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JAPAN'S TAIWAN POLICY IN THE XI JINPING ERA: MOVING TOWARD STRATEGIC CLARITY

MOVING TOWARD STRATEGIC CLARITY

Most would agree that the United States, which helps Taiwan resist mounting pressure from China, is Taiwan's most critical ally. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has claimed that "Taiwan was part of China in the past and should be part of China in the future" since 1949 and it has supported this sovereignty claim over Taiwan through military threats, diplomatic pressure, and the economic coercion of Taiwan and any country challenging this claim. For the United States, Taiwan being a member of the free world fits its global grand strategy. However, waging a war against a nuclear armed great power for this self-governed island does not. As a result, since 1949, leaders in Washington have viewed US relations with Taiwan in terms of a greater China framework. Through this framework, the United States does not explicitly commit to the defence of Taiwan in the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, but it does not explicitly support China's sovereignty claim over Taiwan in the US-China Joint Statement of 1979 either. These two non-commitments are essential components which shape the strategic ambiguity of the United States' One China Policy regarding Taiwan, through which has, over past decades, allowed itself to flexibly manage any contingent issues between Taiwan and China. Although this framework does not provide any official diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the United States, Taiwan benefits from how the United States has managed the choppy water of the Taiwan Strait. US-Taiwan unofficial relations are in fact closer, stronger, and more substantive than the United States' official relations with some other countries. Moreover, the United States keeps engaging with Taiwan's defence planning and military training to deter China, even though it is not legally obligated to defend the island from China in a crisis. Thus, Taiwan's security, and its economic and democratic achievements over the past seven decades, would have been impossible without the United States.

Like the United States, Japan sees its relations with Taiwan in terms of the same greater China framework, and has used a similar strategic ambiguity toward Taiwan to navigate its relations with China and Taiwan. Taiwan's ties with Japan are just as important as its ties with the United States; however, Taiwan and Japan's relationship has received relatively little scholarly attention. Driven mainly by its business interests, Japan shifted its diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan to the PRC in 1972, earlier than the United States. Nevertheless, when China demanded that Japan recognize China's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan based on the

so-called One China Principle, the Kakuei Tanaka administration did not accept the principle outright, but used the phrase “fully understands and respects” in the Sino-Japanese Joint Communiqué of 1972 to avoid accepting the claim (Seiichiro, 2006: 112). Like the United States, based on this position regarding Taiwan’s sovereignty, Japan maintains unofficial but very close and strong relations with Taiwan (Thomas and Williams, 2017). Economically, Japan was Taiwan’s third-largest trade partner in 2020, and Taiwan was the fourth-largest trade partner of Japan in the same year. As for the security dimension, even though Japan does not have its own version of the Taiwan Relations Act to address contingencies relating to Taiwan, it has still joined the United States in discouraging China’s military ambitions toward Taiwan, never ruling out the possibility of Japan defending Taiwan. During the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in March 1996, for instance, Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro repeatedly stated “a very strong concern” (Seiichiro, 2006: 119) about the rising tension in the Taiwan Strait in Diet sessions. One month after the crisis, Japan revised the Japan-US Defence Cooperation Guideline with the United States, to better cope with future situations “in the area surrounding Japan,” which logically includes Taiwan.

Although the United States and Japan are both crucial partners for Taiwan, their roles during China-Taiwan conflicts have differed. The United States and Japan’s strategic ambiguities toward Taiwan have underpinned the *de facto* independence of Taiwan over the past seventy years, deterring China from using force against Taiwan as well as limiting the damage of Chinese boxing in Taiwan diplomatically and economically. However, the United States has usually taken the lead to deter and defuse Chinese pressure on Taiwan, while Japan has followed the United States in a low-key and indirect manner, so as not to trigger unnecessary anti-Japanese nationalism in Chinese society. For example, Japan prefers to let the US use its military bases and facilities in Japan, following Article VI of the US-Japan security pact, to deal with Taiwanese contingencies, rather than Japan sending military forces to aid Taiwan directly.

