

# Japan-Taiwan Relations: Opportunities and Challenges

## Report Launch Webinar

Stimson Center  
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### SUMMARY

*Panelists:*

Madoka Fukuda

Kayo Takuma

Takahisa Kawaguchi

Yuka Koshino

Yuki Tatsumi (Moderator)

The Stimson Center hosted a webinar via Zoom on March 17, 2021 to launch the publication of *Japan-Taiwan Relations: Opportunities and Challenges*, the 8<sup>th</sup> volume in the *Views from the Next Generation* series of policy brief compilations. At the publication launch, the four authors joined East Asia Program Co-Director Yuki Tatsumi to discuss their research and policy recommendations. Tatsumi opened the event by introducing Dr. Madoka Fukuda (Ph.D., Professor, Department of Global Politics, Hosei University), Dr. Kayo Takuma (Ph.D., Professor, Graduate School of Law and Politics, Tokyo Metropolitan University), Takahisa Kawaguchi (Principle Researcher, Tokio Marine and Nichido Risk Consulting Co.), and Yuka Koshino (Research Fellow for Japanese Defense and Security Policy, International Institute of Strategy Studies).

Fukuda began the panel with a review of Japan-Taiwan historical relations. Bilateral relations are consistent with the Japan-China Joint Communiqué of 1972, making cooperation occasionally dependent on China. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe improved relations with China in 2017, while cooperation with President Tsai involved risk. The importance of Japan and Taiwan having no official diplomatic relations is declining in the context of interaction in the economy, culture, and people-to-people relations, rather than power, politics, and security. However, domestic politics complicate these exchanges, such as Taiwan's ban on Fukushima food imports. In spite of this, COVID-19 cooperation has reinvigorated their relationship.

Fukuda expressed that COVID-19 has changed Japan's policies towards China, in response to China's propaganda campaign and aggressive politico-military operations in the region during the crisis. Meanwhile, Japan's confidence in Taiwan's epidemic prevention policies increased. Fukuda argued that controlling domestic factors, such as the food ban issue, will help improve bilateral relations. She noted that Japan and Taiwan have already signed numerous practical agreements in the last decade. However, it has been politically difficult to include Taiwan in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), establish a bilateral trade agreement, or other cooperative measures, due to China's military presence and watchful eyes.

Fukuda proposed that in order to advance economic and security relations, Taiwan needs to consider lifting the restrictions on Japanese food imports, and Japan needs to consider other options that do not require progress on the food issue as a precondition for improving economic relations. In terms of security cooperation, Fukuda acknowledged that Japanese debate on possible cross-strait involvement is increasing amid China's regional provocations. She argued that Japan should be in alignment with the United States. Japan and Taiwan also share disputes with China in the East and South China Sea. To improve cooperation, Japanese Diet members should deepen their understanding of Japan-Taiwan relations to strengthen political ties.

Next, Takuma discussed Japan-Taiwan COVID-19 cooperation. Takuma acknowledged Taiwan's success in handling the virus, and the need to incorporate Taiwan into the global cooperative system, given its international exclusion. She described how Taiwan has been an observer with the World Health Organization (WHO) under the name "Chinese Taipei" since 2009, as agreed upon by former President Ma Ying-jeou and the Beijing government. In 2016, however, the Tsai administration rejected the conditions of the arrangement. As a result, Taiwan has been excluded from the global cooperative structure. At the World Health Assembly, member nations decided to set aside the matter of Taiwan's observer status to focus on COVID-19 and WHO reform.

Takuma argued that support from other countries, namely the United States and Japan, is needed to break Taiwan's isolation. In August 2020, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar met with President Tsai in Taiwan, reiterating U.S.-Taiwan cooperation and democratic values. U.S. support is a solid step forward for realizing Taiwan's participation in the global health framework. At the same time, Takuma expressed that the U.S.-Taiwan approach may be understood in the context of U.S.-China confrontation. Since 1972, the U.S. government has restricted official contact with the Taiwanese government. However, the Trump administration ended this rule. Therefore, U.S.-Taiwan cooperation is not an exact model for Japan-Taiwan cooperation.

