

Work Samples (in order, PDFs attached):

- 1. Can China-Japan youth exchanges and goodwill overcome their deep political chill?**
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3277600/can-china-japan-youth-exchanges-and-goodwill-overcome-their-deep-political-chill>
South China Morning Post
I reported this story and interviewed Japanese college students and experts in Sino-Japanese relations.
The full text of the article is available at:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K8PUDuwBIu4fgwvi-xmaIYtBAYeoOu9a/view?usp=sharing>
- 2. Communist Party exhibitions lean on honour and obligation among young Chinese.**
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3273812/communist-party-exhibitions-lean-honour-and-obligation-among-young-chinese>
South China Morning Post
I pitched and reported this story.
The full text of the article is available at:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FW2xaVpLYB_rqxztpp8g7yp66-6qI-da/view?usp=sharing
- 3. China's new brain chip research centre a shot in the arm amid US tech race.**
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3273285/chinas-future-tech-race-us-set-boost-new-fudan-brain-chip-centre>
South China Morning Post
I pitched and reported this story.
The full text of the article is available at:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BGIwvXtRcONUpQmTJeMRchMSC5OI2HH0/view?usp=sharing>
- 4. Video: Is Tokyo turning into Asia's new sex tourism destination?**
<https://www.scmp.com/video/asia/3289119/tokyo-turning-asias-new-sex-tourism-destination>
South China Morning Post
I reported this video story. I interviewed Japanese social workers and edited the transcript and subtitles.

Additional work can be found in my portfolio at the South China Morning Post:

<https://www.scmp.com/author/yijing-shen>

Source:

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3277600/can-china-japan-youth-exchanges-and-goodwill-overcome-their-deep-political-chill>

China / Diplomacy

Can China–Japan youth exchanges and goodwill overcome their deep political chill?

Beijing and Tokyo hope to build bonds with young people, but strained regional ties and sinking public opinion are blocking the welcome mats

Laura Zhou and **Yijing Shen**

Published: 6:00am, 8 Sep 2024 / Updated: 6:00am, 8 Sep 2024



Illustration: Lau Ka-kuen

Yasushi Kaifu has never been to China, and the 15-year-old Tokyo resident does not plan on visiting any time soon.

Few of Kaifu's high school friends have ever travelled to China either, and as reports of tensions in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait mount, so too do their negative views and unease about Japan's big neighbour.

"Because I live in [Japan](#), I would be worried if there was a big war once a conflict broke out in the Taiwan Strait," he said.

Keitoku Ikegami, 24, a graduate student at International Christian University in Tokyo, has been to China, but said visiting now would not be an easy decision.

"As a Japanese person, considering political tensions between the two countries, I will be quite hesitant on whether I should really go to China," he said.



The crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan. Photo: Kyodo

When he was 10, Ikegami went on a family trip to the southwestern Chinese province of [Sichuan](#). His most recent visit to the country was last year, when bilateral tensions spiked again after China imposed a ban on all imports of Japanese seafood following Tokyo's controversial discharge of water from its damaged Fukushima nuclear plant.

Ties had already been strained since 2020, first amid Japanese concerns over Beijing's transparency regarding the extent of the Covid-19 pandemic and then its introduction of a national security law in Hong Kong, where Japanese businesses have a significant presence.

“My impression of China is that the food is very delicious and roads are broad, but the society is under tighter control than I expected, and there are so many surveillance cameras on the streets and in the subway stations,” Ikegami said.

He added that he would prefer travelling to neighbouring [South Korea](#), which shared similar political systems and democratic values.

While Beijing and Tokyo have been at odds on many issues, leaders and politicians from either side – including Chinese President Xi Jinping and outgoing Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida – have pledged to build strong bonds between their young people.

Yang Wanming, president of the semi-official Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, told People’s Daily in a recent interview that the organisation was planning to invite 1,500 Japanese youths to China.

“The goodwill of the youth of the two countries towards each other is an important base of public opinion and the improvement of public opinion is fundamental work for the development of Sino-Japanese relations,” Yang was quoted as saying by the Communist Party mouthpiece.