Japan’s strong recent support to counter China’s pressure on Taiwan, however, seems to suggest that Japan’s Taiwan policy is moving away from the old strategic ambiguity toward a new strategic clarity. Some developments in Japan-Taiwan relations in recent years show an interesting tendency for Japan to be more and more willing to openly defend the interests of Taiwan against China. For example, while China attempted to block Taiwan’s access to COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic, Japan generously donated approximately four million doses of AstraZeneca to Taiwan, despite Japan’s domestic battle against the disease. Taiwan now receives the largest number of vaccines in Japan’s vaccine donation program, and Japan is the biggest vaccine donor to Taiwan. Furthermore, in February 2021, the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) Foreign Affairs Subcommittee established a Taiwan Policy Review Project Team which aims at upgrading Japan’s current relations with Taiwan due to the increasing instability of the Taiwan Strait. The director of the subcommittee Masahisa Sato used social media to publicly stress the need to strengthen relations between the two sides a number of times.¹ Two months later, in a joint statement, Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and US President Joseph Biden expressed their strong concern about

¹ Please see Sato’s personal website: <https://ameblo.jp/satomasahisa/entry-12677214986.html> (12.10. 2021).

China's recent moves in Asia in general, and Taiwan in particular: "We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues."² US and Japanese leaders mentioning the issue of Taiwan in a joint statement has not happened for decades. The last time this occurred was at the meeting between Eisaku Sato and Richard Nixon in 1969.

Most puzzlingly, Japan has started to take the lead in "normalizing" its relations with Taiwan, rather than its previous approach of acting only within the boundaries of US precedents. Breaking a long-held tradition of referring to Taiwan as a "region" at official events, Suga referred Taiwan as a "country" in a parliamentary debate in June 2021, a diplomatic gesture that US presidents have not made since the 1970s (*Japan's PM Refers to Taiwan as Country, Draws Fire from China*, 2021). It could hardly be argued that this is just a careless slip-up because Suga did not retract this reference later. In the same month, in an unrepresented move of signalling, all 245 members of the House of Councillors across different parties unanimously approved Taiwan's membership bid to the World Health Organization for 2022. In August 2021, Masahisa Sato and National Defence Division head Taku Otsuka held a Japanese version of a 2 + 2 meeting with their Taiwanese counterparts in the Democratic Progress Party, while again US officials still avoid contacting their counterparts in Taiwan in such a high-profile manner to avoid Beijing's ire. Now, Japanese Deputy Defence Minister Yasuhide Nakayama has urged America to be strong on the issue of Taiwan (Park, 2020).

This dazzlingly strong support of Taiwan from Japan in recent times implies that Japan's Taiwan policy has substantively departed from its long-held strategic ambiguity. Why has Japan started to protect Taiwan proactively and directly in recent years? How to explain the transformation of Japan's policy toward Taiwan from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity? Drawing upon various primary materials, this article approached those questions from a social constructivism lens. It argues that Japan's new identity is a critical factor in Japan's strategic transformation of its Taiwan policy. The following section will show that the existing explanations are unable to properly account for the shift of Japan's policy toward Taiwan. The third section will detail the process in which how Japan steadily changed its state identity over the years. Some policy implications will be offered in the conclusion section.