Nonetheless, Takuma stated that Japan would be an invaluable player for including Taiwan in the health cooperative scheme. Both share values of freedom, democracy, human rights, cross-economic relations, and people-to-people exchanges at the nongovernmental level. Since 2004, Japan's National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) annually hosts a Japan-Taiwan symposium on infectious diseases. She recommended that both push for cooperation through the exchange of researchers and establishment of an information-sharing or early alert system between Japan's NIID and Taiwan's Center for Disease Control. Furthermore, both can engage in joint-medicine or vaccine development for future diseases to help Japan's preparedness, and reinforce the global cooperative system.

Kawaguchi then discussed Japan-Taiwan cooperation against disinformation. He defined disinformation as the usage of unreliable information by foreign governments to politically influence countries, oftentimes manipulating accurate information. Taiwan has been exposed to massive disinformation during its elections and the COVID-19 crisis but has made remarkable strides to confront it. It revised relevant laws and strengthened fact-checking on the communication app LINE, which is the most popular messaging app in Taiwan and Japan. Kawaguchi assessed that the main battlefield of disinformation is not only on open social media platforms but on private communication apps as well.

Kawaguchi expressed that Japan does not consider disinformation a major threat to national security. However, the government has started to act. In October 2018, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications established an expert panel on digital platforms. It released a report, urging the government to encourage voluntary efforts by digital platforms to combat fake news. However, the report overlooked disinformation by foreign governments, and its impact on national security. The United States also experienced massive disinformation during the 2020 president election. Kawaguchi determined that Russian media outlets propagated disinformation in the U.S. on election fraud, revealing how difficult it is to distinguish unreliable information spread spontaneously, and disinformation disseminated by foreign governments.

Kawaguchi argued that Japan, Taiwan, and the U.S. need to attribute disinformation to the specific adversary, as well as combat disinformation without violating freedom of speech and expression. Attention should also be given to China's influence operations in cyberspace, more so than just Russia. The three democracies should also build democratic coalitions to promote cross-cooperation in threat intelligence, cyber attribution, as well as

coordinated countermeasures involving financial sanctions and criminal prosecution. He also recommended that the three encourage private sector efforts to control disinformation, including digital platforms and fact-checking bodies.

Koshino discussed her paper “Japan-Taiwan Cooperation Towards an Open, Interoperable, Reliable, and Secure Digital Economy.” She wrote the paper to give context to Taiwan’s place in ongoing U.S.-Japan cooperation under the digital connectivity pillar of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept, as well as to address the need for closer government-level policy cooperation between Tokyo and Taipei. Koshino noted three trends driving this cooperation: China’s rise in the digital sphere, including the spread of Chinese digital infrastructure and the promoting of data protectionism; economic security challenges, especially within U.S.-China strategic competition that has intensified a “digital decoupling” policy by the United States; and the need to prevent Taiwan’s isolation from key multilateral groups.

Koshino found four areas where Tokyo and Taipei could expand their cooperation, including network security and resiliency, particularly in 5G; domestic technological and industrial capabilities; building and strengthening rules and norms around the digital economy, such as through the CPTPP e-commerce chapter; and cooperation with the United States in various venues, ranging from bilateral to plurilateral. Among her policy recommendations, Koshino urged Japan and Taiwan to conduct joint research and development on 5G open architecture and in advanced semiconductor design and manufacturing. Koshino also recommended that Japan and Taiwan work together promote information exchange on cybersecurity at the legislative member group-level, and cooperate on preventing technology and talent outflow to China. Finally, Koshino encouraged Japan to assist Taiwan’s participation in international venues and groups on preventing the spread of data protectionism and supporting digital economy norms.

Tatsumi invited the audience to submit questions for the authors to the Q&A function on Zoom. One attendee asked what the greatest investment or economic opportunity for Japan and Taiwan in the future would be. Koshino noted that Japan has a growing interest in bringing investments from Taiwan’s semiconductor industry and that there is a possibility of Japanese telecommunications vendors investing in Taiwan.

