



THE CHANGING PATTERNS OF INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONS

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Abstract:

The article examines the different factors that have contributed to the current state of India-Japan ties. There are four parts to the paper. (1) China's growth and aggressiveness, (2) India-Japan convergence of interests, (3) Japan's need for India, and (4) India's need for Japan. The paper brings all of these factors together to reach the conclusion that India-Japan interactions are at an all-time high; it not only addresses the 'China factor' but also lays the groundwork for Asia to become a hot spot for multiple regional powers, working toward a better and more stable Indo-Pacific region, with regional stability as its top priority.

Keywords: Asian Pivot, China factor, Indo-Pacific, Regional cooperation, Strategic alliance.

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Introduction:

The diplomatic relations between India and Japan began in 1952 when the Japanese Peace Treaty was signed. Welcoming Japan to India's First Asian Games in 1951 and urging Japan to join in the Afro-Asian Summit in Bandung in 1955, India was crucial in enabling Japan's entrance into the mainstream of regional and international affairs^[1]. India was also very supportive of reconstructing Japan's economy after the disaster by providing vital minerals such as iron ore. Following it, "Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru" had fruitful visits. By 1986, India had become the world's biggest aid provider and the first receiver of yen financial assistance^[2]. However, with the advent of Cold War politics, this relationship deteriorated as India adopted non-alignment and Japan allied with the US, putting both nations on opposing theoretical fronts. With the 1971 friendship pact, India shifted its allegiance to the Soviet Union, separated itself from the United States, and eventually distanced itself from Japan, which suffered significant losses^[3]. The Sino-India border war broke out in 1962, and Japan chose to remain neutral in both the Sino-India border war and India's disputes with Pakistan^[4]. India had pursued a socialist economic growth path. At the same time, Japan, on the other hand, forged forward with strong commercial ties with East and Southeast Asian countries, with China



benefiting greatly from this connection. India was on the periphery for Japan at the time because it was seen as a chaotic, dysfunctional, and impoverished country, and India saw Japan as a camp subordinate of the United States. Japan never visited India as a potential companion and saw it as a local strength, always patronymic with Pakistan and outside the scope of international institutions, even though ASEAN was established. In 1991, India experienced a paradigm shift with the arrival of the globalization process and liberalization. Still, India-Japan interactions did not reach new heights, as Japan's economy sank and became inward-looking. India was too preoccupied with looking at western powers such as the United States, which needed a bailout due to the economic catastrophe^[5].

The alliance between India and Japan was still friendly, but some considered it a distant one. The year 1998 saw a shift in this friendly relationship when India conducted Pokhran II, which enraged Japan, which opposed nuclear power because of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a result, Japan's Official Development Assistance was cut off (ODA). However, this connection quickly changed when Prime Minister Mori visited India and referred to India as a global partner, a title formerly held exclusively for the United States of America. Both Prime Ministers sought to establish a comprehensive collaboration targeted at nuclear proliferation, UNSC reforms, economic exchange and trade connections, security and defense concerns, youth programs and exchanges, and infrastructure development during their visit. It acquired greater importance as a result of this visit, and the number of meetings between defense ministers, ministers, and flag commanders increased dramatically. There were many additional milestones, including signing a joint statement on defense partnership in 2008, which was accompanied by regular bilateral naval drills, which became an annual event by 2012. In addition, India and Japan inked "the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in 2011. (CEPA)". As a result, the critical issue is driving the fast change in India-Japan ties, and what reasons, both foreign and internal, are to blame for this enhanced relationship^[6].

The end of the Cold War, the emergence and expansion of globalization, and America's declaration of a war on terror occurred in the past quarter. Asia, too, was experiencing a transformation, with India and Japan emerging as the two nations (together with China) to acquire importance in international politics. India and Japan had the tenth and third-biggest gross domestic product (GDP) in the world in 2012, respectively, while China had the second largest. Similarly, following the United States of America and China, India and Japan were placed third and fourth, respectively, in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). Apart from that, India and Japan had more significant defense ties, which aided in stimulating trade ties, altering the economic landscape due to their respective economies' growth. Asia was regarded as having one of the world's fastest-rising military expenditures. While the percentages of military budgets for Japan, India, and China stayed relatively stable in terms of percentage of GDP (1989 to 2013), the spending increased dramatically. According to the Military Expenditure Database of the



Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India has already doubled its military spending and is now among the world's top spenders.