CURRENT EXPLANATIONS

Regarding the question of how to explain Japan's recent movements toward strategic clarity in its Taiwan policy, explanations may come chiefly from three levels. At the person-to-person level, Japanese sentiments toward China and Taiwan respectively are likely one important factor pushing Tokyo to level-up its relations with Taiwan. Although Japan and Taiwan do have diplomatic friction at times because of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the comfort women issue, Japanese and Taiwanese sentiments

² Please see the statement of the White House: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/> (12.10.2021).

about each other have been quite positive overall. According to a survey conducted by the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, Japan has been the country that Taiwanese people like best since 2009.³ Millions of Taiwanese travellers choose Japan as one of their favourite tourist destinations every year. Likewise, a survey conducted by Taiwan's Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Japan indicated almost 80% of Japanese citizens held a positive attitude toward Taiwan in 2020.⁴ Taiwan's warm response to the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and its successful experience in fighting against COVID-19 are key reasons contributing to the positive feelings of Japanese citizens. It is not a surprise to see the majority of respondents in a survey of Nikkei Shimbun supported the Suga administration's policy toward the Taiwan Strait after the Biden-Suga summit in April 2021 (Miki and Kato, 2021). As a sharp contrast, multiple surveys conducted by different agencies have found that Japanese people hold strong negative views of China (Stokes, 2016). A governmental survey of Japan for instance showed that only around 20% of Japanese people felt an affinity with China in 2018.⁵ From this perspective, as a democratic government, Japan's policy toward Taiwan should reflect the overall sentiments of how Japanese people view Taiwan.

At the leadership level, amicable personal ties between Taiwanese and Japanese senior leadership may be another explanation. Given Taiwan's colonial history, some Taiwanese politicians received a Japanese education, and hence understand Japanese culture and values very well. The former President of Taiwan Lee Teng-hui is one decent example. Knowing Japan well, Lee, through his personal network and years cultivating friendships in Japan, has laid the foundation of close Japan-Taiwan relations for the next generation of senior leaders in Taipei and Tokyo. Shared democratic and human rights values further consolidates the friendship between the two sides. Today, Japanese politicians who share a pro-Taiwan sentiment are equal, if not greater than, the number of pro-China politicians. Yoshiro Mori, Shinzo Abe and, Nobuo Kishi are all pro-Taiwan figures who are exerting political influence in Japanese policymaking to some degree. Due to this layer of personal relations, it is common to see politicians from both sides interacting positively with one another on social media, which does not happen frequently in how Japanese leaders interact with Chinese leaders.

The two explanations above have a certain degree of explanatory power for Japan's recent strong support of Taiwan, but they have a common weakness—they are both givens. Japanese positive sentiment toward Taiwan and negative sentiment toward China have been two stable trends in Japanese society for years, if not decades. Similarly, the friendships between Japanese and Taiwanese leaders may be able to explain Tokyo's willingness to defend Taiwan against China's pressure, but this factor, too, has existed since the Lee era, if not earlier. In other words, to explain the sudden quick strategic transformation of Tokyo in recent years appropriately, timing is key.

³ Please see the survey in here: https://www.koryu.or.jp/Portals/0/culture/%E4%B8%96%E8%AB%96/2018_seron_kani_CH.pdf (12.10.2021).

⁴ Please see the survey in here: https://www.taiwanembassy.org/uploads/sites/43/2021/01/%E3%80%902020%E3%80%91%E5%8F%B0%E6%B9%BE%E3%81%AB%E5%AF%BE%E3%81%99%E3%82%8B%E6%84%8F%E8%AD%98%E8%AA%BF%E6%9F%BB_%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8.pdf (12.10.2021).

⁵ Please see "Overview of the Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy" issued by the Japanese government in 2018 in here: <https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/pdf/summaryg18.pdf> (12.10.2021).

At the international system level, China's aggressive behaviour in the world in general and the East Asian region in particular in the Xi Jinping era is an explanation some China-watchers often refer to (Liff, 2019; Xin, 2021; Liff, 2021; Kennedy, 2021). Since Xi took power, China has unapologetically attempted to shift the international order in its own favour on various fronts. It challenged Japan's *de facto* administrative control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands by dispatching Chinese civilian and military vessels and aircraft to intrude on the waters and airspace around the island since 2012. In 2016, it disregarded the verdict of the Permanent Court of Arbitration which ruled its nine-dash line unlawful. Islands under China's control in the South China Sea are now militarized by missiles and strategic bombers. As for Taiwan, China has increased the speed and scale of diplomatic isolation, economic containment, and military threats. Seven diplomatic allies of Taiwan have been won over by China since 2016. As with the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, China dispatching military vessels and aircraft to circle Taiwan has become a regular event. Xi further announced a so-called Taiwanese version of One Country Two Systems in his speech To Taiwan Compatriots in 2019, proclaiming to Taiwan that unification between China and Taiwan must be fulfilled. Admiral Philip Davidson, then Commander of US Indo-Pacific Command, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2021 that China may take Taiwan in the next six years (Shelbourne, 2021).

