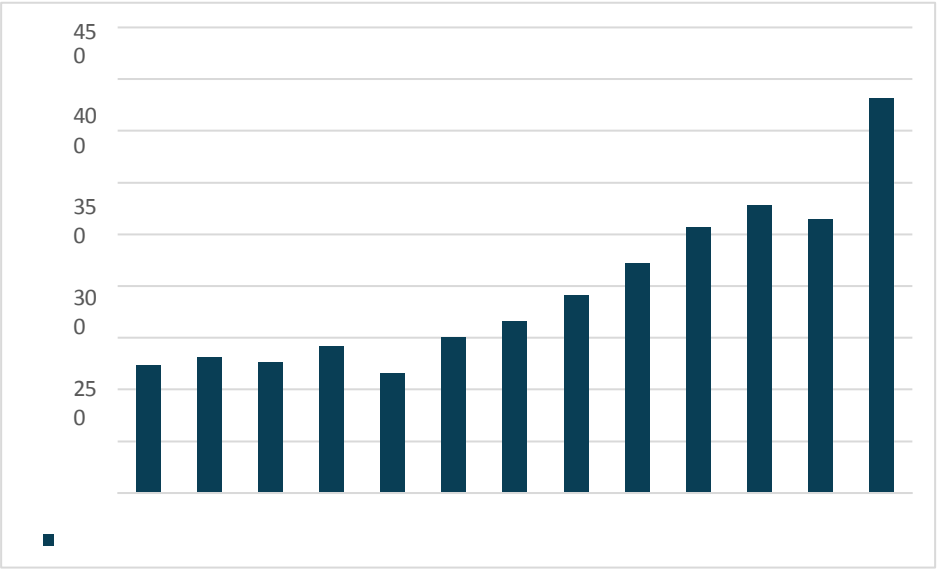
The importance of India in Japan's Indo-Pacific Vision has resulted in support for India's efforts to improve its infrastructure and connectivity with neighbouring regions and to better integrate into the Asian context. This was also a response to the rise of China in Asia. Both countries began their economic liberalisation process in the late 1970s and 1980s. In 2024, China ($13,136) is almost 4.8 times richer than India ($2,731) on a nominal basis and 2.47 times richer on a PPP basis. China's remarkable growth was fueled by recognising the significance of infrastructural connectivity and making substantial investments from the outset. This led to a strategic policy convergence between India and Japan, accompanied by a significant increase in Japanese aid to India, as shown in Figure 2.

Prime Minister Abe initiated several groundbreaking initiatives, such as Japan's Revitalisation Strategy in 2013 and the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure in 2016, aiming to prioritise infrastructure investment in Japan's foreign policy and capture the international infrastructure market to meet the increasing demands for connectivity. India aligned with Japan on its Look East and Act East Policy, particularly with the Make in India Policy. During the 2000s, Japan began acknowledging India's potential to become a manufacturing hub due to factors such as a cost-effective labour force, abundant engineers, lower wages compared to China, and significant domestic consumption of manufactured goods. The strained political relationship between Japan and China has driven Japan to diversify its

Asian supply chain. While some scholars like Burns (2008), Beehner (2008), Brown (2016), and Nagy (2018) argue that the strong economic foundation between Japan and China influences their political relations, others like Chiang (2019) suggest that their strained political ties often overshadow their economic connections.

Pandemic disruption of the supply chain and Japan's policy to collaborate with nations for alternative supply chains have ushered in a new dimension to the India-Japan partnership. This development requires India to step up and ensure full utilisation of the opportunities presented.

Figure 2: Trends of ODA Loan to India (2008-2020)



0	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Series1	123.3	131.2	126.5	142	116	150.4	165.9	190.6	222	256.8	278.2	264.6	381.7

Source: JICA Data, compiled by Chandrali Sarkar

India's interest in infrastructure aligns with Japan's FOIP, and India boasts a plethora of policies designed to support its developmental agenda of becoming a five-trillion-dollar economy by 2030. Critical policies that resonate in India-Japan joint statements include "Make in India", "Skill in India", and "Act East Policy". The Act Fast Act First Policy for the Northeast focuses on integrating the Northeast seven sisters with the mainland and making it a conduit for trade and investment in Southeast Asia, which has become a priority given Japan's interest in integrating with Matabari Port in Bangladesh. Furthermore, India actively promotes multilateral platforms such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN. The vision is to integrate India into the global value chain, which essentially requires access to the Indian Ocean.

As part of a report by ADB, Joseph Gautrin[vi] evaluated various corridors. According to that report, South Asia's connection to Southeast Asia through roads, railways, and waterways would begin at Kolkata or Chittagong port in the Bay of Bengal, which could potentially be the best route in terms of operational cost, trade enhancement, and passenger tourism connecting South and Southeast Asian regions. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, the road corridors follow existing Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) routes, with the eastern gateway port cities in Vietnam being Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, or Hai Phong. However, this was before the Big B initiative of Matabari Port. This has only strengthened Japan's commitment to integrating India's Northeast region with Southeast Asia to enhance the value chain and create a route to the Indo-Pacific through the following corridors:

- Kolkata–Ho Chi Minh City corridor, passing through the 'Chicken's Neck' of northeast India and running through Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia.
- Chittagong–Ho Chi Minh City corridor.
- Chennai–Dawei–Ho Chi Minh City corridor.

The priority highways identified in these corridors are Imphal–Moreh in Myanmar, Eindu–Myawaddy at the Thai border, Thailand from the Myanmar border at Mae Sot to Tak, and the Thailand–Cambodia border, Aryanaprathet–Poipet. Priority

highway projects are primarily identified in Northeast India for the Kolkata-Saigon Corridor, aiming to connect Kolkata to the Northeast Indian States and enhance intra-regional connectivity.

The Chennai–Dawei–Ho Chi Minh City Corridor has the potential to be a highly successful economic corridor. Japan's past and ongoing connectivity projects in South and Southeast Asia are crucial in facilitating regional connectivity. The Northeast Road Network Connectivity Projects enhance the existing Asian Highway that connects the Northeast with Kolkata, West Bengal, India, which in turn links to Myanmar through the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. This highway reaches Mawlamyaing, Myanmar, bordering Thailand, and serves as the starting point of the JICA-sponsored East-West Corridor in ASEAN. The East-West Economic Corridor begins at Da Nang, Vietnam, and extends through Laos and Thailand, reaching Mawlamyaing, Myanmar. JICA has supported several infrastructure projects to promote development and intra-regional connectivity.

The second potential road connecting Chittagong, Bangladesh, to Ho Chi Minh also holds the potential to link the two regions. JICA's investment in Tripura is instrumental. It has been stated that "if Bangladesh is India-locked, Tripura is Bangladesh-locked". Therefore, connecting Tripura to Bangladesh is pivotal in envisioning this corridor. Furthermore, Bangladesh's strategic location between South Asia and Southeast Asia presents a unique opportunity for the country to play a significant role in regional and inter-regional matters, particularly given the current global economic power shift toward the Indo-Pacific Ocean region.

In 2022, India, Japan, and Bangladesh discussed coordinating connectivity efforts in Bangladesh and India's northeastern states to attract regional value chains and manufacturing over the next five years. This collaboration aims to draw investment towards Bangladesh and India's northeastern states from current manufacturing hubs in Southeast Asian nations. It will complement JICA's ongoing and completed projects in Bangladesh and Northeast India. The potential of this connectivity has been demonstrated through the deep-sea Matabari port. Moreover, the third corridor

could potentially connect the Chennai-Bangalore Industrial Corridor to the Southern Economic Corridor, starting from Dawei, Myanmar, by land and sea. The Southern Economic Corridor links the major economic centres of the Mekong region. However, developments in Bangladesh in 2024 have resulted in an impasse, not due to Japan's motives but rather the nadir that India-Bangladesh relations have reached. Nonetheless, conversations with JICA personnel in India and Thailand reveal optimism that the economic needs of these two nations will facilitate the realisation of this project as visualised during its inception.

