

# Correct Understanding of Japan's One China Policy and Its Future

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Japan demonstrated its commitment to Taiwan's security together with the United States at the meeting of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and U.S. President Joe Biden in April 2021. As concern over China's belligerence toward Taiwan grows, the joint statement of the two leaders stressed "the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" and encouraged "the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues."<sup>1</sup> It is the first time since 1969 that the leaders of the two states mentioned Taiwan in a joint statement.

The year 2022 will mark the 50th anniversary of normalizing diplomatic relations between Japan and China. While the Taiwan issue was the biggest obstacle to resuming Japan-China relations in the past, it is once again becoming the flashpoint of conflict between China and the U.S. and Japan today. Under this circumstance, the consistency of Japan's 'One China policy' is called into question. This article will give an overview of the 'One China policy,' looking at how the policy was made and how the Taiwan issue was addressed during and after the 1972 negotiation for the normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations.

## **The Japan-China Joint Communiqué agreeing on the Reversion of Taiwan to China**

It is important to consider first how the Taiwan issue was dealt with during the negotiation for the normalization of Japan-China relations in September 1972. In the second clause of the joint communiqué between Japan and China, the Japanese government recognized "the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China." The third clause stated "the Government of the People's Republic of China reiterates that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China. The Government of Japan fully understands and respects this stand of the Government of the People's Republic of China, and it firmly maintains its stand under Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation."<sup>2</sup>

Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation, under which Japan surrendered unconditionally in World War II, stipulates that "the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out."<sup>3</sup> What does this mean? Drafted by the United Kingdom, the U.S. and China in November 1943, the Cairo Declaration called for Japan's restoration of Manchuria, "Formosa" [Taiwan] and "the Pescadores" [islands and islets in the Taiwan Strait] to China.<sup>4</sup>

In a 2007 article, Takakazu Kuriyama – a former Ambassador to the US and Director of Treaty Division at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1972 negotiations with China – notes that Japan’s reference to Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation states that it agreed to restore Taiwan to the People’s Republic of China.<sup>5</sup>

According to Kuriyama, China initially was not satisfied with the phrase, “The Government of Japan fully understands and respects this stand of the Government of the People’s Republic of China” on the draft joint communiqué and therefore Japan added specific reference to Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai understood the connotation of the language and accepted the revised draft which rejects a ‘Two Chinas’ or ‘One China, One Taiwan’ position.

The joint communiqué demonstrated a change in Japan’s position on Taiwan. In the Treaty of Peace of 1951, Japan renounced sovereignty over Taiwan but since neither the Republic of China nor the People’s Republic of China were parties to the treaty, neither was declared a beneficiary of the Japanese renouncement. During the 1972 negotiation, however, Japan changed its stance to recognizing the restoration of Taiwan to China.

### **Remarks on Taiwan in U.S.-Japan 2+2 Meetings**

A half-century later, the Japan-U.S. joint leaders’ statement issued at the meeting in April 2021 clearly demonstrated a change in the nature of the Japan-U.S. alliance. The issue of Taiwan was raised for the first time since the normalization of Japan-China relations. The change is based on the premise that the next Taiwan crisis, which would be triggered by China’s use of force, is imminent.

Before the meeting, the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee – the so-called Japan-U.S. “2+2” which was held by the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense and U.S. Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense on March 16, 2021 – also mentioned and criticized China in its statement. In its 30-year history, the committee has noted China and Taiwan only twice.

The first remark was made in the joint statement of the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee, which convened under the administration of George W. Bush, Jr. in Washington D.C. on February 19, 2005. As common strategic objectives, the two countries sought to “develop a cooperative relationship with China, welcoming the country to play a responsible and constructive role regionally as well as globally” and to “encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue.”<sup>6</sup>

The other remark is found in the Japan-U.S. 2+2 meeting on June 21, 2011. Japan and the U.S. updated the common strategic objectives. Since relations between China and Taiwan improved under the Ma Ying-jeou administration, the joint statement stated “while welcoming the progress to date in improving cross-Strait relations, [we] encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues through dialogue.”<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized both statements with a deliberate tone. In contrast, China’s reaction to the remark on the Taiwan issue at the 2+2 meeting in March 2021 was intense. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson accused Japan of being a U.S. dependent state attempting to collapse China-Japan relations.<sup>8</sup>

### **Japan’s Two Contradictory Legal Systems**

Since independence under the 1952 Treaty of Peace (the San Francisco Peace Treaty), Japan is governed by two

contradictory legal systems: the Constitution and the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States. The Constitution renounces war and promotes international peace without threat or use of force.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty centers the Japan-U.S. alliance on diplomacy and security and allows for the use of force, if necessary, for purposes of maintaining international peace.

The Japanese political left supported the Constitution whereas the right adhered to the Treaty until Japan's rapid economic development ended and the bubble economy collapsed in the 1990s. Despite the political disputes between the left and right, there was no objection to expanding the economic pie. Therefore, even though the two legal systems contradicted each other in terms of the use of force, they were able to coexist.

In the 21st century, Japan's decline has continued, while China has risen politically and economically. The expansion of the economic pie – which simultaneously maintained the two legal systems and hid their contradictions – is no longer feasible.

Facing North Korea's growing nuclear and military power in the 1990s, and the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis and China's expanding military in the mid-1990s, Japan's right advocating the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty came to have more power, while the left protecting the Constitution rapidly lost its voice.

