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Tagore's Vision of China and Japan in the Context of Asian Civilization

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Abstract:

This article examines Rabindranath Tagore's engagement with China and Japan and explores his vision of cultural cooperation and intellectual exchange among Asian nations. Through an analysis of his visits, speeches, and interactions with Chinese and Japanese scholars, the study highlights Tagore's efforts to strengthen cultural ties between India, China, and Japan. It discusses Tagore's admiration for the rich cultural traditions of both countries and his belief that Asia could contribute to global civilization through its humanistic and spiritual values.

The article also analyzes Tagore's critique of aggressive nationalism, militarism, and excessive materialism, which he viewed as major threats to human civilization. While recognizing the importance of scientific and technological progress, Tagore emphasized the need to balance modernization with ethical and spiritual development. His speeches in China and Japan reveal his commitment to universal humanism, intercultural dialogue, and mutual respect among nations.

The study concludes that Tagore's ideas remain relevant in the contemporary world, where international cooperation and cultural understanding are increasingly important. His vision of friendship among India, China, and Japan continues to offer valuable insights for promoting peace, cultural exchange, and regional harmony in Asia.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore and China-Japan, Tagore & Asian unity,



Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore's views on China and Japan were an important part of his broader vision of Asian unity and cultural cooperation. He believed that the countries of Asia shared a rich spiritual, cultural, and intellectual heritage that could offer an alternative to the materialism, imperialism, and aggressive nationalism developing in the West. Tagore admired both China and Japan for their ancient civilizations, artistic achievements, philosophical traditions, and contributions to world culture. He hoped that these nations would work together to revive the cultural strength of Asia and promote peace, understanding, and mutual respect among nations.

However, Tagore's relationship with China and Japan was not based only on admiration. He also criticized them when he believed they were moving away from humanistic values. In Japan, he was deeply impressed by the country's rapid modernization and national discipline, but he became increasingly concerned about the rise of militarism and imperial expansion. He warned that Japan's imitation of Western nationalism and imperialism could lead to conflict and moral decline. In China, Tagore admired the country's long cultural history and intellectual traditions, but some Chinese intellectuals criticized him for emphasizing spirituality at a time when China was struggling with political and social crises. Despite these disagreements, Tagore remained committed to promoting dialogue between Asian cultures. His views on both countries reflected his belief that true progress should be based on moral values, cultural creativity, and international cooperation rather than political power or military strength.

This paper examines how Tagore's engagement with China and Japan was shaped by both appreciation and criticism, reflecting his commitment to a harmonious and morally grounded Asia.

Tagore and Japan: Admiration and Criticism:

Rabindranath Tagore shared a deep and complex relationship with Japan. His connection with Japan was not limited to travel or cultural admiration; it was an intellectual and spiritual engagement that reflected his ideas about Asian unity, culture, nationalism, art, and modern civilization.

Tagore wanted to travel even during the difficult years of the First World War. After visiting Europe and America, his attention turned towards East Asia, especially Japan. One reason was the influence of his close friend, Okakura Kakuzō (1) who had invited him to visit the Far East before his death in 1913. Although Tagore planned to visit Japan in 1915, the journey was postponed several times and he finally left in May 1916.

Tagore delayed his visit to Japan mainly because he was worried about the country's growing militarism and imperial ambitions. Although financial problems and the threat of famine also contributed to the postponement, his greatest concern was Japan's increasing aggression toward other Asian countries. In his letters to C. F. Andrews, Tagore expressed fear that Japan was following the path of Western imperial powers by expanding its control over Korea and China. He was also worried that India might become a target if British influence weakened. Tagore



believed that Japan's focus on military power, industrial growth, and scientific progress was causing it to lose the spiritual and moral values that had once defined its culture.

Soon after this, Tagore left for his first visit to Japan in 1916 with W. W. Pearson, C. F. Andrews, and Mukul Dey, a young Bengali artist and printmaker. The voyage passed through Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, and finally Kobe. During the journey, Tagore spent much of his time reflecting on the First World War, nationalism, industrialization, and colonialism.

At that time, Japan had emerged as a powerful modern nation after the Meiji Restoration (2). Unlike many Asian countries that had fallen under Western colonial rule, Japan successfully modernized while preserving many aspects of its traditional culture. Tagore admired this achievement greatly. He was impressed by the cleanliness of Japanese cities, the discipline of the people, and the aesthetic beauty visible in everyday life.