“We will always attach great importance to the work of youth exchanges, and endeavour to nurture the power of knowledge and friendship with China for the new era.”

But the political chill, coupled with Japan’s increasing alignment with the United States, record low public opinion of China, and Beijing’s controversial [anti-espionage law](#) will hamper efforts to rebuild youth ties, according to observers.

Relations between China and Japan, the world’s second and third largest economies, respectively, are contentious and complicated.

Once a victim of brutal Japanese aggression from the 1930s to the end of World War II, China established diplomatic ties with Japan in 1972. Six years later, both countries reaffirmed they would “settle all disputes by peaceful means” in a peace treaty following a historic visit by late Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping.



Territorial disputes in regions like the East China Sea have cast a shadow over China’s relationships with its neighbours. Photo: Reuters/Kyodo

Japanese were among the first [foreign investors](#) to come to China, and more than 31,000 Japanese companies now operate in the country. The two countries are also each other’s major export destinations.

Still, bitterness runs deep – from [wartime history](#) to territorial disputes in the East China Sea, and frequent confrontations between coastguard ships and [military jets](#).

China has yet to resume its 15-day [visa waiver](#) policy for Japanese travellers. The number of Japanese visiting China in the first 11 months of last year was just one-third of that during the same period in 2019, according to the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China.

“This is very worrying, as the exchange of young people has been dealt a blow because of political tensions in recent years and Covid-19 pandemic restrictions,” said a Chinese expert with a government think tank who declined to be named.

“Cultivating bonds between young people is like planting trees for your heirs, and it will have an impact on generations to come,” the expert said.

“I think leaders of the two countries need to take the initiative, because, like it or not, you can either forge ahead or fall behind when it comes to China-Japan relations.”



Item not supported in this print-friendly version

Youth exchanges have long been seen as a barometer of the health of ties between China and Japan.

The first group of Japanese students arrived in China soon after the two countries signed an agreement on exchanges in 1979. According to Chinese state media, some 480 Japanese students studied in Chinese universities between 1979 and 1982, while 960 students from China, sponsored by scholarships and loans from the Japanese government, enrolled in Japanese universities.

The peak came in the early 1980s, when [Hu Yaobang](#), then general secretary of the party, visited Tokyo and extended an invitation to 3,000 Japanese young people to visit China.

In September 1984, a total of 12 flights carried 3,000 Japanese youths to China, according to China Youth Daily, and [Hu Jintao](#), then head of the [Communist Youth League of China](#), met them at the airport in Shanghai.

In 1985, Hu, who became party general secretary in 2002 and president of China the following year, led a delegation of 100 Chinese youths on a reciprocal trip to Japan.

“At that time, political ties were warm and it was largely the Chinese top leaders that spearheaded the exchanges between the young people,” the Chinese expert said. “And many of the young people at that time later became politicians and businessmen and helped improve ties with China.”

Even when political ties were strained and general public perception of China was negative, it appeared that Japanese youth held the most positive views of China.

In the most recent poll, conducted by the Japanese government last September and October, a record low of 12.7 per cent of the Japanese public said they considered China to be “friendly”, a dramatic drop from a peak of 78.6 per cent in 1980.

But the same poll last year showed about 20 per cent of people aged between 18 and 39 felt China was “friendly” – much higher than the percentages for those over 40.

Shin Kawashima, a professor at the University of Tokyo who specialises in modern Chinese diplomatic history, said improving youth exchanges was more important than ever.

“The negative public sentiment is a major challenge and cannot be overcome overnight, so seeking to strengthen exchanges between young people is becoming more meaningful now because they have better views of each other compared with other age groups,” Kawashima said.

Measures need to be taken before young Japanese lose interest in China, observers say, but the task will not be easy.



Item not supported in this print-friendly version

In Japan, where the population is ageing faster than in almost any other country, it will be a growing challenge to promote interest for exchanges among the younger generations.

“In the 1980s, young Japanese were invited to eat delicious Chinese food and watch performances in the Great Hall of the People [in Beijing] under a typical ‘friendship’ atmosphere, but do you think young people nowadays would like that?” Kawashima said.

