

The mutually-beneficial strategic relationship between Japan and China has begun to lose its foundation of trust.

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This year's joint public opinion survey was significant for two reasons. First, it was able to successfully clarify the Chinese public's perspectives on the current state of the world, which is seeing a rise in division and conflict, as well as Chinese public opinion on Ukraine, North Korea, the United Nations, and a broad range of other issues.

The second reason was that the survey attempted to clarify whether the people of Japan and China believe that their countries are able to cooperate in achieving peace in Asia and addressing the increasing number of serious issues facing the world.

The survey questions were designed to answer these questions because the world is currently growing increasingly divided, and countries are no longer able to work together to deal with situations in which cooperation is necessary. In addition, the conflict between the US and China is intensifying, and both countries are in the difficult position of having to consider how their future relationship will look.

With this in mind, we aimed to ask the people of both Japan and China their opinions on the current situation. However, the results showed the magnitude of the task facing us – ensuring that Japan and China are able to cooperate in addressing complex global issues such as those mentioned above.

Chinese public perception of Japan has not only deteriorated significantly over the last year, but it has done so across all aspects of their relationship. While the public in each country have similar opinions about many of the difficult challenges faced by Asia and the world in general, the Chinese public is significantly less open to the idea of cooperating with Japan to deal with them.

One of the primary purposes of this analysis is to determine how this situation should be approached.

Progressively clear opposition in China to Russia's actions

This year's survey posed a total of 89 questions, and as it would be difficult to explain such a vast amount of information in detail, we have divided the results into three broad categories explained below.

First, we asked respondents how they feel about the current global situation; this analysis puts a particular focus on the Chinese responses.

Next, we will reveal how people in both countries view the relationship between Japan and China and the possibility of future bilateral cooperation.

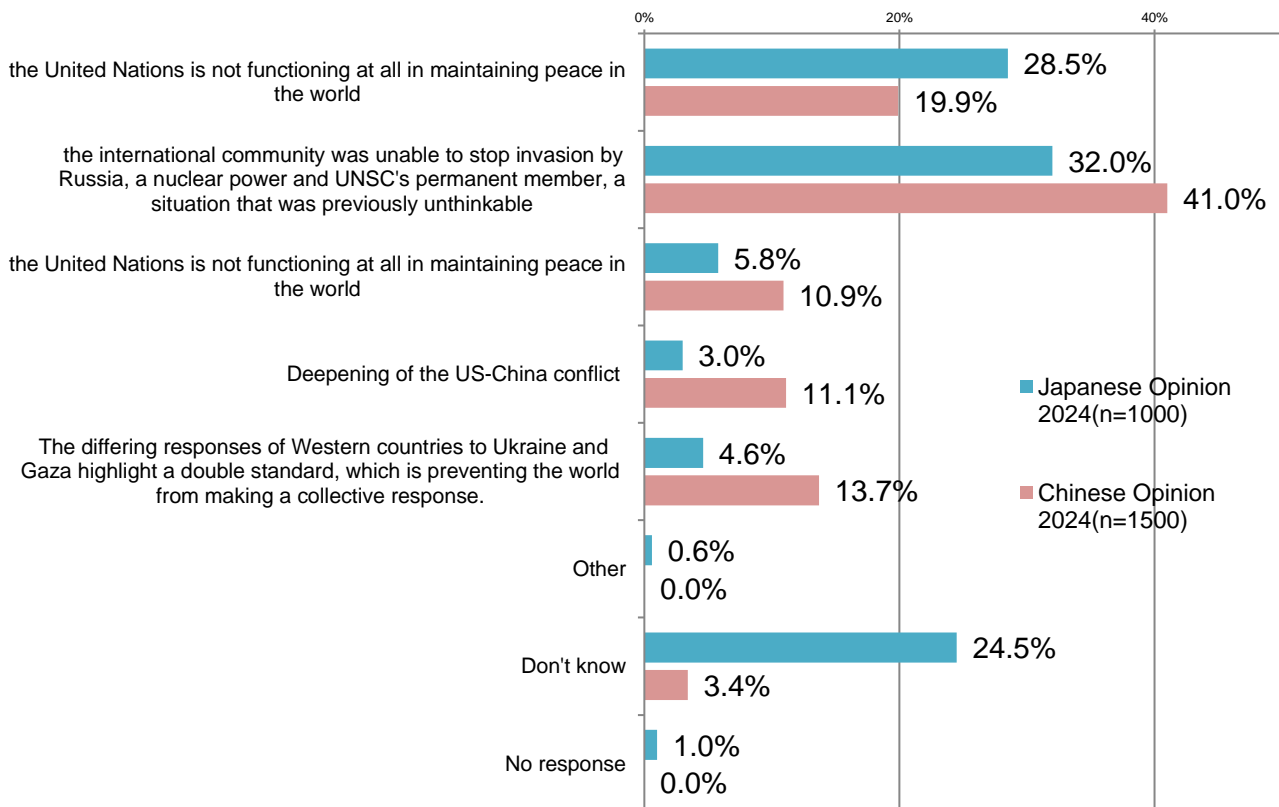
Finally, we will look into why Chinese opinion of Japan has deteriorated so much over the last year, and consider what sort of message the results of this survey are sending out to Japan and China.