For Tagore, Japan represented the possibility of an Asian civilization that could modernize without completely surrendering to Western materialism. He believed that Japan had maintained harmony between nature, art, and daily life. These observations deeply influenced his thoughts about cultural identity and the future of Asia.

During his stay in Japan, he was deeply impressed by many aspects of traditional Japanese culture. He admired the country's beauty, its people, and especially its artistic sensibility. He wrote short poems for Japanese admirers, many of which were later published as *Fireflies*. One particularly moving moment occurred when a group of Buddhist followers greeted him respectfully at a railway station. Their silent reverence touched him so deeply that tears came to his eyes. Tagore was deeply impressed by the beauty and harmony of the Japanese society. He describes how beauty in Japan is not only confined to palaces, temples, or works of art but is present even in ordinary household objects, social manners, and everyday activities. According to him, the Japanese people have cultivated an artistic sensibility that transforms daily life into an expression of grace and discipline. He repeatedly emphasizes that Japanese civilization is rooted in simplicity, refinement, self-control, and respect for harmony. Unlike Western industrial societies, where material wealth and power dominate human life, Japan, in Tagore's view, has traditionally valued emotional and spiritual richness. According to Tagore, the Japanese had inherited a rich civilization that shaped their graceful behavior and strong moral values. He especially admired the spirit of Bushido, the samurai code of honour, which emphasized loyalty, courage, and self-discipline. He admires the Japanese ability to maintain cleanliness, order, politeness, and elegance without excessive luxury or arrogance. Even the smallest actions of ordinary people appear graceful and meaningful to him. This sensitivity toward beauty, he argues, comes from Japan's close relationship with nature.

"I am just coming from my visit to Japan, where I exhorted this young nation to take its stand upon the higher ideals of humanity and never to follow the West in its acceptance of the organized selfishness of Nationalism as its religion, never to gloat upon the febleness of its neighbours, never to be unscrupulous in its behavior to the weak, where it can be gloriously mean with impunity, while turning its right cheek of brighter humanity for the kiss of admiration to those who have the power to deal it a blow.

The truth is that Japan is old and new at the same time. She has her legacy of ancient culture from the East,—the culture that enjoins man to look for his true wealth and power in his inner



soul, the culture that gives self-possession in the face of loss and danger, self-sacrifice without counting the cost or hoping for gain, defiance of death, acceptance of countless social obligations that we owe to men as social beings. In a word, modern Japan has come out of the immemorial East like a lotus blossoming in easy grace, all the while keeping its firm hold upon the profound depth from which it has sprung. And Japan, the child of the Ancient East, has also fearlessly claimed all the gifts of the modern age for herself. She has shown her bold spirit in breaking through the confinements of habits, useless accumulations of the lazy mind, which seeks safety in its thrift and its locks and keys. Thus, she has come in contact with the living time and has accepted with eagerness and aptitude the responsibilities of modern civilization". (3)

Tagore believed that Asian countries shared a spiritual and cultural heritage distinct from the materialistic civilization of the West. He hoped that Asian nations would cooperate to create a more humane and balanced world civilization. According to Tagore, Japan, being one of the most advanced Asian nations of the time, played an important role.

During his lectures in Japan, Tagore spoke about the need for cultural cooperation among Asian countries. He encouraged Japan to become a moral and cultural leader rather than an imperial power. He believed that true progress should be based on human values, creativity, and spiritual freedom rather than military strength.

Delivered in 1916 at Keio Gijuku University in Tokyo, this speech praises Japan's cultural achievements while warning against the dangers of blindly imitating Western industrial and political models. Tagore explains that although he spent only a short time in Japan, he was able to understand the deeper spirit of the country through his feelings, observations, and intuition. He believed that the true character of a nation cannot be understood only through facts, statistics, or material progress. Instead, it can be seen in the people's way of life, their values, their art, and their relationship with nature and other human beings. From the beginning of the speech, Tagore argues that Japan has a unique spiritual and artistic culture that makes it different from many other modern nations.

His ideas influenced many Japanese intellectuals who were interested in Indian philosophy, Buddhism, and in the revival of Asian culture. Tagore's speeches promoted a sense of cultural connection between India and Japan and encouraged mutual respect between the two nations.

