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Between the Dragon and the Eagle: The Rising Sun - India-Japan Relations in the Age of Geopolitical Uncertainty

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Throughout history, India and Japan have been united by spiritual exchanges, cultural affinity, and a shared ideology that continues to gain significance in the contemporary era. India and Japan stand today at a pivotal moment in their bilateral relationship due to their shared democratic values, economic interdependence, and overlapping strategic interests. India and Japan's historic relationship is now being altered proactively to deal with a world where strategic uncertainties and regional power rivalries define the new normal. India and Japan come together today due to their shared democratic values, economic interdependence, and overlapping strategic interests. This momentum is further highlighted in 2025, when PM Modi went to Tokyo to represent both a reaffirmation of trust between the two Asian allies and an attempt to balance the nuisance of the Eagle and the Dragon, which are the United States and China, respectively. Increasing mistrust of China, and new questions regarding predictability and reliability have been raised due to Trump 2.0 in the US. Thus, for India, strengthening shared commitments in defence, economic resilience, critical technologies, and regional connectivity with Japan reflects that it is more than a diplomatic ritual. In this context, Japan becomes the "Rising Sun," a stable and practical ally that India looks to for both stability and innovation. This paper seeks to study how this partnership of India and Japan evolves in a geopolitical setting and the effect it has on the globe.

Keywords: geopolitics, diplomacy, bilateral relations, regional security.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the focus of the world has diverted from the developed to the developing world, where Asian-Pacific nations began to gain prominence and where all of the major powers converge. Ethno-religious divisions have prevented the South Asian nations from coming together, but Japan has remained unaffected by power struggles and has instead changed its foreign policy stance to become known as a “cultural and economic powerhouse.” Three main priorities—security, economic development, and status, as well as a general desire for strategic autonomy serve as the foundation for Indian foreign policy strategy.¹ The 15th India-Japan Annual Summit took place on August 29–30, 2025, and it was Prime Minister Modi's first time meeting with PM Shigeru Ishiba, and it was his eighth trip to Japan. The evolution of India-Japan relations provides an engaging narrative that can be used as support to demonstrate that involvement in Tokyo has significance that goes well beyond the bilateral. To manage the US-driven global strategic framework in the face of Chinese attempts at establishing fairness in world politics with novel concepts, structures, and facilities, this research paper builds on that base by placing India-Japan relationships within the broader global changes of the year 2025 and advocating the Indo-Pacific plan of action.² The groundbreaking Action Plan for Human Resource Exchange, which includes exchanges of scholars, pupils, and competent workers on both sides, is additionally addressed in this paper, which bolsters the two nations' collaborative innovation initiatives, academic partnerships, and interpersonal interactions. The research outlines India and Japan's pragmatic responses to intensifying territorial rivalry and worldwide volatility, highlighting the cooperation's emerging areas of focus in digitalisation, ecological sustainability, supply chain endurance, and multilateral cooperation structures like the Quad.³ Ultimately, this study demonstrates the ways India-Japan interactions are developing into an evolving bilateralism framework that strikes the right balance between strategic autonomy and intentional

¹ Rajesh Basrur and Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, 'Modi's India and Japan: nested strategic partnerships' (2022) 59 *International Politics* 67 <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-021-00288-2>> accessed 06 September 2025

² Titli Basu, 'India-Japan Vision 2025: Deciphering the Indo Pacific Strategy' (2018) 13(3) *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* <https://www.idsa.in/system/files/news/india-japan_vision_2025.pdf> accessed 06 September 2025

³ '15th India-Japan Annual Summit Joint Statement: Partnership for Security and Prosperity of our Next Generation' (*Ministry of External Affairs*, 29 August 2025) <<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40062>> accessed 06 September 2025

