

# The Relationship between Nepal and Japan: Diplomacy and Development

Sunil Babu Shrestha\*

## Abstract

After learning that Japan had developed and made marvelous progress because of education development, the then reformist Rana Prime Minister Dev Shumsher decided to send eight Nepalese students with the spirit of "Let's learn from the East". Later, the students sent to Japan during the Chandra Shumsher era became beneficial and effective not only for the transfer of knowledge, skills, and technologies; it has also helped to bud the relationship between Nepal and Japan. Later the diplomatic relation was established on September 1, 1965. Furthermore, the relationship between both nations has been strengthening through high-level exchange visits, people-to-people relationships, and development diplomacy. Japan has been helping Nepal in key sectors such as human resource development, health, agriculture development, infrastructure development, environment protection, culture, etc. through grants, loans and technical support This has made a great contribution to the socioeconomic development of Nepal. Nepal and Japan's relationship is without any problems since the establishment of the relation between the two countries and put similar views on the international agenda in the United Nations (UN) and international platform based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, sovereign equality of the states, and non-alignment. In this context, this paper tries to advocate for the promotion and integration of science diplomacy to deepen ties between Nepal and Japan in the era of science and technology so that more long-term benefits could be achieved from Japan for the sustainable development of Nepal.

**Keywords:** Development Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Official Development Assistance (ODA), People-to-People Relations, Science Diplomacy.

## Introduction

Nepal's foreign policy's primary goal is to uphold the dignity of the country by preserving independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity while fostering Nepal's economic wellness and prosperity, and promoting security, harmony, and peace on a worldwide scale (GoN-MoFA, 2021). Based on this primary goal, Nepal is extending its foreign relation with various countries of the world. On this background, the relationship between Nepal and Japan seem to be started when Buddhist monk Ekai Kawaguchi 1898 visited Nepal on the way to Tibet. It is

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\* Dr. Shrestha is an Academician of NAST and Life Member of NCWA.

considered to be the reason to sprout the relationship between Nepal and Japan. After learning from monk Kawaguchi that the reason behind the development of Japan is the development of the education and the patriotism of the citizens, according to the plan of Dev Shumsher, the then Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher sent eight Nepali students to Japan on April 29, 1902 for pursuing higher education in between 1902-1905 (GoN- MoFA, 2023). After the return of the Nepali students, it seems that they have contributed to improving Nepal-Japan relations by communicating the education, language, culture, and customs learned from Japan in Nepali society. While King Mahendra was willing to expand foreign relationships of Nepal with others to reduce over-dependency on neighbors, his coronation ceremony in 1955 became a good opportunity to prepare a background for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan. Japanese people faced weak morale due to the hardships suffered from the Japanese in the Second World War and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on May 9, 1956. In the meantime, Japanese citizen Toshima Imanisi and Nepali citizen Galen Norbu Sherpa successfully climbed the world's seventh highest snow peak, Manaslu Mountain (8163 m.) in Gorkha, Nepal. This exciting event has also helped to play an important role in establishing diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan. The relationship became formal with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan was established on September 1, 1956 (GoN- MoFA, 2023). Japan was the 7th country to establish such relations with Nepal. Both countries Nepal and Japan established an embassy in Tokyo and Kathmandu respectively in 1965 and 1967. In Osaka, Nepal has Honorary Consulate. The relations between Nepal and Japan are marked by close, cordial, and cooperative. The friendly relationship has already passed 66 years. On the occasion of the sixty anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations in 2016, both countries made a grand celebration by organizing many programs.

Japan is a popular tourist destination because Nepal has an abundance of the Himalayas, a cultural legacy, and Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha. Two significant UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Lumbini in Nepal and Koyasan in Japan, have been sister cities since 2015 (GoN- MoFA, 2023). Japan and Nepal have strong business and investment ties. Some of Nepal's major exports to Japan include pashmina products, ready-to-wear, woolen goods, carpets, handicrafts, Nepali paper and paper products, leather goods, silverware, and jewelry. Among Nepal's major imports from Japan are vehicles and spare parts, electronics, machinery, equipment, iron and steel products, photographic goods, medical supplies, and textiles (GoN- MoFA, 2023). Japan is a large source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Nepal in addition to being a big trading partner.

