Background of Ancient Cultures of Japan and India

Civilization creates the highly developed society mostly at the stage of urbanization with a collective form of cultures throughout interchanges with other civilizations.

The Indian subcontinent, located in the “Middle world” between the East and the West, has provided multi-environments, i.e. “India of Barley” in association with “Dry Asia”, “India of Rice” with “Monsoon Asia”, “India of Cotton”, and the coastal areas with “Maritime Asia”. The Japanese Archipelago is also located both in “Monsoon Asia” and “Maritime Asia”. Accordingly, the general characters of Japanese have kept a similarity to the ones of Indians, i.e. the conservatism in wet-rice agrarian society and the liberalism in maritime trade and commerce. Also, Japan has shared similar cultural elements with India from a root of “Forest Culture of Shinny Leaves” in “East Asian Crescent”, the mythologies over Eurasia and the movements of northern nomads. However, the Japanese civilization has started as a periphery of the Chinese civilization, yet under the indirect influence of the Indian civilization mostly through Buddhism.

The Indian history has progressed under the dynastic struggles among multi-zones, i.e. northern plains, central Deccan plateau, and southern peninsula. Consequently, a sort of cycle between a few imperial unities like by the Mauryas and the Guptas and ordinary regional separations has been repeated. On the other hand, the Japanese history has made the linear movement under the imperial lineage of Ten-no unbroken for ages eternal with religious dignity.

Both the ancient histories can share a similar tendency of cultural epochs despite
time gap for Japan around 1,000 to 500 years later than India. Major epochs in ancient India were the first urbanization in the Harappan culture, the eastward expansion of agriculture with iron implements, the second urbanization and the emergence of Buddhism, the penetration of Hellenic culture and the Golden Age of Hindu culture during the Gupta era; whereas, in ancient Japan, the introduction of wet-rice agriculture with bronze and iron implements during the Yayoi period, the penetration of nomadic horse-riders' culture during the middle Kofun period, the introduction of Buddhism during the Asuka period, and the formation of national culture during the Heian period.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that Japan and India have shared similar ecological environments as “Monsoon Asia” and “Maritime Asia”, and Indian notions had prevailed in Japan mostly through Buddhism in ancient times.

Influence of Intermediate Regions

The cultural propagations were boosted by human interactions and trade activities across inland and maritime routes particularly through Silk Route. The common mythologies prevailed over Eurasia witness active interchanges from pre-historic age.

The Jōmon culture was associated with both northern and southern cultures, the Yayoi culture with Coastal Province and Korea, the Kofun culture with Scytho-Siberian culture, and the Asuka culture onwards with T'ang, Indian, Hellenic and Persian cultures, etc. Buddhism worked as a strong motive to propagate ideas, technologies, arts and products. Through the Sinicization of Buddhism, eastern Eurasia was unified into one universal world, motivated by Buddhist notions. Japan became linked with India through the full involvement into Chinese civilization. It took long strides by receiving Buddhism together with Chinese characters and the Ritsu-ryō institution to organize a
high state of civilization. The Yamato court exchanged envoys with respective Chinese and Korean dynasties like Sui, T’ang, P’o-hai and Paekche. Foreign cultures were largely brought by immigrants and travellers like monks, artists and traders. Persian and Buddhist cultures were propagated mainly through Overland Silk Route, esoteric Buddhism through Sea Silk Route and Scythian culture through Steppe Route, supplemented by Highland Silk Route (Tibet route) and South-west Silk Route (Yunnan route). Finally Chinese culture, represented by T’ang, crossed the sea to Japan with them or separately.

Though changed by period, major merchandises were silks and porcelains from China; furs, horses and Persian utensils from North, Central and West Asia; spices, aromatics from Southeast Asia; Buddhist-related things, cottons, spices and aromatics from India; frankincense and horses from Arabia; gold and silver coins and glassware from the Roman Empire. Japan imported mainly Buddhist-related things, aromatics, celadon and suō (red or purple dyestuff originated from India and Southeast Asia) from China and furs from P’o-hai, and exported brocades and silks to P’o-hai. Major traders were Arabs, Persians, Indians, Scythians, Sogdians, Funan and Chinese.

Intensive interchanges among regions have inspired various zone theories, e.g. “East Asian World”, “Scytho-Siberian Cultural Zone”, “Himālayo-Centrism”, “Forest Culture of Shinny Leaves”, “Fan-shaped Cultural Zone”, “Interaction Sphere of Civilizations” and “Peripheral Cultural Zone”. The theory “Horse-riding race’s conquest of Japan” is related to Scytho-Siberian culture.

