

Japan-India at 70: The Early Origins of a Relationship that Defines Asia's Future

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Abstract

This paper tracks the trajectory of Japan's relations with India from the time when the latter remained peripheral as far as Tokyo's postwar "Asia vision" was concerned. From being part of the "other Asia" for Japan, India has come a long way in figuring more prominently in Japanese foreign policy thinking, formulation, and posture, be it economic, political, or strategic. This paper chronicles the journey of Indo-Japan ties since their nascent beginnings in history and outlines the conceptual underpinnings of this equation as *political realism* which prioritizes national interest and security. India's presence in Japan's economic diplomacy and technological aid and assistance schematic capitalizes on strategic necessities as the sub-continent exhibits its competitive and conflictual sides correspondingly, especially in terms of the struggle for regional significance and power. In the past 70 years, Tokyo's relationship with New Delhi has traveled a distance whereby it is no longer possible to separate economics from politics (*seikei bunri*). Today, Japan's comprehensive security (*sogo anzen hoshō*) strategy seeks to revolve more acutely around active politico-diplomatic involvement, for which its policy interests and approaches, traditionally limited to East Asia and Southeast Asia prior to the Cold War, have increasingly shifted towards the Indian Ocean region, of which India remains the nucleus.

The year 2022 is momentous for Indo-Japanese relations as the two countries mark the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations. Indeed, it has been a seven-decade long journey of significant milestones and shared visions for the future. The foundation of the contemporary Indo-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership was laid by Japanese PM Yoshiro Mori when he visited India in 2000 and established the Global Partnership in the 21st Century with Indian PM Atal Behari Vajpayee. Subsequently, Vajpayee's successor Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to Japan in 2006, during which the India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership was inked. The Indo-Japanese relationship remains firmly rooted in history with common values being its mainspring for advancing shared strategic objectives and progress for the benefit of the entire Indo-Pacific region.

The Historical Connect and Context of Japan's Ties with India

When India declared its independence from British colonial rule and governance in August 1947, Japan was among the first nations to recognize India's sovereignty. India, on its part, declined attending the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951, arguing against the limitations being placed on Japan's sovereignty. New Delhi also pointed out that the United States was failing to give due recognition to the wishes of the Japanese people. Instead, India chose to enter a bilateral peace treaty with Japan in 1952, as part of which the former waived all reparation claims against

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Japan. Moreover, India also became among the first Asian nations to establish diplomatic ties with Tokyo in 1952.

It was in that same decade that Japanese PM Nobusuke Kishi visited India in 1957. Kishi, who served in office from January 1957 to July 1960, became the first-ever Japanese PM to visit New Delhi and it was following this visit that he launched Japan's first postwar overseas Official Development Assistance (ODA) to India with the grant of international yen loans that Tokyo began providing in 1958. Japan also began providing loans to India in 1958, the first Japanese yen loan aid extended by the Japanese government. While development assistance and aid ideally should be separated from foreign policy objectives, the former tends to focus on the security concerns of developed nations in the politically fragile regions where aid is to be granted. Specifically, the geostrategic importance and vulnerabilities of South Asia make it almost impossible for a donor country to keep politics out of its development aid agenda to further the politico-diplomatic goals of the donor, along with ensuring the developmental objectives of recipient nations.¹

Since then, Japan has gone on to become India's largest bilateral lender and largest humanitarian assistance provider, both directly and indirectly, through multilateral agencies.² The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)—the primary governmental agency that coordinates and delivers the bulk of Japan's ODA to developing countries—views the stability and development of India and South Asia as critical since it is a strategic region linking ASEAN with the Middle East and Africa. Developing economic foundations and improving connectivity, especially in India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, in line with relevant intergovernmental joint statements, JICA is implementing programs and projects that contribute to developing transport infrastructure (railways, roads, and ports) that are essential elements for sustainable regional growth.

