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JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

THE VELVET GLOVES FRAY...SLIGHTLY

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Major concern in this period centered around the future of Sino-Japanese relations in the post-Abe era, with most analysts predicting that there would be little change. China's impressive, though credit-fueled, rebound from the coronavirus pandemic as Japan's economy sharply contracted indicate that Tokyo will seek to maximize trade with the PRC. Xi Jinping's long-awaited state visit to Japan is on indefinite hold, with concern for the pandemic a convenient explanation for underlying multiparty opposition due to Beijing's assertive actions in contested areas and its repressive measures in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Differences on opinion remain on the wording of a so-called 4th Sino-Japanese Communique that is much desired by Beijing.

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Xi Jinping's long-awaited state visit to Japan is on indefinite hold, with concern for the pandemic a convenient explanation for underlying multiparty opposition due to Beijing's assertive actions in contested areas and its repressive measures in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Differences on opinion remain on the wording of a so-called 4th Sino-Japanese Communique that is much desired by Beijing.

Politics

Xinhua on Aug. 28 [reported](#) matter-of-factly on the sudden resignation of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo due to illness, with *Global Times* [observing](#) that, since stable relations with China were vital to the Japanese economy, his successor would likely continue Abe's policies. That is not necessarily good news for Sino-Japanese relations. The Chinese government's repressive actions toward Hong Kong were the main source of friction during this period. Still, Japanese newspapers avoided commenting directly on China's National People's Congress passing a law that severely limits Hong Kong's autonomy, generally reprinting foreign press agencies' coverage that described the issue as between China on one hand and the US and UK on the other.



Figure 1 Abe announces his resignation. Photo: AP

From May 8-10 a [standoff](#) took place in waters around the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands between the Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) and two Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ships as the Chinese vessels pursued a Japanese fishing boat. The Chinese government responded to Japanese protests by saying that the CCG was simply regulating illegal operations in Chinese waters and demanded that the JCG refrain from future obstruction. A *Japan Times* commentator on May 11 urged Japan to cooperate with the Philippines,

Vietnam, and other friendly facing the same challenges, with no noticeable results thus far.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide, regarded as a likely successor to Abe, at the end of June said only that China's decision on Hong Kong was "regrettable," particularly after the strong concern expressed by the international community, and that the government would continue to appropriately address the issue with the countries involved. In response to a question at his regular press conference on May 26, Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu [addressed](#) the draconian Hong Kong national security, saying that he had had his deputy call in the Chinese ambassador, and "not for the first time," to express Japan's concern that the territory maintain the freedoms it had enjoyed under the previous system. Japan, he said, would "carefully observe" developments and respond in "an appropriate manner."

The Abe administration's diffident approach to China's actions in Hong Kong contrasted sharply with that of Japanese public opinion and of many members of the Diet, including those in the prime minister's own party. [Responding](#) to Japan's failure to join other democracies in denouncing the PRC's legislation on Hong Kong, a Kyorin University professor emeritus accused his country of "judo diplomacy" at the beginning of June; pulling back when pressed and moving forward when pushed, thus fatigued other countries without consuming much energy and moving principles to the back burner. Questioned about an LDP draft resolution criticizing China for its new security law targeting Hong Kong and calling for cancellation of Xi Jinping's planned visit to Tokyo, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhou Lijiang on July 3 [responded](#) that the statements "are meaningless and I do not have the time or interest to deal with them."

A [rally](#) in support of Hong Kong democracy advocate Agnes Chow took place in Tokyo in mid-August. Tweets with the hashtag "FreeAgnes" went [viral](#) in Japan following her arrest in August for violating China's new national security law, with more than 290,000 messages posted under it. Chow, fluent in Japanese, later said that she thought of the song "Fukyouwaon" (Discord) by a Japanese girl group as she was arrested.



Figure 2 A rally in support of Hong Kong pro-democracy advocat Agnes Chow took place in Tokyo in mid-August. Photo: Asahi Shimbun

Some support for more harmonious relations remains, however. In a mid-May interview with center-right *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Japan's highest circulation daily, journalist Ma Licheng [repeated](#) calls for reconciliation, noting that previous efforts had resulted in "fierce attacks" against him by people "who regard anti-Japan as justice [sic]." In the same vein, in a dispassionate mid-May article in *Global Times*, the director of Northeast Asian Studies at the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences [noted](#) that while Japan is reducing its industrial plans in China and encouraging industries to relocate back to Japan, it has also signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Trade, promoted the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and is an active partner in the China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement. According to the director, although Japan will be more vigilant of risks in its cooperation with China, it will not give up its decades-long investment and future goals in China.

On the other hand, in late June both China and Taiwan [protested](#) a vote by the Okinawa city council to change the administrative status of the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands from "Tonoshiro" to "Tonoshiro Senkaku," purportedly to avoid confusion with another area of Ishigaki, which administers the islands. The China Coast Guard (CCG) said that a "fleet" of its ships was in the waters around the islands. And *Global Times* [warned](#) Japan in late May that, if it wants to maintain sound economic and

trade relations with China, it had better not side with the US. A *Global Times* article observed that since Japan, unlike South Korea, does not have a fast-track entry system, passengers on the two chartered flights from Osaka to Wuhan the previous day would have to spend two weeks in quarantine, and hoped that "Japanese politicians should have a clear mind when considering bilateral relations."

