



INDIA- JAPAN BILATERAL RELATIONS AND BEYOND

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: STUDENT VOICES AND ASPIRATIONS



A REPORT BY INDIA JAPAN LABORATORY (IJL), KEIO UNIVERSITY, JAPAN

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report is a part of Keio University's India-Japan Laboratory research initiatives and highlights student voices and aspirations to further strengthen India-Japan bilateral relations. As 2025 marks the 73rd anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two nations, the report begins with a historical overview of India-Japan ties and emphasises its growing importance for the future. The main section of the report synthesises perspectives from Keio University students, particularly those from the 2025 batch of the course 'Culture, Environment, and Technology of India'. It reflects how India is perceived in Japan today and identifies potential areas for cooperation to enhance future relations. The insights are drawn from two-page summaries submitted by students as part of their coursework. The findings from this report hope to offer valuable guidance for shaping India-Japan bilateral relations for the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seira Mary Cherian, born in 1999, hails from Kerala, popularly called "God's own country," a state in the southernmost part of India. Kerala is renowned for its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, which has had a profound influence on developing her character. She has a passion for dancing and sports and represented her school in various events. She has a bachelor's degree in Architecture from the College of Architecture Trivandrum, India. During her undergraduate studies, she developed a strong interest in climate studies and sustainability, which later deepened through an elective in disaster management. This experience reshaped her perspective on architecture and led her to focus her final dissertation on developing context-specific guidelines for temporary shelters for refugees in Kerala. Inspired by Japan's exemplary disaster resilience practices, Seira chose to pursue her master's degree at Keio University, Japan, where she studies under Professor Rajib Shaw, a renowned expert in disaster studies. Passionate about resilience, sustainability, and human-centred design, she aspires to work with international NGOs in the future, contributing to disaster management and fostering collaborations to support vulnerable communities worldwide.



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This report is developed based on the experiences derived from the coursework of Keio University, SFC, and a review of available literature. The complete list of referred sources is provided at the end of the report.

PREFACE

This is the 6th batch of the students who are undertaking the class 'Culture, Environment, and Technology of India.' The two-credit class started online in 2020 in the middle of pandemic. With the opening remarks from Hon Ambassador of India to Japan, we got deep insights from wide range of professionals, academics, development specialists, practitioners from both the countries. We gradually gained momentum in the course, and currently, it has more than 800 accumulated number of students who have taken this course over last three years.

Like every year, we provide assignments to the students, and this report is an analytical summary of the views of the students after the class.

Among many focuses of India Japan's bilateral relations, people to people connectivity is a key element. The recent "India - Japan Joint Vision for the Next Decade: Eight Directions to Steer the Special Strategic and Global Partnership" (30th of August 2025) stated the following:

"Strengthening exchanges of researchers and students through Sakura Science Exchange Program, the LOTUS Programme, HOPE meetings and the Inter-University Exchange Project by MEXT, Japan and supporting educational collaboration through the initiative of EDU-Port Japan."

I hope and believe that our this effort of the class is a small contribution to bring the young population of both countries together.

I hope the findings and observations of the report are useful.

Rajib Shaw
Professor and Director, India Japan Laboratory
Keio University, Fujisawa, Japan
1st of September 2025

1. INTRODUCTION TO INDIA-JAPAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

India and Japan have shared a relationship built on mutual respect and goodwill, free from any major historical conflict. Formal diplomatic ties were established on April 28, 1952, with the signing of the Treaty of Peace, making India one of the first nations to sign a peace agreement with Japan after World War II. In the years that followed, India supported Japan's postwar recovery through iron ore exports, while Japan provided its first yen loan to India in 1958.

In recent decades, India has risen to become one of the world's top five economies, recognised for its thriving IT sector, entrepreneurial talent, and influential film industry. Close cooperation between Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi, along with platforms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), has further strengthened bilateral ties. The "Japan and India Vision 2025" has since laid the foundation for long-term strategic and economic collaboration, with Japan emerging as India's fourth-largest investor.

While India's growing economy is driven by its youthful population and rapid technological progress, Japan faces the challenge of an ageing and shrinking workforce. As the two countries celebrated 70 years of diplomatic relations in 2022, the need for greater mutual understanding became clear. India is often viewed in Japan as an unfamiliar and exotic nation, despite its reputation for producing highly skilled professionals. Strengthening cultural and educational exchanges will be essential for deepening this partnership in the years ahead.