In a display of decades-old personal ties with India, when Japan's longest-serving prime minister Shinzo Abe visited India in 2017, he recalled his family's links with India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. "My grandfather, Prime Minister Kishi, loved India. He was introduced personally by Prime Minister Nehru to the Indian people. Like my grandfather, I also hope to have strong ties with the Indian people." Abe said while addressing an audience as large as the one that greeted his grandfather. During Prime Minister Kishi's 1957 visit to India, PM Nehru introduced his guest in a public rally saying, "This is the prime minister of Japan, a country I hold in greatest esteem."³ "My grandfather visited India in the 1950s and, as you know, we were [then] still recovering from the defeat in the war," said Abe, indicating that Nehru's gesture had created a personal connect between the two prime ministers of postwar India and Japan. Earlier as well, Abe recalled during his 2011 visit, "As a young boy seated on his knee, I would hear grandfather telling me that PM Nehru introduced him to the biggest audience he had ever seen in his lifetime—that of a hundred thousand people."⁴

The South Asian sub-continent remained peripheral as far as Japan's postwar "Asia vision"

¹ For details on the subject see, A. Estache, "Emerging Infrastructure Policy Issues in Developing Countries: A Survey of the Recent Economic Literature," *Background Paper*, Meeting of the POVNET Infrastructure Working Group, October 2004; also see, S. Jones, "Contribution of Infrastructure to Growth and Poverty Reduction in East Asia and the Pacific," *Background Paper*, Oxford Policy Management, October 2004; and see, Stephen Jones, "Infrastructure Challenges in East and South Asia," *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 3, May 2006, Institute of Development Studies, p. 29.

² Sunil Chacko, "Japanese Investment to India: Possibilities and Constraints," *The Sunday Guardian*, May 2, 2020.

³ "Shinzo Abe recalls grandfather's ties with Nehru," *The Hindu*, September 15, 2017, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/abe-recalls-grandfathers-ties-with-nehru/article19685815.ece>

⁴ *Ibid.*

was concerned, especially in comparison to its far profounder engagement with East Asia and Southeast Asia. During that period, South Asia professedly was the “other Asia” for Japan. In Japan’s foreign policy strategy after World War II, Southeast Asia was considered to include South Asia. The mid-1960s marked the beginning of an era in which South Asia inclusive of India was omitted from what Japan considered as Asia.⁵ Besides, India’s pursuit of an insular economic system during that period was much in contrast to Japan’s open market economy, which stymied the development of close bilateral economic ties. A systemic dissection of the Asian continent into its many sub-regions revealed that Japan’s presence and influence in South Asia, be it economic, political, or strategic, came nowhere close to the effect it wielded in the other sub-regions mentioned above. Despite its dense population of 1.97 billion, which constitutes 24.9 percent of the globe’s humanity, South Asia’s widespread poverty, limited industrialization, and inward-looking economic policies placed limits on Japan’s economic and diplomatic penetration of the region.⁶ Furthermore, Japan’s limited influence in South Asia was also reflected in the inadequate coverage given the sub-region in books, special editions of academic journals, and magazines that dealt with Japan’s relations within Asia. For instance, a 1996 *Far Eastern Economic Review* article on the changing role of Japanese *sogo shosha* (Japan’s prominent companies involved in trade and business) in Asia did not even mention South Asia.⁷

The three areas which remained particularly underdeveloped in Japan-South Asia ties were aid, trade, and investment-commercial ties. South Asia and the South Pacific constituted two sub-regions where Japan was not involved in any striking conflicts, so both remained of lesser geo-economic status. Foreign policymaking in Japan leans principally towards responding to external developments and gravity. Since the start of the postwar period, Japan and South Asian nations were best defined as distantly estranged Asian neighbors with a conventional view that Japan came to act under external determinant factors (*gaiatsu*). It remained the case that *gaiatsu* did, at times, play a critical role in bringing key Japanese foreign policy initiatives to fruition.⁸ Tokyo’s postwar foreign policy between 1952 and 1973 followed a “separation of economics and politics” (*seikei bunri*) strategy, whereby it avoided involvement in almost all international issues. This phase abruptly ended in late 1973, however, with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries’ (OPEC’s) quadrupling of oil prices and the oil embargo by the Arab states. It was here when Japan arrived at comprehending that it was no longer possible to separate economics from politics, a consequence of which was its “comprehensive security” (*sogo anzen hosho*) strategy entailing active diplomatic involvement.⁹

Rising from the aftermath of 1945, Tokyo’s exponential growth miracle rendered it an economic superpower enabling it to master a neo-mercantilist strategy that lasted from 1973 until 1990. The period saw Japan’s foreign economic presence throughout the Third World (including South Asia) expand rapidly as Tokyo confronted a range of issues in its quest for diversified

⁵ Hiroshi Sato, “New Relationship between Japan and India in the Postwar Period,” in Toshio Yamazaki and Mitsuru Takahashi, eds., *A History of India-Japan Relations*, (Institute of Developing Economies, 1993) p. 165.