Meanwhile, China’s controversial anti-espionage law and the [detention](#) of Japanese businesspeople and academics have sent chills across Japan, including scholars who used to be active in taking Japanese students to China for study programmes.



Japanese people do not really know where the red line is, so many of them just give up going to China

Shin Kawashima, professor, University of Tokyo

“Before that, many Japanese professors worked very hard to promote youth exchanges, however now it is not just the young students but also scholars whose interest in coming to China is waning,” the Chinese expert said.

Kawashima agreed that there were grave security concerns.

“Japanese people do not really know where the red line is, so many of them just give up going to China, and this also brings a negative impact on people-to-people exchanges.”

A first step would be to encourage young Japanese to see China for themselves to shift negative perceptions of China, according to Kawashima.

Kaifu, the 15-year-old from Tokyo, said he and his friends were fascinated with mahjong video games, which were inspired by the 19th century [Chinese tile-based game](#), and someday he would like to experience “the differences in daily life between Chinese and Japanese”.

When he was 17, Takumi Inoue, now a 22-year-old undergraduate at Waseda University in Tokyo, decided that he wanted to go to China.

At the time, China’s alleged suppression of ethnic minorities in its western Xinjiang region had drawn international criticism and media attention, but this had also raised Inoue’s interest in China’s ethnic policy.

“Japan also has a history of suppression of the Ryukyuan people in Okinawa and the Ainu people in northern Japan,” he said.

In 2022, when China was still under a strict zero-Covid policy, Inoue flew to Beijing, where he endured a month-long quarantine before joining Peking University’s double-degree programme.

“I think it’s easy to attack China’s authoritarian system, and right-wing politicians in Japan have often criticised the zero-Covid policy, but I believe that unless I really experience it, I cannot just criticise it.”



Item not supported in this print-friendly version

Spending time in China did give him a new perspective on the country, he said.

“I used to believe that Chinese people hate us, and in fact, while I was called *riben guizi* [Japanese devil] twice in China, many people were very friendly after knowing I was Japanese,” he said.

Shotaro Abe, a 20-year-old from Kamakura, the political centre of medieval Japan, said he held “very negative views on the authoritarian government in China, especially after the Tiananmen crackdown and its policy in Xinjiang”.

But Abe, whose dream is to become the mayor of his hometown, recently applied for a two-week exchange programme to China, hoping to “really experience China because honestly I don’t really know the country”.

“I also want to talk to my peers in China, about everything from politics to music, for example, why China has so many young and famous pianists like Lang Lang and Yuja Wang.”



China / Politics

Communist Party exhibitions lean on honour and obligation among young Chinese

- Museums seek to inspire students with stories of the party's early days – but not everybody is won over

Yijing Shen and **Alcott Wei**

Published: 2:00pm, 11 Aug 2024 / Updated: 4:58pm, 11 Aug 2024



Patriotism-themed exhibitions attended by young Chinese have become a common sight in recent years, particularly during public holidays. Photo: Yijing Shen

Xintiandi in downtown Shanghai used to be the name of a subway stop known for its chic restaurants and boutiques.

Three years ago, the stop was rebadged as the Site of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Xintiandi Station, to mark the party's centenary.

At the same time, just a few minutes' walk from the station, an expanded memorial to the party's origins in the city opened, housing a permanent exhibition to the organisation's founding.

Since then, a steady stream of visitors – many of them students – have bypassed the shops to make their way to the patriotic-themed memorial, particularly on public holidays.

As part of summer holiday school assignments, students are required to visit patriotic exhibitions, and the one at the memorial is on a list of options they can choose from.

The idea is to inspire greater loyalty to the party through stories of its struggles and success but while some visitors say the approach is motivating, others are looking for a more diverse view of history.



Item not supported in this print-friendly version

Patriotic education has become a national priority with the introduction of a law in January that spells out the responsibilities of everyone, from children to adults, and schools to families, to the drive to build a strong, rejuvenated nation.

The effectiveness of the patriotism drive is difficult to measure, but one of those won over at the Shanghai memorial was Wang Xinning, a student at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Visiting the exhibition before the summer holiday, Wang said she was impressed by the stories of party martyrs who sacrificed their lives at a young age.