We begin by looking at public opinion about the conflict and division in the world today. There were 23 questions that touched upon this subject, and here we look at six of the questions that show the latest perspectives of the people of China.

The first question asked respondents what they think is causing the current global tension and conflict.

【What is causing the current global tensions and conflicts?】

What do you think is causing the current global tensions and conflicts? Select the response below that is closest to your own opinion on the matter. 【Select one】



What caught our attention is that the most selected response in China (41%) was that the source of the conflict comes from the international community being unable to stop the

invasion of Ukraine by Russia, a nuclear power and permanent member of the UN security council, a situation that was previously unthinkable.

In other words, many in China believe that Russia’s actions are one cause of the current global tension. Furthermore, the next most popular answer (19.9%) was that the United Nations is not functioning at all in maintaining peace in the world.

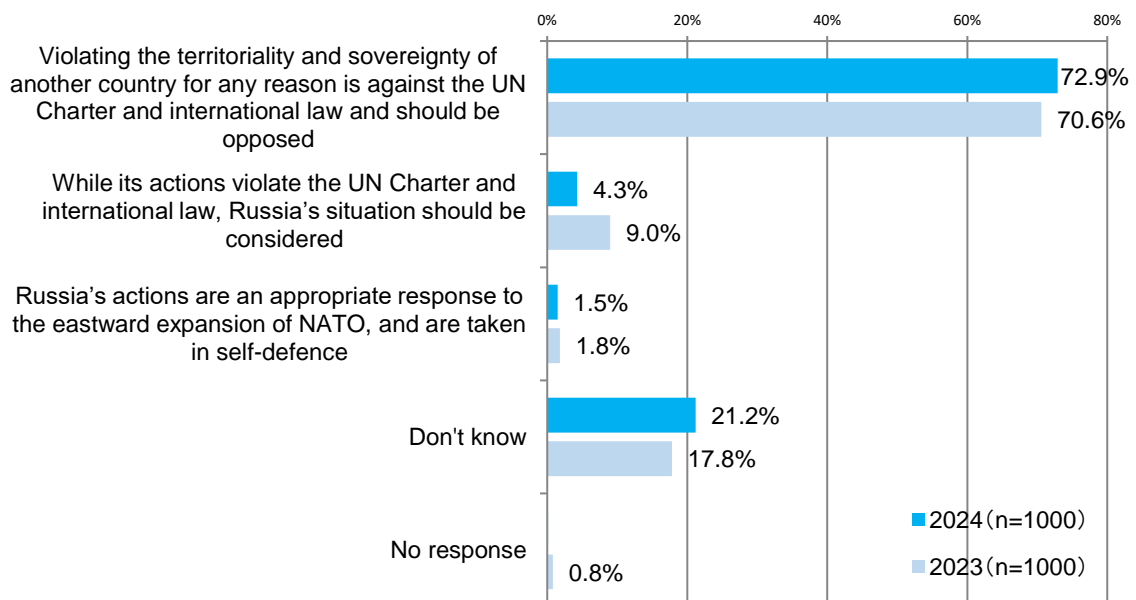
The people of Japan have a similar perspective, with 60.5% selecting one of those two responses as being closest to their own opinion.