Similarly, over the same period, Japan boosted its expenditure by 50% and placed among the best five economies in the world ^[7]. It's important to remember that India is bordered by two nuclear-armed neighbors, Pakistan and China, constantly posing a danger. With rising military conflicts and border tensions, it's only logical to boost military expenditure. Japan is concerned about China's military power and its economic development, and despite providing ODA to Pakistan in the past, Japan's ties with Pakistan have remained strained. With both big economies expanding militarily and having tense relations with their near neighbors', an agreement between India and Japan on defense is required to maintain stability and cope with potential hostility since China and Pakistan are hostile. The second factor was Asian democratization, strengthening India-Japan ties since both countries are democracies, with India being one of the world's biggest democracies and Japan being Asia's oldest democracy. Both strive for democratic ideals and can inspire other nations to engage in progressive ideals and use democracy as a system of governance if they work together. Apart from supplying democracy and ideologies, India and Japan have been more active in international politics, as shown by UN changes, particularly the Security Council. Even though Japan and South Africa backed India in gaining UNSC membership, Japan has also expanded its participation. Apart from the United Nations Security Council, India and Japan have been aggressively developing their ties with ASEAN and have been engaged economically, militarily, and in areas such as infrastructure. In 1992, India announced its Look East Policy, which was later renamed 'Act East Policy' in 2014, with a focus on East Asia, Pacific Islands, and Southeast Asia, with a particular emphasis on them financially and infrastructural by constructing several developments in the Northeast to communicate with Southeast Asian nations, with Japan playing a pivotal role. These initiatives serve as stepping stones in the long-term security partnership between India and Japan ^[8].

As a result, to respond to India-Japan ties exploring and developing, it is essential to identify the reasons for bringing India and Japan pretty close together now. The factors have indeed been classified as follows:

- i. China's ascension and aggressiveness
- ii. India and Japan Share Common Interests
- iii. Why does Japan need India?
- iv. Why does India need Japan?
 - i) **China's ascension and aggressiveness**



China is a significant source of worry, given its belligerent behavior and attitude in the geopolitical context and its attempts to change Asia's power balances. China believes that it has already surpassed Japan economically and that by being confrontational financially and militarily, particularly in the marine sector, it can alter the power trajectories of the Asia-Pacific by displacing the United States' hegemonic power and forcing the United States to reconsider its Asia pivot, causing the United States to rebalance its policy, and finally, with the United States out of the picture, China may indeed emerge as the dominant power in the region. India and Japan see China's growth and aggression as a significant danger. Both nations have formed an alignment based on a shared acknowledgment to create an alliance that may influence Asian geopolitics^[9].

China is one of the primary reasons for the improved relationship between India and Japan since both nations have historical ties with China. India's partnership with China had deteriorated since the 1962 war, which was a significant setback for India because, before the war, India had unleashed the "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" campaign (India-China brotherhood) and, as a result of the 1962 war, India is still dealing with the mental and emotional effects of the war, as well as numerous border claims with China^[10]. China's growth is viewed as a result of its development as an economic and military force, which is concerning for India. Apart from that, China's recent aggressive behavior in the Doklam and Galwan issues, as well as its advances in the Indian Ocean region, particularly with its "string of pearls strategy," has made India not only distrustful and concerned but also aware that Japan can be a great ally in counteracting China, as China has grown into an Aspirational power not just in Indian Ocean region (IOR), but also on the South China Sea. Besides that, the primary source of concern is that China has been constructing a base in the Senkaku Islands. Aerial photographs released by the "Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington" have unveiled that the dwellings have been strengthened for the safeguard of warships, hangers are being prepared for aircraft and radars, and for the enough that "Senkaku islands" As a result, China has constructed a 27-acre hinterland for its defensive lines, dubbed the "series of archipelagos as their first island chain built for defense"^[11]. This is a significant source of worry for Japan since China employs "salami-slicing techniques" to create a new territorial negotiated settlement via coercion rather than a military assault^[12].

As a result, many Japanese defensive system planners regard China as a "significant threat, a realist threat, and a potential threat." On the other hand, it creates opportunities because Japan believes that India can be used as a hedging strategy in their China policy and a counterweight to forceful China to safeguard Asian stability. This connection is reinforced further because Japan considers China's position as a shared concern, one of the significant drivers of Japan's India policy. Former Foreign Minister Aso Taro once said, "India can serve as a helpful component in balancing against China," which is one of the reasons for improved relations between India and



Japan. However, this cannot be the only reason because the Sino-Japanese disputes have a long history from their own, and both countries have historical connotations that are difficult to shed [13].

ii) **India and Japan Share Common Interests**

The second factor driving improved ties among India and Japan is their shared universal ideals and vision, or in other words, their shared interests.