"[Their stories] contrasted sharply with my life, and made me rethink my purpose of joining the Communist Party," she said.

It was a similar story at the Red Building on the Peking University campus in Beijing, where a young student of Marxism said she felt “fired up” when she visited the historic party site.

The site is often regarded as the cradle of the student-led [May Fourth Movement](#) of 1919, an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement in early modern China. The Red Building, a four-storey red brick house, reopened in 2021 to serve as a memorial to the party’s early revolutionary activities.

“I feel like I am in the company of those students [in 1919], and I am motivated to relearn Marxism and theories about the Communist Party,” the student said.



[Their stories] contrasted sharply with my life, and made me rethink my purpose of joining the Communist Party

Wang Xinning, university student

But there were also visitors to these exhibitions who came out of obligation.

At the Communist Party Museum near Beijing Olympic Park, some parents said they came to help their children fulfil school requirements. One mother said her son needed to complete a worksheet about the Red Army and write the story of a Red Army soldier.

“These tasks are troublesome, but they are requirements from the school. How can we refuse to do that?” she said.

An undergraduate student at the Red Building said the visit was just “a waste of time”.

“It’s so boring and all propaganda, and there’s nothing new in any of these [exhibition] rooms,” he said. “I could have spent my time better studying for the postgraduate entrance examination.

“We waste too much time in ideological and political courses – even when we are on summer holidays.”

Yuan Bo, who has completed her graduate studies and is working at a start-up in Shanghai, said she was often more interested in observing other visitors’ reactions rather than the exhibits.

On a humid and hot Sunday afternoon in July, she visited the Sihang Warehouse Memorial of War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in central Shanghai, which houses an exhibition documenting [a battle by Chinese soldiers against the invading Japanese army](#) that started in 1937.



Crowds gather at the Sihang Warehouse Memorial of War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. Photo: Yijing Shen

Yuan said she was indifferent about the memorial since the exhibition was similar to other patriotic education sites she had visited.

“We are told how we should feel about history and the motherland, instead of having our own thoughts and ideas. We won [the war against Japan’s invasion] because of all the great work by our country and our people,” she said.

Watching small children running and shouting “defeat the Japanese” at the memorial, Yuan said she was like them when she was their age but had since experienced a shift.

“Before I could form my own values, I was often fed with different ideas by others, and it’s difficult not to be influenced by all those anti-Japanese films and TV series.

“But I don’t want to blindly follow others now.”

She said while patriotism was important, it should not be at the expense of independent thinking.

“Patriotic education is indeed necessary, but there should be room for discussion,” Yuan said. “Promoting peace may be more important than promoting patriotism.”

Jonathan Sullivan, an associate professor specialising in Chinese politics at the University of Nottingham, said that in China, “control of representations of the past represents an ideological battleground”.



The People's Cafe serves up a patriotic coffee. Photo: Yijing Shen

Just outside the Sihang Warehouse exhibition, a coffee shop called The People's Cafe continues the patriotic message in its decor, which features red stars and other Communist Party icons. A stereo plays patriotic songs on a loop, and revolutionary posters on the walls carry slogans such as “Taiwan independence is a dead end”.

Beijing sees Taiwan as part of China to be reunited by force if necessary. Most countries, including the US, do not recognise Taiwan as an independent state, but Washington is opposed to any attempt to take the self-governed island by force and is committed to supplying it with weapons.

The cafe sells two types of cappuccino – one with foam in the shape of China's territory and the other topped with foam in the shape of the word “China” in Chinese characters.

Its pineapple-flavoured latte, a new introduction in July, is decorated with the shape of Taiwan island and the words “must be returned” on top.

“I felt I was living in magical realism,” said Yuan, watching the chocolate foam dwindling from the cappuccino she ordered.