⁶ William R. Nester, *Japan and the Third World: Patterns, Power, Prospects*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992) pp. 271–274, as cited in, Monika Chansoria, “Japan’s Relations with South Asia,” in Sumit Ganguly and Frank O’Donnell (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of the International Relations of South Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2022).

⁷ “Tokyo’s Deal Makers,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 1, 1996, cited in Purnendra Jain, “Japan’s Relations with South Asia,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 37, no. 4, April 1997, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

⁸ Tanaka Akihiko, “Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy,” in Inoguchi Takashi and Purnendra Jain, eds., *Japanese Foreign Policy Today: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.

⁹ Nester, n. 6, p. 15, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

sources of markets, raw materials, cheap labor, and energy.¹⁰ The first signs of change in this situation emerged in the 1980s when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had visited Japan earlier in 1969, made another visit in 1982.¹¹ This was followed by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's visit to India in 1984. This was the first visit in 23 years by a Japanese PM since Hayato Ikeda had traveled to India in 1961. Nakasone's trip was regarded as the starting point for Japan-India relations and marked the revival of sustained political contacts.¹² Japan's policy toward the Third World became a foundational strategy through which Tokyo employed foreign aid as a diplomatic tool to spread its influence across the Third World, including South Asia. Interestingly, in February 1989 Thailand's Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan commented, "The world economic war is over; Japan has won."¹³ That notwithstanding, Japanese investments in South Asia were minuscule between 1979 and 1986, which could be gauged from the fact that it constituted less than 0.1 percent of its total foreign investments globally during the period, and less than 0.5 percent of its total investments in Asia.¹⁴ Japan's interest in South Asia [particularly India] grew very gradually post-1991 following several high-profile investment missions, including one by officials from the Federation of Economic Organizations (*Keidanren*) and a first-ever visit from Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1995.¹⁵

Japan-India Relations Post-Cold War

It was the end of the Cold War that provided the real impetus for a further development of Japan-India relations. Japan-India relations after World War II can be broadly divided chronologically into two phases: the first phase lasting until the end of the 1980s and the second phase beginning in the 1990s.¹⁶ The decade of the 1990s saw relations between the global economic power (Japan) and South Asia (particularly India) improve dramatically.¹⁷ The primary factors behind this were Japan's ambition to re-emerge as an international actor with former premier Yasuhiro Nakasone's repeated call for the "internationalization of Japan." His successor Noboru Takeshita, too, echoed the view that Japan needed to revive and widen the ambit of its ties with other nations, and not singularly deal with the West, which included the US. This approach seemingly stemmed from the friction that Japan was experiencing with Washington and Europe over matters pertaining to trade, tariffs, and investments that were seen as a serious challenge to Japan's economic growth. In its search for newer markets and partners, South Asia as a region emerged as a natural contender with its enormous size and potential.

A highly symbolic tour of South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) was undertaken by Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu in April-May 1990. This visit resulted in India developing a more positive understanding of Japan. Successive Japanese PMs from Nakasone to Toshiki Kaifu, who undertook a defining visit to South Asia in April 1990, reinforced the thought

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

¹¹ Takenori Horimoto, "Japan-India Rapprochement and Its Future Issues," cited in *Japan's Diplomacy Series, Toward the World's Third Great Power: India's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy*, (Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 2015).

¹² Sato, n. 5, p. 176.

¹³ Bruce Koppel and Michael Plummer, "Japan Ascendancy as a Foreign-Aid Power," *Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 11, 1989, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 271-274.

¹⁵ Jain, n. 7.