Notable influences of intermediate regions are exemplified by the Lantern Roof Design and colossal image from Central Asia, the Scythian Animal Style and kurugan from North Asia, and the Indianized architecture and art from Southeast Asia. They may
have reached ancient Japan, mostly filtered through Chinese and Korean cultures.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that human intercourses stimulated cultural diffusions from India to Japan with various cultures in intermediate regions through inland and maritime trade routes over Eurasia.

Comparison of Political, Economic and Social Movements

The Indian history is comparable to the history of East Asia, in which Japan is just a periphery. Different ecological backgrounds have made the Japanese history linear ahead under the authority of Ten-nō, whereas the Indian history being rotated between unity and separation.

In ancient Japan, the Jōmon Neolithic society maintained the indigenous and bottom layer of Japanese culture (c. 10000 - 400 B.C). The Yayoi agricultural society evolved through the introduction of wet-rice agriculture and bronze and iron technologies from the continent (c. 400 B.C. - A.D. 300). The Kofun period (c. A.D. 300 - 587) developed the state formation by Yamato Dynasty with the construction of huge tombs. From the Asuka to the Nara periods (A.D. 587 - 794), The Chinese civilization was intensively assimilated to establish the Ritsu-ryō and Buddhist state. The Heian aristocratic society realized the height in imperial power, but later approached to the medieval age through the monopoly of Fujiwara clan, the cloister government by senior retired emperors and the increase of manors (A.D. 794 - 1185). The continental culture was finally transformed into national culture.

In ancient India, the Neolithic Age expanded from Baluchistān to the Indus Plain (c. 7000 B.C. onwards). The Bronze Age and the first urbanization emerged in the mature Harappan culture with uniformity and standardization (c. 3500 – 1300 B.C). The Iron
Age expanded settlements further eastwards by the development of agriculture and the formation of states started the political union among janapadas (c. 1000 B.C. onwards). The Mahājanapadas and the second urbanization grew larger cities to lead to the rising Magadha Empire through the struggle and merger among Mahājanapadas (the 6th to 5th centuries B.C.). Buddhism and Jainism emerged as typical heterodox sects against Brāhmaṇism. After the impact of the Alexander’s invasion, the Maurya Empire achieved the vast empire (the 4th to 2nd centuries B.C.). The political unity led to a cultural unity of language, literature and art. After the Central Asian contacts with continuous foreign invasions, the Kuśāna Empire prospered the East and West trade by controlling Silk Route, with the emergence of the Mahāyāna and the Hellenic art of Gandhāra (the 1st to 3rd centuries A.D.). The Gupta Empire again united major parts of subcontinent to flourish the Hindu culture as the Golden Age (the 4th to 5th centuries A.D.). However, the Hūnas’ invasion weakened and dissolved the empire. Though Harsa united most of North India, the period gradually moved towards the early medieval age under fierce struggles among Rājputs, Muslims, etc. in the North, Deccan and the South (the 7th to 12th centuries A.D.). Finally Muslims gained the control of North India.

 Mostly peculiarities besides few similarities are found between the two ancient histories. Just a typical phenomenon in contrast between Japan and India is picked up in each field, such as the Ten-nō similar to Devaputra in ruler’s title, the influence from the continent versus the expansion of Greater India in diplomacy, trade and cultural interchange, the shift of capitals versus the two phases of urbanization, the rulers and commoners versus the varṇa and jāti in social classification, the shōen (manor) similar to the Jāgīrdārs in landlordism, etc.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that ancient Japan and India took different
courses of history, i.e. ‘Linear’ Japanese history and ‘Cyclic’ Indian history, yet shared basically a similar historical progress through foreign influences.

**Comparison of Metropolises as Core of Civilization**

The criteria of urbanization were first made archaeologically by V.G. Childe. However, the cosmology of each ethnic group is fundamentally important to dominate the concept of city plan. The Indian concept as mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* placed the divine zone in the centre to symbolize the religious superiority to the secular power of king, whereas the Chinese concept placed the royal palace in the centre like Lo-yang and Ch’ang-an, which Japan took as prototype of capital.