These actions by China have made Japan feel that its security is deteriorating, especially in the event that China takes Taiwan by force. The geopolitical importance of Taiwan to Japan has been apparent for centuries. When planning to annex Taiwan in the first Sino-Japanese War, General Katsura Taro believed that "It (Taiwan) is not only the most ideal location for expanding (Japanese) power to southern China, but also to the islands in Southeast Asia" (Tsai, 2009: 128). Japan, as the country geographically closest to Taiwan (the Yonaguni Island is just a hundred kilometres away from Taiwan), certainly does not want to see Taiwan fall into China's hands. For one thing, Japan would inevitably be dragged into any military conflict that broke out between Taiwan and China, given that military bases at Okinawa would be the main bases for US forces to defend Taiwan if necessary. For another, if Taiwan were captured by China, China, with Taiwan as its naval base, could easily cut Japan's sea lanes of communication in the South China Sea, on which Japan relies to import oil and supplies. Beijing would then hold a better position to claim the sovereignty of and put military pressure on the Senkaku Islands. Therefore, as Masahisa Sato indicated frankly: "Taiwan's crisis is our own crisis";⁶ the defence of Taiwan equals the defence of Japan.

The explanation of Chinese aggression toward Taiwan from the system level remains imperfect, however. It cannot sufficiently explain why, unlike before, Japan now chooses not to follow the lead of the United States. Although the United States ignored its allies at times under the Donald Trump administration, empirically, it has strengthened its security commitments to Taiwan in many respects. The US's commitment to Taiwan was one of few issues that both the US administration and the congress and both parties in the congress agreed on. Since 2016, the US's military sales to Taiwan have been regularized. The frequency of US Freedom of Navigation Operations over

⁶ Please see Sato's personal website: <https://ameblo.jp/satomasahisa/entry-12677214986.html> (12.10.2021).

the Taiwan Strait has also begun to occur regularly, once a month. Pro-Taiwan legislation has been passed one bill after another. At multiple public occasions, US leaders have not only made high-profile visits to Taiwan, but repeatedly emphasized the necessity of solving the Taiwan issue peacefully to leaders in Beijing. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the United States has not responded to China's escalating pressure on Taiwan. While the United States' policy on Taiwan may have incentivized Japanese leaders' commitment to Taiwan, the speed and scale with which Japan increased its official connections with and security commitments to Taiwan outpaced that of the United States. Simply put, Japan is facing a similar structural pressure, but it has demonstrated a very distinct behaviour pattern. There must be a missing factor to understanding Japan's strategic transformation of its Taiwan policy.

FROM A FOLLOWER TO A PROACTIVE PEACE PROMOTER

This article argues that Japan's new identity is a critical factor in understanding Japan's strategic transformation of its Taiwan policy, resulting in strong pro-Taiwan behaviour. In social constructivist parlance, identity defines interests and interests drive behaviour (Wendt, 1999, 1992). How a state defines its identity will determine how the state sees itself and hence how it interacts with others. When a state, in its interaction with others, constantly practices a behaviour prescribed by its new identity for a long period of time, the identity will set root and the behaviour pattern will become a habit ultimately. For many Japanese politicians and policymakers in the government today, a new state identity they envision for Japan is a "proactive peace promoter." This new identity has, firstly, taken shape due to the growing challenge from China and, secondly, been accelerated hardened by the caprices of the United States. It is this new identity and the normative expectations associated with it that have caused Japan to demonstrate fundamentally different foreign behaviour.