Next, we wanted to know how the Chinese public views Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

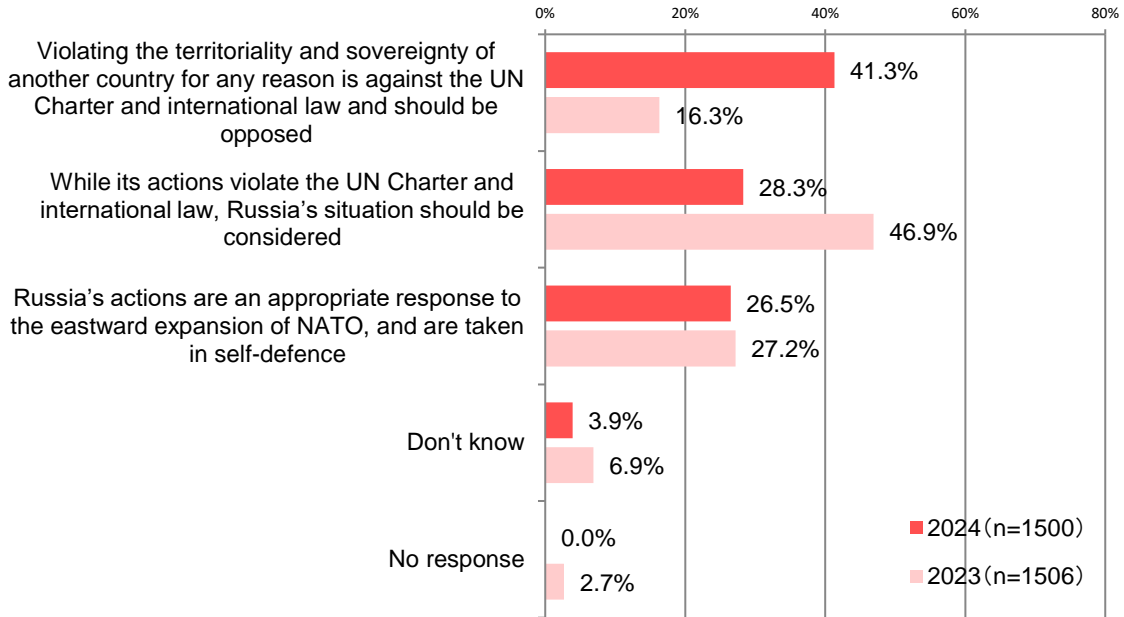
【Views Russia’s invasion of Ukraine】

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has been called a violation of the territoriality and sovereignty of another country, and a violation of both the UN Charter and international law. Select the response below that is closest to your own opinion on the matter. 【Select one】

【Japanese Opinion】



【Chinese Opinion】



This question has been part of the three surveys that have been conducted since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, but this year, the most selected answer among respondents in China (at 41.3%) was “Violating the territoriality and sovereignty of another country for any reason is against the UN Charter and international law and should be opposed,” a 25-point increase over last year’s 16.3%.

The second most selected response (28.3%) was “While its actions violate the UN Charter and international law, Russia’s situation should be considered,” which was the top response in last year’s survey, meaning that almost 70% of the Chinese public see Russia’s actions as a violation of international law.

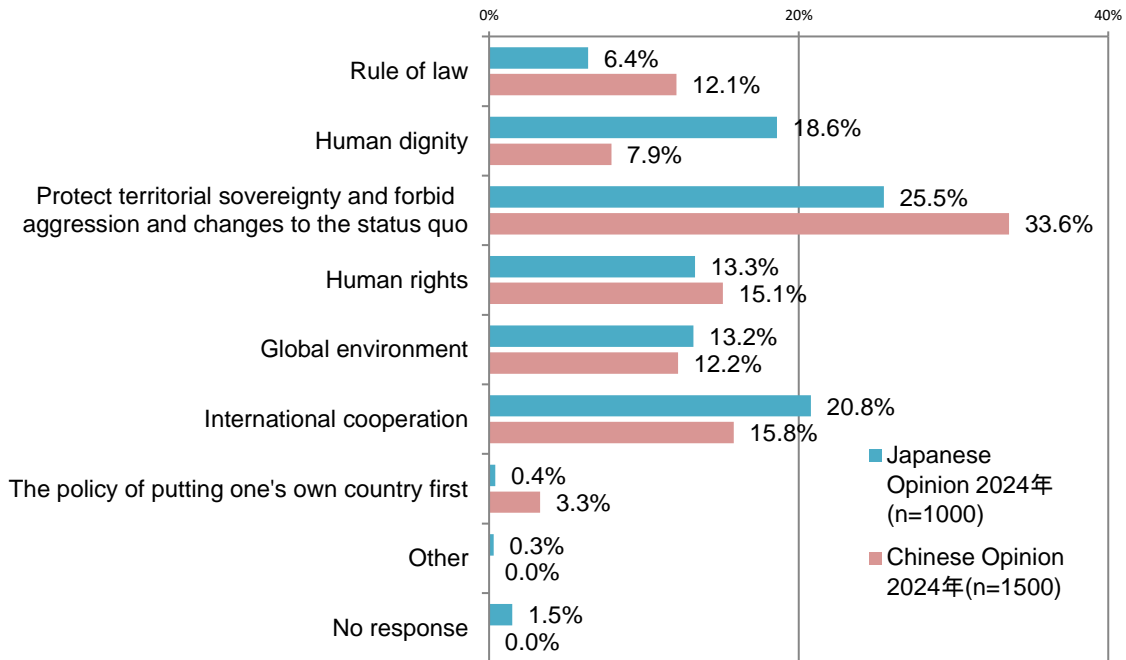
More than 70% of Japanese respondents feel that the invasion should be opposed, a number which has remained consistent over past surveys.