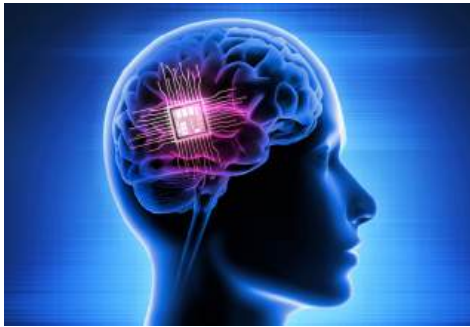
China / Science

China's future tech race with US set for a boost with new Fudan brain chip centre

- Fudan University's US\$56 million facility in Shanghai comes as China pushes disruptive technology among 'new quality productive forces'

Yijing Shen

Published: 10:00am, 6 Aug 2024 / Updated: 10:00am, 6 Aug 2024



Brain-computer interface technology's revolutionary potential in the medical and healthcare industry includes restoring a sense of sight for the blind and mobility for paralysed patients. Photo: Shutterstock

A leading Chinese university has set up a [research centre](#) for brain-computer interface (BCI), a technology that gives humans the ability to control external devices such as computers or robotic limbs with their minds.

The 400 million yuan (US\$56 million) facility at Fudan University comes as China continues to push the development of disruptive technology amid a race for tech supremacy with the United States, a long-time leader in BCI research.

Launched last Saturday, the university's Neuromodulation and BCI Research Centre is expected to drive innovation for the technology's revolutionary potential in the medical and healthcare industry – such as restoring a sense of sight for the blind and mobility for paralysed patients.

According to the centre's deputy director, Shu Yousheng, industrialisation of innovative BCI has been held back by the lack of technical support from other disciplines.

The new research centre aimed to bridge the gap between brain disease research and industry, the public university in Shanghai said on its website.

The centre represented a systemic integration of Fudan's brain science-related resources, and expected to power the clinical application and industrialisation of BCI, it said.

The Shanghai city government in December 2021 listed rehabilitation and training equipment with BCI technology as a focus for high-end medical equipment development under its latest five-year plan.

BCI is among the future industries being especially promoted by the central government as "[new quality productive forces](#)" – a concept for hi-tech, innovative development put forward by President Xi Jinping about a year back.

In January, an official guideline on the development of emerging and future industries released by Beijing emphasised the industrialisation of BCI technologies.

The country encourages "breakthroughs in key technologies and devices such as brain-computer fusion and brain-like chips, and exploration of applications in typical fields such as medical rehabilitation", the document said.

The Beijing city government in April unveiled a road map for faster development of the BCI industry, aimed at breakthroughs in related core key technologies and incubating many leading companies by 2026.

A BCI laboratory was also set up in March 2023 in the northeastern port city of Tianjin near Beijing. In May this year, the lab established a BCI and Human-machine Fusion Association involving more than 40 financial institutions, research institutes and state companies, the Tianjin science and technology bureau said.

The United States has led the way on BCI technology for years, with significant research contributions from the University of California, Berkeley and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

As China tries to close the gap, it has seen an explosion in research papers on the subject.

According to a peer-reviewed paper published in the journal Brain Informatics in December, the number of BCI publications in China from 2019 onwards exceeded that of the US, which started to decline during the period.



Item not supported in this print-friendly version

Neuralink Corp, a BCI pioneer co-founded in 2016 by [Elon Musk](#), has successfully implanted a second paralysed patient with a device designed to enable the use of digital devices using only their thoughts, according to the billionaire businessman and start-up investor.

The procedure “seems to have gone extremely well”, Musk told a podcast hosted by computer scientist Lex Fridman and released last Friday.

The trial patient had a spinal cord injury similar to the [first patient](#), who was paralysed in a diving accident, he said. That procedure had been carried out in January.

In February, scientists at China’s Tsinghua University reported “[breakthrough progress](#)” in their first patient for a wireless BCI implant, and said their device was less invasive than Musk’s Neuralink chip.

China is also racing to set up industry standards for the future technology – which involves key ethical concerns including privacy, safety and autonomy – and released a guideline in February to regulate the development and application of BCI research.

And last month, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology completed seeking public feedback on a plan to set up a committee to develop standards for the use of BCI technology, such as brain information acquisition, preprocessing, encoding and decoding, data communication and data visualisation.

