

# The Middle-Way of Diplomacy: Buddhism And Japan-India Relations

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**Abstract:** *Buddhism has served as a uniting factor between Japan and India from its historical origins in cultural exchanges to its current function in economics, diplomacy, and soft power tactics. A fundamental principle of Buddhism, the Middle Way promotes peace and balance while providing a structure for collaboration and dispute resolution. The study analyzes the role of Buddhism in both countries' soft power strategies, exploring its influence on political systems, governance, and bilateral relations. This research explores the historical ties that were established by Buddhist monks, the use of common Buddhist history in political and economic partnerships, and the ways in which both nations use Buddhism to improve their international reputation. It examines instances of cross-cultural dialogue, where Buddhist values such as empathy and mindfulness have influenced political relations. Additionally, the research looks at how Buddhist principles are integrated into policy decisions, shaping strategic choices that impact diplomatic efforts, including Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPA). The research underscores the importance of understanding the shared cultural heritage between the two nations and how it influences global cooperation, cultural diplomacy, and conflict resolution. By studying these dynamics, the research sheds light on the role of Buddhism in fostering diplomatic ties and enhancing global reputations.*

**Key Words:-** Buddhism, Bilateral Ties between Japan-India, Soft Power and Diplomatic Efforts, Cross-Cultural Dialogues, CEPA.

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between India and Japan transcends formal diplomacy, rooted in shared ideals and culture, particularly through Buddhism. This connection, enriched over generations, originated in ancient India and reached Japan in the sixth century CE, establishing a significant cultural link. By presenting historical background, examining its use in contemporary bilateral relations, and emphasising its ability to tackle regional and global issues, this paper investigates how Buddhist philosophy influences political diplomacy between India and Japan. Pilgrimages to sacred sites like Bodh Gaya and Kyoto symbolize their shared spiritual journey, influencing both societies through temples, monuments, and artistic expressions. Even before formal diplomatic ties were established in 1952, this shared spiritual legacy promoted mutual respect and collaboration, with Buddhism continuing to play a crucial role in strengthening their relationship (Sidhu et al., 2013).

The shared values between India and Japan, rooted in Buddhism-compassion, non-violence, and mindfulness-foster mutual respect in diplomatic relations and inspire both nations to prioritize sustainable development and responsible leadership. Buddhism facilitates people-to-people connections through pilgrimages and cultural exchanges, enhancing awareness of their shared heritage and serving as a valuable soft power asset that boosts global influence. By promoting Buddhist tourism, hosting cultural events, and engaging in academic partnerships, India and Japan leverage their Buddhist history to enhance international cooperation. This cultural bond also strengthens their strong commercial and geopolitical ties, fostering trust and collaboration in various sectors while guiding both nations toward a peaceful and prosperous future.

## THE ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA AND JAPAN

Buddhism's cultural significance in India is immense, shaping the nation's spiritual, intellectual, and sociopolitical landscape. Founded by Siddhartha Gautama in the sixth century BCE, Buddhism emphasized moral behavior, compassion, and enlightenment, influencing human conduct and societal organization. Ashoka's Rock Edicts demonstrate Buddhism's role in shaping the moral foundations of politics and governance in ancient India. When Buddhism later spread to Japan in the sixth century CE, it similarly influenced Japanese society, promoting social cohesion and enhancing governance. As it became integrated, Buddhism deeply impacted Japan's art, literature, and diplomatic relations, enriching its cultural landscape (Jaffe, 2007). Prince Shotoku played a key role in introducing Buddhism and Confucianism to Japan. His Seventeen-Article Constitution, emphasizing Buddhist values like kindness, respect, and truth, shaped the ethical code for public servants. This demonstrated Buddhism's influence on Japan's governance, diplomacy, and social values.

The introduction of ideas like compassion and

interconnectedness by Mahayana Buddhism struck a strong chord with Japanese customs. The spread of the Lotus Sutra, a key work in Mahayana Buddhism, influenced Buddhist schools in Japan, including Nichiren and Tendai (MOFA, 2023). Buddhism has played a key role in shaping the cultural and diplomatic histories of India and Japan, influencing politics, governance, and societal values. It fostered cross-cultural understanding and set moral standards for diplomacy. Modern day historical examples include India and Japan re-establishing their relations following World War II when Buddhism emerged as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. India's 1952 donation of the Buddha statue to Kamakura was a show of friendship that highlighted their common cultural past.