For a long period after World War II, Japan had been a "passive peace follower" on the world stage, avoiding overcommitting to foreign missions or taking a leadership role in international affairs. Japan is an economically powerful actor at global scale, but politically, it was reactive and passive. It lived comfortably in an international order built and maintained by the United States in which democracy, the rule of law, human rights, free trade, an open South China Sea, and an independent Taiwan free from China's control were all essential components. Japan was involved in many international issues in the East Asian region, such as the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–96 and the Six-Party Talks addressing North Korean nuclear weapons, but it did not lead in any significant way. The typical pattern of Japan's foreign behaviour during crises was to follow the steps and pace of the United States, though there was some friction between the two countries at times. Japan's shadow of guilt regarding World War II and the benefits that it could gain from the Yoshida doctrine were two main factors that caused it to keep this follower identity. Consensus on this identity permeated both the leadership and grassroots levels. Sometimes, at home and abroad, there were voices claiming that Japan should take a bigger leadership role in international affairs commensurate with its global economic weight, especially after the Gulf War of

1990–91, but those voices did not fundamentally shake this consensus. Michael Green questioned what Japan's foreign policy was in 2003 (Green, 2003) and, ten years later, Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye asked whether Japan would drift into becoming a tier-two country (Armitage and Nye, 2012).

China's direct challenge to Japan from 2010 was a wake-up call, leading Japan to appreciate that the security environment around it was quickly deteriorating. In 2010, China replaced Japan as the second largest economy in the world. In the same year, a Chinese fishing boat deliberately rammed a Japanese coastguard vessel near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, but the Naoto Kan administration ultimately released the captain of the fishing boat due to the various economic and diplomatic pressures from China afterward. Many Japanese lamented that Japan "lost face in a big way" (The International Crisis Group, 2013: 22). More importantly, as mentioned above, China has established a new normal over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands: every month, hundreds of Chinese civilian and military vessels and aircraft now routinely "patrol" waters and airspace around the islands. In doing so, China has achieved a *fait accompli*: there is a double administrative control over the islands. Japanese leaders have now realized that the security environment Japan faces is full of "grey-zone conflicts", in which there is frequent low-level conflict with the potential of escalating into full-scale war.

Given that China has been gradually and consistently upsetting the existing international order of the East Asian region, from which Japan has benefited enormously in past decades, and given that the United States is seemingly hesitant to commit more to this region to meet China's challenge, leaders in Tokyo have recognized that it is time for Japan to proactively safeguard the order of the region itself. Japan now perceives itself as an indispensable guardian of the international order that must maintain the current system to prevent the status quo from being altered by China completely.

The Japanese leader who pushed most strongly for Japan to redefine its identity has been Shinzo Abe. After Abe became the Prime Minister of Japan for the second time in 2012, he delivered a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies just few months after his inauguration, in which he outlined the future identity he imagined for Japan:

Japan is not, and will never be, a Tier-two country... A rules-promoter, a commons' guardian, and an effective ally and partner to the U.S. and other democracies, MUST Japan be... It is high time, in this age of Asian resurgence, for Japan to bear even more responsibilities to promote our shared rules and values... In order for us, Japan and the United States, to jointly provide the region and the world with more rule of law, more democracy, more security and less poverty, Japan must stay strong.⁷

This new identity Abe envisioned for Japan materialized in Japan's very first National Security Strategy in 2013, calling for Japan being a proactive peace contributor:

As Japan's security environment becomes ever more severe, Japan needs to identify its national interests from a long-term perspective, determine the course it should pursue in the international community, and adopt a *whole-government approach* [author emphasis] for national security policies and measures in order to continue developing a prosperous and peaceful society. Japan has contributed to the peace,

