

NEPAL-JAPAN RELATIONS
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND
COOPERATION
(1956-2006)

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Preface

“Why Japan?” This was the question most of my intimate friends asked when I mentioned what I was doing and why was I not visible both in print and person when Nepal was undergoing tumultuous political change. This question never surprised me because as a matter of fact I had virtually no Japan “connection.” I have been to Japan only once in my life: as a member of the Royal entourage during King Birendra’s unofficial visit there in 1985. I can barely manage to speak two or three words of Japanese at the most. I do not have a Japanese wife. Nor do I have a single Japanese friend. As a Brahmin with a pointed nose, I do not even look like a Japanese.

And yet Japan has always fascinated me for several reasons. First, it is a highly developed and industrialized economy while Nepal’s is underdeveloped and backward. Is it the fate of Nepal to be poor and underdeveloped? Why cannot Nepal be a Japan? Apart from the geo-strategic location, Nepal never had a leadership with a vision and commitment to build strong political and economic institutions and processes to promote the well-being of the Nepali people. Japan had and has such a leadership. Second, many officials in both the countries refer to the common Asian values, which is more a myth than reality. Nepal is a traditional society struggling to modernize while Japan is so Westernized and modernized that any comparison between the two societies does not make sense. Thirdly, the process of Nepal’s political modernization has been entirely different than Japan’s. Democracy or no democracy, Nepal continues in the tradition of *hukumi sasan* where elected leaders see the absolute monarchs they condemn as their role model. As a result, there has never been any serious attempt at creating viable and strong political institutions. This has been the opposite in Japan where ruling elite especially during the Meiji regime laid solid foundations of strong political and economic institutions. It is a long list.

Nepal’s contact with Japan is over a century old now and even formal diplomatic relations half a century. There is a nagging feeling that this may have been the missed

opportunity. Has Nepal learnt any lessons from the Japanese political and economic history, and its strategic approach especially in the context of Nepal's foreign policy in general and Nepal-Japan bilateral relations in particular? The dissertation makes an attempt to take closer look at Nepal-Japan relations in order to explore the prospects of strategic partnership between the two countries in order to further strengthen relations in the mutual interest of both the countries and its people.

Table of Contents

Recommendation	
Letter of Recommendation	
Acknowledgement	
Preface	
Table of Contents	
List of Tables/Graphs	
List of Annexes	
Glossary of Japanese terms	

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1	Background	1
1.2	Statement of Problem	1
1.3	Objectives	3
1.4	Justification	3
1.5	Methodology	3
	1.5.1 Primary Sources	4
	1.5.2 Secondary Sources	4
1.6	Review of Literature	5
1.7	Conceptual Framework	12
	1.7.1 Functional Definition	15
1.8	Limitations of the Study	16
1.9	Organization of the Study	16

Chapter II

Socio-Cultural Relations

2.1	Significance of Socio-Cultural Relations	17
2.2	Socio-Cultural Modernization in Nepal and Japan	19
2.2.1	Socio-Cultural Modernization in Nepal	19
	2.2.1.1 National Unification (1768-1846)	20

2.2.1.2	Rana Oligarchy (1846-1950)	20
2.2.1.3	Restoration of Monarchy (1951-1990)	20
2.2.1.4	Revival of Democracy (1990-present)	21
2.2.2	Socio-Cultural Modernization in Japan	22
2.2.2.1	Tokugawa Regime (1600-1868)	22
2.2.2.2	Meiji Restoration (1868-1911)	22
2.2.2.3	Imperial Japan (1912-1945)	23
2.2.2.4	Modern Japan (1946-present)	24
2.3	Socio-Cultural Similarities and Differences	24
2.3.1	Physiographic Characteristics	25
2.3.2	Demographic Characteristics	26
2.3.3	Religious Characteristics	26
2.3.4	Ethnic Mosaic	27
2.3.5	Linguistic Diversity	28
2.3.6	Social Values	29
2.3.7	Food Habits	30
2.3.8	Annual Events	31
2.3.9	Education	32
2.3.10	Arts and Literature	32
2.3.11	Status of Women	33
2.4	Cultural Relations	34
2.5	Cultural Exchanges	37
2.5.1	Japanese Alumni Associations in Nepal	41
2.5.1.1	Japan University Students Association	41
2.5.1.2	Japanese Language Teachers Association Nepal	42
2.5.1.3	JICA Alumni Association of Nepal	42
2.5.1.4	Nepal AOTS Alumni Association	42
2.5.1.5	Nepal-Japan Friendship and Cultural Association	43
2.5.1.6	Nepal-Japan Friendship Council	43
2.5.1.7	Nepal Japan Children Library	43
2.6	Japanese Cultural Program	43
2.7	Impact on Socio-Cultural Modernization	45