Structure, internal, and individual leadership have all played a role in the increasing confluence of objectives between India and Japan. These criteria were chosen with Japan's need for India in consideration. They clearly demonstrate how Japan gains more from possessing India and why India is advantageous to Japan in dealing with and countering China. These burgeoning convergences come at a time of significant global shifts in both the global and regional geopolitical sectors. As a result of these shifts, many changes have occurred, such as China's rise, the United States' rebalancing and pivot to Asia policy, regional countries' responses, the transformation of ASEAN and the ASEAN neighborhood, and the development of new defense infrastructure alone. One must keep in mind that the above changes impact Japan more than they do India and that to cope with all of these developments, Japan needs a collaborator like India, since together they can deal with them [14].

The structural factor refers to a change in the power balance in Asia-Pacific due to the lack of appropriate regional power and a regional institution, which has created a power vacuum, which China is using to establish itself as the region's main force. As a result, to cope with China's upsurge, India and Japan have concluded to counter China's rise by strengthening their ties with ASEAN and the ASEAN neighborhood. India has also stepped forward by revitalizing its Look East Policy (1992) to Act East Policy (2014) [15]. It has been developing numerous initiatives in the Northeast and with ASEAN countries, with these projects being financed by a grant from the Asian Development Bank. Japan is a US ally, and the India-US Nuclear Deal has enhanced entanglements among India and the US. This deal benefits Japan because their allies, the US, and its all-weather friend, India, are now friends, setting the stage for a multi-power collective against China, which has been attempting to exceed itself and confront the US in the Asia-Pacific. As a result, it believes that, just as China intends to be the ultimate power in Asia-Pacific and exploit the political imbalance, this alliance between India, Japan, and the United States may well be a response to China's threats. The domestic factor is critical to India-Japan relations since Japan has the world's oldest populace and a labor deficit.

In contrast, on the other side, India has a demographic surplus that may assist Japan in meeting its labor needs and provide many other possibilities. Because Japan has plentiful capital and future technologies, it can quickly provide skilled labor from India. India is a highly profitable



market with cheap labor, prompting Japan to invest enough to in India. To address China's economic growth, Japan believes that it would want to keep moving its consumer base to India from China. Furthermore, both nations have agreed that there should be no disparities between them. They have set their sights on strengthening defense and security relations, which are critical areas in countering China. The individual leadership factor is concerned with "Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's" friendship, in which they have not only good diplomatic and political interactions but also an individual affinity for one another, which is a game-changer in terms of strategically cooperating to stop the growth of Sino-centric Asia. As a result, it ends by presenting India and Japan as natural allies, based on their common historical background as a magnificent civilization with the concept of liberal democracy and no history of territorial warfare and a shared worry about China's growth, making them ideal partners^[16].

In 2017, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address in the Indian Parliament on the "Confluence of the Two Seas" celebrated a decade. With ten years along the memory lane from 2007 to 2017, India and Japan's shared universal ideals and vision have more importance. India has envisioned itself as a vital strategic anchor for Japan, as India is a crucial component of Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy,' which has progressed intending to secure strategic solidity and economic wellbeing in the Indo-Pacific space,' culminating in the "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with its India-Japan Vision 2025." It is important to remember that the convergence of agendas between India and Japan has prepared the way for more fruitful future paths. This mutually beneficial relationship has become permanent, and both Prime Ministers engage in high-powered outreach for each other. We've seen that transitioning from being "special partners" to fully realizing the promise of a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" has strengthened this relationship even further, as they work toward shared objectives and a secure Indo-Pacific^[17].

iii) Why does Japan need India?

India as a rising force, not just as an economic strength but also as a strategically, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area, is the third reason driving the enhanced connection between India and Japan.

As previously stated, India and Japan share widely accepted values and visions. They also support the assumption of Pan-Asiannism, which can be traced back to Tenshin Okakura and Rabindranath Tagore in the early 1900s, and was carried forth by Prime Minister Nehru and Prime Minister Nobusuke, who resurrected Asian ideologies. Prime Minister Abe renewed this emotional trip by visiting Kolkata and paying a visit to the house of Subhash Chandra Bose, a key figure in the Japanese Army's cooperation against both the British in the Pacific War. Prime Minister Abe also met with the close relatives of Judge Radhabinod Pal, who had delivered the dissenting judgment in the International Military Tribunal, and all of this rekindled Japan's



interest in Pan-Asianism. This was due to Japan's mental and emotional trust in India, making India a trustable friend.