Japan International Cooperation Agency: Continued Engagement in Infrastructure

In 1972, a separate agency named the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was established. Its role was to identify, disburse, and evaluate projects. Japan has incorporated human security and capacity building since the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to do so today; this includes security and the rule of law, as it is believed that development assistance should contribute to these areas and go beyond traditional goals (Hiroshi, 2022).[vii]

The Development Cooperation Charter (June 2023) also follows the direction of NSS 2022. Referring to the disruption in the world as a historic turning point, the charter presents a "new direction for development cooperation to further a more effective and strategic use of development cooperation as one of the most important tools of its diplomacy."[viii]

The charter outlines its goals by stating that Japan will enhance collaboration through coordination with host countries based on transparent and equitable principles. Additionally, it emphasises that "Loans from emerging donors that neglect debt sustainability do not aid the development of growing nations." It focuses on high-quality infrastructure, digital innovation, and collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders (PPP model). A new "offer-type" cooperation aspect will see Japan identifying projects through dialogue and partnership, utilising its

extensive expertise, financial resources, and willingness to offer these to tackle localised and broader challenges from geopolitical and geostrategic risks.

Consequently, the "Multi-Layered Connectivity" goal in the New FOIP aligns with the Development Charter and presents significant opportunities for India, a crucial partner for Japan. This charter positions Japan as a positive force on the global stage, advancing the "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" to a new level of interaction where securing the Indo-Pacific is of prime importance. The way Japanese investments have been unveiled in India, notably, and South Asia, in general, shows their intention to create a network between remote areas and industrialised zones. The aim is also to leverage technology to alleviate traffic congestion, decrease air pollution, reduce road accidents, and enhance travel efficiency.

JICA Engagement: Few Examples

Since 2012, Japan's diplomacy towards South Asia has centred on India. Through JICA, Japan's aid policy has integrated India's developmental agenda, thus focusing on:

- Improving the transportation network
- Generating employment with the help of the private sector and boosting private-sector investment in India
- Enhancing income generation in rural areas by improving agricultural productivity.
- Enhancing basic social services by improving health and sanitation.
- Conserving and enhancing the urban environment by preventing pollution and managing water resources
- Promoting environmental conservation by increasing reliance on renewable energy.

JICA's cooperation strategy links security considerations and the FOIP vision of multi-layered connectivity to propel India's railway transport towards being safe and fast. The energy sector is part of JICA's infrastructure agenda, and Japan has shown keen interest in both renewable energy and nuclear civil deals. As a result, Japan has emerged as the largest investor in India within the South Asian region, with significant investments in the transport sector. JICA's investment in India's transport sector focuses on roads, ports, railways, and air connectivity. The objectives behind Japan's investment in India's infrastructure are as follows:

- Mitigating vehicular congestion in urban areas by enhancing metro connectivity.
- Promoting regional connectivity through the urbanisation of roads, highways, and connectivity.
- Connecting ports with inland areas.
- Enhancing the capacity of ports.
- Envisioning the development of high-speed corridors as per Vision (FCCI, 2020).

JICA has successfully improved metro connectivity in India and has contributed to the construction of over 400 km of metro rail network across six cities: Kolkata, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, and Ahmedabad. The investment in these metro projects exceeds JPY 1.2 trillion.[ix]

1. Metro Network - The most visible and highly appreciated investment made in the Delhi Metro since 1995 has been significant. The Delhi Metro adopted a forward-looking approach by emulating the Japanese train system to enhance daily connectivity in the National Capital Region. This project marked the first instance where JICA was responsible for 60% of the capital investment in Phases 1 and 2. Furthermore, it represents an extensive metro project involving an investment of JPY 705,206 million. The project is groundbreaking, as it is the first in the world to claim carbon credits for its Regenerative Braking and Modal Shift Projects. Additionally, it aims to become the world's first solar-powered transportation system. The stations in Phase 3 have achieved a

'Platinum' rating from the India Green Building Council for their adherence to Green Building norms, aligning with the ideal of quality infrastructure.

The investment in the Delhi Metro by JICA[x] has benefited India in several ways. For example, it has reduced the number of vehicles on the road, led to a significant decrease in annual fuel consumption, and resulted in a considerable reduction in pollutants. The first phase of the Kolkata Metro, which faced many pitfalls, was rectified, and JICA bolstered mobility by inaugurating Kolkata East-West Metro Line 2 in 2020. The initial metro endeavour was the Calcutta Metro Railways (Phase II) Construction Project, and the Patna Metro Rail Construction Project in March 2023, which involved a loan transfer of JPY 98,612 million, exemplifies Japan's continuing aid programme for the urban mobility network.

2. Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) - Regarding road connectivity, the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) project between Delhi and Mumbai features an automated signal and communication system that contributes to the growth of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. The Japanese ODA loan for this project focuses on constructing an approximately 1,500-km track of the Western Corridor, connecting major industrial hubs in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, and Rajasthan. It also includes the introduction of electric locomotives capable of high-speed, high-capacity transportation (JICA, Press Release: activities in India, 2010). The project involves constructing new double-track electrified railway lines dedicated to high-speed freight cargo trains, which is key to the DMIC development plan. This initiative aims to reduce travel time in this corridor from three days to one day. Initially, a total amount of JPY 94.5 billion was dedicated to the construction of Phase 1(I), Phase 1 (II), and Phase 2(I) in 2010. Later, in 2016, JICA extended the grant to JPY 164,664 million for Phase 1 (III) of DFC.[xi]

3. Port Connectivity - Port connectivity is a significant focus of JICA's increasing investment in India. Projects such as the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link and the

Chennai Peripheral Ring Road are under construction. JICA has also invested in enhancing the capacity and efficiency of cargo handling at the Vishakhapatnam and Chennai ports. Furthermore, in 2023, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced a $131 million deal, which includes funding from JICA's "Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund" (LEAP). The funding has been signed with Nhava Sheva Freeport Terminal Private Limited (NSFTPL), comprising a $61.4 million direct loan from ADB and $69.6 million from LEAP. This loan aims to support the refurbishment, operation, and maintenance of the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Container Terminal (JNPCT), located in Navi Mumbai, as part of the Mumbai metropolitan area in India. The project is under a 30-year contract awarded to NSFTPL on a PPP basis.

The loan will help reduce logistics costs by alleviating port congestion and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions through facility electrification. Furthermore, it will contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure). This reflects Japan’s commitment to enhancing supply chain resilience following the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

4. High-Speed Railway - Japan's primary investment in India is the Mumbai to Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (HSR) corridor. In the India-Japan Vision Document 2025, both prime ministers emphasised the opportunities for Japanese companies in rolling stock manufacturing, high-speed rail construction, and station redevelopment due to the modernisation and expansion of Indian railways. A memorandum of cooperation was signed between India and Japan to introduce Japan’s HSR technologies on the Mumbai–Ahmedabad route (MOFA, 2015). JICA provided a loan of JPY 89,547 million in Tranche 1 for the project (JICA, India, 2018). Although the construction was initially anticipated to commence in 2020 and conclude by 2023, challenges in land acquisition by the Indian government in Maharashtra have led to delays. Over 98.5% of the land in Gujarat has been acquired, while in Maharashtra, 44% of the land, primarily in the Palghar district, has been

procured. Consequently, the completion date has been extended to October 2028, with the 50 km stretch from Surat to Bilimoria expected to be completed by 2026.