The urbanization in ancient Japan was equal to the construction of capital with imperial palace. The palace was built and shifted at each enthronement of the emperor before the area was focused on Asuka-kyō. The Ikaruga palace and Wakakusa complex built by Prince Shōtoku were closely functioned with the capital as Buddhist learning centre. Naniwa-kyō was built as sub-capital near seaport. Fujiwara-kyō realized the first full-fledged Chinese-style capital combining both palace and city areas to centralize the bureaucratic government. Heijō-kyō was shifted more strategically by economic convenience to connect with coastal area. The palace area was placed on north-central with the imperial palace facing to the court on the south. However, no fortification was constructed besides petty earthen walls on both sides of main gate to symbolize the religious authority of *Ten-nō* rather than military power. The imperial palace being centred with more spiritual dignity, the capital plan of Japan may be placed in an intermediate position between India and China. No mausoleum, shrine and temple were allocated in the centre. Thus Heijō-kyō took Ch’ang-an as model but did not imitate it.
State-administrated markets became indispensable for exchange of levied commodities as well as officials' salaried ones into necessary materials and products through the circulation of coin currency. Heian-kyō completed a secularized capital after short-lived Nagaoka-kyō. The capital was finally became the metropolis equipped with residential functions and conveniences.

The urbanization in ancient India can be divided into two phases, i.e. the first urbanization in the mature Harappan culture and the second urbanization during the emergence of Mahājanapadas in the early historical period. Some scholars argue about the third urbanization in the medieval age as the revival from urban stagnation in certain regions. The first urbanization is represented by two typical Harappan sites, Mohenjo-daro and Harappā, under a clear city plan with uniformity. The monumental buildings like palace, temple and tomb have not been identified besides the Great Bath and the Granary. Different size and locality of sites represent two types of city plan, i.e. Citadel probably for defence and rituals and Lower Town separated mainly in central regions and the both zones enclosed within a city wall mainly in peripheral regions, possibly colonized settlements with production centre at some sites. The latter type is represented by Dholavira, Lothal and Banāwali. The early historic urbanization was largely stimulated by coinage and iron technology. Notable features of early historic cities were fortification, street plan, monumental building like the Mauryan Pillared Hall, house plan with drainage and sanitary devices, coins and iron implements, and scripts. Various early historic cities emerged all over the subcontinent as capital or administrative centre, trade centre or port, religious and pilgrimage centre, and learning centre. However, the lack of horizontal excavation has discouraged the synthetic study of city functions, except such four sites as Shahi Khan Dheri, Takṣaśilā, Bhita and
Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Further Śiśupālgarh is suggestive by the square fortification plan as described in the Arthaśāstra. Yet the typical formation of capitals and peripheral cities can be taken from Magadha, i.e. Old and New Rājagrha, Pāṭaliputra, Nālandā and several Buddhist sites.

The function of ancient capitals in Japan was closely connected with Buddhist temples in cultural activities and welfare as they founded scholarly centre, commoners’ school, remedy centre, medical hospital, etc. Yet the location of temples was carefully restricted out of the centre of capital to avoid the political interference from religious authority. In ancient India, though the Arthaśāstra describes the shrine to be placed in the centre of city plan, temples may have tended to be neutral from secular powers as long as they were not authorized as state religion but patronized personally by rulers.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that ancient Japan and India took different courses of urbanization, i.e. the construction and shift of unfortified capitals with imperial palace in the centre in Japan, and the rise and decline of various urban centres, fortified with shrine in the centre ideally, through two phases of urbanization in India.

Development and Influence of Buddhism

The history of Indian religion means the transformation of Brāhmaṇism or Hinduism. Buddhism can be placed as one important movement in a whole process of transformation. It contributed particularly to loosening caste system, turning to value of life by morality and spreading Indian culture over Asia. Two points are remarkable out of several causes of the decline of Buddhism in India, i.e. the development of Tāntrism and Brāhmaṇical tendency in the Mahāyāna as original ethical principles superimposed by exorcism and divine worship, and the termination of political and social roles as a
counterpart for Hinduism taken over by Islam.

The East Asian cultural zone was formed under Buddhism with Chinese scripts. In ancient Japan, the state Buddhism supported the sovereignty of Ten-no under the Ritsu-ryō institution. Buddhism and Shintō, native faith, together took charge of imperial services. In its Buddhist history, Japan had the closest relationship with India in the early Heian period. Saichō and Kūkai brought esoteric Buddhism from China after close contacts with Indian monks there. Kūkai made esoteric Buddhism relevant to Japanese emotion through integration with native faith under the concept of sokuushin-jōbutsu (worldly union with Buddha upon completion of practices). Saichō reached the absolute monism to harmonize all the sects under the sansen-sōmoku-shikkai-jōbutsu (mountains, rivers, grasses, trees, all united with Buddha). Incorporated in Buddhist pantheon as guardians, Brähmanical deities were worshipped primarily for material benefits and favours.