Chapter III

Political Relations

46	3.1	Political Modernization in Nepal	
	3.1.1	National Unification (1768-1846)	46
	3.1.2	Rana Oligarchy (1846-1950)	47
	3.1.3	Democratic Interregnum (1951-60)	48
	3.1.4	The Panchayat Regime	50
	3.1.5	Revival of Democracy (1990-present)	52
3.2		Political Modernization of Japan	56
	3.2.1	Tokugawa Rule (1600-1868)	56
	3.2.2	Meiji Restoration (1868-1911)	57
	3.2.3	Imperial Japan (1911-1945)	58
	3.2.4	Modern Japan (1946-present)	59
3.3		Significance of Nepal-Japan Political Relations	60
3.4		Foreign Policy Formulation	63
	3.4.1	Structure of Foreign Policy Formulation	64
	3.4.2	Process of Foreign policy Formulation	66
3.5		Monarchy: A Common Bond?	68
	3.5.1	Royalties in Transition	69
3.6		Exchange of Visits	72
3.7		Convergence and Divergence on political Issues	78
	3.7.1	Democracy and Human Rights	79
	3.7.2	Terrorism	83
	3.7.3	Peace-Building	84
	3.7.4	Human Security	86
	3.7.5	United Nations Reforms	87
	3.7.6	Kyoto Protocol	89
	3.7.7	Nepali POWs in Japan	90
	3.7.8	Nuclear Proliferation	91
	3.7.9	Water Summits	92

Chapter IV

Economic Relations

4.1	Significance of Economic Relations	
93		
4.2	Economic Modernization in Nepal and Japan	96
4.2.1	Nepali Economy: Sitting Duck	96
4.2.1.1	Economy during National Unification (1768-1840)	96
4.2.1.2	Economy during Rana Oligarchy (1846-1950)	97
4.2.1.3	Economy after Restoration of Monarchy (1951-90)	98
4.2.1.4	Economy after Restoration of Democracy (1990-present)	98
4.2.2	Japanese Economy: Flying Goose	99
4.2.2.1	Economy under Tokugawa Regime (1600-1868)	99
4.2.2.2	Economy under Meiji Restoration (1868-1911)	100
4.2.2.3	Economy during Imperial Japan (1911-1945)	101
4.2.2.4	Modern Japanese Economy (1946-present)	102
4.3	Nepal's Foreign Aid Policy	103
4.4	Japan's Official Development Assistance Policy	105
4.5	Japan's ODA to Nepal	108
4.5.1	Human Resource Development	112
4.5.2	Social Sector	114
4.5.3	Agriculture Development	115
4.5.4	Infrastructure Development	117
4.5.4.1	Key Issues	118
4.5.4.2	Kulekhani Hydroelectric Project	119
4.5.4.3	Arun III Hydroelectric Project	121
4.5.4.4	Kali Gandaki "A" Hydroelectric Project	125
4.5.4.5	Power Transmission and Distribution	126
4.5.4.6	Melamchi Drinking Water Project	126
4.5.4.7	Road Project	128
4.6	Trade Relations	130
4.7	Foreign Direct Investment	134
4.8	Foreign Employment	136
4.9	Tourism	137