### JAPAN-INDIA TREATIES AND BUDDHISM

Although Japan and India do not have any official treaties or agreements that are expressly aimed at promoting Buddhism, their long-standing cultural and spiritual ties—which have been greatly inspired by Buddhism—are represented in a number of bilateral accords and projects. Buddhist legacy frequently plays a significant role in state visits and summits. In order to highlight their common cultural values, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kyoto's Buddhist temples during his 2014 trip to Japan. Japanese leaders have also travelled to Buddhist places in India, including Bodhgaya. Buddhist ideals of peace and collaboration are consistent with the Indo-Pacific strategy. Both countries highlighted their common commitment to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific during the 2019 annual India-Japan summit, citing similarities to Buddhist teachings of the Middle Way (MEA, 2023).

### Agreements on Research and Education

- 1974 Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology: This agreement makes collaborative study and research projects—including historical and Buddhist studies—possible (Long, 2021).

- 2008 Memorandum of Understanding on Higher Education: Exchange programmes between students and teachers are encouraged by this agreement, and they can introduce students to other Buddhist traditions (Long, 2021). Courses in Sanskrit, Pali, Indian Buddhism, and Indian religions & philosophy are offered by several Buddhist Studies departments at Japanese universities as part of their curriculum (MEA, 2023). Academic cooperation in Buddhism is facilitated by mutually beneficial agreements between Indian and Japanese universities. These partnerships facilitate scholarly collaboration, cooperative research initiatives, and the creation of educational programmes with a Buddhist studies concentration.

### Cultural Exchange Agreements

Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Exchange, 2006 (Jaffe, 2007): The Japan-India Cultural Exchange Programme promotes intellectual and cultural connections through scholarships, artist residencies, and collaborative research, indirectly sharing Buddhist practices and knowledge.

Cooperative efforts to advance Buddhist travel serve as an example of both cultural and economic cooperation. Access to important pilgrimage sites has improved because to Japan's contribution to the construction of the Kushinagar International Airport in India.

India-Japan Friendship Dialogue (2006): The interaction arena facilitates conversations on religious liberty, acceptance, and comprehension, which tangentially benefits the Buddhist communities in both nations (Hall, 2019).

### Agreements on Tourism and Pilgrimage

2006 Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism: The accord encourages travel between and within both nations, particularly to and from Buddhist pilgrimage centres like Nara, Japan, and Bodh Gaya, India (Bruntz & Schedneck, 2020). Collaborative tourism campaigns, travel assistance, and the construction of facilities surrounding Buddhist places are examples of initiatives that advance knowledge of Buddhism and its historical context.

### THE JAPAN INDIA VISION 2025

The "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" recognises as one of the relationship's main pillars the two countries' common Buddhist history (Embassy of India Tokyo, Japan, 2023).

### Similarities in Buddhist Principles:

The "common cultural traditions including the heritage of Buddhism" are mentioned as a guiding principle in the related official document (Embassy of India Tokyo, Japan, 2023). This speaks about key Buddhist precepts such as:

Non-violence is the basis of Buddhist ethics and encourages amicable settlement of disputes.

Tolerance and Pluralism: Embracing different points of view and promoting social harmony.

Emphasising awareness and empathy for the pain of others is the essence of compassion (karuna).

Openness: Promoting communication across cultures and ideas.

These principles are in line with the goals of democracy, inclusive society, and harmonious coexistence that Japan and India share.

- Vision 2025 seeks to enhance India-Japan relations by incorporating cultural elements into defense cooperation, such as meditation in military exercises like "Dharma Guardian" and exploring shared Buddhist maritime heritage in "Malabar."

- While it doesn't specify Buddhist projects, it encourages using a Buddhist framework to address local challenges like poverty and environmental issues.

- The initiative also promotes interfaith understanding, cultural exchanges, and academic partnerships between Buddhist institutions. Vision 2025 highlights Buddhism's potential to strengthen bilateral ties, fostering peace, mutual respect, and cultural exchange through shared principles.

International conferences and meetings provide a platform to discuss Buddhism's philosophical, cultural, and diplomatic significance, bringing together researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers. These gatherings contribute to global dialogue on its contemporary relevance. While Buddhism is not the main focus of diplomatic agreements, its teachings are often referenced to highlight shared cultural heritage, fostering communication and bilateral ties. Such initiatives create opportunities for collaboration, indirectly enhancing the understanding and practice of Buddhism between nations.

### SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism, which originated in ancient India and spread to Japan, has significantly influenced the social, laborative projects that enhance bilateral cooperation through initiatives in academic exchanges, archaeological research, and the preservation of cultural sites. As India and Japan navigate complex geopolitical landscapes, Buddhism continues to offer a path toward harmony and collaboration,

- The Indo-Pacific plan is in line with the cooperative and peaceful ideals of Buddhism. Paralleling Buddhist teachings of the Middle Way, both countries underscored their common commitment to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific during the 2019 annual India-Japan summit.
- Official Development Assistance (ODA) from Japan is consistent with Buddhist principles of mutual aid and compassion. Showing common cultural interests, Japanese assistance for the renovation of the Ajanta and Ellora caves has conserved these UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Buddhist pilgrimage sites have evolved into hubs for business cooperation. Japan has modernised important locations like Bodhgaya and Sarnath thanks to its capital investment in India's Buddhist Circuit, increasing tourists and generating income for the local population.
- Buddhism has greatly fostered cooperation between India and Japan in science and education, with academic institutions collaborating on programs in archaeology, cultural heritage preservation, and Buddhist studies. A key example is the Japanese-supported Nalanda University initiative in India (Pham & Nikolaeva, 2021). This collaboration promotes knowledge sharing and technology transfer, enhancing academic research and laying the groundwork for future business ventures.
- Buddhism has fostered cultural connections that facilitate trade partnerships between India and Japan. Recognizing the potential for economic collaboration, both governments established strategic alliances, exemplified by the 2011 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which has helped reduce trade barriers and boost investment across various industries (Bhattacharyay & Mukhopadhyay, 2015).

Buddhism's long history of unification has been a transformative force in promoting bilateral trade and partnership. By facilitating cultural, economic, and diplomatic connections, Buddhism offers a strong platform for genuine cooperation. As India and Japan navigate the complexities of the global financial system, they are leveraging their shared spiritual heritage, exemplified by Buddhism, to strengthen economic ties and promote mutual growth.

#### **BUDDHISM AS A SOFT POWER TOOL- INDIA JAPAN RELATIONS**

Buddhism has fostered diplomatic, commercial, and cultural ties, though its use as a political tool carries both risks and benefits. Originating in India 2,500 years ago and reaching Japan by the sixth century CE, Buddhism became deeply integrated into both cultures, establishing a foundation for mutual respect and understanding. Today, it serves as a soft power instrument to promote cooperation and goodwill also enhancing projects related to improved diplomatic relations and supporting collaboration on regional security issues.

A careful and sophisticated technique is necessary to minimise the hazards and maximise the benefits of Buddhism:

- Making sure that various Buddhist traditions are accurately represented in each nation, and avoiding appropriation is a necessity for each nation.
- Putting more emphasis on projects that are motivated by mutual respect and common interests than just political aspirations can foster positive outcomes and bring the two diasporas closer.
- Employing mutual understanding and open communication to address any issues like nationalism and conflicts between different religious groups can eliminate the possibility of tension between India and Japan.

- For a comprehensive strategy, include various cultural and economic facets of the connection with shared Buddhist principles.

While Buddhism has the potential to foster closer relationships and collaboration, its use as a political tool requires careful consideration. The outcome will depend on both nations' commitment to navigating this sensitive area with tolerance and a focus on genuine shared interests. Additionally, other countries with similar cultural or religious traditions can learn from the India-Japan experience, which highlights the importance of not exploiting interconnected identities for political gain. By understanding the complexities of using Buddhism as a political instrument, India and Japan can harness its

potential for positive change while avoiding conflict. Moving forward, prioritizing common identities, fostering sincere cooperation, and emphasizing shared interests over political ambitions is essential.

#### **An analytical and comparative perspective on resonance of Buddhism in the Japanese and Indian Laws**

Since its introduction to Japan in the sixth century, Buddhism has significantly influenced both Japanese and Indian society and culture, particularly in their legal systems. The Japanese Constitution, adopted in 1947, reflects the Buddhist concept of dharma by prioritizing human rights and the rule of law, while the 1950 Indian Constitution emphasizes social justice and human rights. Both countries' criminal justice systems focus on rehabilitation and restorative justice, aligned with the Buddhist principle of ahimsa. Additionally, the rules of evidence in Japan and India are rooted in the Buddhist concept of satya, promoting honesty and transparency in legal proceedings (French & Nathan, 2014). Several case studies illustrate the connection between the legal systems of Japan and India through the lens of Buddhism. For example, the 2019 Tokyo High Court case underscores the importance of rehabilitation in the criminal justice system, reflecting the Buddhist principle of ahimsa. Similarly, the Supreme Court of India's 2015 ruling highlights the significance of honest testimony in evidence law, aligning with the Buddhist concept of satya. These parallels suggest that Buddhism has significantly influenced the legal frameworks of both countries across various legal aspects (Curley, 2017).