However, Tagore also noticed a striking contrast between Japan's traditional beauty and its growing imitation of the West. When he reached Tokyo, he was overwhelmed by reporters, photographers, and the modern publicity surrounding his arrival. His companions remarked on the contradiction between Japan's refined artistic culture and its eagerness to copy Western industrial civilization. Among those who saw photographs of Tagore during this visit was a young student named Yasunari Kawabata, who would later become the first Japanese winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Kawabata never forgot the image of Tagore, whom he described as a wise and almost magical figure with flowing white hair and deep, thoughtful eyes.

During his visit, Tagore repeatedly urged the Japanese people not to abandon their cultural traditions. Speaking before leading politicians, scholars, and religious figures in Tokyo, he warned that blindly imitating the West would damage Japan's true spirit. At first, some leaders appreciated his advice. Even the Prime Minister thanked him for offering an important warning at a critical moment in Japan's history.



“What is dangerous for Japan is, not the imitation of the outer features of the West, but the acceptance of the motive force of the Western nationalism as her own. Her social ideals are already showing signs of defeat at the hands of politics. I can see her motto, taken from science, "Survival of the Fittest," writ large at the entrance of her present-day history—the motto whose meaning is, "Help yourself, and never heed what it costs to others"; the motto of the blind man who only believes in what he can touch, because he cannot see. But those who can see know that men are so closely knit that when you strike others the blow comes back to yourself. The moral law, which is the greatest discovery of man, is the discovery of this wonderful truth, that man becomes all the truer the more he realizes himself in others. This truth has not only a subjective value, but is manifested in every department of our life. And nations who sedulously cultivate moral blindness as the cult of patriotism will end their existence in a sudden and violent death”. (4)

Although Tagore admired Japan’s cultural achievements, he became increasingly concerned about the rise of militarism and aggressive nationalism in the country. When Tagore visited Japan again in 1924, after the First World War, he observed that Japan was more and more influenced by Western imperialist ideas. Tagore openly criticized narrow nationalism in his lectures and essays. He warned that blind nationalism could destroy the moral and spiritual values of society. According to him, nationalism based on power and conquest would ultimately lead to violence and human suffering.

Tagore's views were not always welcomed in Japan. During his early visits, he was widely admired for his poetry, ideas, and vision of Asian unity. However, as he began to criticize the growing nationalism and militarism in Japan, public opinion gradually turned against him. As a result, when Tagore returned to Japan in 1924 and again in 1929, he received a much less enthusiastic reception than before. Many Japanese people thought that his ideas about peace, humanism, and idealism might make the nation weaker and less powerful. He argued that modern nations often believed they had to be ruthless, use military power, and pursue wealth and expansion without moral restraint. Tagore strongly rejected this view and warned that such nationalism would ultimately lead to violence, exploitation, and spiritual decline.

Overall, Tagore's relationship with Japan was marked by both admiration and disappointment. He loved Japan's artistic traditions, cultural refinement, and spiritual heritage, but he strongly criticized its growing nationalism, militarism, and imitation of Western imperial powers. His visits reflected his lifelong belief that true progress must be guided by moral and spiritual values rather than by power and material success alone.

Many Japanese nationalists considered Tagore's ideas too idealistic and felt that, as India was still under British rule, he was not in a position to criticize Japan. However, many Japanese scholars, writers, and artists continued to respect him for his honesty and wisdom. Later, as Japan moved toward militarism, some people recognized that Tagore's warnings had been far-sighted. Despite these changes, Tagore never lost faith in Japan. He believed that Japan could become modern while preserving its cultural identity and spiritual values, and could serve as an example for the future of civilization



Tagore & China:

India and China have shared a long history of cultural, religious, and intellectual exchanges. Although they differ in many ways, both are among the world's oldest civilizations. They have experienced foreign domination, possess vast territories and large populations, and today play important roles in global politics and economic development.

The introduction of Buddhism from India into China was a major event in the history of Asia. After reaching China, Buddhism gradually developed and adapted to Chinese society by interacting with local beliefs and traditions. Indian and Central Asian Buddhist ideas were absorbed into Chinese culture and became an important part of its religious and intellectual life.

From the second century CE, merchants and Buddhist monks helped spread Buddhism from India to China. Along with Buddhist teachings such as karma, rebirth, monasteries, and monastic life, they also introduced many other forms of knowledge. Buddhism became a channel for the exchange of philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, literature, art, architecture, and translation practices. As a result, it made a lasting contribution to China's intellectual, cultural, and scientific development.