Japan has been an important development partner and contributing to the socio-economic development of Nepal since 1954. The friendly relationship between Nepal and Japan has been upgraded with the exchange of high-level visits. The

strong social-cultural bond between the two countries historically has been easing to establish people-to-people relations. The number of Nepali living in Japan has reached more than 87,000 (GoN- MoFA, 2023). Among the foreign communities in Japan, the community of Nepali is 7th largest (GoN- MoFA, 2023). For Nepali students, Japan is the second most preferred destination to study abroad. Looking at the number of Nepali who goes to Japan for higher education and language studies in the number of thousands every year, it seems that the relationship established about a hundred and twenty years ago has made the socio-economic relationship acceptable and strong at the people's level.

### **Diplomacy and Development**

Development diplomacy is a special type of public diplomacy that establishes bilateral ties through actions that promote the welfare of developing nations. Development diplomacy not only serves as a tool for developing soft power but also exclusively uses soft power assets to achieve its public diplomacy objectives (Gulrajani et al., 2022). During the reign of King Mahendra, Nepal and Japan established diplomatic relations. The Japanese Ambassador in New Delhi was concurrently named ambassador to Nepal before the inauguration of the embassy chancelleries in Kathmandu and Tokyo. Similarly, the Nepalese envoy to New Delhi also served as ambassador to Japan at the same time. Their Excellencies Mr. Seijiro Yoshizawa and Mr. Daman Shumsher Rana were subsequently appointed as their respective nations' first ambassadors. (Embassy of Japan in Nepal, 2022) King Mahendra had given the relationship with Japan top priority. In addition to visiting Japan, he hosted a visit of a Japanese prince and princess to Nepal. He also sent the crown prince Birendra, to Tokyo University to study (Embassy of Japan in Nepal, 2022). Being monarchies in both nations at the time, it was important and also easy for the mutual relationship to be strengthened. Later, King Birendra kept giving the relationship with Japan top attention. He traveled to Japan. During his coronation ceremony in 1975, King Birendra proposed a Zone of Peace (ZoP) for Nepal (Malla, 2014). Japan provided its full support to this proposal. The relationship between Nepal and Japan gained continuous priority even after the country adopted a democratic system. To strengthen bilateral ties between the two nations, Prime Minister G.P. Koirala visited Japan while Japanese Prime Minister Mori visited Nepal. Following then, high-level visits and exchanges continue, which has helped to strengthen the ties between Nepal and Japan. Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kono of Japan made a recent high-level visit in January 2019 (GoN- MoFA, 2023). During his visit, the foreign ministers of the two nations held a bilateral discussion at the delegation level.

Since the beginning of diplomatic relations, there have never been any issues in the two countries relationship. Both nations are fully committed to the principles of peaceful coexistence, sovereign equality of the states, and non-alignment. They

have faith in the United Nations (UN) and share common political ambitions in many areas. The foundation of their relationships is mutual understanding and respect for each other's ambitions, as well as the five ideas of *Panchsheel* ideas. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the eight member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which was founded in 1985. Since April 2007, Japan has been a SAARC observer and has contributed to the implementation of numerous initiatives through the SAARC-Japan Special Fund (SJSF) (GoN- MoFA, 2023). In the multilateral forums, such as the United Nations, Nepal, and Japan have been closely collaborating on issues of shared interest and supporting one another as best they are able.

Japan has been a key player in Nepal's numerous development initiatives by providing Nepal with technical assistance and financial support. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) office was established in 1978 and has since contributed to Nepal's social and economic development (Malla, 2014). Japan Overseas Volunteers (JOCVs) have been offering services under Technical Cooperation in a variety of disciplines since 1969 when loans and grants from Japan to Nepal began (GoN- MoFA, 2023). Similar to this, the two nations inked a bilateral agreement on technical cooperation to expand their economic and technological ties and further enhance their relations with Nepal and Japan. The two nations also made an air service agreement in Kathmandu in 2003 during the visit of the Japanese foreign minister. Because of the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Labour and Transport, the Government of Nepal, and the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO), Nepali Industrial Workers now have more opportunities for training in Japan. Additionally, Japan's Government has included Nepal as one of the source countries for its labor market in the country's updated immigration law (GoN- MoFA, 2023).