During the 15th India–Japan Annual Summit in Tokyo on August 29th to 30th, 2025, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba unveiled an ambitious "India–Japan Joint Vision for the Next Decade." This vision is based on eight strategic pillars, including economic security, mobility, technology, health, and people-to-people ties. The summit was a historic step up in collaboration between the two countries, with Japan promising to invest ¥10 trillion (about US \$68 billion) in India over the next decade. The two leaders also announced a Human Resource Exchange Plan that aims to exchange 500,000 people over five years, including 50,000 skilled workers, as well as other important projects, including the Economic Security Initiative, the Digital Partnership 2.0, and the AI Cooperation Initiative. Defence and security cooperation were also reinvigorated through a renewed Joint Declaration, which covered critical minerals, lunar exploration (Chandrayaan-5), clean hydrogen, and sustainable fuels, reinforcing the countries' shared commitment to a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific, committed to democratic values.

For a more detailed historical timeline, you can refer to the previous reports of India-Japan Bilateral Relations and Beyond by India Japan Laboratory, Keio University, Japan.

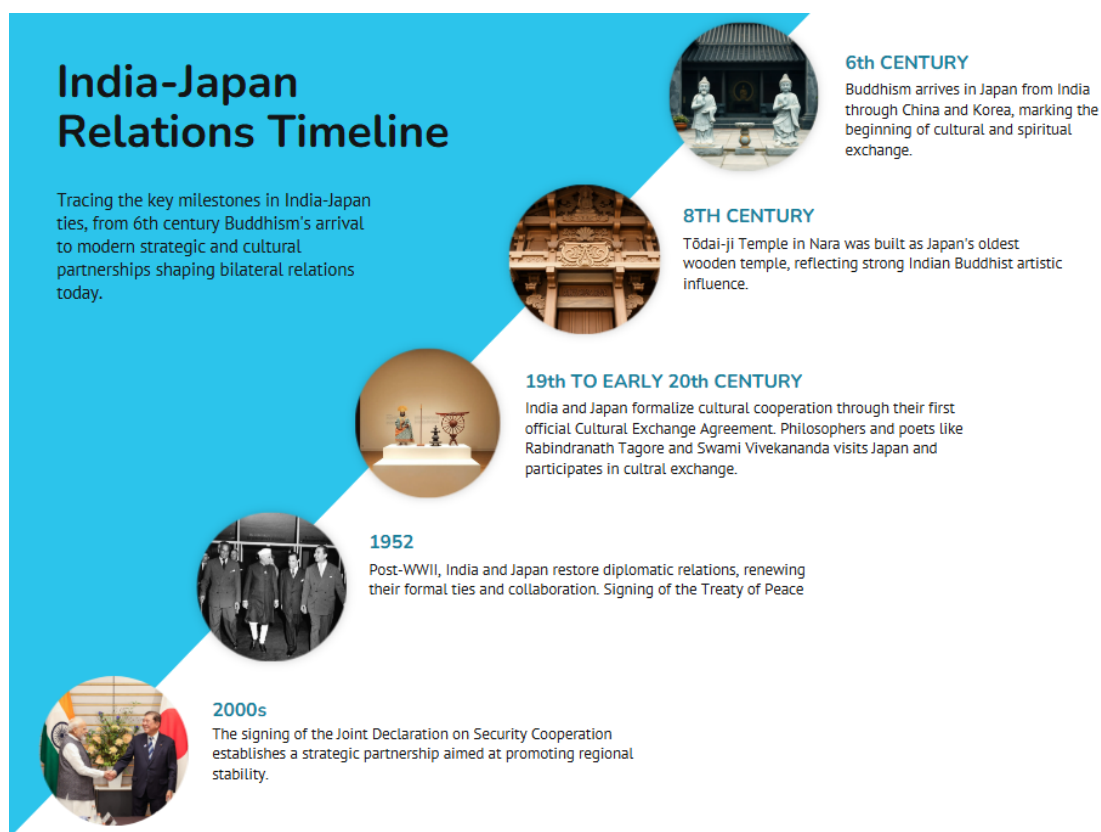


Fig 1. India-Japan Relations Timeline Overview

2. ABOUT THE COURSE ‘CULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY OF INDIA’

In the Spring Semester of 2020, Keio University’s Shonan Fujisawa Campus launched a distinctive course titled “*Culture, Environment, and Technology of India*”, organised primarily by the India Japan Laboratory. The course is designed to broaden students’ understanding of India’s cultural diversity while exploring avenues for future India–Japan collaboration. As the first program of its kind, it adopts an interdisciplinary approach covering three key areas:

1. Indian culture, history, art, religion, and languages
2. Development, environmental issues, and economic growth strategies
3. Science, technology, and innovation

The curriculum combines lectures by Keio faculty with presentations from distinguished guest speakers, offering students a holistic perspective on India. It further provides opportunities to

interact directly with experts from leading Indian and Japanese institutions, enriching the learning experience with real-world insights. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the course has been held online, enabling active participation from guest speakers based in India and abroad. In the class of 2025, a total of 14 lectures were conducted through online mode, the contents of which are briefly described below.