After the Song dynasty (AD 960 to AD 1279), Buddhism's influence in China declined, and other foreign influences affected India-China relations. In the 18th century, India became a British colony. After the Opium War, China became a semi-colonial, semi-feudal state. The two countries gradually became isolated, and the ancient channels of cultural exchange were shrouded in oblivion. With a strong sense of historical responsibility, Rabindranath Tagore was determined to restore these ancient channels of cultural exchange. Tagore held profound respect for Buddhism and was deeply aware of the historical connections between India and China. He loved Chinese poetry, and from his childhood, he admired Chinese culture. Numerous references in his writings demonstrate this enduring interest. His articles "Cheena Maraner Byabsay" (The Death Trade in China), published in the Bengali magazine Bharati in 1881, and "Chinemaner Chithi" (Letters of a Chinaman), based on Dickinson's Letters of John Chinaman (1898), provide strong evidence of his knowledge and engagement with Chinese affairs.

In 1923, discussions regarding Tagore's proposed visit to China took place among Leonard Elmhirst, the Chinese poet Xu Zhimo, and Qu Xing. They communicated the invitation to Liang Qichao, who subsequently extended an official invitation to Tagore. Upon receiving it, Tagore remarked that he regarded the invitation not merely as a personal request but as a call from the Chinese people to India. As a humble son of India, he felt it was his duty to accept. He expressed the hope that his visit would help revive the cultural and spiritual ties between the two ancient civilizations, stating:

"My friends, I have come to ask you to reopen the channel of communion, which I hope is still there; for though overgrown with weeds of oblivion, its lines can still be traced. I shall consider myself fortunate if, through this visit, China comes nearer to India and India to China, for no political or commercial purpose, but for disinterested human love and for nothing else" (5)



Tagore visited China in 1924, at a time when Chinese intellectuals were deeply influenced by the May Fourth Movement(6), which began in Beijing on 4 May 1919 and quickly spread across the country. The movement sparked important debates about East and West, tradition and modernity, and the best path for China's development. Students and intellectuals played a leading role in these discussions and helped shape modern Chinese thought.

Different groups offered different solutions for China's future. Some supported the adoption of Marxist ideas, while others believed that Western science and culture were necessary for national progress. Another group of modernists argued for a complete break from traditional values. In this atmosphere of intellectual debate, Chinese scholars invited well-known international thinkers to deliver lectures and contribute to discussions on nation-building. Among those invited were Rabindranath Tagore, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, and Albert Einstein.

Prior to Tagore's arrival in Beijing, Liang Qichao made a statement saying,

“We would welcome Rabindranath Tagore in the same spirit as when more than one thousand years ago the people of Lu San welcomed Chang Ti. Rabindranath Tagore wishes to make it known that he is not a religious teacher or an educationist or a philosopher, he says that he is only a poet. This we fully acknowledge. And he says also that he cannot under any circumstances place himself on the same level as his predecessors, who came in our early dynasties, because India at that time was in a period of great epic pre-eminence; it was an epoch which was capable of giving birth to great ideals and noble personalities, and therefore totally different in its spirit to the present era of transition, when human thoughts and ideas are in a state of turmoil and confusion and therefore offer no encouragement to the development of genuine and worthy personalities. This sentiment we can also, I think, indorse. And yet, to be a great poet needs more than an exquisite sense of what is artistic, — one must also be inspired by serious and magnanimous thoughts. In the personality of Rabindranath Tagore, as well as in his poetry, we find that exemplification of those principles of absolute love and absolute freedom, which form the basis of Hindu culture and civilisation” (7)

During his stay in Nanjing, Tagore delivered a speech at the Southeast University Gymnasium. Addressing the students, he encouraged them to remain hopeful despite the challenges facing their country. He compared the coming future to the dawn that follows the songs of morning birds and urged them to prepare for a new and brighter age. While speaking to Chinese students, Tagore encouraged them to cultivate emotional sensitivity and maintain a close connection with nature. He believed that a free and harmonious relationship with the natural world would help create a better and more beautiful future. He also warned that an excessive focus on utility and practical benefits could destroy beauty and reduce the quality of human life. Addressing the youth of China, Tagore urged them to uphold ideals such as truth, beauty, purity, compassion, and moral responsibility. He believed that young people would play a crucial role in shaping the future of civilization. Through his lectures, he called for Asian unity, cultural exchange, humanism, and the renewal of spiritual values. Overall, his message was that Asia



should engage with the modern world while preserving its cultural identity and contributing to a more peaceful, humane, and morally enriched global civilization.