coordination, offering certainty, advancement, and collaborative development in a changing world and regional order.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is based on a comparative method to analyse different notions of India-Japan bilateral ties and their effects on the globe. It also contains a multifaceted methodology with secondary sources that uses news articles, various websites and several journal articles for the research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The book “Changing Dynamics of India-Japan Relations: Buddhism to Special Strategic Partnership” by Shamshad Ahmad Khan particularly talks about the bond between the two countries and its evolution. The title speaks for itself about the connection of the countries in terms of foreign policy and strategic issues. The author seeks to explain the resurgence of a historical cultural connection of the nations to analyse Japan’s assistance in India’s independence. Recalling their historical ties, the leaders declared that “India and Japan are natural partners as the largest and most developed democracies of Asia, with a mutual stake in each other's progress and prosperity.”⁴ In the book “Towards a Beautiful Country”, Ex-PM Abe highlighted India as an extremely important ally and explained how Japan could further the state’s interests by bonding with India.⁵ Abe stated, “It will not be a surprise if in another decade Japan-India relations overtake Japan-US and Japan-China ties”.⁶ Even India made efforts to interact with Japan and absorb knowledge from the only developed country in Asia at the time. All books mentioned above point to the importance of strong cooperation and strengthening community relations between the two countries.

⁴ ‘Joint Statement Towards India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership’ (*Ministry of External Affairs*, 15 December 2006) <<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6368/Joint+Statement+Towards+IndiaJapan+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership>> accessed 06 September 2025

⁵ Mohammad Moinuddin, ‘Evolution of Strategic Relation: Changing Dynamics of India-Japan Relations’ (2018) 13 *Asia Japan Journal* 83 <https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/repo/ouka/all/89364/ajj013_06_083.pdf> accessed 06 September 2025

⁶ *Ibid*

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

With resources like iron ore, raw jute, and cotton, India rose to become Japan's third-largest trading partner by the early 1900s.⁷ Japan-India Association, which is said to be Japan's most historical international friendship organisation, was established in the early 20th century. Japan was one of the first countries to acknowledge Indian sovereignty following its independence from the United Kingdom on August 15, 1947.⁸ But since 1991, the bond between the two countries has taken significant turns. An important turning point was in 1991, when India liberalised its economy, acknowledging Japan as a major source of technology and investment. In addition to enhancing bilateral relations, this multifaceted partnership places India and Japan to influence the future of the region.

TACTICAL AUTONOMY

Tactical autonomy comes from the agonising British Raj and the ensuing Indian Independence.⁹ There are various benefits to this strategic autonomy. First, they allow for more flexibility in negotiations with adversaries and more independence than groupings. Second, it enhances military security while fostering better capacities through military exercises and sharing military logistics. Third, economic gain from trade and investment is typically linked to strategic partnerships. Fourth, they make it easier to achieve a higher status by forming strong ties with other powerful nations and, occasionally, with prevailing world values. PM of India states that this friendship can develop into "a profound influence on shaping the course of Asia and our interlinked ocean regions."¹⁰

⁷ Gajula Sai Niranjan, 'From Aid to Alliance: The Role of Japan's Aid Diplomacy in Shaping India-Japan Strategic Relations' (2025) 6(1) Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies
<https://www.ejsss.net.in/uploads/172/15746_pdf.pdf> accessed 06 September 2025

⁸ Dr Arpita Paul, 'Soft Road to Trans-national Encompassment- Analyzing role of Soft Power in shaping the contours of India-Japan Relations' (2023) 5(6) International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research
<<https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2023/6/9575.pdf>> accessed 06 September 2025

⁹ Basrur (n 1)

¹⁰ 'Media Statement by Prime Minister with Japanese Prime Minister in New Delhi' (*Ministry of External Affairs*, 12 December 2015) <<https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/26175/Media+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+with+Japanese+Prime+Minister+in+New+Delhi+December+12+2015>> accessed 06 September 2025

BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP

There was a gap between the nations during the Cold War. The first reason was India's Non-Alignment Movement. In 1991, when the USSR disintegrated, India faced the infamous 'balance of payments' crisis, which forced India to open up its economic policies, or economic liberalisation, which was perceived positively on the Japanese side. In 1993, PM Rao put into effect the "Look East Policy."¹¹ India saw Japan as Western-aligned, while the Japanese saw India as a poor country.¹² India was then neglected completely to come into the good books as 'Japan's future partner.' India was still viewed as an outsider. PM Mori introduced the idea that is "global partnership" during his historic visit to India in 2000.¹³ Harsh V. Pant, Professor of International Relations at King's College London, states, "the confluence of structural, domestic and individual leadership factors contributed to the newfound dynamism in India-Japan relations."¹⁴

POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Since 2006, the Japanese and Indian front have held frequent summit meetings in their respective capitals. Since 2014, their bond has turned into a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership." In 2015, two leaders decided to establish both countries' "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" They also unveiled "Japan-India Vision 2025," which calls for cooperation for the region and the globe's peace & prosperity.¹⁵ During the 9th month of 2023, the PM of Japan, Fumio Kishida and PM Modi had a bilateral meeting for the G20 Summit. Both leaders talked about their goals for their G7 and G20 Presidencies during this bilateral meeting, with a focus on elevating the Global South's ambitions. Furthermore, the two countries' bilateral cooperation has been further strengthened by the recent visit.

¹¹ Basrur (n 1)

¹² Dr Asima Sahu, 'India-Japan Relations@70: From Civilisational to Strategic Partnership' (2024) 6(4) International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research <<https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2024/4/24244.pdf>> accessed 06 September 2025

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Harsh V Pant, 'India-Japan Relations: A Slow, but Steady, Transformation' in Sumit Ganguly (ed), *Indian Foreign Policy* (OUP 2011)

¹⁵ Prasanta Sahoo and Sasmita Khandual, 'Indo-Japanese Relations: From Spiritual to Special Strategic & Global Partnership' (2024) 6(6) International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research <<https://www.ijfmr.com/research-paper.php?id=31455>> accessed 06 September 2025

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Japan and India continue to have a strong commercial and trade partnership. Once more, India is undoubtedly an important market for Japanese companies. India is home to manufacturing facilities for well-known Japanese corporations, including Sony, Toyota, and Honda. As we talk about the aspect of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with India, Japanese relations shine. An important turning point in the Indo-Japanese business relationship occurred in 2008. To establish a new “economic partnership agreement” by giving their bilateral trade relationship more significance and impetus. According to statistics, since 1991, Japanese businesses have invested a total of about \$2.6 billion in India.¹⁶ Japan was the third-largest investor in India as of March 2006, with an estimated \$2.12 billion invested overall.¹⁷ The year 2011 could be considered a turning point in history in exchange for the two states, as the ‘Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement’ was settled. The trade by which both have benefited was estimated to be worth USD 20 billion as of early 2024. India's economy is developing, whereas Japan's is advanced. Furthermore, Japan has contributed significantly to India's development in other areas, such as transportation, power, and the environment.¹⁸ Over the next ten years, Japan plans to invest ¥10 trillion (roughly \$68 billion) in India to strengthen its manufacturing, clean energy, infrastructure, and technology partnerships.¹⁹

CHALLENGES WITH THE DRAGON AND EAGLE

In implementing the ways to deal with China, which is somewhat mistrustful, India is not lagging behind. Both nations are powerful Asian nations with aspirations to rule the world and some serious competing interests. Since both China and India aspire to be significant world powers, there will be fierce competition between them. To find new partners and allies, India has recently been redefining its friendships. However, India is fortifying its ties with Japan and the Western superpower. Despite China's resistance, Japan was adamantly in favour of India joining ASEAN.

¹⁶ Dr Aleya Mousami Sultana, *INDIAN FOREIGN POLICIES AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD* (Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University, 2020)

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ Mohd Rizwan Alam, ‘THE INDO-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP: AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SCENARIO’ (2019) 23(3) *The Journal of International Issues* 102 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48531053>> accessed 07 September 2025

¹⁹ Harsh V Pant and Pratinashree Basu, ‘India-Japan ties — old partners, new priorities’ *The Hindu* (26 August 2025) <<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-japan-ties-old-partners-new-priorities/article69975928.ece>> accessed 06 September 2025

The year 2020 brought blood on the pages of the book which defined India and China relations, in name as the Galwan Valley confrontation, which ended up with a deadly clash, and deepened the territorial dispute between the two nations and along with it, unimaginable distrust and hostility. This event has left both nations more wary and defensive, fuelling a significant shift from cautious engagement to overt strategic rivalry.²⁰ Thus, the significant structural shifts in this region have resulted in closer ties between India and Japan.