At the beginning of June, the center-left *Asahi* [took note](#) of Japan's struggle to cooperate with China in the economic sector while strengthening its defense alliance with the US. It described the Abe administration as divided, with some officials, mainly in the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, wanting to stress business the foreign ministry leans toward emphasizing national security and international norms.

Xinhua [reported](#) that a joint statement by Japanese civic groups in commemoration of the 83th anniversary of the July 7, 1937 hostilities at Marco Polo Bridge had called on Japan to recognize that only when it faced up to history could there be mutual trust and understanding between the two nations. Also in July, the Japanese government [protested](#) to Beijing over a Chinese maritime scientific survey ship that operated for 10 days inside the exclusive economic zone claimed by Japan around Okinotori. The Chinese government maintains that Okinotori is a rock, not an island, and is therefore not entitled to an EEZ or the need to seek permission to operate within it.

In a gesture of defiance to China as well as South Korea, four Cabinet ministers [visited](#) the Yasukuni Shrine on the Aug. 6 anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II, the first such Cabinet-level visit since 2016, when two ministers attended. Abe did not attend but sent a representative who paid for a ritual offering of the sacred *sakaki* tree. Uncharacteristically, Xinhua barely [mentioned](#) the visit at the end of a longer article about the emperor expressing "deep remorse" in a separate ceremony at the Nippon Budokan. [Symbolically](#), however, in his address to the Nippon Budokan ceremony, Abe did not mention "taking the lessons of history deeply into our hearts," standard language since then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi first included it in 1995. Murayama, now 97, pronounced the omission "utterly unacceptable." The Chinese government has

regarded the Murayama statement as the absolute minimum for an acceptable apology.



Figure 3 Four Japanese cabinet ministers, including Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi visit the Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 6. Photo: Asahi Shimbun

Abe replaced the missing phrase by saying that Japan has worked tirelessly to make the world a better place. Though neither Xinhua nor *Global Times* commented, *China Daily* [ran](#) a mildly critical article on Aug. 17 headlined “War End Anniversary Sees No Abe Apology.” Referencing a virtual summit between the Indian and Japanese prime ministers in early September, a research director at Tsinghua University [opined](#) that India’s anticipated effort to “rope Japan into” an effort to suppress China was doomed to fail because Tokyo needs stable economic relations with Beijing in the post-pandemic era. In an unusual departure from past practice, a *Global Times* cartoonist did not depict Japan as a sumo wrestler or samurai, but as a benign-looking figure in a business suit.

Economics

Japan’s GDP dropped by 27.8% in the April–June period while China’s rebounded from a prior drop by 3.2%, though economists [cautioned](#) that the uptick was credit-fueled and that consumer demand, although improving somewhat, remained worrisomely sluggish. Japan is officially in [recession](#) after 71 months of growth, just short of the postwar record of 73 months, with a rise in the consumption tax adding to the depressive effects of the coronavirus. In a move to mitigate the drop, the Japanese government has been [encouraging](#) Hong Kong financial professionals to move to Tokyo. However, on June 24, reflecting Tokyo’s concern over China’s growing influence, the government also announced more stringent regulations on foreign investment in 518 firms it identified as having operations critical to national security.

Although downplaying the effects of Japan’s stimulus package of subsidies to businesses to move production back to Japan, Beijing was sufficiently [concerned](#) in mid-May to press Japanese authorities to explain the meaning of the measure, and to poll Japanese businesses in China on whether they planned to leave.

As if picking up on this, the director of Northeast Asian Studies at the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences [noted](#) that, while Japan was reducing its industrial plans in China and encouraging industries to relocate back to Japan, Tokyo had also signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Trade, promoted the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and has been an active partner in the China–Japan–South Korea Free Trade Agreement. Although Japan will be more vigilant of risks in its cooperation with China, it will not give up its decades-long investment and future goals in China. On May 14, *Yomiuri* reported on a 2019 Chinese language document that enumerates 63 industrial technologies not possessed by China and the names of foreign companies and research institutes that possess them, including those involving Japanese semiconductor materials and carbon fibers. An anonymous former administrative vice-minister then lamented that Japan had almost no weapons to counter the PRC’s efforts to gain technological supremacy, with both the Office of the Prime Minister and the newly founded economic department of the National Security Secretariat’s arguing that passing laws to protect theft would “excessively provoke China.” A *Nikkei* survey in mid-August [revealed](#) that in 2019 China surpassed Japan in 12 high-technology markets and is now second only to the United States.

Yomiuri commented that behind the struggle against the coronavirus, the battle between nations over national security has been intensifying. In a revised Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law, the Japanese government has designated 558 companies in 12 sectors as particularly important for national security, and will require all foreign investors seeking to acquire more than 1% in them to notify the government in advance. One of these, chemical manufacturer Denka, whose production line for the anti-coronavirus drug Avigan, had been transferred to China, agreed to reopen a Niigata factory that had been scheduled for demolition. Eager to get its economy back to normal, the

Chinese government [proposed](#) easing its travel ban if the number of new cases declines, with the largest number of tourists coming from Japan. Japan remains reluctant to participate in Xi's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and has effectively excluded China's equipment in its core telecom infrastructure for [fear](#) of inviting a Trojan horse into the network.

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry in mid-July [announced](#) the first tranche of companies eligible for "China exit subsidies." Eighty-seven companies are to receive a total of \$653 million. Thirty of these are to shift production to Southeast Asia while the other 57 will move operations back to Japan. A consortium of Japanese companies' bid to build a \$2 billion liquified natural gas-fired power plant in Myanmar with a projected capacity of about 20% of the country's existing power plants. Myanmar, with its access to the Indian Ocean, is a key part of BRI, with Chinese companies having secured the rights to a similar-sized power plant in 2018.