“The soil on which has flourished an ancient forest with innumerable generations of trees, become deep, rich and fruitful by the, shedding of "leaves and flowers. Your old civilisation has enriched the soil of the heart. Its constant huthan touch has a vitalising efect upon everything belonging to it. This civilisation could not have lasted so long, if it had not been eminently human, if it had not been full of the life of the spirit”. (8)

In his major speeches in China, Tagore emphasized the shared spiritual heritage of India and China, especially the influence of Lord Buddha and Buddhism. He expressed great confidence in the revival of Chinese civilization and believed that China would play a leading role in the future of Asia.

“You have a temple nearby where there is a picture, carved upon the rock, of an Indian monk or sage who came to this country centuries ago. 18 most interesting about him is the fact that when he came here, he felt that these hills were just like the hills with which he was familiar in his own motherland. It is said that this hill came flying from India to this place. But the real fact is that the hill which he had known in his own country had a Sanskrit name meaning the Vulture Peak. When he saw a hill here so like the one, he had loved in India, he felt a great delight and gave it the same name. When I came, I too saw your beautiful lake and the hills around. They did not seem at all strange, for your hills speak the same language as ours, your lake has the same smile as our lakes, your trees the same physiognomy, with only a slight difference, as our Indian trees. Therefore when I find myself in the heart of nature here, I realize the unity of different countries in their outer aspect”. (9)

Tagore's speeches clearly reflected his philosophical beliefs. As in his speeches in Japan, one of his main concerns was the growing influence of Western materialism on Eastern societies. He believed that Asia's strength lay in values such as peace, love, tolerance, and freedom, which had long connected its peoples and cultures. He feared that these values were being weakened by excessive materialism and nationalism. Through his visit, he hoped to strengthen the bonds between India and China and preserve their shared cultural heritage. He warned that neglecting these traditions would dishonor the achievements of their ancestors.

In his speeches, Tagore clearly stated that he did not completely reject the West. He argued that the positive aspects of Western civilization, such as scientific knowledge and rational thinking, should be accepted with respect and careful judgment. However, he warned against blindly copying Western models. According to Tagore, Westernization and modernity were not the same thing. True modernity required independent thinking and moral progress, not simple imitation. He urged his Chinese audience to examine every idea critically and accept only what was genuinely beneficial for their society.

Tagore believed that Asian culture is based on truth, an eternal value that never loses its importance. He argued that a nation cannot become truly strong through material progress alone, because the pursuit of power often leads to conflict and destruction. For this reason, he



stressed the need to develop spiritual awareness alongside scientific knowledge and intellectual growth.

“In Asia we must seek our strength in union, in an unwavering faith in righteousness, and never in the egotistic spirit of separateness and self-assertion. It is from the heart of the East that the utterance has sprung forth: “The meek shall inherit the earth.” For the meek never waste energy in the display of insolence, but are firmly established in true prosperity through harmony with the All. In Asia we must unite, not through some mechanical method of organization, but through a spirit of true sympathy. The organized power of the machine is ready to smite and devour us, from which we must be rescued by that living power of spirit which grows into strength, not through mere addition, but through organic assimilation. That we should borrow science from the West is right. We have a great thing to accept from the people of the West, — their treasure of intellect, which is immense and whose superiority we must acknowledge. But it would be degradation on our part, and an insult to our ancestors, if we forgot our own moral wealth of wisdom, which is of far greater value than a system that produces endless materials and a physical power that is always on the warpath.” (10)

In his discussions with Chinese educators, Tagore explained his educational philosophy and criticized conventional methods of teaching. Drawing on his own experiences and the educational model he developed at Santiniketan, India, he emphasized learning in close contact with nature rather than within rigid classroom systems. Through these ideas, Tagore hoped to inspire young people to combine knowledge, moral values, and creativity in order to meet the challenges of a changing world.

A well-travelled man, Tagore incorporated the best elements of Western thought into his Pan-Asian vision while maintaining a distinctly Asian ethos. He urged Chinese audiences to embrace peace, love, tolerance, and freedom—values that had long served as the foundation of Asian civilization. A central theme of his speeches was his criticism of excessive materialism. Tagore warned that the relentless pursuit of wealth, power, and profit, without a moral purpose, could weaken human values and weaken society. He argued that Westernization should not be equated with modernity. Although he admired the West's achievements in science and knowledge, he believed that new ideas should be examined critically rather than accepted uncritically.