¹⁶ Horimoto, n. 11

¹⁷ Badar Alam Iqbal, "Indo-Japanese Economic Relations in the 1990s," *India Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 1/2 (January-June 1996); also see, Rajesh Mehta, "Indo-Japanese Trade: Recent Trends," *RIS Discussion Papers*, no. 12, May 2001, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

that “...peace and stability in Asia is a matter of great concern to Japan... the development of this region inhabited by... one fifth of all mankind, is in itself one of the major interests of the whole world...”¹⁸ Kaifu also made a keynote speech at the Indian Parliament covering Japan’s Asia policy¹⁹ and stressed that Japan would seek to deepen engagement on issues without limiting these to agenda items on bilateral or Asian issues alone.²⁰ It was for these reasons that, despite the fact that Japanese premiers had previously visited the region in 1957, 1961, and 1984, the visit of Prime Minister Kaifu to four South Asian countries in 1990, namely, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, became a landmark in the history of Japan–South Asia ties. By means of this visit, Japan sought to convey that, having achieved “Asian economic powerhouse” status, Tokyo’s policy interests and approach, traditionally limited to East and Southeast Asia, were increasingly making a shift towards South Asia.

Subsequently, in 1991, Japan provided an emergency foreign exchange loan to India, given that the Gulf crisis and other factors had caused India’s foreign exchange reserves to plummet to US \$1.1 billion.²¹ Of all the countries asked by India for emergency assistance, only Japan responded. Indian experts in Japan-India economic relations lauded Japan’s emergency support.²² The emergency assistance was also a manifestation of Japan’s proactive India policy. The speaker of Japan’s Lower House, Yoshio Sakurauchi (1990–1993), responded to Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ call for assistance to India with a view of placing greater priority on Asian diplomacy. Sakurauchi later served as chairman of the Japan-India Association for many years (1997–2002) and poured considerable effort into improving Japan-India relations based on India’s rising strategic importance. India’s objective, on the other hand, was to garner more direct investment from Japan as part of its economic liberalization policy launched in 1991. Alongside this economic liberalization, India also announced its “Look East” foreign policy initiative in 1993, and had high expectations from Japan vis-à-vis investment, trade, and technology.

The sub-continent was increasingly assuming greater significance for Japan’s economic and political interests, which stemmed from the fact that 70 percent of its oil imports from the Middle East came via sea crossing the Indian Ocean. It was thus in Japan’s interest that regional security and stability be maintained by means of providing economic/development assistance. By this time, Japan had already established its credentials in so far as investment and aid across the Third World was concerned. South Asia, for its part too, was seeking Japan’s technological and economic development assistance as well as its foreign aid, which was the largest in absolute dollar terms. Being a net creditor nation soon led to Japan becoming the leading single donor to the development of this region.²³ There came about a seeming convergence of Japan’s overall regional politico-economic strategies with South Asia per se in that the region (especially and most notably India) was pursuing an economic liberalization and deregulation agenda.

Further, India in particular (and South Asia as a whole) began deriving benefits from Japan’s economic and technological assistance and acknowledged the imperatives of its economic interdependence with Tokyo in view of the prevailing global economic realities. Economic

¹⁸ Speech by PM Toshiki Kaifu, *Japan and South Asia: In Pursuit of Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Prosperity* (Parliament House, New Delhi) April 30, 1990.

¹⁹ “Japan’s Kaifu Starts South Asian Visit,” *Los Angeles Times* Archives, April 29, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-04-29-mn-530-story.html>

²⁰ Speech by Kaifu, n. 18.

²¹ Makoto Kojima, “An Analysis of the Indian Economy,” *KOMEI*, May 1993, pp. 199–200.

²² Srabani Roy Choudhury, “India-Japan Economic Partnership: Scope and Prospect,” in Takenori Horimoto and Lalima Varma, eds., *India-Japan Relations in Emerging Asia*, (Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2013) p. 223.

²³ Saburo Okita, “Japan’s Quiet Strength,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 75, Summer 1989, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

assistance was an area where responsibility was²⁴ and continues to be shared widely by various ministries in Japan. The formation of the basic policy of ODA is made by the coordinated efforts of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and Economic Planning Agency (EPA). The influence of METI remains the most pronounced among these in terms of yen loans, with MOFA playing a decisive role in determining grant aid. MOFA divided Japan's aid policy regime into four²⁵ different stages: firstly, a system development period (1954–76); secondly, a system expansion period (1977–91); thirdly, a policy and philosophy enhancement period (1992–2002); and finally, a period for meeting the challenges of a new era (2003 onward). Notably, the ODA Charter of 1992 stipulates few principles for such political use.²⁶ In the case of South Asia, official aid has been a more dominating feature of relations with Japan, given that the latter remains a top aid donor to most of the sub-continent's nations.