5. Regional Connectivity - Regional connectivity can be mapped in two ways. The first is the connectivity between various regions of India. India's vastness has led to fragmented areas of growth. However, India's aspirations demand integration. Connectivity through roads, railways, and internal waterways is critical.

India's Intra-Regional Connectivity

To promote regional connectivity through roads and highways, JICA facilitated the construction of four lanes spanning 220 km of National Highway 82 and National Highway 83 in Bihar (JICA, Signing of Japanese ODA loan agreement with the government of India, 2014). The project, signed on 22 February 2013, aimed to upgrade NH-83 to connect Patna with Gaya and Dobhi, thereby creating a direct link between the state capital and NH-2 within the Golden Quadrilateral, thus enhancing regional connectivity among the four major industrial corridors. Notably, two of these corridors have received financial support from the Governments of India and Japan, namely the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor and the Chennai–Bengaluru Industrial Corridor. Japan's investment in strengthening regional connectivity among these corridors is crucial for promoting India's growth in the manufacturing sector and boosting its global competitiveness.

Second, connectivity infrastructure plays a vital role in integrating India with the production hub that has emerged as the heart of the Indo-Pacific region. The connectivity route begins with the ADB report, positioning Northeast India as one end of the extensive chain.

Business and industry across India and Bangladesh, while connecting the North-Eastern Region of India to the sea by pursuing a comprehensive concept incorporating promotion of private investment, in addition to support for structural and non-structural connectivity. We will also aim to create an industrial value chain that can also benefit the industrial world in Japan after infrastructure development.' – MOFA.

Northeast India Region

Japan supports India's Act East Policy and Make in India Policy, which focuses on developing infrastructure connectivity in the NER region of India, which is considered a gateway to Southeast Asia. Japan's backing of this vision aligns with India's goal of becoming an export-led economy through market integration with Southeast Asian countries. In Bangladesh, Japan supports the development of the Matarbari deep-water port and the connection between this port, Chattogram, and Dhaka under the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative, contributing to Bangladesh's economic development. Japan also aims to improve connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region through the organic synergy created by the individual projects that JICA has invested in for the past 50 years. In the document, MOFA declared that Japan will develop.

Japan will focus on distinct strategies to develop industrial value chains in NER and Bangladesh to achieve this goal. Additionally, efforts will be made to enhance structural and non-structural connectivity between the two regions. This will involve initiatives such as the India-Japan Sustainable Development Initiative for the Northeastern Region of India, Japan-India cooperation in infrastructure development in Bangladesh (including road and rail network improvements), and Japan-Bangladesh cooperation under the BIG-B. Furthermore, there will be a drive to promote the Joint Study Group on the potential of a Japan-Bangladesh Economic Partnership Agreement and to increase human exchange within the region. This comprehensive approach supports JICA's longstanding bilateral and regional involvement while addressing existing connectivity barriers.

- Asian Highway Network, sponsored by UNESCAP.
- The India–Myanmar– Thailand trilateral highway project.
- The Mekong–India economic corridor (including a sea link from Chennai to Dawei and a land link from Dawei to Bangkok).
- The Kaladan multimodal transport project.
- The Delhi–Hanoi railway link.
- The Singapore–Kunming Rail Link (SKRL)[xii]

India's expansion of regional connections beyond its borders is crucial for strengthening its global and regional value chain position. Prime Minister Modi has prioritised integrating the Northeast into India's Act East Policy to reshape the economic and strategic narrative. The Northeast industrial corridor, one of the 11 established under the Make in India initiative, holds immense strategic and economic importance for the India–Japan partnership. The region is rich in economic resources such as coal, uranium, petroleum, and hydroelectricity. It is blessed with natural beauty, including lush green jungles, hills, rivers, and rice paddies, which offer potential for energy resources and agricultural production. Furthermore, the region's unskilled population represents an untapped workforce.

The area's proximity to China provides substantial economic potential and strategic significance. It is one of the five countries bordering India’s Northeast. The Siliguri Corridor, known as the “chicken neck” corridor, is just 17 km wide and connects China to India. Despite India’s defensive stance in the region, it remains largely isolated from the mainland in terms of connectivity. The region grapples with poor connectivity within its seven states, a sense of isolation, increasing insurgency, and growing vulnerability to terrorism, ethnic conflict, and strategic ties with China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Furthermore, due to the absence of a concrete border agreement, the rise of Chinese infrastructure development aid in neighbouring countries, particularly in Myanmar, along with the India–China border dispute in Arunachal Pradesh, amplifies the region’s strategic vulnerability and importance.

Better connectivity with the Northeast region serves a dual purpose for India. The Indian Foreign Secretary, during his address at the 2021 inaugural session of the Dialogue on Development of North-eastern Indian Region: Indo-Japan Collaboration for Connectivity, Commerce, Capacity Building, Culture, and Conservation, stated that "the Northeast connects us to our neighbours and one of the most economically dynamic and politically significant geographies of the world – the ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific[xiii]."

Japan has increasingly engaged in the Northeastern Region (NER), aiming to enhance connectivity between South and Southeast Asia and support Japan's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Its involvement in the region has gained momentum since 2010 with the Official Development Assistance (ODA). In April 2017, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed an agreement with New Delhi to provide over $610 million for Phase I of the Northeast Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project, focusing on key initiatives in Meghalaya and Mizoram. Additionally, the same year, the Prime Ministers of India and Japan established the Act East Forum to identify specific projects for the economic development of India's NER. The Forum emphasises connectivity, infrastructure development, industrial linkages, and people-to-people exchanges through tourism, culture, and sports-related activities.

The Act East Forum prioritised accelerating highway and road projects in Meghalaya and Mizoram, and implementing biodiversity conservation and forest management initiatives in Sikkim and Nagaland, respectively. Furthermore, it initiated new projects such as the Dhubri-Phulbari bridge- the longest river bridge in India- and sustainable forest management projects in Tripura and Meghalaya, among others (Bhatia, 2019).

During the visit of former Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu to Tripura in 2019, he emphasised Japan's long-standing investments in enhancing connectivity in the region, which predates the establishment of the Act East Forum. During his visit, he

announced Japan's commitment to invest $1.8 billion in new development projects across various parts of Northeast India (Bhatia, 2019). Continuing Japan's infrastructural investment in promoting connectivity through road construction, it has also been investing in building a road in the Northeast. The projects are as follows:

- Assam Northeast Connectivity Phase 3 (Dhubri/Phulbari bridge)
- Meghalaya Northeast Connectivity Phase 1 (NH 51)
- Meghalaya Northeast Connectivity Phase 2 (NH 40)
- Mizoram Northeast Connectivity Phase 1 (Aizwal-Tuipang) (NH54)

Japan has announced an investment of $610 million to build phase 1 of the NH-54 (Aizawl to Tuipang) in Mizoram. This investment will enhance the connectivity of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Corridor. Once completed, it will provide an important alternate route between mainland India and the Northeast, reducing the distance compared to the narrow Siliguri Corridor (Singh B, 2021). Furthermore, NH 51 (Tura to Dalu) and NH-40 (Shillong to Dawki) in Meghalaya connect to the Bangladesh border. This significant Japanese investment in the road network linking all the growth centers in NER could complement the Trilateral Highway between India, Myanmar, and Thailand, which serves as India's gateway to the ASEAN region.

The infrastructural development in the Northeastern Region (NER) will directly connect India to the emerging Southeast Asian markets through a network of roads and highways. Japan's investments in developing these five highways align with the vision of both countries to establish connectivity with the ASEAN market. Due to the growing middle-income economies in the ASEAN region, the current consumer market is generating an output of $1.2 trillion, which exceeds that of India, currently at USD 938 billion. Additionally, China's increasing presence and political and economic influence in the region compels India and Japan to enhance their presence in ASEAN. Their active involvement in the NER region supports their broader connectivity goal across the Indo-Pacific region.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Japan's significant investment in India includes the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI). These islands, located between the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, account for thirty per cent of India's Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). The ANI is not only home to vulnerable tribal groups and diverse flora and fauna but also strategically positioned, making it one of the "most strategically located island chains."