Tagore viewed Asia as the guardian of important spiritual traditions developed through centuries of philosophy, religion, and artistic creativity. He believed that these traditions could provide a moral balance to the materialistic tendencies of modern industrial civilization. According to him, genuine progress required harmony between material development and spiritual growth.

Tagore's visit to China in 1924 generated both admiration and criticism. Many Chinese intellectuals welcomed him as a great poet and thinker, but others strongly disagreed with his ideas. Marxist scholars and supporters of Western science and technology often viewed his emphasis on spirituality as unrealistic and unsuitable for a nation struggling with political



instability and social problems. Some realist writers feared that his message would distract young people from the urgent tasks of national reconstruction and social reform.

Despite these criticisms, Tagore's influence in China remained significant. Before his visit, only a small number of his works had been translated into Chinese, including selections from *Gitanjali*, *The Homecoming (Chhuti)*, and *Kabuliwala*. After his visit, more of his writings became available in Chinese translation, including *Chitra*, *The Post Office (Dakghar)*, and *The Home and the World (Ghare-Baire)*. These translations introduced Chinese readers to a wider range of his literary and philosophical ideas.

At first, many Chinese readers misunderstood Tagore's message. Some viewed him mainly as a critic of the West, while others regarded him as a spiritual prophet rather than a poet and humanist. Nevertheless, he continued to enjoy widespread respect among many scholars, writers, and cultural figures. Even Sun Yat-sen, regarded as the Father of Modern China, expressed a desire to meet Tagore, although the meeting never took place. One of the most memorable moments of the visit occurred on 8 May 1924, Tagore's 64th birthday. A grand celebration was organized in his honour on the grounds of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. During the ceremony, Hu Shi delivered a welcome speech in English. Afterwards, Liang Qichao presented Tagore with a special Chinese name, "Zhu Zhendan." (11)

Influence and Legacy:

Tagore's visits to China and Japan had a lasting impact on cultural and intellectual relations between India and East Asia. Through his travels, lectures, and personal connections, he promoted the idea of Asian cultural cooperation and encouraged greater understanding among the peoples of India, China, and Japan.

His interactions with Chinese scholars led to the introduction of Chinese language and culture studies at Santiniketan. In 1927, Tagore met Tan Yunshan in Singapore and invited him to Santiniketan. Professor Tan later became a key figure in strengthening Sino-Indian cultural relations. After returning to China in 1933, he helped establish the Sino-Indian Cultural Society, and Tagore accepted its honorary presidency.

One of the most important outcomes of these efforts was the establishment of Cheena Bhavana (Institute of Chinese studies) at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. Formally inaugurated on 14 April 1937, it became a major centre for the study of Chinese language, culture, and history, as well as a center for academic exchange between India and China. Leaders such as Jiang kai-shek and Zhou Enlai later visited the institution. Cheena Bhavana continues to symbolize as a centre of peace, friendship, and cultural dialogue between the two countries.

Tagore's influence also extended to Chinese literature and art. Writers and poets such as Xu Zhimo, Guo Moruo, and Bing Xin drew inspiration from his works and ideas. The celebrated Chinese painter Xu Beihong studied at Santiniketan and produced several portraits of Tagore, many of which are preserved in Rabindra Bhavana and institutions in Beijing.

Tagore's legacy continues to shape relations between India and China. Many leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Zhou Enlai, K. R. Narayanan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Pratibha Patil, and Wen



Jiabao, have recognized his contribution to friendship and cultural exchange between the two countries. Institutions such as Cheena Bhavana have continued his vision by promoting academic cooperation, educational exchanges, and mutual understanding between India and China. Tagore always considered India and China as two brothers, which inspired these two prime ministers to initiate the famous slogan "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" (India-China Brotherhood). Not only that, Tagore's idea on India-China relation was also reflected in their foreign policy, when they jointly signed the famous "Pancha Sheel" (Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence), which is till now an important norm of maintaining diplomatic relation between these two countries.

Like China, Rabindranath Tagore's relationship with Japan left a lasting legacy in the fields of art, education, and cultural exchange. His interactions with Japanese artists, scholars, and intellectuals helped build a strong bridge of friendship between India and Japan. The exchange of ideas between Indian and Japanese artists enriched modern Asian art and encouraged greater appreciation of each other's cultural traditions.