Despite the gradually ascending and reassuring graph of regional ties illustrated above, the end of the decade of the 1990s witnessed a steep decline and acrimony in Japan's ties with India and Pakistan in particular following the nuclear tests conducted by both nations in May 1998 that led to the nuclearization of the sub-continent. Given Japan's commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, its censure came in the form of an immediate freeze on all grant aid and subsequently on new yen loans.²⁷ In addition, Japan became the first Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nation to impose a range of economic sanctions on both India and Pakistan.²⁸

Subsequently, the period 2000–2010 began witnessing a gradual thawing of ties between Japan and India, with the two having traveled a long distance together since the mid-1960s when South Asia (including India) was omitted from what Japan considered "Asia." This embrace seemingly mirrors the regional and global geopolitics and geostrategies at play that had been impacted by the strategic shifts in policy thinking and approaches occurring within Asia. Japan and India by now shared similar perceptions of the evolving environment in the region and the world at large; recognized their common commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law for promoting stability and development in Asia and beyond; acknowledged their common interest in the safety of sea lines of communications; committed to jointly fight against terrorism and recognized each other's counter-terrorism efforts; and sought to establish a "Strategic and Global Partnership" driven by converging long-term political, economic and strategic interests, aspirations and concerns.²⁹

Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Indo-Japanese Dynamics

India's evolution as a playing field in the Asian geostrategic landscape has transited multiple phases. Beginning essentially as a reluctant player who achieved independence from many decades of British colonial rule following the end of World War II, it emerged as a nation right in the middle of the Indian Ocean—a lifeline water body connecting the Far East with the Atlantic.

²⁴ Purnendra Jain, "Japan and South Asia: Between Cooperation and Confrontation," in Inoguchi Takashi et al., n. 8, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

²⁵ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs on ODA, available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/cooperation/anniv50/pamphlet/index.html>

²⁶ Tanaka Akihiko, n. 8, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

²⁷ "Nuclear Anxiety: The Allies; Japan Freezes Some Grants; Other Nations Seem Doubtful," *The New York Times*, May 14, 1998.

²⁸ Tanaka Akihiko, n. 8, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

²⁹ "Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan," Ministry of External Affairs, India, October 22, 2008.

This added to New Delhi's significance in a remodeled multipolar regional architecture with a blend of foreign policy approaches and strategies cited in the context of historical and current influences and motivations. The conceptual underpinnings of this finds roots in realism (*political realism* to be more precise) that prioritizes national interest and security. The notion is often tantamount with power politics to a large extent, including extended variables such as the drive for regional status, ambitions, and applied strategies including economic statecraft.³⁰ In the realist paradigm, security is primarily based on the principle of balance of power, as state-centric approaches are placed in the traditional realist framework of security that essentially center around the concept of power. India's, and for that matter South Asia's, political realism exhibits its competitive and conflictual sides equally, especially in terms of the struggle for regional significance and power.³¹

While great powers often produce theories of international relations (IR), in the case of Japan and from a Japanese perspective, being embedded in a global governance system governed by the US has inhibited theoretical advancement.³² This, combined with the relatively strong tradition of descriptive work, has tended to discourage the development of a Japanese IR theory.³³ For Japan, its style and form of integration holds three distinctive features that have developed step by step on a domestic, regional, and global scale. Japan's approach to IR theories, among other planes, needs to be identified and understood through the prism of *identity* as a key concept.

Nishida Kitaro has attempted to address the issue of Japanese identity in IR as Japan juggles to fit in a space that lies somewhere between the East and the West. Nishida as an innate constructivist makes identity the thrust of his philosophy.³⁴ The constructivist analysis of IR states that the notion of identity is ideational, shaped by complex factors such as history, way of life, values, and interests. This seems to be particularly useful for analysis in East Asia as it affects policy decisions, particularly in the case study of Japan. The latter seeks to approach regional politics and statecraft through regional economic integration. When combined with sustainable development, this places regional integration theories higher than state sovereignty as economist Hirano Yoshitaro has argued.³⁵ There are two competing ideological factors at work in Japan's approach to the regional economic integration theory. The first is the desire for historical rapprochement with Japan's neighbors in Asia based on the postwar Franco-German model. The other factor is a new nationalism in Japan, designated as the desire for greater "assertiveness" in foreign (especially Asian) affairs. This includes the desire for a stronger Asian role in world affairs (if not Japanese dominance of that role). In the short term, Asian economic