According to a Japanese industry ministry source, China's recent [praise](#) for Japanese companies is likely motivated by a desire to build a supply chain that cannot be blocked by Washington. Japanese executives do not want to offend the U.S. but, because they are ultimately responsible to their company's shareholders, will avoid dealing with products and services that infringe on national security while calculating political risk and seeking ways to make profits in both countries. In August, *China Daily* [ran](#) a mildly critical article linking Abe's failure to apologize for World War II to prospects for improved trade: its unnamed author advised Japanese policymakers to "recognize the status quo and thus explore the potential of bilateral relations more boldly and aggressively to find new growth proposals for economic cooperation with China."

Following on Japan's success in the Myanmar bid, and [described](#) by *Nikkei* as a snub to China, the Chilean government at the end of July chose Japan's trans-Pacific fiber-optic cable route over China's. When completed, the cable will be the first to directly connect South America with the Asia-Pacific. The Japanese route will have Sydney as its terminus, whereas the route proposed by China would end in Shanghai. The conservative *Sankei Shimbun* [reported](#) that NTT DoCoMo, Japan's largest mobile phone operator, is heading a movement to bring together

different countries to build a low-cost communication network without Huawei technology. The Japanese government is [boosting](#) its stockpile of rare metals to reduce its dependence on China which, despite earlier efforts, still accounted for 58% of rare earth imports in 2018. In what is expected to reduce the dependence still further, in August, the Japan Oil, Gas, and Metals National Corporation announced the successful [excavation](#) of rare metals from inside the seabed of Japan's EEZ. It did not mention the commercial feasibility of the extraction. According to the *Yomiuri*, Japan is seeking to [reduce](#) the security risks inherent in its dependence on China by establishing a supply chain network that combines Japan's technological capabilities with Australia's natural resources and Indian information technology, with the participation of the Association of Southeast Asian states.

Despite the rivalry with China and concerns over the PRC-US trade war, Japanese companies have continued to seek opportunities in the PRC. In late August, Daiwa Securities Group [announced](#) that it will set up a joint venture, Daiwa Securities (China) with \$146 million in capital. It will be 51% owned by Daiwa, 33% an investment company owned by the city of Beijing, and 16% by Beijing Xicheng Capital Holdings. Acknowledging the risks of doing business in China, a Daiwa spokesman explained that the PRC is a large market where Daiwa wants to have a foothold.

Defense

In May, two of four Chinese coast guard vessels in waters around the contested Senkaku Islands [approached](#) and chased a Japanese fishing boat, resulting in an immediate protest to the Chinese embassy in Tokyo. This was the first such incident since April 17. A little more than a week later, it was announced that Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force were receiving their first new rifles in 31 years to [assist](#) in defending the Nansei Islands against increasing Chinese pressure. The new Type 20 assault rifles are said to be more resistant to water and corrosion than their predecessor Type 89, and hence better suited for amphibious operations on the Nansei chain, which stretches 1,200 km from Kagoshima's Osumi Islands to Yonaguni in Okinawa Prefecture.

As of mid-June Chinese ships had been operating in the contiguous zone to the

contested Diaoyu/Senkaku islands for 65 days, beginning from mid-April and surpassing the previous record of 64 in 2019 (eventually reaching 100 days; more on this below). In 2019, a total of 1,097 Chinese government ships operated in the contiguous zone over 282 days, a record high for both the number of days they operated and the number of vessels involved. LDP lawmakers called on the government to vigorously protest what they referred to as the repeatedly stalking of Japanese fishing boats in these waters. In June, a Chinese submarine [passed through](#) the contiguous zone off the coast of Amami-Oshima island in southern Japan, the first such incident since January 2018. Trained by a Japanese destroyer and patrol aircraft, it left two days later. Two days later, Defense Minister Kono Taro [announced](#) that the government had heightened its vigilance against Chinese incursions into its territorial and connecting waters. In a conciliatory gesture in mid-August, local Chinese authorities [reportedly](#) instructed fishermen not to sail within 30 nautical miles of the Diaoyu/Senkakus. This was interpreted in Tokyo as a hedge against worsening relations with the United States.



Figure 4 Amami-Oshima island. Photo: Asahi Shimbun

The *Yomiuri* opined on June 24 that the need for discussions on how to respond to China's development of hypersonic missiles is pushing the US-Japan alliance to a turning point that must be addressed in negotiations on burden-sharing, since the current agreement will expire at the end of March 2021.

A retired senior colonel from the PLA's Academy of Military Science [construed](#) Japan's call for the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2020 military exercises to be held on schedule as indicative of its desire to expand its influence in the area, with its navy taking the initiative. The director of Heilongjiang's Institute of Northeast Asian

Studies [opined](#) that Japan is unlikely to permanently abandon the Aegis Ashore system but is awaiting an opportune time to restart the deployment.

Noting the implications of 5G for warfare and China's push to dominate the underseas cable industry, the *Yomiuri* on May 11 urged Japan to act swiftly to ensure the safety of its information and communications systems. A few days later, the paper, lamenting that Japan continued to [procrastinate](#) on hosting the International Linear Collider (ILC) while China had overtaken the country in fields such as quantum encryption technologies, quoted a member of the National Security Secretariat as saying that unless the country nurtured new technologies it would not have any technologies left to protect.