1. Orientation and pitch by private sector companies like TechMahindra, Fidel Technology, atDose Co.Ltd, and WIPRO.
2. India-Japan evolving relations with historical insights
3. India-Japan economic innovations and industry collaborations like METI, JETRO
4. India japan policy perspectives
5. Vivekananda and India Japan Collection
6. RAKUTEN and Indian innovation
7. Development challenges faced in India
8. International development projects and human resource development by PADECO
9. India-Japan 'Sound Culture' Collaboration
10. Yoga and meditation
11. Environment, disaster and climate change
12. Astrology and Astronomy,
13. India under PM Modi's leadership
14. India and Japan's business and innovation potentials.

Through this course, students were able to identify gaps and suggest improvements in India-Japan relations. Their post-course assignments highlighted their key takeaways from the course and their suggestion on potential collaborations for the future. This report summarises these learnings for future relations.

About the Students

The student body at Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus (SFC) is known for its diversity, representing multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In 2025, this particular course, however, had around 80% of the participants who were Japanese. Their familiarity with India and level of interaction with Indian people varied widely, yet most students demonstrated a genuine interest in deepening their understanding of the country. Many acknowledged that the class had expanded their knowledge beyond what they already knew about Hinduism, Yoga, Ayurveda, and Bollywood cinema. Students who actively practice yoga emphasised its positive influence on mindfulness and inner peace.

Some participants, despite having had little or no prior engagement with Indian people, expressed curiosity about India's success in the information technology sector, recognising the global reputation of Indian professionals in IT and engineering. Indian cuisine also served as an accessible

curious about how India's demographic advantage and expanding digital economy contribute to its rising influence in global markets.

- **An emerging power that shares the same values as Japan**

Students increasingly view India as an emerging power that shares many of the same democratic and cultural values as Japan, including respect for peace, cooperation, and inclusivity. They note that both countries balance rapid modernisation with a strong commitment to preserving their rich traditions, cultural heritage, and social norms. This combination of progress and respect for history, along with shared goals of stability in the Indo-Pacific region and advancement in technology, innovation, and sustainable growth, strengthens the perception of India as not only a rising economy but also a trusted partner for Japan in shaping global and regional affairs.

- **Skilled workforce that is expanding globally**

Japanese students often view Indians as highly capable in education and language skills, which enable them to succeed abroad. They recognise India's strong emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, as well as proficiency in English, which helps Indian students communicate effectively in international environments. This combination of technical knowledge, critical thinking, and language ability is seen as a key factor that allows Indian students to excel in global academic and professional settings, earning respect from peers and institutions worldwide.

- **Strong in Culture**

Japanese students often admire Indian culture for its vibrancy, diversity, and rich traditions. Bollywood, in particular, has gained popularity, with films like *RRR* making a strong impression due to their energetic storytelling, music, and dance sequences, which resonate with Japanese audiences. Beyond cinema, Japanese students also enjoy Indian cuisine, especially dishes like curry, which is appreciated for its unique flavours and variety. Curry has been an integral part of Japanese cuisine, but they find it interesting how the Japanese and Indian curries differ in taste and texture.

4. THE OUTCOME OF THE CLASS

This course, popularly called the India Class, offered a unique and enriching educational experience for students by exposing them to a wide array of topics ranging from culture and technology to business and diplomacy. It fosters global awareness, enhances personal growth, and encourages students to think critically about contemporary issues, especially in the context of India-Japan relations. Here are the detailed benefits from the students' perspectives.

