

***Japan and Ukraine:
Strengthening Friendship and Partnership Ties in the Era of Reiwa***

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the fact that Japan and Ukraine are separated by a great geographic distance, the two countries have many things in common. First, they both experienced accidents at nuclear power plants. Second, Japan and Ukraine are united by the issue of occupation of their territories by Russia. Third, both countries share universal values such as democracy, the rule of law and the market economy. The year 2019 saw important developments on both sides. In Japan a new era commenced with the enthronement of Emperor Naruhito, and in Ukraine a new president was elected. The first high level meeting of Reiwa was held in October 2019 between President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo during Zelenskyy's visit to Japan to attend the Enthronement Ceremony. Areas for bilateral collaboration such as investment cooperation, dealing with the aftermath of nuclear accidents, further liberalization of visa regime for Ukrainian citizens, and cooperation in the IT and security areas, were mapped out as priorities. The friendship and partnership ties between Japan and Ukraine, which are based on the deep trust and mutual respect, are expected to see further development. Strengthening of security cooperation, Japan's assistance during the spread of COVID-19, and intercultural collaboration in the framework of the Tokyo Olympics provide a good opportunity for further broadening the horizons of bilateral relations between Japan and Ukraine.

Keywords: Japan-Ukraine relations, Japan's foreign policy, Ukraine, international relations.

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Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explain the contents, characteristics and specifics of the development of Japanese-Ukrainian relations in 2019-2020.

The topicality of the proposed research lies in the fact that the general situation in the world of the early 21st century shows changes in the structure of international relations and highlights the search for new world centers in the “post-postmodern” epoch. The latter determines the transformation of the system of Japan-Ukraine relations, whereas each player is seeking new foundations of domestic consolidation required to develop practical instruments for achieving foreign policy priorities in the international arena.

Changes in Japan’s foreign policy which took place at the beginning of the 21st century led to a situation in which Japanese government, traditionally focused on the development of relations with the US and partners in Asia, expanded the horizons of its foreign policy. The transformation of Japan into an active player in international relations that took place by virtue of the introduction of such foreign policy concepts as the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and “active pacifism” has had a positive impact on Japanese-Ukrainian relations and contributed to the establishment of relations with Ukraine as an independent aspect of Japan’s foreign policy.

The intensification of Japanese-Ukrainian relations, including the latest visit by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Japan in 2019, opened up new opportunities for the further development of relations between the two countries. Cooperation between Japan and Ukraine as reliable partners on a long-term and mutually beneficial basis has a positive impact on international peace and security, expands cooperation between Asia and Europe, and promotes a better understanding between the nations. That is why research on Japanese-Ukrainian relations is relevant not only for Japan and Ukraine, but also for the whole international community. However, not enough attention has been paid to the topic of Japanese-Ukrainian relations in modern historiography.

This research direction is mainly represented by Ukrainian publications that highlight certain aspects or periods of Japanese-Ukrainian ties (M. Byelyeskov, O. Bubenok, L. Vovchuk, O. Volovych, O. Getmanchuk, L. Gordienko, S. Karpanov, Y. Kostenko, S. Korsunsky, M. Kulinich, T. Lahmanyuk, A. Mykal, S. Pron’, V. Rezanenko, M. Shagina, A. Shapovalov, etc.). Japanese-Ukrainian relations have also been studied in the context of the foreign policy of Ukraine (S. Vidniansky, B. Galyk, P. Sardachuk) and its relations with Asia-Pacific states (O. Voytovych, A. Goncharuk, I. Pogorelova, S. Shergin). As for the Japanese experts, works by T. Hirano, D. Kitade, D. Minamino should be mentioned. At the same time, no detailed analysis of the latest developments in the Reiwa era has been offered.

This paper will explore the points of commonality between Japan and Ukraine; propose an overview of bilateral relations consisting of basic information, the legal framework currently in force, the main mechanisms of bilateral cooperation, high level visits by both the Japanese and Ukrainian sides, Japan’s assistance to Ukraine; it will analyze cooperation in the Reiwa era, including the results of Ukrainian President

V. Zelenskyy's visit to Japan in 2019, the joint economic meeting, the "Days of Ukrainian Culture" held by the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan, the second round of cyber security consultations, COVID-19 related cooperation and, finally, present conclusions.

The research methodology includes a set of general scientific methods such as induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis. Historical-genetic, historical-comparative and problem-chronological research methods were used to reveal the causal links in the formation and development of the system of cooperation between Japan and Ukraine, and its main directions, areas and periods. A number of applied methods, in particular the statistical, forecasting method, content-analysis, case study, etc. made it possible to quantify and qualitatively determine the specifics of Japanese-Ukrainian relations in the era of Reiwa. The source base of the researched topic was analyzed through the method of political linguistics.