Given its geographical location at the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the ANI plays a crucial role in ensuring freedom of navigation in the surrounding waters. Additionally, it is situated near the critical Strait of Malacca, which is vital for the energy needs of many East Asian countries. As China's presence in the region grows, the strategic importance of the ANI has increased significantly.

JICA is providing a grant of ¥4.02 billion (About ₹ 265 crore) to enhance the power supply in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The project's objective is to leverage power generated from renewable sources and stabilise the power supply in South Andaman. This will involve introducing essential equipment and facilities such as a 30 MW/15 MWh storage battery system, grid interconnection cassette, SCADA, and buildings for energy storage. These efforts will help improve the industrial competitiveness of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The project includes constructing facilities, procuring equipment, and providing consulting services. Notably, Japan is the first country to invest exclusively in the islands.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Japan has consistently pursued its connectivity agenda to foster development in host nations, enhance connectivity among them, and, over time, integrate security concerns by prioritising infrastructure development, particularly roads, as a strategic consideration. India's aspirations and the needs of the time have welcomed Japan's investment. India has systematically promoted domestic

economic policies to Japan, ensuring that they resonate with the India-Japan joint statement. As a trusted partner, Japan enjoys the unique privilege of working in the Northeast region and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, two critical strategic outposts of India.

However, 2024 has added a new dimension to Japan's long-standing agenda to connect Northeast India to the central hub of the production network, which is situated in the Indo-Pacific region around Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Bangladesh's political instability has impacted India-Bangladesh relations and, in turn, slowed down the connectivity agenda, resembling the instability in Myanmar, which has hindered connectivity between Imphal, Myanmar, and Thailand. Japan's ultimate ambition is to connect landlocked Nepal and Bhutan through Northeast India to the Southeast region, which, in principle, has the full support of India.

However, the dynamics of South Asia have created roadblocks. Myanmar's shift to a military regime has obstructed Japan's road connectivity plan; after returning to the drawing board, the Big Bay Initiative was formulated, with Matabari Port as the fulcrum. While there were many issues that JICA, the Government of India, and the Government of Bangladesh were jostling with, the swift change of political leadership in Bangladesh has resulted in yet another impasse. While optimism continues among Japan's policymakers, the current India and Bangladesh orientation does not foretell a smooth operation of these projects.

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Our Discoveries of India

Between December 2 and 6, 2024, four delegates from the Kajima Institute of International Peace (KIIP) visited Delhi and Varanasi for a four-night stay. During this visit, they exchanged ideas and views with representatives from the India Foundation, the Indian government, think tanks, industry associations, and academia. They also took the opportunity to explore the sights in Varanasi. This visit was the culmination of the India Foundation's four-night stay in Tokyo and Kyoto in December 2023 and twelve months of exchanging ideas and views over Zoom between 2022 and 2023. Here are the "discoveries" from our visit in alphabetical order of authors' surnames:

Nobuyuki Hiraizumi

(President, KIIP)

In terms of security and diplomacy, as long as there is a military dictatorship in China, the interests of Japan and India align, and their good relationship is unlikely to waver. The issue lies in economic relations. Both countries lack mineral resources and have densely populated economies that depend on processing trade. Additionally, there is a disparity in per capita income of 20 to 1 (even 7 to 1 on a purchasing power parity basis), making it challenging for Japanese products to gain a significant market share in India if exported in their current state.

Therefore, direct investment should be made to produce products suitable for the local Indian market. However, Japan already has large production facilities in China for essential goods. From the perspective of economic security, these production facilities should be transferred from China to India. However, this will take time due to several reasons: (1) the decline in Chinese real estate prices makes it inevitable to incur huge losses upon sale, (2) the average tenure of CEOs of Japanese listed

companies is seven years, and it is uncertain whether investments in India will yield profits within that period (failure to do so risks losing the power to be promoted to chairman or to nominate a successor CEO), and (3) shifting the focus of overseas operations from China to India may cause human friction and power struggles within the organisation. Additionally, concerns about the living environment for Japanese executives dispatched to India, underdeveloped infrastructure, the complexity of securing land, and fierce competition with Korean and Chinese companies pose risks that could lower the profitability of investments in India.

In the meantime, an immediate investment target could be India's festival economy. The religious fervour witnessed in Varanasi, not to mention the Kumbh Mela, was beyond imagination. Additional investments in transportation, accommodation, and the food service industry supporting these festivals could yield significant profits. It would be beneficial to establish mechanisms that enable Japanese institutional investors to invest in these sectors and allow Japanese business companies to enter and invest directly in them.

Conversely, by supporting domestic festivals in Japan, such as the Nebuta Festival in Aomori, the Tenjin Festival in Osaka, and the Awa Odori in Tokushima, in terms of people, goods, money, and information, we can expect economic ripple effects in transportation, accommodation, food service, and souvenirs. Particularly, Japanese festivals are essential for making inbound tourists repeat visitors. Additionally, this could alleviate the problem of overtourism in places like Kyoto, Kamakura, and Kanazawa by dispersing destinations. I would like to propose a study group to investigate the actual conditions of the festival economies in Japan and India, clarify their economic ripple effects, and propose mechanisms for investment.

Michio Matsumoto

(Director, KIIP)

During my visit to India, I had the opportunity to explore the Diplomatic Area of Delhi and Varanasi. The experience gave me firsthand insight into the country's workforce and labour issues. One significant observation that stood out was the apparent surplus of people in the labour market. Many seem to engage in low-productivity work, possibly due to remnants of historical employment systems such as servitude or outdated employment structures. An excessive number of people working in service-related roles does not yield significant economic returns. This raises the question: is there a way to better utilise this labour force, or could these workers be redirected to more productive industries?

A key challenge in India is the overwhelming surplus of labor, which the current sectors of the economy cannot absorb. One potential solution to this problem is revitalising domestic industries and creating more job opportunities. Additionally, encouraging workers to seek employment abroad could help alleviate India's labour market strain while simultaneously generating foreign exchange.

The issue of employment in India is closely linked to the demographic gap between India and countries like Japan. The median age in India is 29.8 years, while Japan's is significantly higher at 49.9 years. This demographic difference presents an opportunity for India, as the youth population could be directed towards overseas employment to alleviate the pressure on the domestic market. In particular, providing more job opportunities for Indians in Japan could be a practical solution to this challenge.

The current system for accepting foreign workers in Japan includes programs such as the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), Specified Skilled Workers (SSW), and Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals. However, despite these programs, most foreign workers in Japan come from countries like Vietnam. Vietnamese workers account for over half of the foreign labour force under the TITP and SSW categories.

At the same time, India does not even rank among the top 10 countries that contribute workers to Japan.

On the other hand, India ranks second in receiving Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals after China, but the numbers remain relatively low. In 2023, only about 1,272 Indian workers were admitted under this category, accounting for just 5% of the total foreign workforce. The impact of this figure is still modest.

One reason for this disparity is the proactive stance taken by the Vietnamese government in supporting the international labour market, particularly in supplying workers to countries like Japan. If the Indian government adopted a similar approach and became more supportive of sending workers abroad, it could significantly increase the number of Indian nationals employed in Japan.