Another question focused on the relationship between Japan and Taiwan’s digital security bureaucracies. Kawaguchi noted that there is no publicly available information on any official cooperation, but Japan, Taiwan, and the United States have conducted a multilateral tabletop exercise on cybersecurity and disinformation.

A Stimson colleague asked how the United States could better engage with Japan and Taiwan to support Japan-Taiwan cooperation on cross-border issues like global health. Takuma observed that the relationship between the U.S. and Taiwan is very close, and because of the United States’ influence in the area of health, U.S. support could be used to facilitate Taiwan-Japan activities.

An audience member asked about any progress or roadmaps for Taiwan joining the CPTPP, as well as prospects for the U.S.’s return to the agreement. Fukuda noted that there is no timetable for Taiwan’s joining, and there are obstacles to overcome, but Taiwan’s interest is important for expanding the CPTPP membership. For the U.S. to rejoin, however, would be difficult, considering domestic politics in the United States. Koshino added that Japan is currently the chair of the CPTPP and does have an interest in exploring CPTPP membership with Taiwan. Other countries like the United Kingdom and Australia have expressed interest as well, so there are ample discussions about expanding the CPTPP.

The next question asked what Japan would do if China were to invade Taiwan. Fukuda noted that while Japan would cooperate with the U.S. in its alliance, what Japan

would itself do depends on the situation. Kawaguchi added that crises in the Taiwan Strait affect Japan's security, so Japan could consider the applicability of collective security rights.

Michael Fonte asked whether the U.S. Development Finance Corporation, Japan, and Taiwan could cooperate on sustainable development projects in Pacific islands. Koshino responded that this situation would probably focus more on U.S. and Japanese financing tools to support Pacific islands with ties to Taiwan.

An attendee asked if there are any cooperative initiatives between Japan and Taiwan on vaccines. Takuma noted that while both are members of COVAX Facility, they do not have vaccine development cooperation.

Andrew Oros asked how Japan could expand security cooperation with Taiwan in the context of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Fukuda reiterated the importance of information-sharing on Chinese activities in the East and South China Seas, which Japan and Taiwan could expand with the United States.

Joe Ross asked whether the recent creation of a Taiwan working group in the Japanese Diet reflects growing support for Taiwan in the Liberal Democratic Party. Fukuda observed that there have been many such groups in the Diet for legislative exchange with Taiwan, but the larger issue is that the groups largely don't evolve into more mainstream Diet discussions. Tatsumi asked if there is evidence of growing support from Japanese politicians due to recent statements they have made in the media, including a lawmaker who suggested a Japanese version of the U.S. Taiwan Relations Act. Fukuda agreed that such discussions are increasing but have not become commonplace in the Diet.

Darrell Rico Doss asked how Taiwanese companies could best leverage their relationship with Japan and the U.S. in areas like that face supply chain challenges. Koshino noted that the Global Cooperation and Training Framework is a useful venue for partners like Japan, but there are other groupings of like-minded democracies that are also interested in supply chain resiliency. Taiwan could explore a variety of venues.

The final question focused on what ordinary Japanese citizens could do to promote Japan-Taiwan relations. Koshino observed that Taiwan has become a more prominent topic in Japanese media, which is important for increasing public discussions on Taiwan. She also recommended that students look for exchange opportunities, perhaps virtually during the pandemic. Kawaguchi added that he views communicating between the two societies as important, especially discussing issues like fake news and disinformation. The messaging app LINE, which is popular in both Japan and Taiwan, could be an easy means. Takuma noted that the pandemic has made ordinary Japanese aware of how important cooperation with Taiwan is, so there is an opportunity to foster public health cooperation. Finally, Fukuda emphasized that scholars of Taiwan and China studies should help ordinary citizens understand Taiwan by explaining its history and international status in plain language.

Tatsumi ended the webinar by thanking the Embassy of Japan for the long-running collaboration on the *Views from the Next Generation* project.