What these two questions have clarified for us is that it is becoming increasingly obvious that the Chinese public opposes the actions of Russia – itself a member of the Security Council and a nuclear power – as they violate the UN Charter and international law, and the gap in perspective between Japan and China is disappearing.

In this year’s survey, we also asked participants what they believe are the most important values and principles that countries who are members of the international community should uphold.

【The most important values and principles that countries who are members of the international community should uphold】

What you believe are the most important values and principles that countries who are members of the international community should uphold. **【Select one】**



This was another topic about which Chinese and Japanese respondents had a similar point of view.

The most commonly selected response by Chinese participants by an overwhelming margin (33.6%) was “Protect territorial sovereignty and forbid aggression and changes to the status quo,” followed by “International cooperation” (15.8%), and “Human rights” (15.1%).

The top two responses in Japan were the same, at 25.5% and 20.8% respectively.

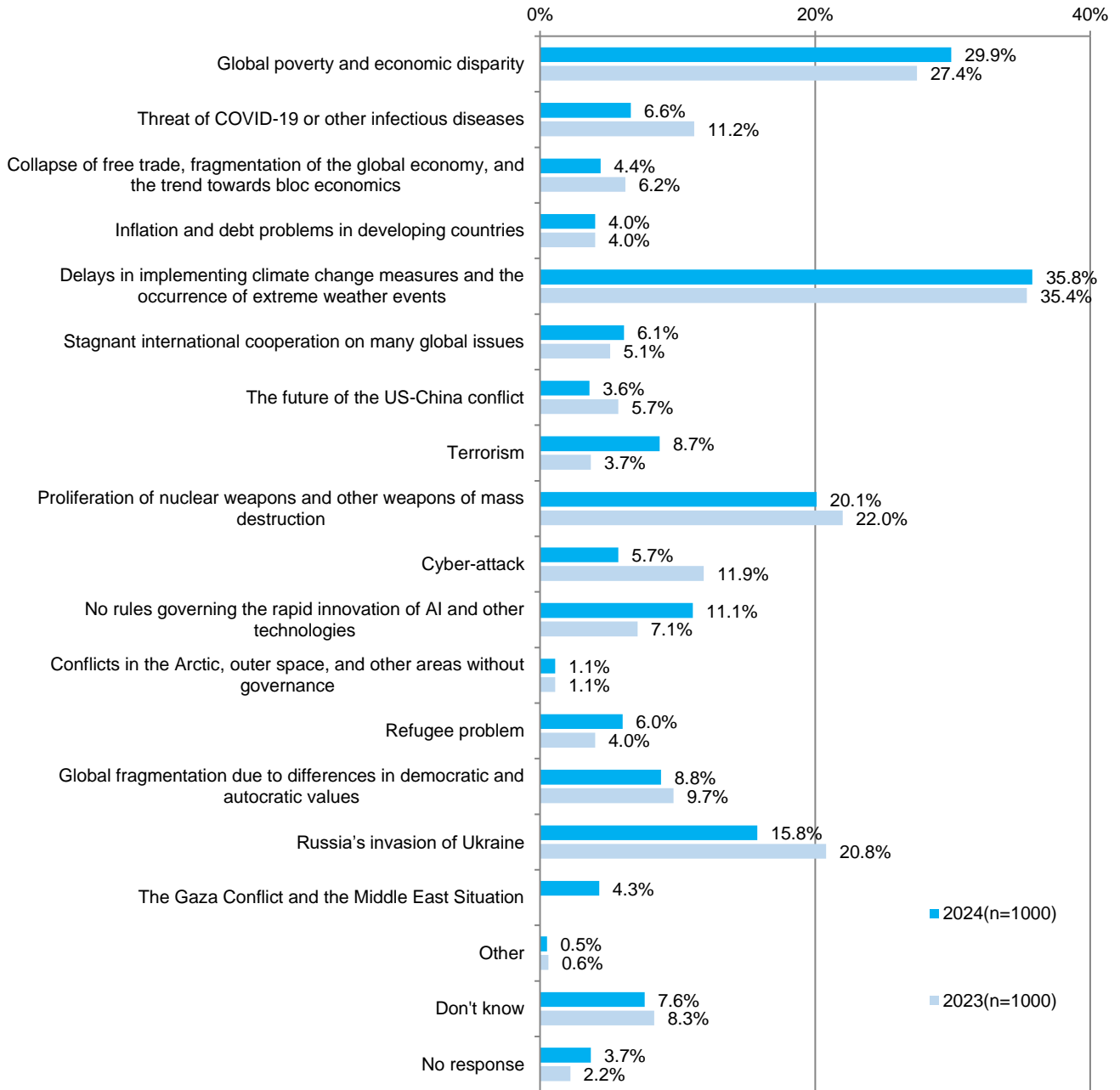
Impact of the US election in China and hostility toward the US