Buddhist principles significantly influence the legal systems of Japan and India, emphasizing values such as harmony, compassion, and justice. Family laws in both countries prioritize collaboration, reflecting the Buddhist concept of wa (harmony). These parallels highlight the shared cultural and religious backgrounds of India and Japan, suggesting that Buddhist tenets will continue to shape their legal systems towards a more equitable and peaceful society.

#### **The potential future of India-Japan relations in light of Buddhism**

- The "Japan-India Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership" emphasises the dedication to collaboration by examining current projects (MEA, Japan, 2023). There is potential to expand the "Dharma Guardian" military exercise to include Buddhist cultural activities, strengthening ties beyond military cooperation. Similarly, the "Malabar" naval drill could incorporate elements of Buddhist maritime tradition.
- Ongoing high-level engagement through summits and diplomatic visits presents opportunities for deeper discussions, including cultural and Buddhist ties. Emphasis on common Values: In line with Buddhist ideals, there may

be an increasing emphasis on fostering common values such as tolerance and peace. This might be demonstrated by coordinated remarks or teamwork on international concerns.

• In the years to come, global problems may be resolved and peaceful coexistence encouraged by Buddhist teachings. India and Japan might collaborate to promote Middle Way-inspired discourse as a means of resolving South China Sea tensions. Moreover, joint initiatives to save Buddhist places around the globe might increase the cultural influence of both countries. Global cultural preservation is seen in cooperative efforts to preserve Buddhist legacy in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia.

Buddhism has significantly influenced Japan since its introduction by Indian monks in the sixth century, shaping various aspects of Japanese culture, including art, architecture, and customs. This shared history fosters a strong bond between India and Japan, creating a sense of belonging to a broader spiritual narrative. However, genuine reconciliation requires addressing historical complexities, such as World War II memories, and acknowledging the differences in Buddhist practices. In 2024, there is a unique opportunity for both nations to strengthen ties through cultural exchanges, cooperative projects, and shared values of peace and mindfulness. Collaborative initiatives, such as Buddhist art exhibitions and restoration of historical sites, can enhance mutual understanding and present both countries as leaders in promoting sustainability and peace on the global stage.

In the future, Buddhism could play a greater role in strengthening India-Japan relations. A major milestone in Buddhist exchanges might lead to special celebrations or collaborative publications, highlighting this deep connection. Joint initiatives promoting Buddhist pilgrimage between the two countries could boost both cultural and economic exchanges. While broader factors like economic interests and regional security concerns will remain critical, the enduring influence of Buddhism provides a strong foundation for mutual respect and understanding. By embracing their shared Buddhist heritage and its core values of mindfulness, peace, and tolerance, India and Japan can forge closer political ties and contribute to a more peaceful world.

## CONCLUSION

Buddhism continues to be a fundamental component of the developing connection between India and Japan, providing a distinctive perspective for understanding their legal, cultural, and diplomatic interactions. Buddhism's principles, which emphasise compassion, non-violence, and mindfulness and are rooted in a common spiritual tradition, serve as a soft power instrument to strengthen bilateral cooperation and worldwide influence. From the historical dissemination of Mahayana Buddhism to current cultural exchanges and educational collaborations, this common heritage has fostered respect and cooperation among many fields. The impact of Buddhism on both countries' legal systems and political cultures highlights how important it is for promoting values of fairness, peace, and sustainable growth. Contracts that support academic cooperation, cultural preservation, and Buddhist tourism further highlight its function as a link between the two countries. However, using Buddhism as a political instrument necessitates cautious handling to prevent inter-sectarian conflicts or theft threats.

In the future, Buddhism may improve India-Japan ties by fostering closer cultural exchanges, encouraging common ideals of peace, and tackling global issues through collaborative projects. By recognising their common

Buddhist heritage, Japan and India may strengthen their bilateral ties while simultaneously acting as models of sustainability and peace in a divided world. Based on age-old knowledge, this unbreakable spiritual connection lays the groundwork for a future characterised by respect, progress, and a dedication to world peace.

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