³⁰ Roger D. Spegele, *Political Realism in International Theory*, (Victoria: Cambridge University Press, 1996); for related reading on the subject see, R. Harrison Wagner, *War and the State: The Theory of International Politics*, (The University of Michigan Press, 2007), (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

³¹ The theoretical roots of South Asia as a sub-region in terms of its strategic thinking and orientation can be traced back in history to the end of fourth century BCE, when the Indian treatise *Arthashastra* (meaning the "Science of Material Gain" or the "Science of Polity")—a voluminous seminal masterpiece written in Sanskrit, delineating theories of statecraft, diplomacy, strategy, and prerequisites of politics and power—was penned by Kautilya. *Arthashastra* became a trailblazing document that contains a realist vision of politics. It is considered unique and defining in Indian literature (and erstwhile united South Asia) owing to the forthright advocacy of its cardinal virtue, *realpolitik*.

³² Inoguchi Takashi, "Why are there no non-Western theories of international relations? The case of Japan," in Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Kitaro Nishida, *Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness: Three Philosophical Essays*, (International Philosophical Research Association of Japan, and East-West Center Press, Honolulu, 1958).

³⁵ Inoguchi Takashi, n. 32.

integration appears to have served both ideologies.³⁶ It required Asian neighbors to put their past relationships with Japan behind them in significant ways, it reoriented Japanese policy initiatives towards Asia (away from the United States), and finally it placed Japan in the position of being a vital player in the region.³⁷

The classical theories on regionalism have focused on regional integration processes explained via geostrategic rationality, realism, and economic interdependence, and through traditional material factors such as security, economic flows, and geostrategic choices.³⁸ Substantively, Japan's international relations have evolved to a stage of developing its own Japan-centric world order, where Japan was envisaged as part of Asia but somewhat separate from Asia.³⁹ Based on these concepts and theories, wherein identity, norms, and interaction of personalities remain vital components, the evolving equation and geostrategic dynamics between Japan and India were evaluated, amidst contesting systemic conditions and states' priorities, to shape a future geopolitical and economic order of Asia that could well be a new prospective dawn of an alternative regional Asian dynamic.

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Framework: Influence of the 1655 Text "Majma-ul-Bahrain" (Confluence of the Two Seas)

Originally a geographic concept comprising the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean that shaped linkages between the United States and East Asia, a free and open Indo-Pacific maritime zone has evolved into a geostrategic concept and strategy. When stretched beyond the Indian Ocean, it paved the way for what more commonly came to be known by the new framework of the "Indo-Pacific". At its heart, a strategic system can be understood as a set of geopolitical power relationships among nations where major changes in one part of the system affect what happens in the other parts.⁴⁰

The US policy pronouncements of "pivot" and later "rebalance" in Asia were almost concurrently followed by PM Shinzo Abe's proposed Indo-Pacific concept and strategic framework in 2012. When Abe penned his book *Utsukushii kuni e* (Towards a Beautiful Country) in 2006, he publicly advocated the concept of a "broader Asia" consisting of nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Abe appeared to have anticipated Asia's geostrategic future exclusively through the prism of political realism, and rightly so.⁴¹ The concept of a "broader Asia" appears to have transcended geographical boundaries, with the Pacific and Indian Oceans' mergence becoming far more pronounced and evident than ever. To catch up with the reality of broader Asia, the Abe administration rehabilitated its focus on South Asia in general, and India in particular, within the ambit of Japan's *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy* launched and pushed during the second tenure of the Abe administration in December 2012. Abe's bid to forge this vision, in fact, began during his first term as Japan's PM, when he addressed the Indian Parliament in August 2007.

³⁶ Adam S. Posen, "Japan's Distraction by Regional Economic Integration," State Department INR Roundtable on Northeast Asian Regional Economic Integration, Peterson Institute for International Economics, June 2002.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sergio Caballero Santos, "Regional Integration Theories: The Suitability of a Constructivist Approach," Paper 383, *Session on Globalization and Governance*, IPSA-Chile, July 2009.