Respondents in both Japan and China believe that international cooperation is important, but there are concerns among the Chinese public that the US is responsible for making such cooperation impossible. Trump’s re-election was confirmed on November 6, while the survey in China continued until November 8, so the election may have had an influence on the results.

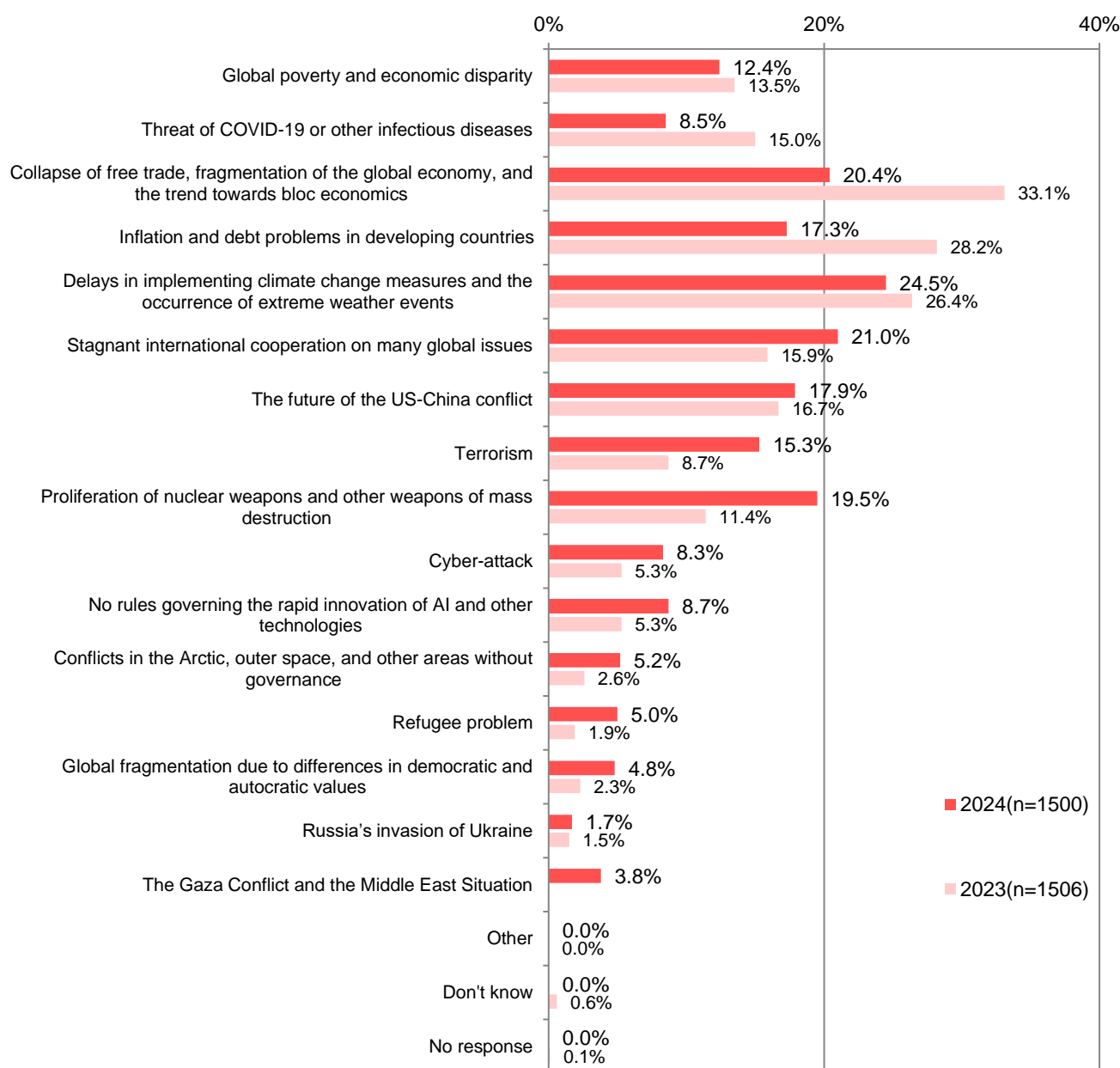
【The greatest global concern about among the challenges facing the world today】