- **Exposure to Experts from Various Fields-** A major benefit of the India Class is the chance to engage with experts from fields such as business, technology, diplomacy, and culture. These interactions provide real-world insights, expand subject knowledge, and emphasise the value of intercultural collaboration. By learning directly from professionals, ranging from technologists discussing AI innovations to diplomats sharing perspectives on India–Japan relations, students gain a deeper appreciation of how cross-cultural partnerships drive progress across industries and global affairs.
- **Technological Innovation-** The India Class also exposes students to technological innovations through interactions with industry experts. India’s expanding digital economy and Japan’s leadership in robotics, automation, and electronics create strong opportunities for collaboration. By exploring the field of Jugaad or local innovation from India, the students came to know about flexible thinking in a way different to what they have seen in Japan.
- **Incorporating Learnings in their Life-** The learnings from the India Class are not purely theoretical but can be meaningfully applied in daily life. A prime example is yoga, a vital aspect of Indian culture that enhances both physical and mental well-being. Regular practice helps students manage stress, improve focus, and cultivate mindfulness, emotional balance, and self-awareness. By linking classroom knowledge to everyday habits, the program highlights its lasting relevance beyond academic study.
- **Revisiting the Bilateral Relations between India and Japan-** The most important outcome was that the students have been able to better understand the bilateral relations between India and Japan, from the perspective of geo-political realities as well as the strategic bilateral cooperation between the two leading nations in Asia that consider freedom and democracy as fundamental principles.

5. HOW JAPAN CAN IMPROVE

Through the course, the students identified some ways in which Japan can improve to make better collaborations with India in the future.

- **Language and Communication-** One of the main challenges identified by students is the lack of Japanese language proficiency among Indian engineers, which can create barriers in day-to-day communication and project coordination. At the same time, relatively few Japanese professionals are fluent in English, limiting smooth collaboration in multinational

teams. Students suggest that both sides could benefit from language training programs and bilingual work environments to enhance understanding and efficiency.

- **Work Culture Differences-** Japanese work culture traditionally emphasises seniority, hierarchy, and group consensus, whereas Indian professionals often bring a more flexible, entrepreneurial, and fast-paced approach. Students note that this cultural gap can lead to misunderstandings or slower decision-making if not addressed. Workshops on intercultural management and regular exchange programs could help build mutual respect and understanding.
- **Immigration and Visa Policy-** Japanese visa regulations are seen as rigid, making it difficult for Indian tech professionals to work and settle in Japan long-term. Students highlight that simplifying visa procedures, providing long-term residency options, and offering family-friendly policies would encourage more talent exchange, benefiting both countries' tech industries.
- **Awareness and Perception-** Many Japanese companies still tend to favour domestic solutions or established American partners, often overlooking Indian innovation. Students believe that creating dedicated platforms, innovation expos, and success stories highlighting Indian technology and entrepreneurial achievements could help reshape these perceptions and foster stronger business ties between Japan and India.

6. INDIA - JAPAN CURRENT COLLABORATIONS

India and Japan have built a deep and multi-dimensional partnership that extends well beyond economics into culture, technology, and people-to-people connections. On the cultural front, Indian traditions have become increasingly visible in Japan. The “*Namaste India*” festival in Tokyo’s Yoyogi Park, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2025, remains a landmark event showcasing Indian cuisine, classical dances like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Mohiniattam, and Odissi, as well as Bollywood performances. Beyond festivals, yoga classes led by Indian teachers are now common in Japanese neighbourhoods, while Ayurveda salons are steadily attracting health-conscious citizens. Conversely, Japanese culture has gained immense popularity in India, especially among the youth, through Anime and Manga. In 2025, Mumbai is hosting India’s first-ever Anime convention by *AnimationXpress*, featuring screenings, concerts, cultural workshops such as Yukata try-ons, origami, calligraphy, and sumi-e painting, with an expected audience of nearly 20,000. Japanese cuisine, too, has entered Indian mainstream culture, with food imports from Japan increasing by almost 40% in recent years.

Parallel to cultural exchanges, India and Japan are also advancing ambitious collaborations across critical sectors. The “Joint Vision for the Next Decade” unveiled in August 2025 outlines eight priority areas, including economic growth, digital partnerships, green energy, healthcare, and human resources. Japan has committed to mobilising JPY 10 trillion (~USD 68 billion) in investment in India over the next decade, alongside increasing workforce and student exchanges to half a million people. Flagship projects such as the “Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail Corridor” and the “Delhi–Mumbai and Chennai–Bangalore industrial corridors” highlight Japan’s role in transforming India’s infrastructure. In technology, both nations are working closely on AI, semiconductors, quantum computing, and digital infrastructure, while in space, they are jointly leading the “Chandrayaan-5” mission to explore the Moon’s polar regions and pioneering projects to tackle space debris. Clean energy is another pillar, with cooperation in hydrogen, ammonia, and decarbonization technologies, complemented by Suzuki’s major EV and battery production initiatives in India. Maritime collaboration has also expanded, with joint work on port digitisation, green shipping, and developing smart islands in the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep regions.