Shintō amalgamated with Buddhism, Shugen-dō (mountain asceticism), Taoism, On’yō-dō (yin-yang notions), Onryō (holy spirits), animism, etc. Even legends of noble or foreign personalities with varied careers were worshipped among the populace. This suggests a real figure of primitive and primary faith of Japanese under constant foreign influences. The close ties between Shintō and esoteric Buddhism invented the doctrine of honji-suijaku (kami manifesting essence of Buddha). The fusion between kami and Buddha (shinbutsu-shūgō) has been built into the bottom layer of Japanese way of thinking to advance religious ideas with complicated and varied natures as one of major elements to search for the essence of Japanese culture. Under esoteric Buddhism, Shugen-dō contributed to propagating a Japanese way of faith, namely all nature full of Buddhahood, among the populace.

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Both Hinduism in India and esoteric Buddhism in Japan have gained the widest coverage of worshipped objects. This may suggest a reason of their continuance up to the present. Evolving the Japanese civilization realized the close interaction with Indian monks in China to lead to the early propagation of esoteric Buddhism.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that Indian notions and life styles were brought into Japan under the framework of Buddhism, being amalgamated with the indigenous faith of nature, which led to a similarity between Japanese Buddhism and Hinduism.

**Comparison and Influence of Form, Style and Pattern of Architecture and Fine Arts**

It may be overemphasized that Stone represents Indian culture, whereas Wood represents Japanese culture. Both the countries have nurtured rich material traditions.

Together with *vimāna*, *stūpa* was propagated and transformed into multi-layered tower in China by placing multi-rings at the top of watchtower, and completed as wooden *pagoda* in Japan. Also Himāchal Pradesh has kept a similar wooden *pagoda* tradition. Stone or wooden towers of *Gorin-tō* and *Taho-tō* were created with unique and original shapes. Clay towers of *Dotō* and *Zutō* possibly succeeded to the tradition of multi-terraced platforms in Southeast Asia.

The architecture of rock-cut temple also flourished in Central Asia and China. However, its influence in Japan was at minimum in architecture. It remained in sculpture of Buddhist stone images. Both functions of shrine and monastery were integrated in a Chinese-style wooden temple complex. Yet, Indian cave tradition is traceable in a few structural remains related to cliff-rock Buddhist images, i.e. the erected stone slabs with bass-reliefs surrounding a stone image, the slant cliff-rock or shallow cave carving images covered by a frontal wooden hall, and the natural or
partially excavated cave carving images.

The Buddha images, originated either from Gandhāra or Mathurā, reached the highest plastic art of Gupta style in Sārnāth. Through clay and stone statues in rock-cut temples in Central Asia, China and Korea, Buddhist images in Japan were largely influenced by the modified Indian style. Gilt-bronze, wood, lacquer, clay and stone were used. The wooden assembling technique of carved pieces and split-and-join method were invented. The forms of repoussé copper plaque, stamped brick and cliff-rock also flourished in Buddhist images. Uniquely carved stone monuments in Asuka may suggest the propagation of non-Buddhist tradition of sculpture.

The mural paintings of the Golden Hall of Hōryū-ji were largely influenced by the ones of Ajantā. Tabo provides a good reference in term of technique as well as Mandala paintings. Hiten, heavenly being, originated from India, solemnized Buddhist images, mural paintings, etc. Vine scroll, lotus pattern and scales pattern, developed in India, decorated various parts of Buddhist images and articles with auspicious and sorcerous meanings. Also the patterns and motifs of Jōmon potteries and Harappan painted potteries possibly represented sorcerous effect. Fuji-no-ki tomb has revealed rich gilt-bronze ornaments of horse equipment, of which metal work techniques and patterns resulted from collective amalgamations over Asia. The Indo-Pacific beads spread across coastal areas of Asia and reached in Yayoi Japan.

Both the treasures of Shōsō-in and Hōryū-ji can be placed as the terminal of Silk Route. Shōsō-in has kept about 9000 items, e.g. musical instruments, dance instruments, game tools, ornaments, clothes and Buddhist implements. Hōryū-ji has kept more than 130,000 pieces of artifacts, e.g. sculptures, paintings, miniature million-stūpas and sūtras. They hold global nature of materials, designs and techniques across Eurasia.
Mainly through Buddhism and China, Japan assimilated Indian artistic traditions well to develop its own artistic representations on top of its indigenous features and materials.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that, irrespective of material change, Indian form, style and pattern were amalgamated and sublimated in the artistic tradition of Japan under a large influence of Buddhist art together with other elements over Eurasia.