³⁹ Inoguchi Takashi in Buzan, et al., n. 32, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

⁴⁰ Rory Medcalf, "The Evolving Security Order in the Indo-Pacific," in David Brewster, ed., *Indo-Pacific Maritime Security: Challenges and Cooperation*, (National Security College, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, July 2016); also see, Rory Medcalf, "The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name?" *The American Interest*, vol. 9, no. 2, Nov/Dec 2013, pp. 58–66.

⁴¹ Monika Chansoria, "Modi-Abe Personality Impacts Foreign Policy," *The Sunday Guardian*, September 20, 2014.

During this visit, he famously cited and quoted *Majma-ul-Bahrain (Confluence of the Two Seas)* published in 1655), a work authored by Mughal prince Dara Shikoh. This book is said to have been the inspiration, foundation, and title of Abe's vision to nurture an open and transparent Indo-Pacific maritime zone as part of a broader Asia.⁴²

Analyzing these past decades of Asian politics and policies brings to the fore certain momentous developments that have redefined Asian geopolitics, expectedly impacting South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). By 2030, Asia will contribute most of the global growth,⁴³ thus underscoring its importance and that of the Indo-Pacific. These security realities have driven Japan's policies and approaches on operating in the IOR as they underwent a major transformation. The first signal of this was the lifting of the ban on overseas deployments to enable its Self-Defense Forces to dispatch armed troops to Iraq in 1992.⁴⁴ From that period, the transition and evolution has reached a point when today, notably, nearly 40 percent of all Japan's Self-Defense Forces' missions have occurred in the IOR, and nearly half of Japanese ODA goes to IOR countries.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Japan's engagement with India symbolizes acknowledgment of the economic and strategic dependence of developments across a much wider maritime region, at the heart of which lies the Indian Ocean. The Indo-Pacific concept has been embraced, with many nations enunciating their strategies and outlook for the region, as witnessed by the creation of partnerships and mechanisms as the opportunities, concerns, and stakes of these nations intersect with those of southern Asia.⁴⁶

Since the time India along with other sub-regions came up on Japan's foreign policy radar, it started becoming increasingly clear that Tokyo's "Third World policy" would serve as a vital component of its overall comprehensive security thinking and approach.⁴⁷ Despite the significance of Japanese aid to India and South Asia, the rationales and results of development cooperation activities that Japan has executed in the region remain underexplored.⁴⁸ It would further be reasonable to argue that, in formulating its foreign policy for India, Japan will likely position itself in favor of closely engaging with India to achieve strategic deliverables. There is a concurrence of thought in Tokyo that, in a world where it is no longer possible to separate economics from politics (*seikei bunri*), Japan's new comprehensive security (*sogo anzen hosho*) strategy should revolve more acutely around active politico-diplomatic involvement. Tokyo's policy interests and approach, traditionally limited to East Asia and Southeast Asia prior to the Cold War, have increasingly shifted towards the Indian Ocean region, with India still at its nucleus. Completing 70 years of bilateral relations, the India-Japan *Special Strategic and Global Partnership* remains

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Praneeth Yendamuri and Zara Ingilizian, "In 2020 Asia Will Have the World's Largest GDP. Here's What That Means," *World Economic Forum*, December 20, 2019, available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/12/asia-economic-growth/>

⁴⁴ John Hartle, "The Normalization of Japanese Policy in the Indian Ocean Region," *Policy Report*, Analysis and Policy Observatory, Australia's Global Interests, June 21, 2018, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

⁴⁵ Peter Wyckoff, "Making Waves: Japan and the Indian Ocean Region," *Commentary*, The Stimson Center, May 1, 2017.

⁴⁶ For further reference and reading on this view, see remarks by V. Muraleedharan, Minister of State for External Affairs, International Workshop on "Quad in the Indo-Pacific," MEA, New Delhi, April 29, 2021.

⁴⁷ Nester, n. 6, p. 279, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

⁴⁸ Sojin Shin, "Japan's Foreign Aid to South Asia: Addressing a Strategic Need," NUS-ISAS *Working Paper*, no. 318, March 8, 2019, (as cited in Chansoria, n. 6.)

firmly rooted in history with common values being the mainspring for advancing shared strategic objectives and progress for the benefit of the entire Indo-Pacific region.