

THE HISTORY OF BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN UZBEKISTAN AND JAPAN

Eshpolatova Maqsuda Baxtiyor qizi

Student of the University of Information Technologies and Management

Annotation: *This article analyzes the historical development of bilateral relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and Japan, including the establishment of diplomatic ties and the expansion of cooperation in political, economic, cultural, and educational spheres. It highlights official visits by the heads of state, Japan's technical and financial assistance to Uzbekistan, and the scope of humanitarian and cultural exchanges between the two peoples. The article also outlines the prospective directions for strengthening bilateral relations.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, Japan, diplomatic relations, strategic partnership, investment, technical cooperation, Asia, education, culture, official visit, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Naruhito.*

Official diplomatic relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and Japan were established on January 26, 1992. Since then, bilateral relations have consistently developed. In 1994, Uzbekistan opened its embassy in Tokyo, and Japan established its embassy in Tashkent. High-level official visits, particularly between Uzbekistan's First President Islam Karimov and Japanese government leaders, have played a key role in strengthening bilateral ties.

Japan has provided Uzbekistan with a range of technical, financial, and grant-based assistance, as well as loans for infrastructure development projects. In this process, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has played a crucial role. Through JICA, numerous projects have been implemented in Uzbekistan in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, environmental protection, and education. Major Japanese companies such as Mitsubishi, Itochu, Toyota, Marubeni, and others are actively involved in Uzbekistan's industrial and energy sectors. Bilateral trade turnover has steadily increased over the years.

Cultural exchange has also become an essential component of the relationship between the two nations. Japanese language and culture centers operate in Tashkent, Samarkand, and other cities. Many Uzbek students study in Japan, while Japanese students undertake training at Uzbekistan's Oriental Studies and World Languages universities. In 2019,

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid an official visit to Japan and held a meeting with Emperor Naruhito, marking a new stage in bilateral relations. During this visit, a number of investment agreements and cooperation documents were signed[1].

At the Scientific Library of the National University of Uzbekistan, there exists a large collection of books and journals published in Japan between 1927 and 1941. In the 1930s, following the establishment of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Japan in the fields of sericulture and mulberry cultivation, a group of Uzbek specialists traveled to Japan. There, they studied Japan's advanced experience in these sectors in detail and later introduced those practices in Uzbekistan.

Several high-yielding mulberry varieties and productive silkworm breeds were imported from Japan and successfully adapted to local conditions. In addition, Japanese machinery and equipment were purchased to meet the needs of Uzbekistan's silk industry. In 1929, Professor E.F. Poyarkov of the Central Asian State University delivered a lecture at a sericulture conference in Japan, further contributing to scientific and technical exchange between the two countries [2].

In 1991, Japan recognized the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, the Embassy of Japan in Tashkent was opened the same year. In 1996, the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Tokyo began its official operations. Equal and mutually respectful relations were established between the two countries. Over the span of 14 years, numerous official documents and agreements were signed between Uzbekistan and Japan.

During this period, the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, paid two official visits to Japan — in 1994 and 2002. In addition, reciprocal visits were made by the foreign ministers, senior government officials, heads of departments, parliamentary delegations, and other representatives of both countries. On March 9, 2001, a meeting was held at the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for State Property Management with representatives of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). During the negotiations, Mr. Mitsuaki Inoue, JICA's regional project coordinator for Central Asia, discussed the agency's planned technical assistance projects for small and medium-sized businesses in 2001 [3].

One of the key areas of cooperation between Uzbekistan and Japan is human resource development. To date, around 800 specialists from various ministries and agencies of Uzbekistan have completed professional training programs in Japan, and 98 young Uzbek professionals have graduated from master's programs at Japan's leading universities. Since 2000, under the scholarship program of the Japan Center for International

Cooperation, 20 Uzbek graduate students per year have been given the opportunity to study in Japan for two years. In 2001, the Uzbekistan–Japan Center for Human Resource Development was established in Tashkent. So far, more than 1,500 people have completed business, Japanese language, and computer courses at the center. In total, over 100,000 participants have taken part in the center’s various cultural and educational programs.

Japanese language education has been introduced into the curricula of higher education institutions in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Fergana, and other cities of Uzbekistan. There is also ongoing scientific cooperation between academic institutions of Uzbekistan and their Japanese counterparts. The Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, through its institutes of electronics, seismology, immunology, biochemistry, chemistry (general and inorganic), physiology and biophysics, oriental studies, archaeology, and the Botanical Scientific Research Center, collaborates with Japanese universities, research institutes, and organizations. One notable achievement is the development of an environmentally friendly metallurgical technology at Uzbekistan’s Institute of Electronics, which was acquired under a licensed agreement by Japan’s Nippon Steel Corporation. From 1989 to 1998, researchers from the Institute of Art Studies of Uzbekistan, under the leadership of Professor Kyozo Kato from Soka University, conducted archaeological research on Buddhist monuments at Dalverzin Tepe, located in the Shurchi district of Surkhandarya region[4].