A security expert interviewed by the *Asahi* [stated](#) in May that China's approximately 2,000 intermediate-range missiles can reach anywhere in Japan, while the US, because it signed the now-expired Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, has no IRBMs. Advocating that such missiles be deployed in Japan, he responded to questions about whether offensive-oriented missiles are barred under the constitution by saying that constitutional scholars and legal experts are not specialists in analyzing the security environment or in defense planning.

In May, Mitsubishi Electric [reported](#) that a cyberattack last year "likely" leaked information on the hypersonic glide missile provided by the Japanese Defense Ministry's Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Agency (ATLA), for purposes of bidding on a contract to develop them. The information included the missile's range, required level of heat resistance, and propulsion, with the hackers exploiting defects in Mitsubishi Electric's computers and the communications equipment of affiliated companies in China to obtain it. Mitsubishi Electric did not win the bid. [Reacting](#) to news in early August that Tokyo would welcome an invitation to join the Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance, Chinese expert on Japanese issues Liu Junhong attributes Tokyo's interest to its mistrust of China "despite bilateral relations being generally positive in the last two years." Regarding the idea of a FVEY free trade zone, Liu opined that if Japan insists on undermining the sustainable development of China-Japan relations, "there will inevitably be consequences." A desire to avoid offending

China may have accounted for Defense Minister Kono [stating](#) that, although unspecified members of the Five Eyes intelligence sharing consortium are seeking closer cooperation with Japan in response to China's growing military expansion, he did not think Japan needs to join the group in the formal sense: "We will just bring our chair to their table and tell them to count us in."

In May several Japanese newspapers reported that a draft of the Japanese defense ministry's annual white paper may [accuse](#) China of spreading false information about the coronavirus outbreak to bolster its geographic influence, and that China's efforts to forge a new regional and global order more to its advantage could create a security issue for Japan. The conservative *Japan Forward* [urged](#) Tokyo to stop ignoring Japan's and Asia's China problem. Among *Japan Forward*'s suggestions were to establish a joint operational headquarters in Japan where US and Japanese forces could coordinate the defense of Northeast Asia; make the defense of the Nansei Shoto a joint effort; consider the defense of Taiwan to be part of its mandate; make the JSF truly a joint force and military service a respected profession; and increase defense spending by 10% for the next five years. [Explaining](#) his decision to explicitly identify a submarine that ventured near Japanese territorial waters as Chinese, Kono said that it was necessary to raise awareness of what is going on around Japan, giving as examples China's actions in the South China Sea, Hong Kong, and along its border with India.

In late June Xinhua [reported](#) without editorial comment Japan's decision to end its Aegis Ashore program, quoting Japanese official sources on the high cost of the project. Japan's revised state secrets law will [allow](#) exchanges with partners such as India, Australia, and the UK as well as the existing exchange with the US, making it easier to share data on Chinese movements. It will also allow Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense and supply fuel and ammunition to other militaries in situations that pose a threat to Japan. By July 22, Chinese government ships had [sailed](#) into the waters surrounding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands for the 100thth straight day, exceeding the previous record, 64 days, in 2019. In what an anonymous Japanese Coast Guard source [described](#) as his government's "sense of crisis," the JCG deployed three large patrol vessels of

3,500 to 6,500 tons in Okinawa and Kagoshima prefectures. Three new jets deployed at Naha Air Base are monitoring the area on rotation, and the Okinawan police have created a guard squad for protecting borders and remote islands against incidents such as illegal landing by armed Chinese fishermen.

In the first explicit [commitment](#) to help address Chinese encroachment in the waters around the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Lieutenant General Kevin Schneider, commander of American forces in Japan said on July 30 that "the United States is 100% absolutely steadfast in its commitment to help the government of Japan with the situation ... that's 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

In light of these developments and China's military exercises near the Paracel Islands of the South China Sea, the *Yomiuri* editorialized on Aug. 31 that countries in the region such as Japan, the US, and Australia need to support ASEAN in emphasizing respect for international rules and protecting freedom of navigation, taking advantage of such opportunities as the RIMPAC naval exercise. Due to [concern](#) that China is siphoning off advanced technological information in the name of joint research, legislation on a certification system for those handling such data will be submitted to next year's Diet session. Japan is the only G7 member lacking such a certification system, which precludes its nationals from participating in cooperative projects.

Japan's Ministry of Defense [released](#) its 2020 White Paper, accusing China, inter alia, of unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion, lack of transparency in its defense budget, and enhancing its capabilities in space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum, leading to "a situation of grave concern." A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [responded](#) by describing the White Paper as fraught with bias against China and false information, while providing no details. He urged Japan to work with China to build constructive security relations, adding that "at the same time, China is unswerving in upholding its sovereignty, security, and development interests."

As the report period closed, Kono [warned](#) China that the SDF and Japanese Coast Guard will respond to intrusions around the

Diaoyu(tai)/Senkaku Islands, but declined to elaborate on what such actions might entail.

Culture

Amid rumors that Beijing was eager to improve China-Japan relations to smooth the way for a Xi Jinping visit to Tokyo, *China Daily* [reported](#) in May on the close work between Chinese and Japanese ornithologists to save the crested ibis from extermination, emphasizing the need for “people to put aside their conflicts and pursue a common goal.” Elsewhere, Chinese documentary film maker Wang Bing’s *Dead Souls*, [detailing](#) the horrors suffered by victims of Mao Zedong’s anti-rightist campaign, is to be shown in Japan.