⁷ Please see Abe's speech here: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201302/22speech_e.html (12.10.2021).

stability and prosperity of the region and the world. In a world where globalization continues, Japan should play *an even more proactive role* [author emphasis] as a major global player in the international community... The key of national security is to create a stable and predictable international environment, and prevent the emergence of threats. It is thus necessary for Japan to realize an international order and security environment that are desirable for Japan, by playing an even more proactive role in achieving peace, stability and prosperity of the international community as a “Proactive Contributor to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation.⁸

Another factor that boosted Japan’s identity transformation was the United States’ shifting commitments to the existing international order in the East Asian region over the past ten years. Many in Japanese leadership believe that Japan can no longer totally rely on the United States to prevent the international order from being demolished by China (Liff, 2019; Samuels and Wallace, 2018; Sahashi, 2017; Solis, 2020). The power of the United States may not be in decline in absolute term in the East Asian region, but its commitments to the region have become empirically unstable. The strategy of “pivot to Asia” advocated loudly by the Barack Obama administration was hobbled by domestic politics. In hindsight, the United States was unable to help its ally, the Philippines, secure sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal, nor could it prevent China from disregarding the verdict of the Permanent Court of Arbitration regarding the South China Sea. Though the United States’ 2017 National Security Strategy positioning China as a strategic competitor was a relief for Japanese defence planners, the alliance network in East Asia was weakened under the Trump administration. The Trans-Pacific Partnership’s (TPP) original purpose was to guard against Xi’s grand Belt and Road Initiative, but the United States withdrew from it in the end. Those episodes all galvanized Japanese leaders to recalibrate Japan’s relations with the United States and hence decided to play a bigger role in the international order for its own sake. As a result, departing from tradition, Japan listed China over North Korea as its top security threat in its 2019 defence white paper (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2019).

It should be noted that many countries have experienced a wake-up call that turns its foreign behaviour from passive to proactive. China, Japan’s geopolitical rival, is no exception. The Chinese version of a wake-up call was the US bombing the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, which Chinese leaders interpreted as a deliberate attempt by Americans to contain the rise of China. This episode made the Chinese leaders question whether Deng’s formula “keep a low profile and strive for achievement” was still relevant. What emerged from this reflection process was similar to what the Japanese are beginning to think now—that China should not passively absorb the shocks of international affairs, but proactively shape a peaceful environment conducive to China’s economic development (Zhang, 2012).

Therefore, it is quite common at present to see language suggesting that Japan should take more responsibility in maintaining the international order appearing in statements by Japanese politicians or government policy papers, suggesting that the new identity of Japan has taken root in Japanese leadership. For example, Japan’s Diplomatic Bluebook 2018 stated:

⁸ Please see National Security Strategy of Japan here: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/index.html (12.10.2021).

In this period of change in the international order, Japan must not be a “follower.” Together with the U.S. and other allies, as well as friendly nations, Japan is determined to become a “beacon” to bring peace and prosperity to the world (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018: Preface).

Nobuo Kishi, the Japanese Minister of Defence, pointed out in the opening remarks of Japan's 2021 Defence White Paper:

The Indo-Pacific region is the core of the world's vitality, and at the same time, it faces various security challenges. In the midst of the changing global power balance, the importance of the region is further increasing. In order to counter these challenges in the security environment, it is essential not only to strengthen Japan's own defense capabilities and *expand the roles we can fulfill* [author emphasis], but also to closely cooperate with countries that share the same fundamental values (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2021: Preface).

It is because of this profound identity transformation that made Japan carry the TPP after the withdrawal of the United States, reinterpret its Constitution, advocate for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiatives, organize the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue⁹, and persuade the Biden administration to keep using the term “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” Those moves all aim to uphold the current international order in this chaotic era.

