

Review Article





Japan's free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy and India

Abstract

Japan is an economically developed and technologically advanced country with a commitment to global prosperity and peace. Historically, culturally, and religiously India's engagements with Japan is century-old. Considering India's liberal democratic culture, open economic policy, and philosophy of non-violence helped to establish a strong multidimensional relationship. The century-old relationship between Tokyo and New Delhi has evolved. As part of Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) policy, India gained a significant position. The reciprocal engagements not only strengthen the bilateral relationship but also contribute to regional and global well-being. This paper intends to explore Japan's engagements with India and the role of FOIP. It will also further throw light on the strategic factor and how FOIP plays significant role in the bilateral relations. The content analysis method will be applied in this paper.

Keywords: Japan, India, non-violence, development, FOIP, bilateral

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Introduction

There exists a long-standing history of the connection between Japan and India. The introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the sixth century is believed to have initiated trade between the two nations. India-Japan relations have a rich history that spans over a century, rooted in their shared civilizational values. By honoring their traditional areas of collaboration, these two nations have not only redefined the boundaries and elements of their bilateral ties but have also forged a relationship that extends beyond the realm of bilateralism. New Delhi and Tokyo have successfully cultivated a partnership that transcends conventional diplomatic norms.1 The Japanese people's affinity towards India can be attributed to the profound impact of Indian culture, transmitted through Buddhism, on Japanese society. India's involvement in Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) initiative is of great importance. From a geographical perspective, the comprehensive definition of the term Indo-Pacific (IP) encompasses all nations and islands situated in the vicinity of the Indian or Pacific oceans. The FOIP is grounded on three core principles: freedom of navigation, free trade, and the promotion of the rule of law.

Japan and India are in sync in their efforts to achieve economic growth, stability, and harmony. Their mutual interests enable the harmonization of their objectives. Tokyo and New Delhi are united in their commitment to global peace, human rights, and environmental conservation efforts. Through their liberal economic policies, shared strategic objectives, and advancements in science and technology, both nations have found a common ground for cooperation. India and Japan have similar perspectives on global issues. Japan is often perceived as a peaceful and prosperous nation. After World War II, there was a significant shift in Japan's ideology and strategies. The country transitioned from a militaristic approach to focusing on industrial growth and technological advancements to drive economic development. Consequently, Japan established strong trade relationships with numerous countries worldwide. Japan's reliability, active participation in global economic affairs, and efforts towards promoting world peace and human security has contributed to its increasing popularity on an international level. Japan is recognized as the largest contributor to international peacekeeping missions.

Research objectives, research questions, and methodology

There are two research objectives of the paper--(1) to investigate the reasons behind Japan's growing synergies with India following the policy of FOIP. (2) To explore the dynamics of multi-layered connectivity and engagements between India and Japan. This paper has two research questions--(1) what are the reasons behind the gradual multidimensional engagements between India and Japan? (2) How did Japan establish multi-layered connectivity and engagements with India? The content analysis method will be applied in this paper. Both primary and secondary sources are used in this paper, such as governmental reports, books, journals, etc.

Background

Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, presented an Indian elephant to the Tokyo Ueno Zoo in 1949 after the conclusion of World War II. This act of generosity served as a ray of hope for the Japanese people who were still mourning their losses from the war. In 1952, a peace treaty was signed between Japan and India, marking the establishment of diplomatic relations. This treaty was one of the earliest post-World War II peace agreements for Japan. Since the establishment of diplomatic contacts, the two nations have maintained a cordial relationship. The availability of iron ore from India played a significant role in Japan's recovery from the war's devastation. In 1957, during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi to India, Japan initiated the practice of lending yen to India.

In particular, Japan's policy towards South Asia during the Cold War was primarily concerned with promoting economic ties. Several circumstances caused the restricted degree of intimacy between Japan and South Asia. Japan's main objective after regaining sovereignty in 1952 was to rebuild its economy, which the war had severely damaged. As such, it made an effort to forge closer ties with nations that could provide raw materials, act as marketplaces for its produced goods, or provide an atmosphere conducive to investment. Regretfully, at this time Japan's economic interests were not served by the South Asian nations. Geographically speaking, South Asia was seen as being far away from Japan. India and other South Asian nations were seen by the Japanese as having a low profile in international affairs.