Taiwan

China continued to respond to perceived Japanese efforts to support Taiwan’s anti-unification government. Beijing protested when Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide [congratulated](#) Tsai Ing-wen on her inauguration in May, using her formal title of president, although Suga was careful to add that relations would be deepened on a nongovernmental level. Simultaneously, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020 Diplomatic Blue Book for the first time backed Taiwan’s inclusion in the World Health Assembly as an observer. *Global Times* [termed](#) this a “hypocritical move” designed to please the US. The paper also noted that, whereas the 2019 Blue Book described Taiwan as an “important partner” of Japan, the 2020 version called it “critically important,” and that content on Taiwan had been raised from half a page in 2019 to a full page in 2020.

In another, albeit modest, sign of cooperation, Japan Airlines in late May [evacuated](#) Taiwanese who had been stranded in Russia for two months due to the pandemic, re-routing a flight from Helsinki to stop in Moscow to pick them up. The *Asahi*’s lead [editorial](#), the day after China’s National People’s Congress passed a national security law that drastically limits Hong Kong’s autonomy, was entitled “Taiwan’s Success in Containing the Virus Should Be a Lesson Passed On.” In keeping with publicizing the positive side of Japan-Taiwan relations during the colonial period, Kyodo in early July ran an usually long [article](#) on a Taipei celebration commemorating Japan’s contribution to Taiwan’s tap water. The event centered around the premiere of a documentary film, *Tracing*

Roots, that focuses on the island’s transformation under Japanese rule.

Separately, on July 7 *Yomiuri* expressed concern about the increasing number of Chinese planes making threatening flights around Taiwan, which it attributed to testing the Taiwan military’s defense capability in case of a contingency, and linking the incursions with the increasing presence of Chinese ships in waters that China and Japan contest ownership of. In a mid-July interview with *Nikkei*, Taiwan’s digital minister and former hacker Audrey Tang [warned](#) Japan that putting China’s equipment in its core telecom infrastructure is akin to inviting a Trojan horse into the network.

The Japanese government announced on July 19 that it will invite Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to take part in joint projects in Japan, in response to a potential threat from China’s efforts to build systems to enable its companies to produce finished products, including semiconductors, all on their own.

All major Japanese newspapers carried the obituary of former Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui, praising his knowledge of Japan. Prime Minister Abe also [praised](#) Lee for contributing to enhancing Japan and Taiwan’s bilateral relations and for promulgating freedom and democracy in Taiwan. However, in an obvious effort to avoid annoying China, the government delegation that [visited](#) Taiwan to pay respects to Lee was headed by the long-ago and not highly regarded Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro. Despite the brevity of the trip, Mori’s delegation did meet with Tsai and conveyed to her Abe’s “heartfelt gratitude for Lee’s guidance for Japan.”

Nonetheless, friction continue to exist on a few matters. Several dozen Taiwanese [protested](#) outside the Taipei office of the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association after Okinawa’s Ishigaki City, which administers the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu(tai) Islands, had changed the administrative designation of the islands from Tonoshiro to Tonoshiro Senkaku. Taiwan’s widely read anti-unification *Liberty Times* [pointed out](#), however, that all the protestors were from the China-friendly KMT and accused the party of seizing on the issue to divert attention from its poor approval ratings. The paper noted that Ishigaki mayor Nakayama Yoshitaka had said he would not object to

Taiwan's Yilan County Council making similar changes since it would be a matter of domestic policy for each side, and that Nakayama had closed his explanatory letter by putting the Taiwan flag next to the Japanese flag, implying sovereignty between the two nations. The article urged the two democracies to work together to develop resources of the disputed area.

Conclusion

Both countries began to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, China with seemingly more success than Japan. A halt in the escalating PRC pressure in the waters around Japanese administered Diaoyu(tai)-Senkaku islands is believed to be temporary as Beijing attempts to cope with difficult relations with the US and Europe as well as protests in Hong Kong and Inner Mongolia. Politically, China-Japan relations continued to be on hold, with Abe's successor unlikely to have an appreciable effect on this status.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS

MAY – AUGUST 2020

May 8, 2020: The Japanese government [announces](#) more stringent regulations on foreign investment in 518 firms it identifies as having operations critical to national security.

May 8, 2020: Two of four China Coast Guard vessels in waters around the contested Senkaku Islands [approached](#) and chased a Japanese fishing boat, resulting in an immediate protest to the Chinese embassy in Tokyo.

May 11, 2020: Noting the implications of 5G telecommunications technology for warfare, and China's push to dominate the underseas cable industry, *Yomiuri* [urges](#) Japan to act swiftly to ensure the safety of its information and communications systems.

May 11, 2020: Eager to get its economy back to normal, the Chinese government [proposes](#) easing its travel ban in anticipation of large numbers of Japanese tourists, assuming that the number of new cases declines

May 12, 2020: Although dismissive of Japan's stimulus package for subsidies to businesses to move production back to Japan, Beijing is sufficiently [concerned](#) to press Japanese authorities to explain the meaning of the measure and poll Japanese businesses in China on whether they plan to leave.

May 12, 2020: Center-right *Yomiuri Shimbun* publishes interview with former *Renmin Ribao* commentator Ma Licheng in which Ma [repeats](#) his past calls for reconciliation with China.

May 14, 2020: *Yomiuri* [reports](#) on a 2019 Chinese language document that enumerates 63 industrial technologies not possessed by China and the names of foreign companies and research institutes that possess them, including Japanese semiconductor materials and carbon fibers.