What issues are you particularly concerned about among the challenges facing the world today?
【Select two】

【Japanese Opinion】



【Chinese Opinion】



The survey asked what respondents' greatest global concern was, and in both countries, the most common response selected was "Delays in implementing climate change measures and the occurrence of extreme weather events," selected by 35.8% in Japan and 24.5% in China. In Japan, that response was followed by "Global poverty and economic disparity" at 29.9% and "Proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction" at 20.1%. Chinese respondents were almost evenly divided for the next most common responses, with "Stagnant international cooperation on many global issues" at 21%, "Collapse of free trade, fragmentation of the global economy, and the trend towards bloc economics" at 20.4%, and "Proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction" at 19.5%.

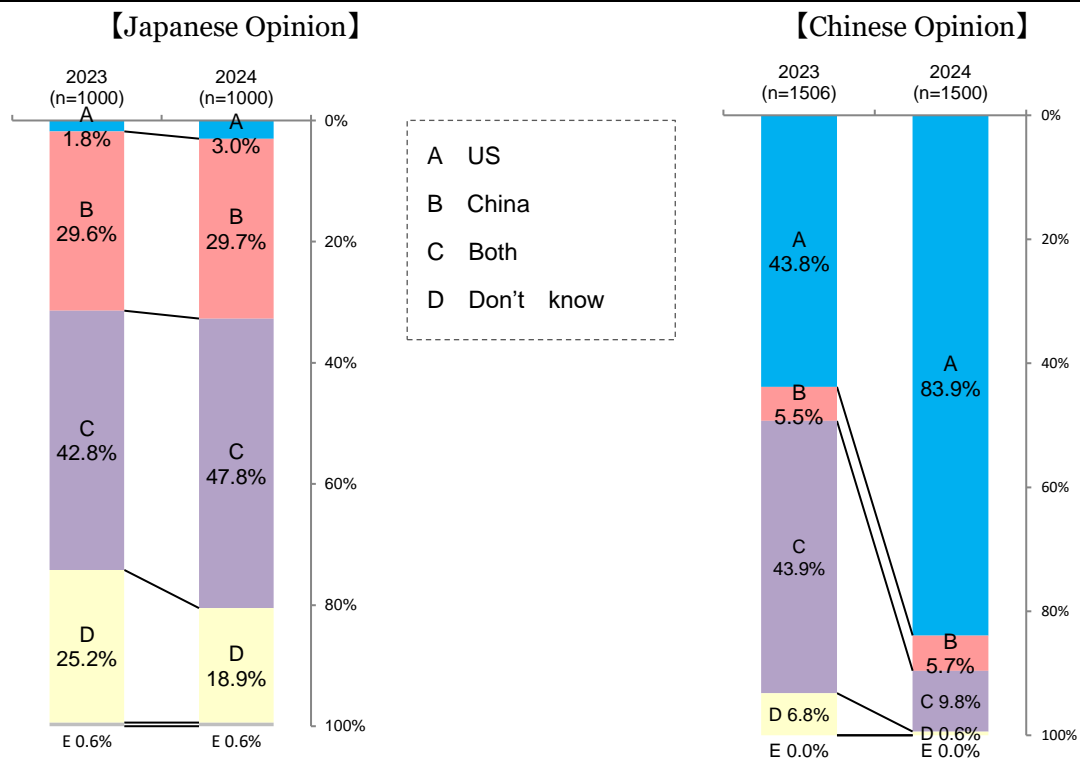
This shows how the Chinese public is concerned about the lack of cooperation in tackling global issues, so their attention will likely be drawn to the election of an “America First” president and to developments in North Korea.