Japan faces 15% tariffs from the USA, whereas India is fixed at 50%.²¹ Under Trump 2.0, India faces several challenges, particularly because of tariffs and unpredictable policy. These include increased trade restrictions affecting major sectors such as pharmaceuticals, steel, and agriculture that affect exports and persistent uncertainty in bilateral agreements that make diplomatic relations and economic planning more difficult. George W. Bush and Joe Biden attempted to turn their tense relationship into a pillar of Indo-Pacific strategy through technology sharing, defence cooperation, and strengthening interpersonal relationships. Trump 2.0 runs the risk of undoing this progress thus far. The trajectory of Quad (India, Australia, Japan, US) seems confusing, as the US partnership seems doubtful.²²

THE RISING SUN: 15TH INDIA-JAPAN ANNUAL SUMMIT JOINT STATEMENT

PM Modi scheduled this visit, that is the 15th Annual Summit, with Japanese PM Ishiba for two days. His next schedule was the SCO Summit at Tianjin. The last interaction between India and Japan was in 2022. In addition to the Joint Statement, there was a “2035 Vision Statement” that included eight areas of cooperation, including the transition to green technologies, mobility, and economic security.²³ To address the labour problem with an ageing population and capitalise on the large population of India, the two leaders went beyond capital flows to promote a generational people-to-people exchange program that aimed to place 500,000 Indian workers

²⁰ Dr Ashok Sharma, ‘Galwan valley clash unmask China’s geopolitical intent and India’s delusion with China’ *The Times of India* (26 September 2020) <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/ashoks-statecraft/galwan-valley-clash-unmasks-chinas-geopolitical-intent-and-indias-delusion-with-china/>> accessed 07 September 2025

²¹ Rupakjyoti Borah, ‘Why the Recent Modi Visit to Japan is Significant’ *Japan Forward* (03 September 2025) <<https://japan-forward.com/why-the-recent-modi-visit-to-japan-is-significant/>> accessed 07 September 2025

²² Pant (n 19)

²³ ‘Renewed focus: On India-Japan ties’ *The Hindu* (01 September 2025) <<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/renewed-focus-on-india-japan-ties/article69996812.ece>> accessed 07 September 2025

and students in Japan over five years.²⁴ PM Modi's visit to Tokyo shows his intention and strategy against both China and the United States. There is also a political aspect to this visit. Being friends with India, Japan claims the idea has advantages in future. Mr Modi visited China for the SCO summit, also called the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, following the Tokyo meeting. The SCO Summit shows some indications of stabilisation as the engagement in direct flights, trade benefits, and visa relaxations can be seen. The transfer of cutting-edge Japanese technology of the high-speed Shinkansen bullet train to India shows further positives of this friendship. In terms of strategy, the meeting reaffirmed both countries' dedication to maintaining a peaceful, rules-based Indo-Pacific and to the Quad grouping. The trip to Tokyo demonstrates India's consistent strategic intent to maintain open lines of communication with Beijing, be ready to deal with the unpredictable U.S., and strengthen long-term alliances with regional powers that share its values. A visit involves identifying the location of India's most reliable ballast.

CONCLUSION

The India-Japan friendship has developed over time beyond historical and cultural ties to become a multifaceted partnership that includes regional development initiatives, economic growth, and security cooperation. With the help of shared democratic ideals and similar goals for a stable Indo-Pacific region, these two countries have become closer because of expanding geopolitical problems. PM Modi went to Tokyo in August 2025, exemplifying this deepening partnership, bringing renewed commitments on joint infrastructure projects, clean energy cooperation, and defence ties. The most fascinating part of India's foreign policy was highlighted by the visit: adaptability without sacrificing strategic focus. PM of India stated at the Japan-India Economic Forum, "In the end, I would like to say this - India and Japan's partnership is strategic and smart, powered by economic logic, we have turned shared interests into shared prosperity. India is the springboard for Japanese businesses to the Global South. Together, we will shape the Asian Century for stability, growth, and prosperity."²⁵

²⁴ Pratinashree Basu, 'India's High-Speed Partnership with Japan' (*Observer Research Foundation*, 03 September 2025) <<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-s-high-speed-partnership-with-japan>> accessed 07 September 2025

²⁵ Borah (n 21)