Tagore's poetry, philosophy, and educational ideals gained wide recognition in Japan, especially after he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Many Japanese readers admired his message of spiritual humanism, peace, and universal brotherhood. His works were translated into Japanese, making him one of the most respected foreign literary figures in the country.

The cultural ties established by Tagore also inspired many Japanese scholars and students to visit Santiniketan and study Indian culture, philosophy, and art. These exchanges strengthened educational and intellectual relations between the two nations and reflected Tagore's belief that mutual understanding could overcome national and cultural barriers.

A lasting symbol of this vision is Visva-Bharati University, which Tagore founded as a centre for international learning and cultural dialogue. Continuing this legacy, Nippon Bhavana was established at Visva-Bharati and formally inaugurated on 3 February 1994 by Vice-President of India K. R. Narayanan. It has since become an important centre for Japanese studies, academic research, and Indo-Japanese cultural exchange.

Conclusion:

Rabindranath Tagore's engagement with China and Japan was an important part of his broader vision for Asia. He deeply admired the rich cultural traditions of both countries and believed that meaningful exchanges in literature, art, education, and philosophy could strengthen understanding among Asian nations. Through his visits and speeches, Tagore sought to build bridges between India, China, and Japan and encourage a spirit of mutual respect and cultural cooperation.

A careful study of his ideas reveals his strong belief that true civilization depends not only on material progress but also on moral and spiritual values. He emphasized the importance of compassion, creativity, freedom of thought, and respect for human dignity. At the same time,



he warned against excessive nationalism, militarism, and the blind imitation of the West, arguing that these forces could lead societies away from their ethical foundations.

Although some of his views were criticized during his lifetime, Tagore remained committed to the ideals of humanism, international understanding, and cultural dialogue. His message went beyond national boundaries and called for harmony among peoples and nations. Today, his legacy continues to inspire scholars, artists, and cultural institutions in both China and Japan. His vision of friendship, mutual respect, and shared human values remains relevant in the modern world, making his engagement with China and Japan a significant chapter in the history of Asian cultural and intellectual exchange.

Notes:

1. Okakura Kakuzō was a famous Japanese thinker who worked to preserve Asian art and culture during a period of rapid Western influence. he is best known for the idea “Asia is One,”
- 2.The Meiji Restoration of 1868 was a landmark political and social transformation that brought an end to the feudal rule of the Tokugawa shogunate and restored supreme authority to the Emperor. It marked the beginning of a far-reaching programme of modernization and reform, through which Japan rapidly adopted Western institutions, technology, and industrial practices. These changes enabled the country to strengthen its political and economic foundations, resist foreign domination, and emerge as a major power on the world stage.
- 3.Nationalism by sir Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan and co., limited St. Martin’s Street, london,1918(page-78)
- 4.Nationalism by sir Rabindranath Tagore, Macmillan and co., limited St. Martin’s Street, london,1918(page-78)
- 5.Talks in China, Rabindranath Tagore, Sisir Kumar Das, Rabindra Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, 1999, page-50
- 6.The May Fourth Movement was a cultural and anti-imperialist political movement in China that began with student protests in Beijing on May 4, 1919. It became an important turning point in the broader New Culture Movement (1915–1921), which aimed to challenge traditional Confucian values and promote new ideas based on science, democracy, and modern thinking. The movement also continued the reform efforts that had begun during the late Qing period.
- 7.Talks in China, Rabindranath Tagore, Sisir Kumar Das, Rabindra Bhavana, Visva Bharati, 1999, page-24
- 8.Talks in China, Rabindranath Tagore, Sisir Kumar Das, Rabindra Bhavana, Visva Bharati, 1999, page-34
- 9.Talks in China, Rabindranath Tagore, Sisir Kumar Das, Rabindra Bhavana, Visva Bharati, 1999, page-48



10. Talks in China, Rabindranath Tagore, Sisir Kumar Das, Rabindra Bhavana, Visva Bharati, 1999, page-51

11. Zhu Zhendan (竺震旦) was the Chinese name given to Rabindranath Tagore during his visit to China in 1924. The character **Zhu** (竺) is an ancient Chinese term for India (derived from *Tianzhu*), while **Zhendān** (震旦) is an old name for China that originated from a Sanskrit term. The name symbolically combined India and China, reflecting Tagore's role in promoting cultural understanding between the two countries.

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