India and Japan are placing strong emphasis on human resource development and skill-building as a foundation for their partnership. Initiatives such as the India–Japan Institute of Manufacturing (JIM) and Japanese Endowed Courses (JEC) in Indian technical institutions are equipping young professionals with Japanese-style manufacturing and management practices. At the same time, programs under Skill Connect are enabling the mobility of Indian workers to Japan in key sectors such as nursing, caregiving, and agriculture, where Japan faces labour shortages. These efforts not only help meet Japan’s workforce needs but also provide Indian professionals with valuable international experience, creating a mutually beneficial exchange of talent and expertise that strengthens long-term collaboration.

Together, these collaborations demonstrate that India and Japan’s relationship is not only strategic but also people-centric, blending innovation, culture, and shared values. While cultural ties like yoga, Ayurveda, Anime, and cuisine strengthen everyday connections, large-scale partnerships in technology, space, infrastructure, and green energy are shaping the future of Asia. Students see this as evidence that India and Japan are uniquely positioned to complement each other’s strengths and deepen their role as trusted partners in both regional stability and global progress.

7. INDIA - JAPAN FUTURE POTENTIALS

From the students' reports, a wide range of themes across culture, technology, economy, and people-to-people ties between India and Japan were found. From these, I extracted the most recurring potential collaboration areas that are either not present yet or still very limited compared to their potential.

Potential Areas for India-Japan Collaboration



Fig. 3. Potential Areas for future India- Japan Collaborations

- **Digital Public Infrastructure & Governance**

India has developed world-leading digital systems such as UPI, Aadhaar, and the Digital India stack, which have transformed financial inclusion and public service delivery. Japan, however, still relies heavily on cash and has a limited digital governance infrastructure. This opens opportunities for collaboration in cashless payments, digital identity systems, e-governance platforms, and mobile-first public services. A structured partnership in this space could help Japan accelerate its digital transformation while giving India an export model for its DPI innovations.

- **Startups & Innovation Partnerships**

India's startup ecosystem is one of the fastest-growing in the world, while Japan has deep strengths in capital, advanced research, and industrial technology. A stronger India-Japan collaboration could take the form of joint incubators, venture funding networks, and cross-border innovation hubs, particularly in areas like AI, semiconductors, green technology, and space-tech startups. This would combine India's entrepreneurial energy with Japan's technological expertise and investment capacity.

- Green Technology & Sustainability

Both India and Japan place strong emphasis on SDGs, renewable energy, and climate solutions, but current cooperation remains fragmented. A dedicated India-Japan Green Tech Alliance could focus on clean energy transitions, hydrogen fuel, smart cities, EV ecosystems, and sustainable manufacturing. Such an alliance would strengthen each country's green development path and create scalable solutions for global markets.

- Cultural & Wellness Exchange

While yoga is already popular in Japan, there is huge untapped potential for broader cultural and wellness collaboration. This includes the promotion of Ayurveda, corporate wellness programs, and wellness tourism, as well as co-creation of cultural content such as Bollywood-anime projects, joint music productions, and VR/AI-driven heritage storytelling. Shared spiritual traditions like Buddhism and astrology could also be leveraged to promote pilgrimage tours and cross-cultural festivals.

- Education, Research & Talent Mobility

Academic and student exchanges between India and Japan exist but remain limited compared to their potential. There is scope to build joint universities, research laboratories, and structured fellowship programs in fields such as quantum computing, AI, and space technology. In addition, vocational training and talent mobility schemes could help address Japan's demographic challenges while providing Indian professionals with valuable global experience.

- Space & Advanced Technology Collaboration

Japan leads in space exploration, robotics, quantum science, and advanced materials, while India is known for cost-effective space missions and technological frugality. A stronger joint focus on satellite launches, lunar exploration, cybersecurity, and quantum research could elevate bilateral cooperation to the next level. Building a shared India-Japan space innovation ecosystem would position both nations as key partners in global advanced technology leadership.

Together, India and Japan stand at a pivotal moment to redefine their partnership beyond traditional trade and investment. By deepening collaboration in digital governance, startups, green technology, culture and wellness, education and talent mobility, as well as space and advanced

technology, the two nations can create a future-oriented alliance that balances economic growth with cultural depth. These areas not only address domestic priorities, such as Japan’s demographic challenges and India’s digital expansion, but also position both countries as joint leaders in sustainable, innovative, and people-centred development. A structured roadmap across these six pillars would transform India–Japan relations into a model of 21st-century cooperation.

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