Nepal has been getting support in the form of grants, loans and technical assistance from Japan in major areas- human resource development, health, agriculture development, infrastructure development, environment protection, culture, etc. Some important ongoing projects are getting a concessional loan from Japan for the infrastructure development projects like Tanahun Hydro, Nagdhunga tunnel, and Improvement of Water Supply Improvement projects (Embassy of Japan in Nepal, 2022).

The Japanese Government extended support in the aftermath of 2015 announcing to provision NRs 26 billion grant for reconstruction works in Nepal (Embassy of Japan in Nepal, 2022). Some of the important projects under Japanese assistance which were already completed are the Kathmandu Valley Power Distribution System, Teaching Hospital, Kanti Children's Hospital, Construction of Food Storage, National Tuberculosis Centre, Expansion of Radio Broadcasting Network, Construction of

Bridges in Kathmandu Valley, Kathmandu Bus Terminal, Improvement of Transport Capacity, Water-Induced Disaster Preventing Centre, Kathmandu Water Supply Facility and Thapathali Bridge (HMG, MoFA, Sept. 1996, p. 12 adopted from Malla,2014). Japan's aid with the grant in Nepal for the extension of transportation and communication networks, modernization of Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), etc. has an important contribution to the socio-economical development of Nepal. Nepal has also received Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) support in some important hydroelectric projects like Kaligandaki A and Kulekhani (Malla, 2014).

In human resource development, the Government of Japan started providing technical training to Nepali students under Colombo Plan with Japan's involvement in 1954. Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) and Senior Volunteers to Nepal under JICA Volunteer Program have been supporting various fields including agriculture, waste management, and education since 1970( Malla, 2014). Annually, Government officials of Nepal are getting the opportunity for capacity development in various fields under the Japan Development Scholarship (JDS) scheme since 2016 (GoN- MoFA, 2023).

### **Science Diplomacy for Strengthening Relationship**

Science has no boundaries. In a globalized context, science diplomacy can be extremely useful in identifying opportunities for scientific collaboration, technology transfer, research and development, capacity building, and data sharing to address both international and domestic issues (Shrestha, 2018). Infrastructure projects like building new roads, bridges, buildings, or hospitals are typically prioritized in bilateral or multilateral international discussions for development partnerships. It is high time for Nepal to seek scientific cooperation by considering Science Diplomacy as an important strategy to promote Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) in the country (Shrestha, 2023). For the sake of sustainable development, emerging nations like Nepal must concentrate on research and innovation. This necessitates a change in the development partner's policy to place more emphasis on creating scientific capacity and encouraging research and innovation for sustainability and efficient resource management. To encourage research, innovation, and the commercialization of cutting-edge technologies, there is a need of promoting scientific diplomacy as a crucial component of foreign policy. Positions like Scientific Advisor to the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Education, Science, and Technology Minister are crucial for enhancing science diplomacy (Shrestha et. al., 2022). There are many areas of cooperation in science and technology that can boost the relationship between two countries based on mutual benefits. Japan appears to be slightly more powerful than before in the world community in terms of science and technology. As a result, Japan is prioritizing the advancement of science diplomacy. Japan's science diplomacy is heading in

the direction of sharing its technology and expertise with other nations through "brain circulation." In connection with Science Diplomacy, based on its science and technological advancement, Japan has been sharing its knowledge, technology, and expertise with several developing nations and expresses a desire to do so.

Japan has provided significant assistance to Nepal in the areas of economic, social, and infrastructure development after the two countries' diplomatic ties were established more than 66 years ago. Japan is gaining prominence among the donor nations that support Nepal. The development of infrastructure and economic diplomacy has been the main focus of Nepal's diplomacy, although strengthening and incorporating technology transfer is mentioned as a goal in the Foreign Policy of Nepal, 2077, very few actual attempts have been made to bring this about (Shrestha, et. al., 2022). The amount of grants and other financial assistance that Nepal has received from international donor organizations is important for the socio-economic development of Nepal, but there is huge potential that has not been yet utilized for knowledge, skill, and technology transfer from Japan to Nepal. The abilities that science diplomacy should develop or the function that it should play in the age of science and technology are still lacking, regardless of whether the diplomats are from Japan to Nepal or Nepali diplomats who have given the responsibility to Japan (Shrestha, 2020b). Therefore, promoting and integrating science diplomacy into the foreign policy of Nepal can provide a much better benefit for the sustainable development of Nepal from friendly countries including Japan.