Since the legislation of peace and security took effect in 2016, the political influence of those protecting the Constitution has further weakened. Because of this transition, Japanese public opinion has swung to the right. Concern over threats from China dominates public opinion. Taiwan continues to resist China's increasing pressure for reunification. The Japanese view Taiwan with empathy and sympathy, as a partner who shares the values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. As a result, the Japanese media and the public have forgotten Japan's basic Chinese policy, 'the One China' policy, and nothing has been done to attenuate the emotional commitment to Taiwan.

Due to the democratization of Taiwan, some military personnel consider Taiwan's security crisis as Japan's as well and as a result there are voices calling for a review of the 'One China policy.' Under these circumstances, it is important to look at why Japan approved and supported the Republic of China under the dictatorship of the Kuomintang (KMT). Would Japan support Taiwan, if it were an autocracy? The answer is no. Taiwan is significant to Japan and the U.S. because it is a useful geopolitical card to contain China. That is the immutable 'logic of nation state' for the two countries since the Cold War. It is reasonable to understand 'democracy' works as a decoration to develop the value-based diplomacy in their favor in the Taiwan context.

In this situation, Japan's reconsideration of its One China policy is unlikely to gain majority support. Nonetheless, as the 50th anniversary of normalizing Japan-China relations approaches, China will press Japan to commit to the One China policy and debate over the policy will probably be active in Japan because of pressure from China.

### **Diplomatic Efforts toward Strategic Autonomy**

The Chinese policy under the Biden administration employs the dichotomy of 'democracy or autocracy' and asks the world to choose either one. The dichotomy, however, leads to a pitfall: the dichotomy of the U.S. or China. The

either-or question is the wrong approach in international politics which is by definition composed of complex interdependence.

China does not suggest its developing model as ‘China Standard.’ Many countries do not like to choose between the U.S. or China. Principles of democracy, including freedom of speech and expression, human rights, and the rule of law, are significant values, but there are no absolute definitions of these principles nor a scale to measure them by. These principles are not universal.

A governance system reflects a nation’s cultural characteristics such as its vision, history, customs, social system, language, and religion. Neither democracy nor autocracy is uniform. They are diverse.

The Chinese policy under the Biden administration will lead to strife whereas diplomacy will control confrontation and promote cooperation through bilateral dialogue. Although President Biden strategically takes the ‘anti-China’ policy that is rarely opposed, in order to bridge the divide and rift in U.S. society, it will eventually falter. President Biden should return to the normal trajectory of diplomacy with dialogue between top leaders.

Some U.S. allies – particularly Germany, France, South Korea, India, and many member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – oppose or are indifferent to the idea of an ‘alliance against China,’ preferring to pursue strategic autonomy or hedging strategy. On the other hand, the Suga administration has encouraged the creation of an anti-China alliance through multilateral frameworks – the G7, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), and the QUAD (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.) – based on the diplomatic policy of ‘Japan-US Security as the key pillar’. The Suga administration is not actively pursuing crucial diplomacy with China. Rather than incline towards the Biden administration’s stance, Japan should engage in dialogue with China and resume talks with President Xi Jinping which was postponed by the Abe administration inviting him as a state guest.

<sup>1</sup> White House, Statement and Releases, U.S.- Japan Joint Leaders’ Statement: “U.S. – JAPAN GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA, April 16, 2021 (accessed July 25, 2021); available from <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/>

<sup>2</sup> National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), The world and Japan, Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, September 29, 1972 (accessed July 25, 2021); available from <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/docs/19720929.D1E.html>

<sup>3</sup> National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), The world and Japan, Potsdam Declaration (Proclamation Defining Terms For Japanese Surrender), July 26, 1945 (accessed July 25, 2021); available from <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/docs/19450726.D1E.html>

<sup>4</sup> National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), The world and Japan, The Cairo Declaration, November 27, 1943 (accessed July 25, 2021); available from <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/docs/19431127.D1E.html>

<sup>5</sup> Takakazu Kuriyama, “Taiwan mondai ni tsuite no nihon no tachiba – Nicchu Kyodo Sengen dai 3 ko no imi – 台湾問題についての日本の立場 – 日中共同声明第三項の意味 –” [Japan’s stance on the Taiwan issue – The meaning of the third clause of Japan-China Joint Communique – ], The Japan Institute of International Affairs, October 24, 2007. Accessed July 25, 2021. Available from [https://www2.jiia.or.jp/RESR/column\\_page.php?id=141](https://www2.jiia.or.jp/RESR/column_page.php?id=141).

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japan-United States of America Relations, Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee (2+2) (March 16, 2021), Joint Statement of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee, Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee, March 16, 2021 (accessed July 25, 2021); available from

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/pdfs/joint0502.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japan-United States of America Relations, U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) (June 2011), Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee Toward a Deeper and Broader U.S.-Japan Alliance: Building on 50 Years of Partnership, June 21, 2011 (accessed July 25, 2021); available from

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/pdfs/joint1106\\_01.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/pdfs/joint1106_01.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> 「2021年3月17日外交部发言人赵立坚主持例行记者会」 (中国外交部HP)

(2021年3月17日外交部发言人赵立坚主持例行记者会 — 中华人民共和国外交部 (fmprc.gov.cn) (accessed Aug 25, 2021); available from [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/fyrbt\\_673021/t1861952.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/t1861952.shtml)

<sup>9</sup> Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, The Constitution of Japan, November 3, 1946 (accessed July 25, 2021);

available from [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html)

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