Overview of Japanese-Ukrainian Bilateral Relations

Japan and Ukraine share a range of common points. First, they both experienced accidents at nuclear power plants. In 1986 the Chernobyl nuclear plant accident happened in Ukraine, and in 2011 Japan saw an accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power station. Both countries are united by the issue of the illegal occupation of their territories by Russia: Crimea and Donbas in Ukraine and the "Northern Territories" in Japan. In addition, Ukraine and Japan share universal values such as democracy, the rule of law and the market economy.

In presenting an overview of bilateral relations, it should be noted that Japan recognized Ukraine's independence on December 28, 1991 and on January 26, 1992 the two countries established diplomatic relations. The Embassy of Japan in Ukraine was opened on April 13, 1993 and the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan on March 23, 1995.

The legal framework of Japanese-Ukrainian relations consists of 55 signed documents, 54 of which are currently valid. The main bilateral documents include:

- Agreement on cooperation in the field of elimination of nuclear weapons to be reduced in Ukraine (signed in 1994, expired in 2018);
- Agreement on the succession of the treaties and agreements concluded between Japan and the USSR (1995);
- Agreement on technical cooperation and grant assistance (2004);
- Loan Agreement for the Boryspil State International Airport Development Project (2005);
- Agreement on the implementation of the technical cooperation project "Ukraine-Japan Center" (2005);
- Agreement on the purchase of Assigned Amount Units based on the green investment scheme (2009);
- Joint statement on Ukraine-Japan global partnership (2011);
- Agreement on cooperation to advance aftermath response to accidents at Nuclear Power Stations (2012);
- Agreement on promotion and mutual protection of investments (2015);

- Loan agreement on the implementation of the “Project for the Reconstruction of the Bortnychi Aeration Station” (2016);
- Memorandum on cooperation and exchanges in the field of defense (2018).

The main mechanisms of bilateral cooperation between Japan and Ukraine are:

- Committee on cooperation at the Foreign Ministers’ Level;
- Commission for Scientific and Technical Cooperation;
- Joint Committee for the Cooperation to Advance Aftermath Response to Accidents at Nuclear Power Stations;
- Joint Meeting of the Coordinating Council for Economic Cooperation with Japan of the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine, and Japan Business Federation (Keidanren);
- Inter-parliamentary dialogue carried out through visits by Heads of Parliaments as well as contacts between the Japanese Parliamentary Association of Friendship “Japan-Ukraine” and parliamentary group of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on inter-parliamentary relations with Japan;
- Japan-Ukraine cyber security consultations;
- Japan-Ukraine security consultations in the format of ”2+2” with participation of the representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs and defense.

The parties established a stable political dialogue on the highest level. Five out of six presidents of Ukraine visited Japan: Leonid Kuchma in March 1995 (Kuchma-Murayama Joint Statement signed); Viktor Yushchenko in July 2005 (Joint Statement on New Partnership in the 21st Century signed); Viktor Yanukovych in January 2011 (Joint Statement on Japan-Ukraine Global Partnership signed); Petro Poroshenko in April 2016; Volodymyr Zelenskyy in October 2019. As for the Japanese side, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo¹ visited Ukraine in June 2015, which was the first visit of the head of Japan’s government to Ukraine.

International cooperation is maintained through the UN; Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Japan was invited to participate in 1992); Council of Europe (Japan has been an observer since 1996); Japan-Black Sea Area Dialogue first held in 2005; “GUAM² + Japan” established in 2007 after the introduction of the fourth pillar of Japan’s foreign policy by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan T. Aso “The Arch of Freedom and Prosperity” in 2006; Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (Japan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner to the BSCE in 2010). Japan and Ukraine’s cooperation with the European Union and NATO provides a basis for even closer ties between the two countries.

An important role in the bilateral relations between Japan and Ukraine is played by Japan’s assistance. According to the Embassy of Japan in Ukraine (2018), as of February 2018, Japan had provided to Ukraine a total of USD 3.1 billion in aid, including USD 1.69 billion of loan aid, USD 98 million of grant aid, USD 580 million of financial assistance, USD 219 million of assistance related to Chernobyl and

¹ Japanese name order: last name first, given name second.

² The GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development is a regional organization of four post-Soviet states: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

nuclear non-proliferation, USD 79 million of technical cooperation, and assistance through the Green Investment Scheme.