Japan's free and open Indo-Pacific policy (FOIP)

During his official visit to New Delhi, India, on March 20, 2023, the esteemed Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio delivered a significant policy speech entitled "The Future of the Indo-Pacific, Japan's New Plan for a FOIP together with India, as an Indispensable Partner". The primary objective of this address was to establish a wide-reaching network and enhance aviation safety and maritime security initiatives to address common challenges in the Indo-Pacific region (IPR). Through the implementation of this comprehensive policy, Japan is steadfastly showcasing its dedication to fostering economic development, regional stability, and enhanced connectivity across the Indo-Pacific (IP) area. Given the expanding influence of China, the FOIP is perceived as an enhanced endeavor by Japan to broaden its strategic horizons by encompassing the establishment of regional order in the IP. Consequently, this situation gives rise to several inquiries. Initially designed to achieve two distinct objectives - shaping an IP regional order and ensuring Japan's defense - the concept of FOIP has gradually shifted Japan's strategic focus towards the former goal, thereby disassociating national defense from the notion of FOIP.

During the Abe Administration, the Japanese foreign policy was centered on the FOIP project. A crucial aspect to consider is whether this particular approach aimed to counter China's rapid ascent. The evolution of this diplomatic strategy was influenced by the development of Japan-China relations and the quadrilateral security cooperation among major democracies in the region. Prime Minister Abe initially introduced the FOIP concept in August 2016. Tokyo's security stance faced challenges between 2000 and 2010 due to two primary geopolitical factors, leading to a gradual shift in the strategic landscape of Asia. Firstly, China's material capabilities expanded rapidly, with its GDP surpassing Japan's around 2001, accompanied by increased military spending. Consequently, Beijing perceived a rise in relative strategic vulnerability and grew increasingly concerned about China's defensive posture and future actions toward Japan. In the wake of the Cold War, a bond developed between the United States of America and India. Post-Cold War, Japan and India also forged a closer working relationship. Driven by mutual geopolitical interests, the USA, Japan, and India joined forces to challenge Chinese supremacy in the IPR.

Diplomatic relations

The meeting between Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in August 2000 solidified the ties between Japan and India. Subsequent summit talks have taken place annually since April 2005, when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited India. The relationship between the two countries was further strengthened during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's trip to Japan in December 2006, where it was upgraded to a global and strategic partnership. In September 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed to enhance their bilateral relations to a unique strategic and global partnership during an official visit to Japan. In December 2015, Prime Minister Abe undertook a trip to India, where he held a summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. After their meeting, the two leaders made a joint decision to enhance the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership, transforming it into a more comprehensive alliance focused on operational effectiveness. This advancement highlighted a notable convergence of their long-standing political, economic, and strategic goals. In November 2016, Prime Minister Modi embarked on an official visit to Japan, where he engaged in official matters and held a

summit with Prime Minister Abe. During this meeting, the two leaders reiterated their unwavering dedication to collaborating towards a FOIP as outlined in the Japan-India Vision Statement, which was unveiled in October 2018 during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan. In September 2021, while attending the Second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Summit Meeting in Washington, D.C., Prime Minister Suga had a summit encounter with Prime Minister Modi. In October 2021, shortly after assuming office, Prime Minister Kishida engaged in a phone conversation with Prime Minister Modi. The significance of this event was further amplified in March 2022 when Prime Minister Kishida embarked on his inaugural visit to India during his tenure as Japan's prime minister, marking it as a truly momentous occasion. In a gesture of gratitude, Prime Minister Modi reciprocated by traveling to Japan in May 2022 to participate in the Japan-Australia-India-United States Summit Meeting. Additionally, Prime Minister Modi returned to Japan to pay his respects at the state funeral of former Prime Minister Abe. As the G7 and G20 presidents in 2023, Japan and India expressed their mutual commitment to fortifying their bilateral relations and collaborating on various global issues.

Knowledge-economy (KE)

In recent years, Japan has placed significant emphasis on the "knowledge economy (KE)." which encompasses advancements in science, high educational standards, cross-cultural interactions, and interpersonal relationships. To enhance the prosperity and human security of the IPR, particularly in South Asia, Japan has actively pursued "soft power diplomacy" while also reaping economic benefits from investments and development initiatives. Unlike other nations, Japan adopts a distinct approach when it comes to providing financial assistance to developing and least developed countries. While China also extends aid, Japan's Official Development Aid (ODA) stands out for its strategic and generous nature. India and Japan have collaborated to promote growth through innovation and technical independence. Both countries have signed agreements to enhance their partnership in semiconductor research, exchange of knowledge, and mutual trade of semiconductor-related goods. The Japanese Society 5.0 vision and the Indian Made in India mission share a common objective of attaining technological self-sufficiency and advancement through innovation.