Moreover, when Indian workers who have learned the Japanese language and become familiar with Japanese business practices return to India, they can play a critical role in accelerating Japanese direct investment in the country. These workers would bring back their skills and a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and practices, which could foster stronger economic and business ties between the two countries.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of surplus labour in India and creating better employment opportunities, both domestically and abroad, could positively impact the country’s economy. By facilitating the migration of skilled Indian workers to Japan, providing them with the appropriate training, and encouraging investment from Japan in India, both nations can benefit from strengthened bilateral relations and a more efficient workforce.

Kazumasa Oguro
(Director, KIIP & Professor, Economics Faculty, Hosei University)

The biggest surprise of the visit was the vision put forward by the Modi administration to make India the "number one country in the world" in 2047, the 100th anniversary of independence. However, contrary to their ambition, infrastructure, such as roads and housing, is lacking in many areas. Therefore, this bold goal is not merely a wish; it requires efforts in numerous areas, including economic growth, infrastructure development, and industrial structure reform.

For India to truly become a world leader, it must overcome many challenges; however, if it succeeds, the impact on the international community will be immeasurable. In particular, based on the idea that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," India's rise is expected to serve as a check on China. If India becomes a larger entity with its economic, military, and diplomatic power, it could become a significant partner in addressing the geopolitical challenges facing many countries, including Japan. Therefore, it is considered extremely important for both countries' interests that Japan actively supports the development of India.
On the other hand, one of the significant obstacles to India achieving this goal is the influence of the still deeply rooted caste system. These social issues may hinder growth acceleration, such as the spread of economic activity and education, and the correction of disparities between urban and rural areas. Whether India can overcome this challenge and achieve economic growth that benefits all its citizens is a key point that will determine the future of India. Notably, India may be able to refer to the development model that Japan achieved during its period of high economic growth.

For example, a toll highway network in Japan was developed nationwide using the Fiscal Investment and Loan Programs (formerly known as the Fiscal Investment and Loan Programs). The expansion of this infrastructure base has significantly contributed to the development of industry and the revitalisation of local economies. In addition, the "Three Road Laws" promoted by Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka

represented groundbreaking policies that efficiently connected the country's land area and aimed to correct disparities between regions. Such success stories could serve as great references for India. How India will achieve growth toward 2047, and what role Japan can play in the process, will be one of the points of interest in the international community in the future.

Hisa Oiwa

(Research Fellow, PHP Institute, Inc.)

India and Japan share numerous commonalities. Beyond the historical ties stemming from the transmission of Buddhism from India to Japan, both nations are democratic states deeply rooted in Asian cultural traditions. In recent years, we have increasingly aligned our security strategies, particularly in response to China's regional ambitions. One of my key discoveries during this delegation's visit to Delhi and the sacred city of Varanasi was the profound cultural affinities between India and Japan.

Furthermore, during the five-day delegation visit, I experienced firsthand India's dynamism as a rapidly growing power. If India's economy can be likened to a massive engine, one of its most crucial energy sources is undoubtedly its young and abundant labor force. India, now the world's most populous country, has a demographic structure where individuals aged 20 to 25 constitute the largest segment. It is, in every sense, a "young" major power.

During various discussions in India, the issue of job creation for young workers was frequently raised. Meanwhile, Japan grapples with a declining workforce and chronic labor shortages stemming from an aging population. Given Japan's demographic challenges and India's demographic dividend, a clear potential exists for a complementary and reciprocal relationship between India and Japan. This was my second key insight gained during the delegation's visit.

Barriers to Deeper Japan-India Engagement

Despite these promising prospects, certain challenges in Japan-India relations have also become apparent. Many stakeholders emphasise that India and Japan have no historical disputes and share strategic interests, making them natural partners. However, the level of mutual understanding between the two societies remains insufficient. Compared to Japan's interactions with neighbouring East Asian

countries such as China and South Korea, or its engagement with ASEAN nations, opportunities for people-to-people exchanges between Japan and India are still limited.

Geographical distance, along with underdeveloped economic linkages, further hinders the exchange of knowledge in business, education, and other sectors. Addressing this deficit is critical for strengthening the multifaceted partnership between the two nations. Meanwhile, the relative lack of engagement also signals untapped potential—an area where proactive initiatives could yield substantial benefits.

Strengthening Mutual Understanding: The Role of Education and Workforce Mobility

Student exchanges and the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) are two key areas for fostering deeper mutual understanding. Currently, the vast majority of Indian students seeking higher education abroad choose English-speaking countries such as the United States and Canada. In 2022, the number of Indian students in the U.S. exceeded 460,000, while only 1,300 Indian students studied in Japan—a stark disparity. However, there are examples of non-English-speaking countries successfully attracting Indian students. For instance, in 2023, India surpassed China as the leading country of origin for international students in Germany, with over 40,000 Indian students pursuing higher education there.

Recognising the need to attract more Indian students, the Japanese Ministry of Education, in collaboration with several Japanese universities, launched an initiative in 2025 to double the number of Indian graduate students in Japan. This program includes scholarships and enhanced access to information about Japanese universities. These students are poised to become crucial contributors to the future of Japan-India relations and key facilitators of mutual understanding. However, beyond academic exchanges, ensuring that such talent has viable career opportunities in Japan after graduation is equally vital. Thus, Japanese companies must proactively

create a welcoming environment for Indian professionals. Encouraging more Japanese students to study in India should also be prioritised.

Beyond student exchanges, expanding the Technical Intern Training Program is another priority. Currently, compared to ASEAN countries like Indonesia and Vietnam, the number of Indian trainees and skilled workers in Japan remains limited. One major barrier is the language requirement—many Indian applicants find it challenging to secure Japanese language training prior to migration. Thus, developing more Japanese language education programs in India is necessary to facilitate smoother integration. Furthermore, Japan must enhance its policies to ensure that skilled interns have clear pathways to full-time employment in Japanese companies after training.

A Call for a More Robust and Enduring Partnership

While education and business are key sectors for fostering deeper exchanges, expanding people-to-people ties across multiple domains will be crucial for strengthening the Japan-India partnership. Enhanced engagement will improve economic collaboration and deepen diplomatic and cultural ties between the two nations.

Before World War II, the intellectual exchange between India and Japan was robust, with figures such as Okakura Tenshin, Rabindranath Tagore, and Subhas Chandra Bose playing pivotal roles. Moving forward, it is essential to reconnect these historical dots and transform them into a cohesive and dynamic flow of cooperation. Just as the sacred Ganges River flows and nourishes vast lands, a strong and enduring Japan-India partnership has the potential to yield mutual prosperity and abundant rewards for both nations.

Jun Osawa

(Director, KIIP & Senior Research Fellow, Nakasone Peace Institute)

When I visited the Hindu holy city of Varanasi, I saw the scene where the dead were cremated on the banks of the Ganges River, and their ashes were washed into the river. On my side of the river, where I was standing, people purified themselves and prayed, monks performed pujas, and it was very noisy; this side belonged to the living. However, on the other side of the Ganges River, which offered nothing to see and was very quiet, lay the side of those who had passed away.

In Japan, it is believed that people cross the river when they die, and there is an event called “Higan (the other side of the river)” in spring and fall to remember and offer memorial services to deceased ancestors. Standing on the banks of the Ganges River in Varanasi, I strongly felt that both Japan and India share a deep awareness of the river in their views of life and death.

In addition, I carry a prayer bead, one of the indispensable Buddhist ritual goods made of 108 beads connected together, as protection against misfortunes. When I arrived at my hotel in India, the hotel staff placed a mala around my neck at the entrance. Later, when I counted the number of beads on the mala in my room, I found that they consisted of 108 beads, and I realised that they were the same as the prayer beads I carry with me. It was a refreshing realisation for me to know that the same style of beads is shared between Japan and India after a long historical connection.