May 16, 2020: In *Global Times*, director of Northeast Asian Studies at the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences [notes](#) that while Japan is reducing industrial plans in China and encouraging industries to relocate back to Japan, it has also signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Trade, promoted the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and is an active partner in the China-Japan, South Korea Free Trade Agreement.

May 16, 2020: *Yomiuri* [quotes](#) a member of the National Security Secretariat as saying that unless the country nurtured new technologies it would not have any technologies left to protect.

May 19, 2020: *Global Times* [calls](#) Japan's 2020 Diplomatic Blue Book, which, for the first time voices support for Taiwan's observer status in the World Health Assembly, a "hypocritical move."

May 19, 2020: Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force reportedly [receives](#) its first new rifles in 31 years to assist it in defending the Nansei (southwestern) Islands against increasing Chinese pressure.

May 19, 2020: A retired senior colonel from the PLA's Academy of Military Science [construes](#) Japan's call for Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2020 military exercises to be held on schedule as indicative of its desire to expand its influence in the area.

May 20, 2020: Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide [congratulated](#) Tsai Ing-wen on her inauguration, using her formal title of president, eliciting protest from China.

May 20, 2020: A security expert interviewed by *Asahi* [states](#) that China's approximately 2000 intermediate-range missiles can reach anywhere in Japan, while the US, because it signed the now-expired Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, has none.

May 20, 2020: Mitsubishi Electric [reports](#) that a cyberattack last year “likely” leaked information on the hypersonic glide missile provided by the Japanese Defense Ministry’s Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Agency (ATLA), for purposes of bidding on a contract to develop them.

May 22, 2020: Several Japanese newspapers [report](#) that a draft of the Japanese defense ministry’s annual white paper may accuse China of spreading false information about the coronavirus outbreak in order to bolster its geographic influence.

May 23, 2020: Japanese newspapers react negatively to the 6.6% increase in the PRC’s announced military budget, with *Asahi* [asking](#) when China will stop its aggressive military buildup ... that exacerbates global security risks” and *Nikkei* describing the increase despite falling revenue as [reflecting](#) an “aggressive diplomatic posture.”

May 23, 2020: *China Daily* [reports](#) on close work between Chinese and Japanese ornithologists to save the crested ibis from extermination, emphasizing the need for “people to put aside their conflicts and pursue a common goal”

May 26, 2020: Japan Airlines [evacuates](#) Taiwanese who had been stranded in Russia for two months due to the pandemic, re-routing a flight from Helsinki to stop in Moscow to pick them up.

May 28, 2020: *Asahi*’s lead [editorial](#) is entitled “Taiwan’s Success in Containing the Virus Should Be a Lesson Passed On.”

May 28, 2020: *Global Times* [warns](#) Japan that, if it wants to maintain sound economic and trade relations with China, it had better not side with the US as Australia has.

May 29, 2020: Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu [addresses](#) China’s National People’s Congress passing a draconian national security law that would affect Hong Kong’s freedoms, saying that he had had his deputy call in the Chinese ambassador to express Japan’s concern.

May 29, 2020: A document delivered to Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga by two LDP foreign policy panels [urges](#) reconsideration of plans for a state visit by Xi Jinping due to “grave and serious concern from the standpoint of respecting freedom and democracy.”

June 1, 2020: *Asahi* [notes](#) Japan’s struggle to cooperate with China in the economic sector while strengthening its defense alliance with the US.

June 2, 2020: A commentary in *Japan Times* [takes note](#) of a May 8–May 10 standoff between the Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) and two Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ships in waters around the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands as the CCG pursued a Japanese fishing boat.

June 3, 2020: Motegi [says](#) in a television interview that Xi’s visit would not take place until after the G20 summit slated for November, and a major factor is China’s National People’s Congress passage of draconian security legislation for Hong Kong.

June 3, 2020: [Criticizing](#) Japan’s reluctance to join other democracies in denouncing PRC legislation on Hong Kong, a Kyorin University professor emeritus accused his country of “judo diplomacy.”

June 4, 2020: LDP Diet members [call](#) on the government to vigorously protest China’s repeated stalking of Japanese fishing boats in waters near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and again urge the government to carefully reconsider a visit by Xi.

June 8, 2020: The conservative *Japan Forward* [urges](#) that Japan stop ignoring its, and Asia’s, China problem, suggesting a joint operational headquarters in Japan where US and Japanese forces could coordinate the defense of Northeast Asia, consider Taiwan’s defense part of its mandate, and increase defense spending by 10% for the next five years.

June 9, 2020: *Yomiuri* [comments](#) that a revised Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law identifies 558 companies in 12 sectors as particularly important for national security, and requires all foreign investors seeking to acquire more than 1% in and of them to notify the government in advance.

June 10, 2020: Several dozen Taiwanese [protest](#) outside the Taipei office of the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association after reports that Okinawa's Ishigaki City, which administers the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu(tai) Islands, is planning to change the administrative designation of the islands from Tonoshiro to Tonoshiro Senkaku.

June 17, 2020: Chinese ships [operate](#) in the contiguous zone to the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku islands for the 65th days, surpassing the previous record of 64 in 2019.

June 18, 2020: *Wall Street Journal* [reports](#) that, after helping to organize a statement critical of China's actions in Hong Kong, the Japanese government is encouraging Hong Kong financial professionals to move to Tokyo.

June 18, 2020: Da Zhigang, director of Heilongjiang's Institute of Northeast Asian Studies, [opines](#) that Japan is unlikely to permanently abandon the Aegis Ashore system but if awaiting an opportune time to restart the deployment.