The following periodization of Japan-Ukraine relations can be proposed: the 1st period (1991-1994) – Policy towards Ukraine as an element of Japan’s post-Soviet strategy; the 2nd period (1995-2005) – Development and institutionalization of bilateral relations; the 3rd period (2006-2013) – The “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and establishment of “GUAM + Japan”; the 4th period (2014 - present) – The temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia and intensification of Japanese-Ukrainian relations (Udovik, 2016, p. 391).

Results of President Zelenskyy’s Visit to Japan

The Reiwa era officially began in Japan on May 1, 2019 when Crown Prince Naruhito ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne as the new emperor. Though there was no political change in Japan, this event marked a new epoch for the Japanese nation. On the other hand, Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected President of Ukraine on April 21, 2019; the inauguration ceremony took place on May 20, 2019. Therefore, in both countries historically important events took place in May 2019.

On October 21-24 of 2019 President Zelenskyy visited Japan in order to participate in the enthronement ceremony of Emperor of Japan Naruhito. During this visit the President of Ukraine had meetings with Prime Minister of Japan Abe Shinzo, the Japan-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Association headed by Mori Eisuke, President of Japan International Cooperation Agency Kitaoka Shin’ichi, the Japanese Association of New Economy and representatives of Japanese business (President of Ukraine, 2019).

One of the main topics to be discussed was cooperation in the area of international security. President Zelenskyy expressed gratitude for Japan’s consistent support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine against the backdrop of Russia’s occupation of Crimea.

In this context it should be noted that Japan condemned the illegal occupation of the Crimea by Russia in 2014, introduced sanctions against Russia and supported the related United Nations General Assembly resolutions. It increased assistance to Ukraine after 2014 and promoted cooperation in security and defense areas: Japanese-Ukrainian security consultations were launched in 2018 and this year Japan announced its plans to participate in the “Sea Breeze” naval exercise in the Black Sea in 2020 organized by Ukraine and the US (these plans were cancelled due to the spread of coronavirus).

Japan’s support for Ukraine can be explained by the following reasons. First, Japan is a global power that promotes “Proactive Contribution to Peace” also known as “active pacifism” – a concept introduced by S. Abe in 2013. Second, Japan does not support change of status-quo by the use of force and makes efforts to ensure international maritime security all over the world including the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov which is explained by unstable situation in the East China Sea (Hirano, 2018). Third, Japan and Ukraine managed to build relations based on mutual trust and respect as

partners that share universal values such as democracy, freedom of speech and the rule of law.

Another important point for discussion during Ukraine President's visit to Japan was investment cooperation. V. Zelenskyy and S. Abe talked about Japan's investments in infrastructure projects in Ukraine, noting that Japan's financial assistance to Ukraine had reached USD 1.8 billion since 2014.

At the moment, the biggest infrastructure projects of Japan's Official Development assistance in Ukraine are a USD 190.9 million loan for building a new terminal at the Boryspil airport (2004-2012) and a USD 1.1 billion loan for reconstruction of the Bortnychi Aeration Station in Kyiv (2015). As for direct investments, as of January 1, 2020, they reached USD 139 million (Embassy of Ukraine in Japan, 2020). The Japan-Ukraine Investment Agreement, signed in 2015, and the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement implemented in 2017, had a positive impact on the development of economic relations between the two countries and allowed more activities of Japanese companies in Ukraine: Fujikura established a factory in Ukraine in 2016, SDGs opened a grain storage in 2018, Sumitomo purchased 51% of Ukrainian company Spectr-Agro in 2018. As of December 2017, 38 Japanese companies were registered in Ukraine (JETRO, 2019).

Considering Japan's financial and investment potential, economic cooperation with Ukraine is considered to be one of the most promising areas of collaboration. In 2019, Ukraine's government set "increase in exports and investment inflows" as one of its goals in the foreign policy domain (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2019). In addition, current Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced the policy of economization of Ukraine's diplomacy and its overall focus on Asia-Pacific, which implies closer ties with such countries and organizations as Japan, China, India and ASEAN. The relaunch of Exporters and Investors' Council within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine is another important step in this direction.

President Zelenskyy also dedicated attention to the visa liberalization issue. In particular, he called for a visa-free regime for Ukrainians on the eve of the Tokyo Olympics.