Overview of Types of Japanese and Indian Civilizations

The Japanese civilization has kept four peculiarities, i.e. the common notion of living in a single nation, the dual structures under primitive Jōmon and wet-rice agrarian traditions, the close connection between the capital and provinces to create new culture from rural culture, and the mixed culture of peasant with seashore and mountainous lives. It assimilated both Chinese and Indian civilizations under the influence of Buddhism. The Japanese opportunism is good at choosing the most suitable things among foreign cultures. However, the real trait of Japanese culture lies in sublimating the imitation to the culture of the way (do), inspired by the meditative culture of India. The ancient Japanese civilization was formed by cultural fusions among India, China, the Steppes, the South Seas, etc. on top of indigenous Jōmon. Yet, various Indian elements are found in Japanese traditions, e.g. *misogi* water purification, Gion car procession and *Onbashira-sai* festival to erect wooden pillars.

Four main peculiarities are also found in the Indian civilization, i.e. the self-sufficient world in a vast subcontinent yet peninsula, the continuity in modifications through the struggle between newcomers and earlier inhabitants, the unity in diversity under Hindu principles, and the religious society under Hinduism with caste system.
Thus, the characteristics of the two civilizations can be symbolized by the term ‘Unity in Diversity’ of India whereas ‘Diversity in Unity’ of Japan.

The pilgrimage organized the information network among sacred places to boost cultural fusions and to create the culture of travel amusement. It derives from the faith to the nature like mountains and waters, e.g. Five Mountains of Rājagrha, Vārāṇasī, Ise, Kumano and Tateyama.

Japanese society was divided into the rulers and the commoners. Hindu society was divided into four varṇas under the Brāhmanical doctrines, practically worked out under the finely divided occupational groups, jātis. In both the countries the untouchables were split out of society by the notion of pollution. Yet, they largely supported people’s daily lives, cultures and industries.

The Japanese civilization could select foreign elements, thanks to a geographical distance from the continent. Eventually it deepened its national culture. New cultures mostly spread from the capital to provinces to develop local cultures. On the other hand, the Indian civilization kept on undergoing foreign influences directly by invasions and migrations. As most foreigners entered from the North-West, the extent of foreign influence varied by regions peculiarly in the South.

Civilizations performed creativities through the process of imitation, addition and transfer among foreign cultures. They closely connected, mutually influenced and transformed themselves through “Medium Civilization”. Mobile nomads, traders and seafarers played a vital role to intermediate among civilizations in “Interchange Sphere of Civilizations”.

Thus, the discussion has concluded that the basis of Japanese way of life, largely influenced by Buddhism, has been possibly traced to the ancient Indian notions inspired
by the speculation for nature, and both Japanese and Indian civilizations have contained a similar characteristic in Diversity and Unity, whichever occupies a larger portion, through the interchanges among civilizations.

Ever since ancient times, humankinds have created culture of life. Nature has influenced human way of life yet awakened human spirits over cosmos for the universal and supreme existence. In other words, human spirits have inspired culture. In relation, nature and spirits interact in terms of cosmos and philosophy, spirits and culture in terms of religion and moral culture, and culture and nature in terms of material culture and resources. Believing in the next world or other dimensions beyond time and space, Indians have been always religious since ancient times, while Japanese have tended to be materialistic recently. However, now is the time for Japanese to look back to the importance of spiritual world, deeply reflected from ancient Indian wisdom. Japanese have assimilated Indian culture mostly through Buddhism. Further, Buddhism brought into Japan different cultures of intermediate regions absorbed in the course of propagation. Similarly, foreign cultures of various regions have flowed into the Indian civilization. When the molded regional peculiarity is removed from each civilization, the cultural commonness nurtured through interchanges among civilizations appears to the face. It is essential for the universality of civilizations to recognize the cultural commonness besides the cultural peculiarity regarded as regional identity. Globalization, in a real sense of prevailing universality, has not only appeared in modern world, but can be traced to the interchanges among civilizations in ancient world. Thus it will be of worth to put the ancient way of interchange to modern use in deepening international relations. A hint is available from the Ancient Indian Influence on Japanese Culture.