At the invitation of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe of Japan, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, paid an official visit to the capital city of Tokyo on December 19, 2019 [5].

The Uzbek and Japanese peoples share many common traits. National and moral values, such as solidarity, diligence, and kindness, are inherent to both nations. These qualities are clearly reflected in the friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries. In recent years, Uzbekistan and Japan have achieved significant progress in developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation based on mutual interests. Uzbekistan places high value on its sincere friendship, strategic partnership, and cooperation with Japan. In turn, Japan recognizes Uzbekistan as a key player in the Central Asian region.

On the third day of his official visit to Japan, the President of Uzbekistan began the day with a meeting at the House of Representatives of the Japanese Parliament. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev met with Tadamori Oshima, Speaker of the House of Representatives, to discuss the further development of Uzbekistan–Japan inter-parliamentary relations. At the end of the meeting, the President of Uzbekistan presented

the Speaker with the first Uzbek-language translated and published edition of the Constitution of Japan, marking a symbolic gesture of respect and cultural exchange.

President Mirziyoyev also met with Akiko Santo, President of the House of Councillors of the Japanese Parliament. The current state of inter-parliamentary cooperation was highly praised, particularly the active dialogue established between the legislative bodies of the two countries under the joint memorandum signed earlier that year. Discussions focused on further strengthening Uzbekistan–Japan friendship and strategic partnership, emphasizing the broad opportunities available in the fields of education, culture, sports, and humanitarian exchange. Additionally, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev held a meeting at the Akasaka State Guest House in Tokyo with Shinichi Kitaoka, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) [6].

As of today, the total value of joint projects between Uzbekistan and Japan has exceeded \$4 billion. A new long-term cooperation program worth more than \$3.5 billion has been agreed upon, which includes initiatives in energy, industry, agriculture modernization, environmental protection, healthcare, and other key sectors.

Special attention was given to supporting small and medium-sized business projects and expanding educational exchange programs. To ensure the timely and high-quality implementation of each project carried out in cooperation with JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), the two sides agreed to develop a “roadmap”.

The main events of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s official visit to Japan took place in Tokyo on December 19. President Mirziyoyev expressed sincere gratitude to the Japanese government for its support of reforms and economic modernization in Uzbekistan, as well as for assisting in the training of highly qualified professionals.

The sides reviewed avenues for continuing constructive political dialogue, and noted the closeness of their positions on pressing international issues. It was with satisfaction that the sides acknowledged the revitalization of inter-parliamentary ties, particularly through the active role of the Uzbekistan–Japan Friendship League within the Japanese Parliament.

The two leaders proposed to further increase mutual trade volumes and expand cooperation in investment, technology, finance, and technical assistance. The outcomes of the business forums held during the President’s visit to Japan were highlighted with great appreciation.

The two sides approved a number of promising projects in key sectors such as energy, mining, mechanical engineering, chemical industry, agriculture, textiles, and tourism, with a particular focus on attracting direct investments and advanced technologies from

leading Japanese companies and banks. In addition, the parties discussed ways to expand cooperation in interregional relations, organized labor migration, education, healthcare, and cultural exchange [7].

Institutional mechanisms for the coordination and promotion of joint projects in key areas were agreed upon. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Prime Minister of Japan Shinzō Abe signed a Joint Statement on further deepening and expanding strategic partnership relations between Uzbekistan and Japan. Agreements were exchanged between the two governments on cooperation in taxation and customs, as well as on the implementation of major investment and infrastructure projects.

In addition, during the visit of the Uzbek delegation, more than ten documents were signed in the fields of economy, industry, tourism, science, innovation, information and communication technologies, labor migration, education, sports, and interregional cooperation. President Mirziyoyev emphasized that developing and expanding multifaceted and mutually beneficial relations with Japan is one of the key priorities of Uzbekistan's foreign policy:

“Today we held in-depth discussions on the prospects of cooperation in politics, inter-parliamentary relations, trade and investment, innovation, small and medium-sized businesses, science and education, healthcare, culture, and other areas, and we reached important agreements,” said Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe added: “Based on the Joint Statement, we will work shoulder to shoulder with President Mirziyoyev to develop cooperation between Japan and Uzbekistan in all areas.”

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