Thus, Japan's new identity is the best framework for understanding Japan's movement toward strategic clarity in its Taiwan policy. Like an amplifier, Japan's new identity has led it to sharpen its awareness of and sensitivity to threats, paying closer attention to the everyday dynamics of its security environment. Taiwan, with its geographic proximity to Japan, is certainly one of Japan's policy priorities because a democratic and an independent Taiwan free from Chinese control has everything to do with the survival of Japan. As Sato pointed out in his social media account, “there is a North Korea missile threat, but preparing for a Taiwan Strait crisis”¹⁰ is the priority. Consequently, Japan was increasingly threatened by China ramping up its military, diplomatic, and economic coercion toward Taiwan after Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016. Without this identity transformation, the level of sense of threat Japan perceived would have been very different. That is why Japanese leaders often use the idea that “the fate of Taiwan and the fate of Japan are deeply connected” as an explanation for their concern about the Taiwan Strait. The Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, for example, stated frankly in July 2021 that “If a major incident happened [in Taiwan], it would not be strange at all if it touches on a situation threatening survival... If that is the case, Japan and the U.S. must defend Taiwan together” (Osawa, 2021). In a similar description to China describing its geopolitical relations with North Korea as “lips and teeth”, Nakayama used the analogy of “nose and eyes” to describe the geopolitical relations between Japan and Taiwan in a public speech at the Hudson Institute:

Kishi-san and I'm kind of a friend of Taiwan, but we are not friend of Taiwan. We are brother. We are family of Taiwan, more closer. So if something happens in Taiwan,

⁹ Please see Abe's article on Project Syndicate: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>.

¹⁰ Please see Sato's twitter account here: https://twitter.com/SatoMasahisa/status/1445881122261385223?s=20&fbclid=IwAR0mgOBnrQYn15wC-Q_E_RqdvvtOh52NL_tW2GYlQaAU3Fwzslvt-DznIwR4g (12.10.2021).

it's directly related to the Okinawa Prefecture. And in Okinawa Prefecture, there is existence of the United States, the armed forces. We have Kadena Air Base. We have the U.S. Marine Corps base and another facilities, not just the Japanese Self Defense Forces and the Japanese citizens living in Okinawa... So please think about the geographically how it is really close to Taiwan Island and Okinawa Island. It's kind of like nose and eyes, this close.¹¹

In addition, the existence of Taiwan is not only related to the security environment of Japan, but also to the very foundation of Japan's new identity. Taiwan and Japan both embrace the universal values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, which are all essential building stones of the international order after the Cold War. Naturally, a free and democratic Taiwan is something that Japan, wishing to safeguard the international order, wants to defend for. Defencing Taiwan is defending Japan's own identity. Japan's diplomatic bluebooks are one piece of evidence reflecting that these shared values bring Japan and Taiwan closer in the ear of Japan with the new identity. In 2014, Japan mainly viewed Japan-Taiwan relations in economic terms: Taiwan was "an important partner and has close economic ties with Japan" (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014: 13). Now, the phrase referring to Taiwan in the 2020 Diplomatic Bluebook is "an extremely crucial partner and an important friend, with which it shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights, and the rule of law, and enjoys close economic relations and people-to-people exchanges" (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020: 58).

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This is not the first time that Japan has proactively shaped its security environment due to a change of identity. Japan's identity also shifted in this fundamental way in the nineteenth century, when Japan attempted to replace the Qing Dynasty, which had maintained the old international order in East Asia. Seeing that the Qing Dynasty was too feeble to effectively resist the impending Russian encroachment on the Korean Peninsula from the North, Japan annexed Korea, which was perceived by Japan as a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan, to create a better security environment for itself (Paine, 2003). A similar pattern was apparent in Japan's rationale for launching the Second Sino-Japanese War in the twentieth century. The history above is not referenced to argue that Japan's new identity will cause it to militarize its foreign policy, but to show that Japan can be quite proactive once it has reoriented its identity and set its new targets. This identity transformation explains the speed and the scale of the recent strategic transformation of Japan's policy toward Taiwan.