During my first visit to India, I strongly felt that the religious and philosophical concepts and views of life and death that form the basis of society are a historical link between Japan and India. Buddhism, which was established in India around the 5th century B.C., is said to have been introduced to Japan around the 6th century A.D. Through this introduction of Buddhism, these shared philosophical concepts and beliefs were brought to Japan. I understood that some of the concepts of Indian philosophy brought to Japan through the introduction of Buddhism are still rooted in

Japanese society today. Sharing philosophical concepts and views of life and death between Japan and India is a great strength in building people-to-people relationships between the two countries.

However, if I am asked whether establishing people-to-people relations will promote business cooperation and the expansion of Japanese companies into India, I must answer negatively. This is because during my visit, I strongly sensed the heterogeneity of Japanese and Indian society. In India, the division of roles among people has become more segmented, and social groups and individualism appear to have formed according to occupations. In Japan, by contrast, historically homogeneous social groups have been established, and working in a group within a company is regarded as a competitive advantage for Japanese companies. Such Japanese collectivism is unacceptable in India, where job functions are highly segmented. This difference in the nature of Japanese and Indian society is likely to hinder the promotion of Japan-India business cooperation in the future.

Improving India's Investment Climate: Opportunities and the Way Forward

Chitra Shekhawat

India and Japan share a long-standing relationship rooted in historical, cultural, and strategic ties. This alliance traces back to the 6th century with the introduction of Buddhism to Japan and the visits of Indian scholars such as Bodhisena. It has since evolved into a robust "Special Strategic and Global Partnership." Since the 1980s, Japan has played a pivotal role as a major provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA), supporting critical infrastructure development in India. Today, the partnership encompasses trade, defence, technology, and regional cooperation, driven by shared interests in ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

This analysis examines the evolution of India-Japan relations, evaluates the current state of bilateral engagement, and suggests strategies to enhance India's investment landscape. It also identifies emerging sectors for collaboration and outlines a roadmap to further strengthen this strategic partnership within the broader Indo-Pacific context.

Economic and Commercial Relations

The India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which has been in effect since 1 August 2011, serves as a cornerstone of bilateral economic cooperation. Unlike traditional trade pacts, CEPA encompasses a broad range of areas, including trade in goods and services, the movement of natural persons, investment, intellectual property rights, customs procedures, and other trade-related disciplines. The primary aim of the agreement is to eliminate tariffs on over 94% of traded goods between the two nations within a decade.

To facilitate effective implementation and strengthen bilateral economic relations, several sub-committees have been established under CEPA. These sub-committees focus on key areas, including rules of origin, customs procedures, technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures, trade in services, enhancement of the business environment, and the movement of natural persons and cooperation. It is pertinent to note that a proposal for the creation of a dedicated sub-committee on trade in goods is currently under consideration by both countries.

During the fiscal year 2023–24, bilateral trade between India and Japan reached USD 22.85 billion. Japanese exports to India totalled USD 17.69 billion, whereas Indian exports to Japan amounted to USD 5.15 billion. Japan was India's 17th largest trading partner, contributing 2.1% to India's total trade. Conversely, India was Japan's 18th largest trading partner, representing 1.4% of Japan's total trade.

Further analysis indicates that India is the 11th largest destination for Japanese exports, accounting for 2.2% of the total, whereas Japan is the 25th largest destination for Indian exports, comprising 1.2% of the total. In terms of imports, India ranks 28th among Japan's import sources, with a 0.7% share, while Japan ranks 12th among India's import sources, holding a 2.6% share.

Between April 2024 and January 2025, bilateral trade between India and Japan totalled USD 21 billion. The trade relationship remained significantly imbalanced, with imports from Japan accounting for USD 15.9 billion, while India's exports totalled just USD 5.1 billion. This led to a substantial trade surplus for Japan and a corresponding deficit for India.

A closer look at the commodities traded highlights the distinct characteristics of the India-Japan economic relationship. India's exports to Japan are led by organic chemicals, reflecting the country's expanding chemical manufacturing capabilities. The inclusion of vehicles (excluding rail and tram) suggests emerging opportunities for Indian automobiles or automotive components in the Japanese market. Exports

of nuclear reactors indicate potential collaboration or supply of specialised equipment in the nuclear energy sector. The presence of aluminium and related products underscores India's role as a supplier of raw or semi-processed metals. Additionally, fish and other aquatic invertebrates exports illustrate contributions from India's agricultural and marine industries to Japan's consumer market.

On the import side, India's key acquisitions from Japan include nuclear reactors, mirroring the export category and potentially indicating a two-way exchange of nuclear technology or components, or perhaps the importation of more advanced reactor technology. Copper and its articles suggest India's reliance on Japan for this essential industrial metal and related manufactured goods. The significant import of electrical machinery and equipment underscores Japan's strength in the electronics and engineering sectors. Inorganic chemicals also constitute a crucial part of India's imports from Japan, highlighting a demand for base chemicals in various industrial processes. Lastly, the import of iron and steel underscores the need for specific grades or types of ferrous metals from Japan, possibly intended for specialised applications in manufacturing or infrastructure development. This detailed breakdown of imports and exports provides a clearer picture of the economic interdependencies and the sectoral strengths of both nations within their bilateral trade framework. The CEPA facilitates a robust and evolving economic partnership, reflecting a mutual commitment to enhanced trade integration and the resolution of obstacles through structured discourse and collaborative efforts.

India remains a highly desirable investment destination for Japan; nonetheless, there exists substantial opportunity to further optimize the investment environment, rendering it more favorable and sustainable for expanded Japanese involvement. The 2024 Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) Survey indicates that India continues to be perceived as the foremost promising nation for Japanese investment in the medium and long term, garnering 58.7% of votes—an increase from 48.6% in 2023—thereby marking India's 15th successive year at the pinnacle. This optimistic outlook is primarily attributed to India's extensive and expanding domestic market.

However, enduring challenges, notably apprehensions regarding the ambiguous implementation of legal frameworks and intense competitive dynamics, persist in affecting investor confidence. Notwithstanding these concerns, Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in India has experienced substantial growth, reaching USD 3.1 billion in 2023–24, compared to USD 1.79 billion in 2022–23, with USD 1.36 billion already recorded in 2024–25 (up to December). The cumulative Japanese FDI in India stands at USD 43.2 billion, positioning Japan as the fifth-largest source of FDI. However, the full potential of this bilateral relationship remains unrealised.

To fully capitalise on this potential, it is imperative that India prioritise the optimisation of regulatory frameworks, enhance legal precision, mitigate bureaucratic impediments, and facilitate an improved business environment, particularly for Japanese investors engaging in strategic sectors such as automotive manufacturing, electronics, telecommunications, chemical industries, financial services, and pharmaceutical production. With a substantial presence of over 1,400 Japanese enterprises operating within nearly 5,000 establishments in India, and with 80.3% expressing intentions for expansion in the forthcoming 1–2 years, significant forward momentum is evident. Furthermore, a profitability rate of 77.7% was reported by Japanese companies in 2024, representing a year-on-year increase of 6.8 percentage points and indicative of heightened demand within India's internal market.

A stronger investment environment in India will enhance Japan's trust and promote deeper collaboration through initiatives such as the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI). India and Japan are partnering with Australia to diversify and stabilise regional supply chains. A more stable and predictable investment ecosystem in India will draw sustained, high-quality Japanese investment, thereby supporting India's economic development and industrial transformation.

Japan is a major, long-standing economic partner for India, with cooperation across various sectors like infrastructure, energy, digital innovation, manufacturing, and human resource development. As India's largest bilateral ODA donor, Japan

provided JPY 580 billion in 2023–24 for key sectors. While engagement is strong, improving the investment environment is crucial to maximise Japan's economic interest. Various institutional mechanisms demonstrate Japan's sectoral commitment, including the India-Japan Digital Partnership (IJDP), which now covers semiconductors and start-ups. Significant Japanese investments in India's skilling ecosystem through initiatives like Japan-India Institute of Manufacturing (JIMs) and Japan Endowed Courses (JECs) aim to enhance India's industrial workforce.