While Japanese nationals have been enjoying a visa-free regime with Ukraine since 2005, Ukrainian diplomats were exempted from Japanese visas in 2016. In 2018 Japan simplified the visa procedure for Ukrainian passport holders. President Zelenskyy's intentions in this area are based on his people-oriented approach and Ukraine government's goal which states that "Ukrainians travel freely around the world without visas" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2019). It is believed that the visa exemption could boost human exchanges and increase the number of travellers from Ukraine before, during and after the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Both parties noted a great potential for cooperation related to the joint development of Information Technology projects. During his visit to Japan, Volodymyr Zelenskyy mentioned that the IT sector was one of the most dynamic and highlighted Ukraine's willingness to create a competitive IT product. Prime Minister Abe, in turn, conveyed Japan's intent to dispatch an IT survey mission to Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019).

The year of 2019 was marked by several important developments in this area: it was widely reported that Rakuten was opening a R&D center in Kyiv and developing an existing office in Odesa; Ukraine IT Association and Japan Innovation System Partners Association signed a memorandum of cooperation in order to promote cooperation between Japanese and Ukrainian IT companies as well as the introduction of Japanese software services in Ukraine; President V. Zelenskyy and Rakuten CEO H. Mikitani held a meeting in Kyiv.

There is no doubt that Japan is interested in Ukrainian IT specialists' skills, which are rated as the world's 8th best, according to "SkillValue" (Goncharov, 2018). Ukrainian side, for its part, has been implementing the governmental project "A State in a Smartphone", which is aimed at providing all public services online, and is therefore seeking international partners in order to promote this and other initiatives in the technological and innovation areas.

Dealing with aftermath of nuclear accidents is another area in the focus of Ukrainian-Japanese talks. V. Zelenskyy stated that the development and introduction of new technologies for the disposal of radioactive waste was a promising area of cooperation.

Since the Chernobyl accident in 1986 and Ukraine's decision to give up its nuclear weapons in 1994, nuclear safety has become a traditional area of cooperation between the two countries. Japan provided Ukraine with comprehensive assistance, including contributions to the Chernobyl Shelter Fund designated for construction of a new safe confinement (USD 117.3 million); the Nuclear Safety Account established to ensure construction of a storage facility for spent nuclear fuel (USD 53.1 million); assistance for denuclearization (USD 21 million); humanitarian aid for the people effected by the Chernobyl accident (USD 27 million) (Embassy of Japan in Ukraine, 2018). Following the Fukushima Daiichi accident in 2011, Ukraine started sharing its experience in dealing with the aftermath of nuclear accidents with Japan, and thus cooperation in this area moved from "donor-recipient" collaboration to the bilateral level (according to the Agreement on cooperation to advance aftermath response to accidents at Nuclear Power Stations of 2012).

As for the disposal of radioactive waste, this issue is a key problem for both sides: 98% of the radioactive waste in Ukraine comes from Chernobyl, and there are 1.15 mln tons of radioactive water accumulated in Fukushima. It is also a concern for the whole international community which shares the same natural environment. With regard to scientific efforts in this area, one should mention that starting in 2017 Ukraine and Fukushima University have been promoting the joint project "Strengthening of the Environmental Radiation Control and Legislative Basis for the Environmental Remediation of Radioactively Contaminated Sites" in order to enable the safe and effective management of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

Latest Developments in Japanese-Ukrainian relations

On December 16, 2019 the 8th Joint Meeting of the Coordinating Council for Economic Cooperation with Japan of the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade

and Agriculture of Ukraine and Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) was held in Tokyo.

Both parties acknowledged that Japan-Ukraine economic relations have untapped potential for the deepening and broadening of win-win business, while Keidanren welcomed the ongoing structural reform in Ukraine. At the same time, Keidanren noted that “in recent years, almost no direct investment by Japanese companies in the manufacturing sector has been seen” (Keidanren, 2020).

Regular meetings in this format commenced in 2008, and Keidanren has been an important connection between Ukraine and Japanese business representatives. Therefore, Ukraine’s consideration of recommendations from this highly important organization, as well as further progress in the improvement of the investment environment, promotion of anti-corruption measures as well as opening of Ukraine’s land market could lead to the realization of its potential in the area of economic cooperation between the two countries.

Japanese-Ukrainian cultural relations received an impetus for further development in the Reiwa era through the holding of “Days of Ukrainian Culture in Japan”, organized by the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan in cooperation with the Japanese partners and Ukrainian community during September – December 2019 in Tokyo, Yokohama, Kyoto and Nagoya.

