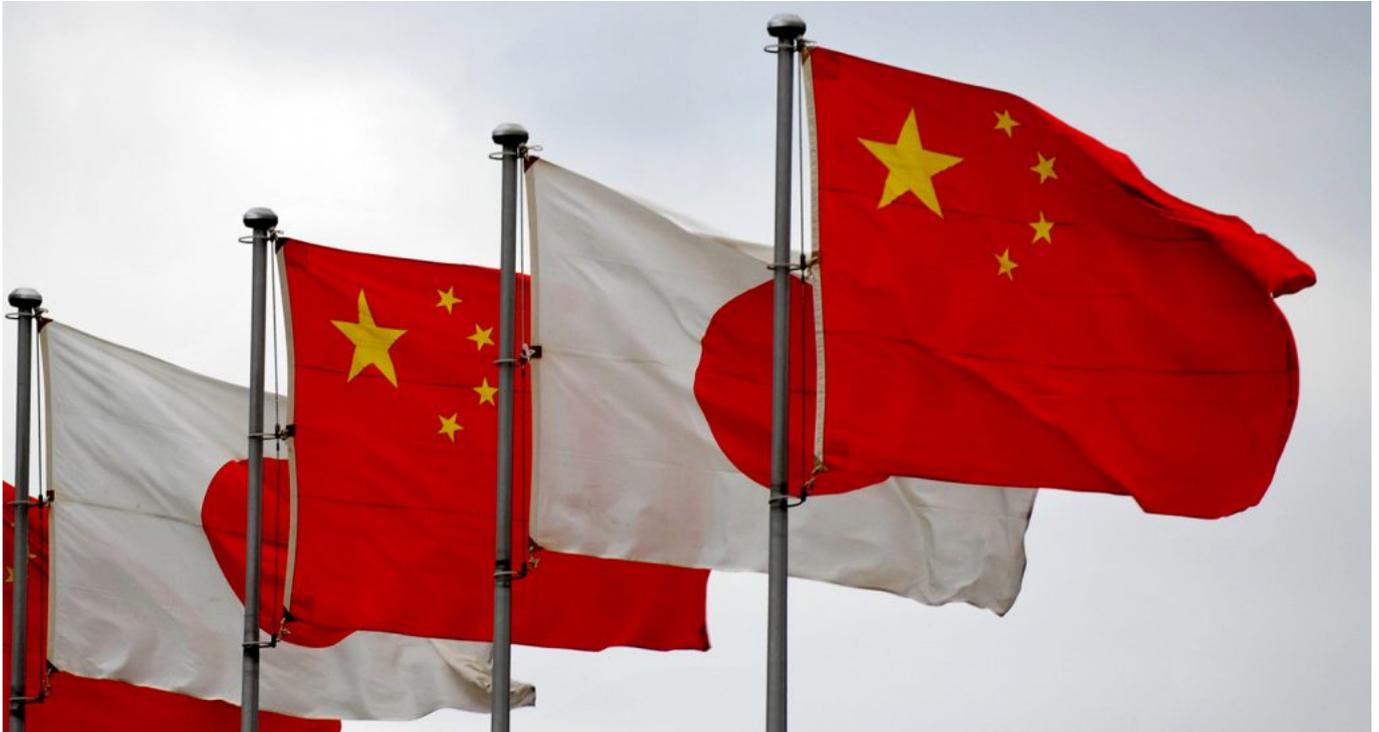


India and Japan have both been party to a historical relationship with China as well as each other through the spread of Buddhism which has its roots of origin in India itself. This started off legendary exchanges of wisdom and trade between the nations. China is the middle ground in this three-way party and has been the main benefactor. From the ancient to the middle ages, India and China have enjoyed more or less amicable relations with the exception of a few skirmishes between independent provinces of both countries. The first major skirmish took place during the British Raj of India when the British Empire made use of the Indian sepoy in the British Indian Army against the Chinese in the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion. After this, there was a mild amount of cooperation between the two countries with respect to thwarting the progress of Imperial Japan. This was a time when Japan and China, however, had an extremely destructive relationship. The First and Second Sino-Japanese wars and the invasion of Manchuria had turned the two into bitter enemies especially with the famous and controversial Rape of Nanking that took place in 1937. The effects of these incidents have lasted all the way to present day with the majority of both Chinese and Japanese citizens have expressed negative views about each other.