The two countries have also introduced an India-Japan Special Economic Partnership Initiative (SEPI) to promote Japanese investment in India and bolster the development of India's industrial and infrastructural sectors. Japan's economic progress has been driven by investments in information and communication technology (ICT), research and development (R&D), and higher education. Furthermore, Japan has actively encouraged global higher education, acquired foreign technology through licensing agreements, and imported advanced capital goods.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital education system has garnered significant popularity and success. Before the global health crisis, numerous countries had already adopted digital and ICT-based education systems to enhance the speed and efficiency of learning. The adoption of digital education systems in South Asia, specifically in India, has sparked concerns, as highlighted by Nandy and Majee.2 India's education system is being fortified through a series of initiatives put forth by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on International Education Day. The goal is to empower young Indians to realize their potential and make significant contributions to the economy and society as a whole. JICA has been persistently working towards addressing the educational crises in primary and higher education institutions, as well as fostering positive changes among the youth and children of India.3

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Japan's 'soft power' diplomacy with India

Joseph Nye^{4,5} introduced the concept of soft power as a means to address both disciplinary and policy-related challenges. Japan, akin to the United States and India, leverages "soft power" in its foreign relations strategy. Through a focus on cultural exports, Japan has effectively bolstered its reputation as a modern and innovative nation on the world stage. The country's diplomatic endeavors in soft power have been reinforced through engagement in the arts, music, literature, and culinary realms, particularly in collaboration with India. Additionally, Japan has demonstrated its commitment to global cultural exchange by establishing the Japan Foundation, a network of cultural centers worldwide. In this context, human-to-human interaction plays a vital role, with "Buddhism" potentially serving as a facilitator of interpersonal communication.

South Asia has become one of the regions where Japanese cuisine has expanded as a result of the growing trend of globalization and increased cross-cultural interactions. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, 117,568 Japanese restaurants were operating overseas as of October 2017. This figure represents a 30% rise from the data collected in 2015 and a fivefold increase from the initial study conducted in 2006. Assmann⁶ argues that Japanese culinary traditions play a crucial role in navigating the complexities of globalization. The acknowledgment of Japanese cuisine by UNESCO as a world heritage, along with the efforts to preserve the authenticity of popular Japanese dishes such as sushi, highlights the importance of cultural diplomacy in promoting Japanese food worldwide. Japanese restaurants provide customers with a cultural immersion by incorporating traditional aesthetics, attentive service, and customs that extend beyond mere culinary indulgence, thereby fostering a deeper connection with their patrons. Moreover, Japanese cuisine is renowned for its versatility in accommodating various dietary needs, offering an extensive array of vegetarian and vegan choices.8 The Japanese populace and dining establishments place great importance on sustainability, and their favorable perception of Japanese gastronomy is largely influenced by the emphasis placed on responsible sourcing.9

Japan is recognized for its creative initiatives in advancing Buddhist tourism in various Asian countries, notably in India and Bhutan, and for leveraging Buddhism as a means to accomplish diplomatic goals. By implementing aid projects, Japan has made significant progress in improving the quality of life for countless individuals and positioning itself as a conscientious global contributor. These initiatives encompass the development of essential infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and educational establishments in underdeveloped nations. Additionally, through the establishment of the Japan Foundation, a series of cultural hubs, Japan has spearheaded efforts to propagate its language and culture on a global scale.

Japan's investment, development, connectivity in India

By the principles of the Special Strategic and Global Partnership, Japan actively promotes collaboration with India, a prominent participant in South Asia. This collaborative effort encompasses various areas, including economic cooperation in significant projects such as the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) Projects, which receive support from the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC). Moreover, this partnership extends to multiple domains, including political and security affairs, commercial ventures, and academic exchanges. In recent years, India has emerged as the primary beneficiary of loans from Japan for official development

assistance (ODA). Japan has extended its support to India primarily in the realm of economic infrastructure development, with a particular focus on the transportation and electricity sectors. The commitment to this partnership was underscored during the Japan-India Summit Meeting held in September 2014.