June 18, 2020: A submarine, presumed but not specifically identified as Chinese, [passes through](#) the contiguous zone off the coast of Amami-Oshima island in southern Japan, the first such incident since January 2018.

June 22, 2020: Both China and Taiwan [protest](#) a vote by the Okinawa city council of change the administrative status of the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands from "Tonoshiro" to "Tonoshiro Senkaku," purportedly to avoid confusion with another area of Ishigaki, which administers the islands.

June 24, 2020: Defense Minister Kono Taro, after taking the unusual step of naming China as the probable owner of the submarine that passed through Japan's contiguous zone (June 18) [announces](#) that the government had heightened vigilance against Chinese incursions.

June 24, 2020: *Yomiuri* [describes](#) urgent need for discussions on how to respond to China's development of hypersonic missiles that is pushing the US-Japan alliance to a turning point and must be addressed in negotiations on burden sharing.

June 25, 2020: Kono [explains](#) his decision to identify a submarine that ventured near Japanese territorial waters as Chinese as necessary to raise awareness.

June 25, 2020: Xinhua [reports](#) without editorial comment Japan's decision to end its Aegis Ashore program, quoting Japanese official sources on the high cost of the project.

June 26, 2020: Taiwan's widely read anti-unification *Liberty Times* [points out](#) that all the protestors to Ishigaki's changes to the names of disputed areas (see June 22) were from the opposition KMT and accused the party of seizing on the issue to divert attention from its poor approval ratings.

June 30, 2020: Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga says that China's imposition of a national security law for Hong Kong is "[regrettable](#)," particularly after strong concern expressed by the international community, and that his government will continue to appropriately address the issue with the countries involved.

July 3, 2020: Japan's passes revised state secrets law that [allows](#) exchanges with partners such as India, Australia, and the UK as well as existing exchange with the US, making it easier to share data on Chinese movements. It also allows Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense and supply fuel and ammunition to other militaries in situations that pose a threat to Japan.

July 4, 2020: Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhou Lijiang [responds](#) to an LDP draft resolution criticizing China for its new security law for Hong Kong by saying the statements "are meaningless and I do not have the time or interest to deal with them."

July 6, 2020: Kyodo [reports](#) that two Chinese Coast Guard vessels stayed in the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu(tai) Islands for 39 hours and 23 minutes, longer than the 30 hours 17 minutes recorded on July 3, over which the Japanese government issued a protest.

July 6, 2020: An unusually long [article](#) in *Kyodo* covers Taipei City's celebration of Japan's contribution to Taiwan's tap water centered around the premiere of a documentary film, *Tracing Roots*, that focuses on the country's transformation during the Japanese colonial period.

July 7, 2020: *Yomiuri* [editorializes](#) on the importance of countries like Japan, the US, and Australia to support ASEAN in its concern for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea through such mechanisms as the RIMPAC naval exercise. *Yomiuri* also [expresses](#) concern about the increasing number of Chinese planes making threatening flights around Taiwan.

July 7, 2020: Xinhua [reports](#) on a joint statement by Japanese civil groups to commemorate the 83rd anniversary of the outbreak of hostilities at Marco Polo Bridge in 1937.

July 14, 2020: Japan's Ministry of Defense [releases](#) its 2020 White Paper, accusing China, inter alia, of unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion, lack of transparency in its defense budget and enhancing its capabilities in space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum, leading to "a situation of grave concern."

July 14, 2020: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [describes](#) the Defense of Japan 2020 White Paper as fraught with bias against China and false information, while providing no details.

July 15, 2020: In an interview with *Nikkei*, Taiwan's Audrey Tang [warns](#) Japan that putting China's equipment in its core telecom infrastructure is akin to inviting a Trojan horse into the network.

July 16, 2020: In a move that symbolizes the Japanese government's hope for warmer ties with the PRC, Tarumi Yoshio, a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' China School, is [appointed](#) ambassador to the PRC. Tarumi is close to LDP Secretary-General Nikai Toshihiro, who is known for his pro-China views.

July 18, 2020: Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry [announces](#) first tranche of companies eligible for "China exit subsidies;" 87 companies will receive a total of \$653 million.

July 19, 2020: The Japanese government will [invite](#) Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to take part in joint projects in Japan, in response to a potential threat from China's efforts to build systems to enable its companies to produce finished products, including semiconductors, all on their own.

July 21, 2020: Japanese government [protests](#) to Beijing over a Chinese maritime scientific survey ship that operated for 10 days inside the EEZ claimed by Japan around Okinotori.

July 22, 2020: Chinese government ships [sail](#) into waters surrounding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands for the 100th straight day.

July 23, 2020: A consortium of Japanese companies [bests](#) China in a bid to build a \$2 billion liquified natural gas-fired power plant in Myanmar, with a projected capacity of about 20 percent of the country's existing power plants. Myanmar, with access to the Indian Ocean, is a key part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, with Chinese companies having secured the rights to a similar-sized power plant in 2018.

July 24, 2020: *Sankei Shimbun* [reports](#) that NTT DoCoMo, Japan's largest mobile phone operator, is heading a movement to bring together different countries to build a low-cost communication network without Huawei technology.

July 29, 2020: In what *Nikkei* [describes](#) as a snub to China, the Chilean government chooses Japan's trans-Pacific fiber-optic cable route in preference to China's. When completed, the cable will be the first to directly connect South America with the Asia-Pacific.