Post World War II, India and China officially established diplomatic relations after India decided to recognize the People's Republic of China as the sovereign government of Mainland China instead of Taiwan (known as the Republic of China back then). Both nations provided their consent to the infamous PANCHSHEEL (Five Principles of Coexistence) in 1954 and a slogan was coined out of it: "*Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*". All was well until the first Sino-Indian border skirmish in 1959 in the Kongka Pass region of Ladakh. A full-scale war then broke out in 1962 over China's claim of Indian interference in Tibet, as a result of which, relations have become marred ever since and full of distrust towards each other. The 1962 war also led to the occupation of the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh as well as the birth of the Chinese claim over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.



National flags of Japan and China (R) are displayed at Tokyo's Haneda Airport/ Image source: KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/Getty Images

With the historical background out of the way, it is, however, a well-known fact that both India and Japan view China as an extremely crucial player in Asian geopolitics and geoeconomics. China earned the title of the 'Rising Dragon' quite rightfully after Deng Xiaoping came to power. The former paramount leader of China was also known as the 'Architect of Modern China' due to the implementation of his "Four Modernizations" in the field of agriculture, science, defence and industry. In 1978, China's major industrial modernization procedures took off with a full swing after the late Xiaoping forged a deal with the Japanese MNC Panasonic, raking in huge amounts of investment and effectively opening up its industries to other sources of FDIs as well. This created a surge in the Chinese industrialisation process which continues even now and has turned the nation into the world's second-largest economy. By literally becoming the world's factory and utilising its low production cost structure, Mainland China now rivals major producers in the West as well in Asia, namely Japan, South Korea and its own Specially Administrated Zone of Hong Kong; it is now the world's largest exporter.

The rise of China has been a cause for concern for both Japan and India due to the extremely close proximity the two nations share with it. The Land of the Rising Sun has

been overtaken by the Rising Dragon in two major areas: technology production & export and national GDP. With regards to the GDP, China is ahead of Japan by a huge amount of \$9 trillion and India by \$11 trillion. The gap continues to increase thanks to the numerous ambitious economic projects it has undertaken as part of its BRI scheme. While China continues to be the largest trading partner of Japan and has been demoted 2nd position by India, the fact of the matter is that both countries face huge trade deficits with it and the gap seems to ever-expanding. On the other hand, Chinese goods have found their way into Indian markets with great ease and have also been greeted with a lot of enthusiasm due to their offer of efficient production quality at cheap rates. The items that India imports from China range from basic household items to children's toys to heavy electronics and raw materials for medicines. Japan too imports a great deal of the same items with the addition of boilers and nuclear reactors. All in all, it is very evident that China has eased its way into our respective markets and has turned itself into a very cumbersome threat: the type in which the two nations can neither entirely cut ties with it nor can they continue to overlook its increasing arrogance.



Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (L) and China's President Xi Jinping (R)/ Image

source: Christian Minelli/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

As previously mentioned, the BRI project of China seeks to increase the span of its trade routes even further across the globe. Many European nations have expressed their support of the idea and many from Asia as well. It is a worrisome development for India in particular because the project not only breaches India's territorial sovereignty in its North but also has the potential of luring its allies away from it towards supporting China. India, geographically surrounded by nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka as well as China itself, could find itself in a precarious situation if it is isolated in the South Asian regional sphere of influence. China's power-play tactics have already been exposed when it increased its naval presence in the Indian Ocean as well as entrapping Sri Lanka into a 99-year deal. Similar deals have been concluded with other countries falling in the Indian Ocean region, extending to Bangladesh, Burma and all the way up to Pakistan's Gwadar Port. The projects and megastructures in each of these locations, if connected, can be visualized into what is now known as the "String of Pearls". This is an ongoing geopolitical theory which if it comes into fruition, may see India's economic, political and territorial integrity coming under severe threats, despite the Chinese side claiming that its non-existence.

China's increasingly daredevil attitude does not end in the Indian Ocean though. It has extended its ferocious claws to the [ASEAN region](#) and more recently the East China Sea region, bickering with Japan over both their claims of 200 nautical miles of the water body. The flames were further fanned due to the discovery of an undersea natural gas field in the region in 1995; Japan seeks to have a share in the natural gas resources while China wants complete ownership of it. Now adding some oil to the already devastating fire was the entry of the purchase of the Senkaku Islands by Japan from a private entity in 2017, a deal labelled as controversial by the CPC. As a consequence to all of these developments, China started displaying a more aggressive stance in the East China Sea, engaging in a few bouts of naval muscle-flexing in order to intimidate the Japanese sea trawlers, an act that forced Japan to amend its constitution in order to introduce "re-militarization"; Japan had discarded its military after the end of the 2nd World War, maintaining only the JSDF for all these decades. However, it is quite obvious that in an immediate face-off, Japan at the moment would not be able to hold down its Chinese counterpart and therefore, has started to look towards India as a strategic counterbalance with a great deal of potential. The Japanese government has recognized that India's rise as not only a regional power but also as a global superpower will prove to be imperative in its efforts to tie China down or at the very least, make the dragon think twice before baring its fangs.