Improving bilateral ties was greatly aided by Abe's 2014 visit to New Delhi, especially in light of the FOIP strategy. During this tour, major initiatives like the creation of smart cities, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Railway, and improvements in energy infrastructure were agreed upon. With billions of Japanese Yen in financial support from the Japanese government, India is actively working on several projects. The Delhi Mass Rapid Transport System Project (Phase 4), Bengaluru Metro Rail Project (Phase 2), Himachal Pradesh Crop Diversification Promotion Project (Phase 2), Kolkata East-West Metro Project (4), North-East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project (Phase 5), and the founding of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences are a few notable examples of these cooperative projects.

Currently, Japan and India has witnessed a significant expansion of economic relations. The trade volume between these two nations has experienced a notable increase. As of 2021, India holds the 18th position among Japan's trading partners, while Japan stands at the 13th position among India's trading partners. Moreover, Japan has displayed a heightened interest in investing directly in India, emerging as the fifth-largest investor in the country during the fiscal year 2021. This growing interest is also reflected in the private Japanese sector, with a total of 1,439 Japanese enterprises establishing branches in India as of 2021.

The Northeast region of India (NER) consists of the seven sister states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, sharing similar economic characteristics. The strategic location of these regions presents a unique opportunity for enhanced economic development and closer integration with the broader IPR. Nevertheless, a significant obstacle hindering economic progress in both the central and peripheral areas is the lack of connectivity between Bangladesh and the NER. Closing this connectivity gap is essential to fully capitalize on the economic synergies between Bangladesh and the NER. Japan stands out as a significant foreign player in the region, with the JICA playing a crucial role in South Asia by supporting various large-scale infrastructure projects. Japan aims to strengthen its economic ties and investments in the IPR.10

India's focus on the North East Region (NER) positions it as a significant participant in the Act East Policy (AEP). A crucial initial step towards fostering a prosperous IPR involves establishing connectivity between the NER and the Bay of Bengal region. The NER boasts abundant natural resources such as petroleum products, forestry, agri-horticulture, and hydel energy. Research suggests that the NER has the potential for even more rapid expansion in the future. To fully unlock the economic potential of the region, it is imperative to encourage cross-border production collaborations, particularly with Bangladesh and other Southeast and East Asian countries. The Northeast Indian region presents ample opportunities for Japanese investment, which will contribute to its growth and gradually alleviate the economic isolation it has experienced. Additional entry points to the Northeastern Indian states are connected to the Matarbari port in Bangladesh, including the Benapole-Petrapole border between India and Bangladesh, the Fulbari border in Siliguri, West Bengal, and the Gede border in West Bengal. Through the removal of barriers in the region, Japan's connectivity strategy has the potential

to attract investments from Japanese companies into Northeast India. Furthermore, Japan can offer Nepal and Bhutan a variety of manufactured goods and services. Japanese investments could play a crucial role in offsetting China's growing economic influence in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan.

Japan's quest for national security and India

Japan has encountered unprecedented security threats and challenges to its national security since the conclusion of the Cold War. Presently, the nation is acutely aware of a mounting military menace emanating from its neighboring countries in Northeast Asia. The Russian Federation has escalated its military presence in the disputed Northern Territories (the Kuril Islands) and frequently dispatches warplanes to encircle the Japanese archipelago. Simultaneously, North Korea persistently sends alarming signals to Tokyo, bolstered by its expanding nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities and proliferation. Nevertheless, Japan identifies the rising power and assertiveness of China as its most significant threat.

Japan perceives itself as being at the forefront of a hazardous neighborhood. Simultaneously, Japanese policymakers possess an understanding of the rapid transformations occurring in terms of regional arms races, technological competitiveness, and heightened activities in the realms of space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains. Japan's security strategy is reinforced by its substantial internal endeavors, encompassing security reforms, modernized defense capabilities, and bolstered military capacities. In recent years, there has been a notable resurgence in Japan's security and military affairs, as acknowledged by scholars. This resurgence has been characterized by vigorous deliberations within the country's strategic community and policy-making sphere, resulting in an unparalleled drive for the enactment of legislation and the formulation of policies.