There are areas where Nepal-Japan relations can be strengthened and where the socioeconomic situation could improve if science diplomacy can take place in the two countries relationship. Let's take an example of the benefit received by Nepal to enter into the space age and Nepali human resource development in the field of space technology with scientific cooperation with Japan. The 17th of June 2019 has earned significant historical significance for Nepal's science and technology sector. The Joint Multinational World's Satellite Project (BIRDS) for nations with their satellites aims to construct satellites as part of a capacity development project run by the United Nations. It is being carried out by the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology and the Kyushu Institute of Technology. Dr. Sunil Babu Shrestha, the vice chancellor of Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) and Prof. Dr. Ojie, the president of University celebrated the development of a 1,300-gram cube satellite with a press conference at Kyutech University on February 15, 2019 (Shrestha, 20220a). On June 17, 2019, Nepali Satellite-1, a satellite that was launched into space as part of the Earth Satellite Birds-3 project after spending roughly two months within the International Space Station, became a momentous day for Nepal and the Nepali people. The Honorable Girirajmani Pokharel, Minister of Education, Science, and Technology of Nepal, and Dr. Sunil Babu Shrestha, Vice Chancellor of NAST, attended the major ceremony held on the grounds of JAXA

(Shrestha, 2020a). NAST at its office organized a public viewing event for the general audience. Mr. Kawari Samamaki, Director of the Space Education Center, and Mr. Yumiko Ashakuma, the head of JICA, attended this occasion on behalf of Mr. Masamiki Saigo, the Ambassador of Nepal to Japan, and the ceremony was joyfully concluded. Now Nepal is trying its best to work in satellite development with backup from the human resource developed from the program. The nation will have long term gain from this. Similar to this, Nepal can have much such scientific cooperation from Japan that helps for the utilization resources more effectively for the sustainable development. For this, it is necessary to promote and further strengthening science diplomacy.

To further advance science diplomacy, each diplomatic mission abroad including Japan needs to have a scientific attaché or counselor. This will provide Nepali scientists and technologists additional chances to work in diplomacy and make a different kind of contribution to the nation. Let's hope that both countries would prioritize scientific diplomacy in the days to come to support and empower the scientists and technologists and promote scientific cooperation which can lead to a sustainable future. There is no doubt that through science diplomacy, the friendly ties between Japan and Nepal will continue to grow and reach new heights in the days to come.

### **Conclusion and A Way Forward**

The sprouting relationship established between Nepal and Japan by the Nepali students' visit to Japan was later converted into diplomatic relations that flourished in both monarchy and democratic regimes. The relationship is not only limited to diplomatic relations there also exists people-to-people relations. Public relations, diplomatic relations, and people-to-people relations between Nepal and Japan have been useful for the development of a developing country like Nepal and need to be explored more opportunities for flourishing development diplomacy. Being the cordial relationship between the two countries without any problem from history, there is a great opportunity to further strengthen the relationship between the two nations during the "Reiwa" time. When he was the Crown Prince of Japan, King Naruhito traveled to Nepal, and it's said he had a unique connection with Nepal (Shrestha, 2020a). Let's hope that throughout the "Reiwa" era, Nepal and Japan's development cooperation and collaboration became much closer and will continue to improve with better diplomatic relations based on science diplomacy. Nepal's development will be much more visible through more scientific collaboration and cooperation from Japan to Nepal.

Nepal's infrastructure development can be benefitted from Japan's cooperation in the construction of earthquake-resistant building technologies, rail transit, tunnels, and the development of water resources, particularly reservoirs constructed by Japan, a

country prone to earthquakes. Japan has similarly proven to be a leader in cutting-edge technology. In this regard, Japan can significantly support Nepal's sustainable prosperity through development cooperation in areas such as border security, climate change and weather forecasting, robotic intelligence, satellite mapping, and environmental monitoring (Shrestha, 2020a). For this, science diplomacy can be a crucial factor to be considered in fostering the relationship between Nepal and Japan.

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