Despite a robust policy framework and institutional collaboration, India must address existing investor concerns regarding regulatory clarity, legal transparency, and operational ease to enhance Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. Given the growing interest of Japanese companies in expanding domestic operations and the rise of sectors such as clean energy, digital infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing, it is essential for India to create a stable and predictable policy environment. This involves improving logistical frameworks, simplifying compliance procedures, and strengthening Intellectual Property (IP) protection mechanisms. By enhancing the investment climate, India can not only attract greater Japanese FDI but also cement its position as a reliable participant in global supply chains and a hub for advanced manufacturing and innovation.

Improving India’s Investment Climate: Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward

India’s burgeoning market, youthful workforce, and economic reforms render it an appealing destination for Japanese investment. Nevertheless, challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory complexities remain. Below are the key opportunities and strategies to improve India’s investment climate.

Opportunities

Japan and India collaborate strategically in several significant areas. Japan's exceptional manufacturing and infrastructure capabilities, particularly in the fields of semiconductors, electronics, and automobiles, bolster India's "Make in India" campaign. Numerous opportunities exist for Japanese investment through the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme, which aims to establish 12 new greenfield industrial cities with advanced infrastructure. The $600 million India-Japan Fund for climate initiatives supports the India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership (2022), which focuses on hydrogen, ammonia, and LNG to achieve carbon neutrality in clean energy and sustainability.

The India-Japan Digital Partnership (2018) fosters cooperation in AI, IoT, and 5G within the realm of digital and emerging technologies. The growing synergy is evidenced by Japanese investments in Indian tech firms and the 2023 agreement on semiconductor research. India's emphasis on defence self-reliance provides Japanese businesses with opportunities to collaborate on the development of defence technologies, such as fighter jets and submarines.

Challenges

Trade and investment are hindered by significant challenges, including non-tariff barriers, taxation issues, infrastructural deficiencies, and bureaucratic delays. Lengthy approval processes and complex regulations discourage investors. Multinational corporations encounter difficulties due to uncertainties in transfer pricing and tax legislation. Operations are adversely affected by inconsistent power supplies and logistical challenges. Stringent certification and quality standards increase costs for Indian exporters to Japan.

New Areas for Bilateral Cooperation

To strengthen the bilateral partnership, India and Japan should contemplate broadening cooperation into the following innovative sectors:

1. Aerospace Technology: The collaboration between the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) could be expanded to include joint satellite development and enhanced space situational awareness, building on the existing Japan-India Space Dialogue. In this regard, the Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX) represents a crucial first step.
2. Digital Framework and Information Technology: To mitigate digital risks and enhance interconnectedness, collaborative partnerships in cybersecurity, underwater telecommunications cables, and advanced wireless communication technologies beyond 5G would be advantageous.
3. Medical and Life Sciences: Japan's advanced technological expertise and India's established pharmaceutical manufacturing capabilities would be utilised through collaboration in medical research, vaccine development, and healthcare infrastructure improvement.

Way Forward

To enhance the strategic partnership, India and Japan should:

1. Enhance Political Participation: Align strategic priorities via annual summits and bilateral ministerial discussions, utilising the 2024 tenth anniversary of the Special Strategic and Global Partnership for ambitious planning.
2. Expand Economic Integration: Negotiate an updated CEPA to broaden service-sector trade and lower non-tariff barriers. The Japan-India Joint Study Group should prioritise frameworks for intellectual property and digital trade. Strengthen economic ties by streamlining regulations through quicker approvals and regular reviews of administrative processes. Expand the Advance Pricing Agreement (APA) scheme to enhance financial certainty for Japanese companies. Prioritise National Infrastructure Pipeline projects, utilising Japanese ODA for resilient logistics and smart urban development. Enhance the India-Japan Industrial

Competitiveness Partnership by focusing on supply chain diversification and improving the business climate. Advance skill development through joint training programmes to align the Indian workforce with Japanese industrial standards.

3. Enhance Defence Cooperation: Establish tri-service partnerships and consider joint manufacturing of defence equipment, such as Japan's US-2 amphibious aircraft.
4. Encouraging Regional Stability: As Quad members, India and Japan ought to spearhead initiatives such as the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative to counter China's dominance.
5. Encourage Interpersonal Relationships: Promote educational partnerships such as joint research projects and enhance cultural exchanges through events like Japan's "India Month."

Conclusion

The bilateral relationship between India and Japan has evolved from cultural exchange to a substantial strategic partnership, grounded in shared values and converging interests. Economic collaboration, significantly bolstered by Japanese investments and Official Development Assistance, has accelerated the transformation of India's infrastructure. Simultaneously, defence and technological cooperation strengthen regional security. By alleviating challenges in the investment environment and exploring opportunities in sectors such as space, cybersecurity, and healthcare, the two nations can fully unlock the latent potential of their partnership. As key players in the Indo-Pacific, India and Japan are strategically positioned to foster a stable, prosperous, and sustainable future, reliant on their commitment to innovation, mutual trust, and collaborative efforts.

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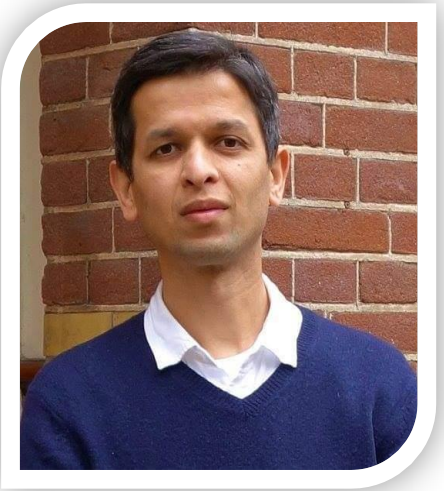
In the course of her career spanning over 36 years, she handled a wide swathe of issues and subjects related to India's relations with key countries such as Pakistan, China, and Japan; participated in international conferences and negotiations related to climate change, sustainable development, disarmament and human rights and was

instrumental in the active promotion of India's economic interests in areas of investments, trade, technology transfer and energy security during postings in Europe, the GCC and Japan.

Ms Wadhwa is currently Chairperson of the India- Japan Friendship Forum and Member Governing Council of the Asian Confluence, based in Shillong which promotes development and connectivity of the Indian North East with its neighbours. She also serves as Independent Director and advisor on the Boards of a few companies. In recognition of her contribution to the promotion of India-Japan relations she was honoured with one of the highest civilian orders of Japan, the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun in April 2024.



Mahesh Madhav Gogate is an affiliated researcher at the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University. His work focuses on the sacred and ecological geography of Indian urban landscapes, with a particular emphasis on Varanasi. He is the author of *The Sacred Waters of Varanasi: The Colonial Draining and Heritage Ecology*(2023/2024), a critical study of how colonial urban policies altered Varanasi's traditional water systems—transforming its temple tanks, ponds, and sacred waterways, and reshaping the city's identity into that of a "dry city." Gogate's doctoral research explored the cultural and ecological heritage of Varanasi's water bodies, and his findings were presented to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018. Before transitioning to academia, he worked in India's IT sector as a software professional and research associate. His interdisciplinary work bridges urban ecology, heritage studies, and South Asian urbanism.