India's economic development is commendable and has attracted worldwide attention. Japan believes that India's economy is constantly growing and enlarging and that India can serve as both a market and an industrial infrastructure for them. China has also consistently served as Japan's market and industrial base because it provided cheap labor, cheap resources, and cheap land. Still, Japan's continued conflicts with China have caused it to reconsider its base in China. Japan believes that because India is a developing market with abundant, inexpensive labor, land, and resources, it is beneficial for its manufacturing base in the fields of cars and bullet trains, which will assist their export base and, in turn, improve the Japanese economy, as India is the destiny of markets.

The considerable geopolitical reconfiguration and the global shift in gravitational force from the Euro-Atlantic to the significantly larger Asia Pacific region, coupled with an emerging new China's rise and aggressive behavior, as well as the United States' rebalancing strategy, has resulted in a shift in the balance of power, posing security challenges that have obligated Japan to take preventive initiatives. North Korea's nuclear and missile obstacles are a substantial concern for Japan, as evidenced by the fact that in 2013, NDPG Japan referenced North Korea as a source of significant worry due to North Korea's Military First policy, the advancement of weapons of mass devastation, the propagation of its ballistic missiles, and its constant controversial attitude by threatening a missile attack. Though the United States has been committed to Japan, it has recently suggested that Japan became more independent. As a result, Japan has discovered it cannot spend all its eggs in one basket. They believe India might be very beneficial to Japan in developing its security plan without the United States^[18].

India became a nuclear power, and its nuclear agreement with the United States has resulted in trilateral cooperation between India, the United States, and Japan. Japan always has the United States as a security ally. The addition of India to this twosome is the frosting on the cake, as Japan now has two close alliances that are opposed to China. However, in 2008, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that the relationship between China and America is "of the century," which made Japan wary of the US and put Japan in a security bind^[19]. But while India was taken into consideration a high power at the time, it was the absolute best partnership for Japan to pursue because both nations shared values and visions, had no historical baggage, and were peace-loving nations, all of which paved the way for a joint democratic founding of collaborative partnership in the upcoming years.

India is strategically located at the crossroads of South Asia and the waterways from Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. Japan sees India's geopolitical situation as advantageous because most oil and raw materials pass via the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. Because India has a

decisive naval force situated in the Indian Ocean, it protects Japan's sea lanes (SLOC) and maritime security from piracy and China's imperialistic policy in the Indian Ocean. China is interested in the Indian Ocean because it believes that if it takes possession of the IOR, it will go on to the Bay of Bengal, surrounding India, and gaining control of the whole waterway. India has realized that China's goal has been to prevent China's entrance into the Indian Ocean and has responded appropriately. Japan is more concerned about the security of sea lanes because future wars will be fought based on sea line access. Japan is alarmed by China's aggressive takeover of the South China Sea (SCS) and looks to India for assistance. India is privileged with an unprecedented naval power that could assist Japan in the South China Sea if necessary^[20].

As a result, India is regarded as a lucrative center for Japan. It is financially robust and stable on defense and security problems, particularly those affecting the Indo-Pacific area. Japan believes that India is by far the most reliable and recognizable alliance for its security and safety pursuits against China and others, not only because of its existence, but also because it is an active player in geopolitics, particularly in the Indian Ocean region, and for maintaining its sea lines of communication.

iv) Why does India need Japan?

The fourth factor for improved relations is Japan's technologically advanced country with a high-quality manufacturing center. India gains from these characteristics, paving the path for India's holistic growth to challenge China.

Japan is India's all-weather friend, and with China as a point of conflict, the relationship seems to be blossoming. Japan has recognized that fighting China alone in the South China Sea waterways is impossible, and India is another country embroiled in a significant dispute with China. Both countries feel that China's territorial aggressiveness would jeopardize their sovereignty, and as a result, China must be restrained. To tackle China, Japan has noticed that it continues to encourage India to strengthen ties with the other Southeast Asian nations that may also take a stand against China. In an attempt to do so, Japan has been assisting in developing India's Northeast, which acts as an entry point to the Southeast.