Image source: HT

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2020, Chinese and Indian soldiers engaged in brutal melee combat in the Sino-Indian border at multiple locations. The tussle kept escalating until it reached its peak on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June when a six-hour-long fight resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and approximately 35-43 Chinese soldiers. There was a massive public outcry in response to this incident among the Indian citizens who collectively took to social media to promote a boycott of Chinese products. In response, the Indian government took a drastic step by banning 50 Chinese made apps which include TikTok, CamScanner, UC Browser, Line messenger etc. in an effort to deliver a mortal blow to the Chinese government. Experts from the Chinese side have commented that India's plan to counter China by disrupting trade relations and aligning itself with the US would have a negative outcome not only for the Chinese economy but the Indian economy as well. Amidst the Covid-19 crisis, China's markets have taken massive hits in addition to the already existing wounds sustained from the ongoing US-China trade war. As such, both sides have agreed to engage in delimitation talks and withdraw their respective troops. Even if and when the delimitation talks become successful, there is no more doubt remaining in the minds of Indian leaders that China may pull a similar stunt again in the not so distant future, the aggregate result of which might be

a full scale conventional or in the worst-case scenario, a nuclear war.

Keeping the above views in mind, even the most ardent supporters of maintaining the India-China relationship at amicable levels are now hardening their stances; topmost Indian leaders are expected to turn their eyes back onto the full-fledged resurrection and initiation of the Quadrilateral Movement or QUAD for short. The QUAD comprises of four nations which are the United States, Australia, Japan and India respectively. After a decade long hiatus that started in 2007, this grouping decided to rear its head from slumber in 2017 and now in 2020, signifies a unified resolve to counter China's rising assertiveness and blatant disrespect of international laws. Beginning with Australia, Beijing's policies regarding the South China Sea, to Taiwan and Hong Kong, to its growing influence in Australian politics and potentially using Huawei for espionage purposes, Canberra's growing indignation can be understood. The Australian government also released a defence strategy update paper which cites its transition from a passive to a more aggressive military stance in response to the disturbing changes in China's movements.



QUAD Prime Ministers/ Image: PMOIndia@ Twitter

So far, India has been the weakest link in the QUAD due to its insistence on maintaining balanced ties with China. However, in 2019, the Indian foreign minister managed to persuade PM Modi to finally consider the Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's request that all four QUAD leaders sit together opposite China's Xi Jinping at the G20 summit as a symbol of retaliation. With the 2020 events acting as a major catalyst to everything else, New Delhi too has now realized the vital importance of ramping up the activities of this special arrangement. India and Japan's strengthening ties will play a pivotal role in bringing the four countries together and forging an indomitable bond capable of pushing back the Rising Dragon back into its cave. Though Japan is declining in power and influence relative to China, its strategic response to it and the growth of India will have a significant impact on the balance of power in Asia. After years of distant relations which were focused on heavy industries only, Japan is increasingly turning to India as a counterweight to China, encouraging Indian participation in the East Asia Summit and moving forward on security and nuclear cooperation talks. Japan and India must engage in interactions *other than* their current entanglements and expand into areas such as infrastructure building, import-export of light machinery and electronics, increased trade of food and agricultural products, exchange of education and also ensuring a bigger role for their individual soft power in the arena.

Beijing's ambition is clear: to displace the United States as the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific. There is no question, moreover, that America's influence in the region is weakening relative to China's. There are growing concerns that the coronavirus pandemic has handed Beijing an opportunity to seize the mantle of leadership from the United States, by providing medical supplies to Spain, Italy, and other countries in need and ramping up its public diplomacy. In such a situation, India and Japan find themselves in the same situation and must increase efforts to improve bilateral ties.

**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BY THE KOOTNEETI

**JOIN TODAY!**

team@thekootneeti.com  
courses.thekootneeti.in  
(+91) 120 4565994

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not*

*necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

Facebook Comments