Srabani Roy Choudhury is a Professor of Japanese Studies at the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), India. With over three decades of academic engagement with Japan, she has made notable contributions to the field of Japanese Studies and international relations. In 2024, she was awarded the prestigious "Commendation for Promotion of Japanese Studies" by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, in recognition of her efforts to deepen academic and cultural understanding between India and Japan. Throughout her career, Dr. Choudhury has held visiting scholar positions at several esteemed institutions, including the Policy Research Institute (2011), Kobe University (2014), Nagoya University (2019), Keio University (2022), and the University of Navarra (2024). Her scholarly output includes six edited volumes that reflect her expertise on Japan's regional engagement and its evolving partnerships: *Japan-SAARC Partnership: A Way Ahead* (2014), *India-Japan Relations @ 70: Building Beyond Bilateral* (2022), *The Indo-Pacific Theatre: Strategic Visions and Frameworks* (2023), *Japan and Its Partners in the Indo-Pacific: Engagements and Alignment* (2023), *India-Japan Partnership: Abe the Game Changer* (2024), and *India, Japan and Beyond* (2024). Dr. Choudhury is currently a Japan Foundation Indo-Pacific Fellow (2024–25), continuing her research on strategic alignments and partnerships within the Indo-Pacific region.

Nobuyuki Hiraizumi is the President of the Kajima Institute of International Peace (KIIP) in Japan. He holds a Bachelor's degree from Waseda University and an MBA from the University of Virginia. With over 40 years of experience at Kajima Corporation, he has held various leadership roles, including serving as Director from 2012 to 2023. He also spent two years as Chief Economist at Japan's Ministry of Finance Policy Research Institute. In addition to his role at KIIP, he is active in policy and academic circles, contributing to discussions on international peace and the liberal international order. He was born and raised in Tokyo.

Michio Matsumoto is the Head of Japan at EQT Real Estate, the Japan-based real estate business of Swedish private equity firm EQT, since April 2025. With over 30 years of experience in Japan's real estate industry, he most recently served as Executive Officer and Head of Investments at KJR Management from October 2023 to February 2025. KJR Management is one of the largest managers of listed real estate investment trusts in Japan.

Prior to KJR, Mr. Matsumoto spent more than a decade at CBRE Investment Management (formerly CBRE Global Investors), where he held key leadership roles including Senior Director, Head of Commercial-Residential, and Head of Acquisitions.

He began his career at Kajima Corporation and later gained experience in the real estate division of Deutsche Bank. Mr. Matsumoto holds an MBA from the University of Rochester in the United States and a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Tokyo.

Kazumasa Oguro is a faculty member at the Department of Economics, Hosei University**,** where he specializes in public economics. He graduated from the Faculty of Science at Kyoto University and later earned his Doctorate in Economics from the Graduate School of Economics, Hitotsubashi University**.** He began his career at the Ministry of the Treasury (now the Ministry of Finance) in 1997, where he held several key positions, including Assistant Legal Examiner at the Minister's Secretariat Documentation Division, Deputy Director-General of the Monitoring Division at the Bureau of Customs, and Senior Researcher at the Ministry of Finance's Policy Research Institute. He also served as Associate Professor at Hitotsubashi University's Institute of Economic Research before assuming his current position at Hosei University in April 2015.

Professor Oguro has held several influential policy-related roles, including Counselor to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare for *The Japan Vision: Health Care 2035* and Member of the Cabinet Secretariat's Innovative Business Activity Evaluation Committee**.** He is currently Senior Visiting Fellow at

the Ministry of Finance Policy Research Institute, Consulting Fellow at the Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry (RIETI), Special Investigator of the Board of Audit of Japan, and a Member of the Fiscal System Council at the Ministry of Finance. Additionally, he serves as Executive Director at the Kajima Institute of International Peace, Director at the Institute for New Era Strategy (INES), and Senior Researcher at the Canon Institute for Global Studies.

Hisa Oiwa is a Research Fellow in the Policy Division of PHP Institute, Inc. (2021-), where her work centers on soft power and public diplomacy**.** She also serves in several key advisory and coordination roles, including as an advisor at the Cabinet Public Relations Office (2022–), **a** member of the Project Evaluation Committee at the Agency for Cultural Affairs (2023–), and a coordinator at the Japan Productivity Center (2023–). Prior to her current role, she was Deputy Editor-in-Chief in the Publishing Department at PHP Institute, Inc. She holds a degree from the Faculty of Letters, Osaka University, graduating in 2008.

Her recent publications and presentations reflect her active engagement in shaping Japan's narrative strategies and institutional communication. Notable works include the PHP policy proposals *"Japan's Narrative Power – Strategies for 2025 and Beyond"* (2023) and *"Management of Cabinet Office – How to Organize Core-Executives"* (2024). She has also delivered the lecture *"Narrative Power of Japan"* for Japan International Broadcasting Inc. (2024), participated in the panel discussion *"Communicating Japan to the World"* hosted by Nippon.com (2024), and authored the article *"War and Peace: Soft Power Strategy in Japan"* for *The Mainichi Newspapers* (2023).

Jun Osawa is a Senior Fellow at the Nakasone Peace Institute (NPI) since 2017 and holds multiple prominent positions in the field of national and international security. He currently serves as Research Director at the DENTSU SOKEN Center for Economic Security Research (2025–), Senior Fellow at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (2018–), Director of the Cyber Situation Analysis Department at the IT Security Center of the Information-Technology Promotion Agency (2023–), and is a board member of the Kajima Peace Institute (2018–). His research interests span national cybersecurity, strategic assessment, and North-East Asian international security. Mr. Osawa began his career at the NPI (formerly IIPS) in 1995, serving as a Research Fellow (1995–2009), and later as a Senior Research Fellow (2009–2014, 2017–2025). His previous roles include Senior Fellow and Deputy Cabinet Counsellor at the National Security Secretariat (NSS) of Japan's Cabinet Secretariat (2014–2019), Visiting Fellow at the Center for East Asia Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution (2013), and Visiting Scholar at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (2011–2016). He also served as Policy Planning Researcher and Advisor in the Foreign Policy Bureau's Policy Planning Division at the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs of Japan (2007–2009), and as an Analyst in its Intelligence and Analysis Service (2004–2006).

Mr. Osawa holds a B.A. (1994) and an M.A. (1996) in Political Science from Keio University, Japan.

Rami Niranjan Desai is an author, anthropologist and researcher with subject expertise in the north east region of India and India's neighborhood. She has studied at King's College, London where she received her degrees in Anthropology of religion and Theology. Rami has spent over two decades studying insurgency, ethnic armed organisations, religion and identity issues. Her vast repository of work is based on her groundbreaking fieldwork over the years in the northeast region and in India's neighborhood such as Myanmar. She is also well known for her research and analysis and is invited regularly by private and government organisations as a subject expert. She has also collaborated and published books on various occasions with organisations and universities such as Manipur University and Indira Gandhi National Tribal University. She regularly writes for various journals and national publications such as India Today, Open Magazine and has a weekly column called "Ramification" in Firstpost. She is also a regular television panelist appearing on all major English and Hindi news channels. As Distinguished Fellow at India Foundation she focusses on current affairs, the northeast region of India and the neighbourhood. She also curates India Foundation's flagship event India Ideas Conclave and podcast Insight while leading other significant initiatives.

Chitra Shekhawat is currently a Research Fellow at India Foundation**,** New Delhi, where her work focuses on development economics, good governance, public policy, and advocacy. She holds a Master's degree in Economics (2021) and a B.A. (Honours) in Economics from St. Xavier's College, Jaipur**,** where she also served as the Cultural Secretary of the Student Council. At India Foundation, Chitra contributes to research-driven policy discourse and has authored analytical pieces published in platforms such as *IF Journal*, *Chintan*, *Organiser*, and *News18*.

Printed and published by:

India Foundation

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Email: contact@indiafoundation.in Website: www.indiafoundation.in

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