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has signed a 610 million dollar contract with The government for the North-East Road Network Connectivity Development Program, Phase-I of which includes the construction of two highways in "Mizoram and Meghalaya, National Highway 54 (Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Corridor) and National Highway 51", which are currently under construction (ongoing). They advocated establishing the India-Japan Coordinating Forum for North-East Development, which focuses on critical infrastructure, power, and disaster response. A 251-kilometer road connecting "Aizawl and Tuipang in Mizoram has been upgraded thanks to a loan from Japan. The Umiam Stage-II Hydro Power



Station Renovation and Modernization Project in Meghalaya” has been finished in the energy sector. In Assam, the Guwahati Water Supply Project and the Guwahati Sewerage Project are presently under construction in the water supply and sewage sectors. In the health sector, there have been numerous projects completed. They are the Project for the Eradication of Poliomyelitis in India through “UNICEF in parts of Assam, Project for Primary Health Care promotion for Grassroots Communities in Imphal West, Manipur, Nurse Dispatched to Community Health Clinic in Mizoram as Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer in Mizoram and finally, the Project for Construction of Community of Health Clinic in Khamrang Village, Kolasib district, Mizoram.” Mizoram has researched the planning and improvement of land and water sources for sustainable agriculture in the agricultural sector. A program on performance improvement for sustainable farming and irrigated expansion is underway. “The Tripura Forest Environmental Improvement and Poverty Alleviation Project, the Capacity Development for Forest Management and Personnel Training Project in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, and the Nagaland Forest Resource Management Project” are all underway in the environment sector. The Project for the Construction of a Primary School for Scheduled Tribes in Manipur and the Construction of a Vocational Training Centre for Poor Women in Kamrup, Assam, has been completed for women and children.

Furthermore, the Innovative Asia for IIT Guwahati, Assam, Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) Programme, Japan-Asia Youth Exchange Program in Science (SAKURA Exchange Program in Science), and DAILAB (DBT-AIST International Laboratory for Advanced Biomedicine) at Sikkim are all in the process of being implemented (Sikkim and Assam). Furthermore, the invitation of 25 Manipur and Nagaland youngsters to Japan under the Japan-funded Afforestation Project is still in the works. The Nippon Foundation provides financial assistance for constructing the Imphal War Museum as part of the postwar reconciliation process, which is now underway. This has been accomplished via the convergence of Japan and India’s Act East Policy and Japan’s Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) Initiative. Both countries have agreed to form the India-Japan Act East Forum to promote development initiatives, with Japan contributing 350 million dollars^[21]. This kind of activity in the Northeast demonstrates that Japan has made and continues to make every effort to strengthen India’s Northeast, not only to link with Southeast Asian countries but also to prepare India to fight China.

From 2000 to 2017, Japan spent about \$25 billion in India’s various industries, making it the country’s third-biggest investor. In addition, Japan has promised to spend \$35 billion between 2014 and 2019. The Mumbai-Ahmadabad Shinkansen high-speed rail line project, which has received a 19 billion dollar investment and is expected to be operational by the end of 2023, is an example of infrastructure development. Through this rail project in place, India will soon join the bullet train league, carving out its own space in the world of high-tech transportation. Both



nations' ties in nuclear energy and space have strengthened, and the signing of "the Civil Nuclear Agreement in November 2016" has resulted in even more excellent relations between them. What's noteworthy is that India was the first nation to refuse to join the NPT while maintaining a nuclear deal with Japan, which benefits India in the long run. The Indian Space Research Organisation constructed the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Station (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) in Thumba, Thiruvananthapuram, and concentrate on disaster prevention in the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum ^[22]. Japan is endowed with world-class equipment, while India is blessed with plentiful and inexpensive labor, resulting in a winning combination that will help both countries develop even further.

As a result, India requires Japan's assistance in developing its northeastern region, which will soon serve as a hub for connectivity, trade, and long-term relations with other Southeast Asian nations who will advantage of this and could ultimately play a key role in countering China alongside India. India gains significantly from Japan since it is equipped with high-tech equipment and high-quality goods that will aid India in its 'Make in India' initiative, allowing the Indian economy to expand even faster, benefiting the Japanese economy. Japan is astute in that developing India, and it puts India on par with other industrialized countries. A developed India might be better prepared to fight China, which would benefit Japan's security strategy.

Conclusion:

It is essential to recognize that the increased relations between India and Japan have resulted in a counter-offensive against China due to its belligerent behavior and attitude, resulting in the emergence of various powers that serve as a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific. With the improved alliances between India and Japan, a group of countries has formed that works for the common good of Asian identity and Asian security. When it comes to safety, it paves the way for free and secure sea routes while also contributing to the region's maritime security. Since China's belligerent battlegrounds in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea have heightened, India and Japan's increased ties serve as a counterweight to China. The two countries may likely ally water battles against China. Though China isn't the sole cause for the improved relations, both nations need to be economically robust. Both serve as support networks for each other in building and growing their economies. With no historical baggage, shared ideals, and many similar interests, this relationship can extend much beyond expectations since both of these countries may be sister states in the future, particularly in the security sector.

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