Chapter V

Strategic Partnership and Cooperation

5.1	Global Strategic Environment	
141		
5.2	Global and Regional Players	142
5.2.1	The United States	143
5.2.2	Japan	144
5.2.3	“Peaceful Rise” of China	145
5.2.4	India: A Regional Hegemon?	147
5.3	Patterns of Strategic Partnership	148
5.3.1	Anglo-American Strategic Partnership	148
5.3.2	Japan-US Strategic Partnership	149
5.3.3	Emerging Patterns of Strategic partnership	150
5.3.3.1	Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership	150
5.3.3.2	Shanghai Cooperation Organization	151
5.3.3.3	India’s Strategic Partners	151
5.4	Nepal’s Strategic Significance	152
5.4.1	Historical Evolution of Nepal’s Strategic Relations	153
5.4.1.1	Strategic Relations during National Unification	153
5.4.1.2	Strategic Relations under Rana Regime	154
5.4.1.3	Strategic Relations under Shah Dynasty	156
5.4.1.4	Strategic Relations after Revival of Democracy	162
5.5	A Case for Strategic Partnership	165
5.6	Japan’s Strategic Interests in Nepal	167
5.7	Nepal-Japan Strategic Partnership and Cooperation	168
5.8	Objectives of Nepal-Japan Partnership and Cooperation	170
5.8.1	Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation	170
5.8.2	Democracy Building	171
5.8.3	Economic Cooperation, Trade and Investment	171
5.8.4	Strengthening National Security	174
5.8.5	Constraints of Nepal-Japan Strategic Partnership	175

Chapter VI

Findings and Recommendations

6.1	Socio-Cultural Relations	176
6.1.1	Cultural Policy	176
6.1.2	Cultural Exchanges	177
6.1.3	Cultural Cooperation	178
6.2	Political Relations	178
6.2.1	Coherent Japan Policy	178
6.2.2	Political Dialogue	179
6.3	Economic Relations	180
6.3.1	Economic Cooperation	180
6.3.2	Water Resources	180
6.3.3	Road Building	181
6.3.4	Trade Relations	182
6.3.5	Foreign Direct Investment	182
6.3.6	Foreign Employment	183
6.3.7	Tourism	183
6.4	Strategic Partnership and Cooperation	184
6.4.1	Political and Strategic Dialogue	184
	Annexes	185
	Bibliography	204

List of Tables/Graphs

2.1	Nepali and International Students in Japan, 2004	40
4.1	Distribution of Japanese ODA to Nepal 1969-2005	109
4.2	Distribution of Japanese Grant Assistance (1970-2005)	110
4.3	Sectoral Distribution of Grant Aid (1970-2005)	110
4.4	Japanese Loan Commitment 1969-2005	111
4.5	Japanese Technical Cooperation 1974-2005	112
4.6	Japanese Experts and Volunteers 1982-2005	113

4.7	Cost of Production of Hydroelectricity in Nepal	118
4.8	Export to and Import from Japan	131
4.9	Japan in Nepal's Bilateral Trade 1997-2004	132
4.10	Export of readymade Garment to Japan	132
4.11	Export of Woolen Shawls, Scarves, Mufflers	133
4.12	Top 10 FDIs in Nepal (Country-wise)	134
4.13	Japan FDIs in Nepal (Category-wise)	135
4.14	Japanese FDIs in Nepal (Sector-wise)	135
4.11	Japanese Tourist Arrivals	139

Index of Annexes

I.	List of Persons Interviewed/Contacted	
		186
II.	Interview Guide	187
III.	Text of the Letter from Ekai Kawaguchi	188
IV.	Associations/Organizations involved in Cultural Promotion	194
V.	List of Countries having Diplomatic Relations with Nepal	195
VI.	Exchange of Letters on Establishing Diplomatic Relations	198
VII.	Chronology of Major Exchange of Visits	200
VIII.	Text of the Nepal-Japan Joint Communiqué May 1978	202

Glossary of Japanese terms

Bakufu	military government
Bakumatsu	men of action
Bonsai	traditional plant raising method
Chanoyu	tea ceremony
Daimyo	military lords
Fukoku kyohei	rich country, strong army
Gakusei	code of education
Gimu	intimate obligation
Giri	honor
Harakiri	disemboweling performed by samurai warriors
Ikebana	traditional flower arrangement
Origami	paper cutting
Jikki	journal
Kinken shorei undo	campaign to encourage diligence and thrift
Nihonjinron	cultural nationalism
Nihon no ryori	Japanese cuisine
Minryoken kanyo undo	campaign to foster national strength
Samurai	warriors
Shogun	military lords
Zaibatsu	financial clique