July 29, 2020: Reflecting what an anonymous Japanese Coast Guard source [describes](#) as his government's "sense of crisis," the JCG deploys three large patrol vessels of 3,500 to 6,500 tons in Okinawa and Kagoshima prefectures.

July 30, 2020: In the first explicit [commitment](#) to help address recent Chinese encroachment in the waters around the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Lt. Gen Kevin Schneider, commander of American forces in Japan, says that "the United States is 100% absolutely steadfast in its commitment to help the government of Japan with the situation ... that's 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

July 31, 2020: All major Japanese newspapers carry obituary of Taiwan's former President Lee Teng-hui, mentioning his impressive knowledge of Japan. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo [praises](#) Lee for contributing to enhancing Japan and Taiwan's bilateral relations and for promulgating freedom and democracy in Taiwan.

Aug. 3, 2020: According to a Japanese industry ministry source, China's recent showering of [praise](#) on Japanese companies seems part of a campaign to build a supply chain that cannot be blocked by Washington.

Aug. 4, 2020: Reacting to news that Tokyo would welcome an invitation to join the Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance, Chinese expert on Japanese issues Liu Junhong [attributes](#) Tokyo's interest to its mistrust of China "despite bilateral relations being generally positive in the last two years."

Aug. 4, 2020: Defense Minister Kono [warns](#) China that the SDF and Japanese Coast Guard will respond to intrusions around the Diaoyu(tai)/Senkaku Islands, declining to elaborate on what such actions might entail.

Aug. 9, 2020: A delegation led by former Prime Minister Mori Yoshihiro [visits](#) Taiwan to pay respects to Lee, meeting with President Tsai as well. Mori conveyed to her Abe's "heartfelt gratitude for Lee's guidance for Japan."

Aug. 12, 2020: A *Nikkei* survey [reveals](#) that in 2019 China surpassed Japan in 12 hi-tech markets and is now and second only to the United States.

Aug. 12, 2020: Tweets with the hashtag "FreeAgnes" go [viral](#) in Japan in response to activist Agnes Chow's arrest in Hong Kong for violating the new national security law, with more than 290,000 messages posted under it.

Aug. 13, 2020: A rally of support for Chow [takes place](#) in Tokyo.

Aug. 13, 2020: Due to concern that China is siphoning off advanced technological information in the name of joint research, legislation on a certification system for those handling such data will be [submitted](#) to next year's Diet session. Japan is the only G7 member lacking such a certification system.

Aug. 13, 2020: Japanese government [boosts](#) its stockpile of rare metals to reduce its dependence on China which, despite earlier efforts, still accounted for 58% of rare earth imports in 2018.

Aug. 14, 2020: Kono [states](#) that unspecified members of the Five Eyes intelligence sharing consortium are seeking closer cooperation with Japan in response to China's growing military expansion but opines that he does not think Japan needs to in the formal sense.

Aug. 15, 2020: Four Cabinet ministers [visit](#) the Yasukuni Shrine on the anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II, the first such Cabinet-level visit since 2016 when two ministers attended. Abe does not, but sends a representative who paid for a ritual offering of the sacred *sakaki* tree. Uncharacteristically, Xinhua barely [mentions](#) the visit.

Aug. 16, 2020: Local Chinese authorities [reportedly](#) instruct fishermen not to sail within 30 nautical miles of the Diaoyu/Senkaku, possibly as a hedge against worsening relations with the US.

Aug. 16, 2020: In a government memorial service for the war dead, Abe [does not mention](#) "taking the lessons of history deeply into our hearts," which has been standard since then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi first included it in 1995.

Aug. 17, 2020: *China Daily* [runs](#) a mildly critical article on the memorial service headlined "War End Anniversary Sees No Abe Apology." The unnamed author advised Japanese policymakers to "recognize the status quo and thus explore the potential of bilateral relations more boldly and aggressively to find new growth policies for economic cooperation with China."

Aug. 17, 2020: In response to news that Abe visited a hospital for a health check-up, *Global Times* opines that the Japanese economy, having suffered a 27.8 % contraction in the last quarter, also needed a check-up.

Aug. 20, 2020: Referencing a virtual summit between the Indian and Japanese prime ministers in early September, a research director at Tsinghua University [opines](#) that India's anticipated effort to "rope Japan into" an effort to suppress China is doomed to fail because Tokyo needs stable economic relations with Beijing in the post-pandemic era.

Aug. 22, 2020: Japan Oil, Gas, and Metals National Corporation announces successful [excavation](#) of rare metals from inside the seabed of Japan's EEZ, describing it as an important step in Japan's plans to reduce its reliance on China for these commodities.

Aug. 28, 2020: Xinhua [reports](#) matter-of-factly on the sudden resignation of Abe due to illness, while *Global Times* [observes](#) that, since stable relations with China was vital to the Japanese economy, his successor would likely continue Abe's policies.

Aug. 31, 2020: Japanese brokerage house Daiwa Securities Group [announces](#) that it will set up a joint venture, Daiwa Securities (China) with \$146 million in capital. It will be 51% owned by Daiwa, 33% an investment company owned by the city of Beijing, and 16% by Beijing Xicheng Capital Holdings.

Aug. 31, 2020: *Yomiuri* reports that Japan is seeking to [reduce](#) security risks inherent in its dependence on China by establishing a supply chain network that combines Japan's technological capabilities with Australia's natural resources and Indian information technology, with the participation of the Association of Southeast Asian states.