“Days of Ukrainian Culture in Japan” included exhibition of Ukrainian artists’ works at the 104th NIKA art salon at the National Art Center, Tokyo; UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Petrykivka painting master classes by prominent Ukrainian artist H. Nazarenko; a Ukrainian fashion show at Bunka Fashion College, Tokyo; Ukrainian film festivals in Tokyo and Yokohama; Ukrainian classical music concerts in Kyoto and Tokyo, with the participation of musicians from the M. Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy H. Ivanyushenko and B. Korchynska, Japanese violinist and head of the “Japanese-Ukrainian Art Association” C.Sawada and Ukrainian opera singer O. Stepanyuk; Ukrainian cuisine master classes in Nagoya; “Ukrainian Christmas” festival in Tokyo, etc.

The abovementioned events contributed to the further development of cultural ties between Japan and Ukraine, which have been maintained through regular tours by the National Opera and Ballet and National Symphonic Orchestra of Ukraine (from 2000s); P. Virsky Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble Japan tours (2000s); the Month of Ukraine in Japan (2006); the exhibition “Gold Treasures of Ukraine” introducing Scythian gold (2010s); the inauguration of Z. Skoropadenko’s statue “The Hope” in Fukushima (2016); holding of the “Year of Japan in Ukraine” (2017) and “Ukraine week” in Tokyo (2018), as well as the continuous activities of such cultural Ambassadors as O. Stepanyuk, K. Guziy and N. Guziy in Japan. On the eve of the Tokyo Olympics, cultural projects are being developed with such host towns of Ukraine’s national team as Hino (Tokyo Prefecture), Kashihara (Nara Prefecture) and Amagasaki (Hyogo Prefecture).

In January of 2020, Ukraine and Japan held their second round of cyber security consultations. According to the official statement, “Ukraine and Japan reaffirmed their commitment to promoting an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure

cyberspace and to enhancing bilateral cyber security cooperation to combat cyber threats of mutual concern” (Ukrinform, 2020).

It is noteworthy that this area of cooperation is quite new for both sides. In 2015 Japan adopted the Basic Act on Cyber Security and Cyber Security Strategy. Cyber security consultations between Ukraine and Japan were first held in 2016. As of 2018, Japan has had bilateral dialogues on cyber security with such countries as the US, Australia, the UK, France, Germany, Russia, India, Republic of Korea, Israel, Estonia and Ukraine.

In Japan, cyber attacks increased by 900% in the period from 2013 to 2016 (Volodzko, 2018). Ukraine, in its turn, has experienced numerous cyber attacks, including ransomware hits in 2017, and has been strengthening its capabilities to protect itself from such attacks in the future. Therefore, given that Japan is planning to hold Tokyo Olympic Games and implement “Society 5.0” also known as the “Super Smart Society”, it is interested in strengthening ties with partners such as Ukraine, which possess deep knowledge in this area.

As the COVID-19 pandemic is spreading around the globe, Japan’s Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu announced on April 7 that Japan had offered to provide anti-flu drug Avigan for free to 20 countries, including Ukraine.

COVID-19 has had negative effect on the world economy and slowed down exchanges in many areas due to the ban on travel and other factors; at the same time, it has provided new opportunities for cooperation which should be utilized by both Japan and Ukraine.

Conclusions

- Analysis of the latest developments in Japanese-Ukrainian bilateral relations shows continuity of policies by both sides after the commencement of the Reiwa era, in areas including political dialogue, economic cooperation, technology, the Fukushima-Chornobyl area, security and cultural exchanges.
- President Zelenskyy’s visit to attend the ceremony of enthronement of the Emperor of Japan demonstrated the deep respect of Ukraine and its people for Japan, and provided an excellent opportunity for establishing contacts on the highest level in order to boost bilateral cooperation and strengthen friendship and partnership ties.
- Relations between Japan and Ukraine currently are at their best. The two countries are united by democratic values and common goals such as the protection of their territories, support for international peace, non-recognition of the use of force in dispute resolution, the ensuring of freedom of navigation, economic recovery and development, the enhancement of human security, and the promotion of international understanding.
- Both countries can implement their strategic policies through the development of bilateral relations and providing mutual support, Japan can reassure its position as a global power and Ukraine can fully realize its potential; Japan-Ukraine tandem on

bilateral and multilateral levels as well as joint efforts will further promote international stability.

- The international crisis provoked by the spread of COVID-19 presented many challenges, but, at the same time, it could be used by both sides as an opportunity to start new projects in economic, scientific, technological, medical and other areas.
- Further successful development of relations between Japan and Ukraine is expected, including activation of both online and offline human and cultural exchanges on the eve of the Tokyo Olympics, close cooperation in the defense and cyber security areas, an increase in trade and investment activities, as well as joint IT projects.
- In the post-COVID world, provided that the sanitary-epidemiological situation is stabilized, the two sides could consider organizing a visit by representatives of the Japanese Imperial Family to Ukraine.

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