Looking ahead, it is likely that Japan-Taiwan relations will become closer and stronger in the years to come. From a social constructivist perspective, a new state identity and associated behaviours will be internalized more and more deeply as the state uses that new identity to interact with others on a daily basis. With the passage of time, the state will gradually create habits based on the new identity, making it dif-

¹¹ Please see Nakayama's speech here: <https://www.hudson.org/research/17059-transcript-the-transformation-of-japan-s-security-strategy> (12.10.2021).

ficult for the state to return to its previous identity (Wendt, 1999: 308–312). If that is the case, with positive feedback from Taiwan, the United States, and the international community, leaders in Tokyo will continue to embrace this new identity of Japan in future. Supporting Taiwan may become a common language of “politically correct” in Japanese policymaking circles. Indeed, recent developments in Japan seem to support this hypothesis. The new Japanese Prime Minister in 2021, Fumio Kishida, who was considered taking a moderate line in Japan’s Taiwan policy, announced three resolutions when running for Prime Minister. The first one was the protection of the stability of the Taiwan Strait.¹²

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ABSTRACT

Like the United States, Japan views its relations with Taiwan through a greater China framework. It uses a similar strategic ambiguity toward Taiwan to navigate its relations with China and Taiwan. However, Japan's recent strong support for Taiwan to counter China's pressure on the island seems to suggest that Japan's Taiwan policy is moving away from its old strategic ambiguity toward a new strategic clarity. Why has Japan started to protect Taiwan proactively and directly in recent years? How to explain the transformation of Japan's policy regarding Taiwan from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity? Drawing upon various primary materials, this article approached those questions from a social constructivism lens. It argues that Japan's new identity is a critical factor in Japan's strategic transformation of its Taiwan policy. Japan's new identity has first taken shape due to the growing challenge from China, and second been accelerated and hardened by the caprices of the United States. It is this new identity and its associated normative expectations that have caused Japan's foreign behaviour to change fundamentally. This article will detail the process in which how Japan steadily changed its state identity over the years after showing that the existing explanations are unable to properly account for the shift of Japan's policy toward Taiwan. Some policy implications will be offered in the conclusion section.

Keywords: social constructivism, strategic ambiguity, strategic clarity, Japan-Taiwan relations

**JAPOŃSKA POLITYKA WOBEC TAJWANU W ERZE XI JINPINGA,
W KIERUNKU STRATEGICZNEJ JEDNOZNACZNOŚCI****STRESZCZENIE**

Japonia, podobnie jak USA, postrzega swoje relacje z Tajwanem w szerszym chińskim kontekście. Państwo to jeszcze do niedawna w swej polityce względem Chin oraz Tajwanu posługiwało się znaną z relacji USA–Tajwan koncepcją strategicznej ambiwalencji. Tymczasem, silne poparcie udzielone wyspie wobec coraz intensywniejszych nacisków ze strony ChRL, zdaje się sugerować, iż Japonia w swoich relacjach z Tajwanem zaczyna odchodzić od dotychczasowej polityki strategicznej ambiwalencji w stronę strategicznej jednoznaczności. Celem artykułu jest analiza przyczyn, jakie stały za zmianą japońskiej polityki wobec Tajwanu w ostatnich latach. Zdaniem autora, odejście władz Japonii od dotychczasowej polityki strategicznej ambiwalencji w stosunku do Tajwanu spowodowane jest strukturalną zmianą, jaka zaszła w polityce zagranicznej Japonii znajdującej swój wyraz zarówno w aspekcie normatywnym, jak i militarnym. Przyczyn owej zmiany autor upatruje we wzroście zagrożenia ze strony Chin oraz bezpośrednio związanej z tym presji USA wywieranej na swego japońskiego sojusznika.

Słowa kluczowe: konstruktywizm społeczny, strategiczna ambiwalencja, strategiczna jednoznaczność, relacje Japonia-Tajwan