The FOIP vision is built on the premise that creating a free and open order under the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region can ensure peace and prosperity for the entire area and beyond. Japan's adoption of the FOIP policy is significant as it signifies Japan's efforts to shape the regional order independently rather than simply aligning with the US-led liberal order. To better align with its interests and identity, Japan has sought to modify various aspects of the US-led liberal order, particularly in the IPR. ¹¹ The FOIP strategy aims to engage with the regional multilateral framework, as evidenced by the consistent emphasis on ASEAN's "centrality". ¹²

During his visit to Japan in October 2008, former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, along with Japanese leaders, issued the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between the two countries. Additionally, Japan and India have established various platforms for discussions on security and defense, including interactions between their Coast Guards, annual Defense Ministerial meetings, and joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meetings. Tokyo hosted the second defense ministers' meeting in September 2022. The Agreement on the Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services between the Governments of the Republic of India and Japan's Self-Defense Forces, along with the India Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, was officially signed on September 9, 2020, and came into effect on July 11, 2021.¹³

To safeguard the rules-based framework in the IPR, Japan bolstered the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) in 2017, subsequent to Shinzo Abe assuming the role of prime minister. The primary impetus behind this action stemmed from China's revisionist policies, particularly its increasing influence in the South China Sea, as well as the perceived risks posed to Japan's investments and infrastructure

projects in ASEAN countries through the Belt and Road Infrastructure initiative. Consequently, the concept of a FOIP was introduced, drawing inspiration from Abe's earlier publication in 2007 titled "The Confluence of the Two Seas". 14

The regular joint exercises between the militaries of Japan and India have been taking place since January 2023, following their first joint air exercise. These exercises are in line with the new National Security Strategy (NSS) and signify the growing security cooperation between Japan and India.15 In addition to these joint exercises, the Indian and Japanese Armies have been conducting the Dharma Guardian Joint Military Exercises (JMEs) annually since 2018. These exercises provide a platform for the exchange of experiences and knowledge related to counter-terrorism operations. The first Dharma Guardian exercise took place in Japan in February and March of 2023, involving both the Japanese Army and the Indian Army. The strategic alliance between Japan and India goes beyond defense and encompasses the joint effort to combat international terrorism. Both countries have experienced incidents of terrorism. Japan and India have established a longstanding security alliance that encompasses cooperation in countering terrorism. They have entered into various security cooperation agreements, including the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2008 and the Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges in 2014. Despite their shared resistance to hegemony and significant military capabilities, Japan and India encounter various security challenges.16

Energy security

India is fully committed to reducing its carbon footprint, while also ensuring economic and social development and eradicating energy poverty. However, achieving all three goals simultaneously poses a challenge as they sometimes conflict with each other. For example, the use of cheap energy sources, predominantly coal, to meet the growing demand for energy at an affordable price may undermine efforts to combat local pollution and address climate change. ¹⁷ Recognizing the need for sustainable economic growth and climate action, both India and Japan acknowledge the importance of exploring various options to secure a reliable and sustainable energy supply. They share the belief that each nation must pursue multiple pathways to transition towards a low-carbon economy. India has taken note of Japan's Asia Energy Transition Initiative (AETI) and has announced an ambitious target of achieving net zero emissions by 2070. Similarly, Japan has set a target to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

To reduce carbon emissions, both countries are employing cutting-edge technology and economic tactics along with low-carbon emerging sectors. India and Japan have agreed to enhance their partnership in the realm of energy security, encompassing electric vehicles (EVs), battery-powered storage systems, infrastructure for EV charging (EVCI), energy-efficient appliances and buildings, as well as industries, solar power development involving photovoltaic solar cells, wind power, clean energy such as green hydrogen, sanitized energy with Green Ammonia, increased and enhanced use of LNG, carbon recycling and carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), novel fuels like CBG and bio-fuels, strategic petroleum reserves, and technology for clean coal.

Conclusion

Bureaucratic barriers persist despite attempts to update regulations, hindering businesses from fully capitalizing on opportunities in both markets. Moreover, companies seeking international expansion encounter challenges arising from differing legal and tax systems.

Another significant factor is the lack of robust infrastructure connectivity between the two countries. The cost and complexity of conducting business are further deterrents to investment and trade expansion, exacerbated by insufficient transportation networks and logistical inefficiencies. Furthermore, the absence of a robust bilateral trade agreement restricts the scope of economic collaboration. To maintain stability in the maritime domain, Japan and India are dedicated to expanding their connections with other relevant stakeholders through the use of agreements for intelligence sharing and logistics, as well as by promoting naval interoperability. India is enthusiastic about advancing the post-COVID agenda and building upon Vision 2025, with Kishida being entrusted with leadership responsibilities by Japan. Following the end of the pandemic, there has been a resurgence of high-level in-person diplomacy on the global stage, and Kishida's eagerly awaited visit to India as prime minister sooner rather than later will be an ideal starting point. 18-23 Japan's engagement with India commits to fulfilling its FOIP policy. In South Asia, India is considered as the best partner of Japan.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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