Many of the questions asked have revealed that the Chinese public has become significantly more conscious of the conflict with the US over the past year.

The percentage of Chinese respondents who blame the US for the escalating conflict almost doubled from 43.8% last year to 83.9% this year, and while in last year’s survey the most common response was “Both China and the US” at 43.9%, that number dropped to 9.8% this year.

【The fault lies for the worsening US-China conflict: China or the US?】

Where do you think the fault lies for the worsening US-China conflict: China or the US? 【Select one】



The last time the first response was selected by such a high proportion of respondents was in 2020 during Donald Trump’s first term, when 86.2% selected the US. Chinese sentiment began to warm in 2022 after the summit between the US and China, but it has now cooled again to previous levels.

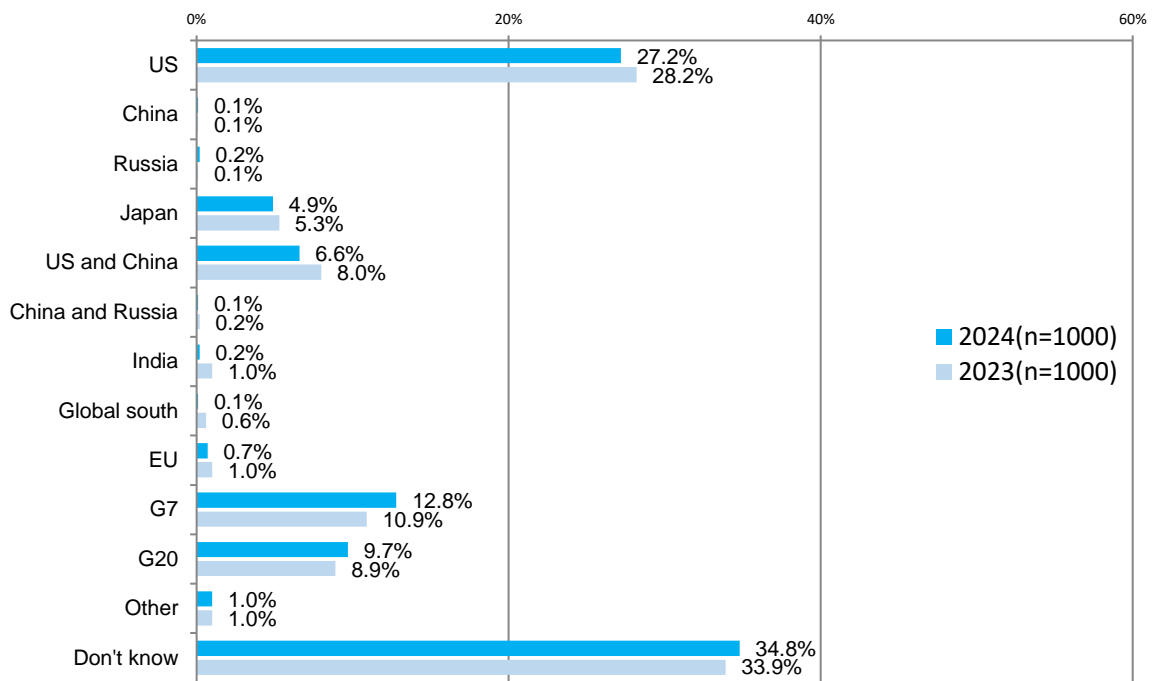
Almost 80% of Chinese respondents are growing more concerned about being unable to predict when the conflict will end and there being no means of bringing about a resolution.

In the last of the six questions regarding Chinese public opinion on global conflict, we found that there has been a dramatic change in what Chinese respondents feel about who should take the lead in bringing stability to the global order.

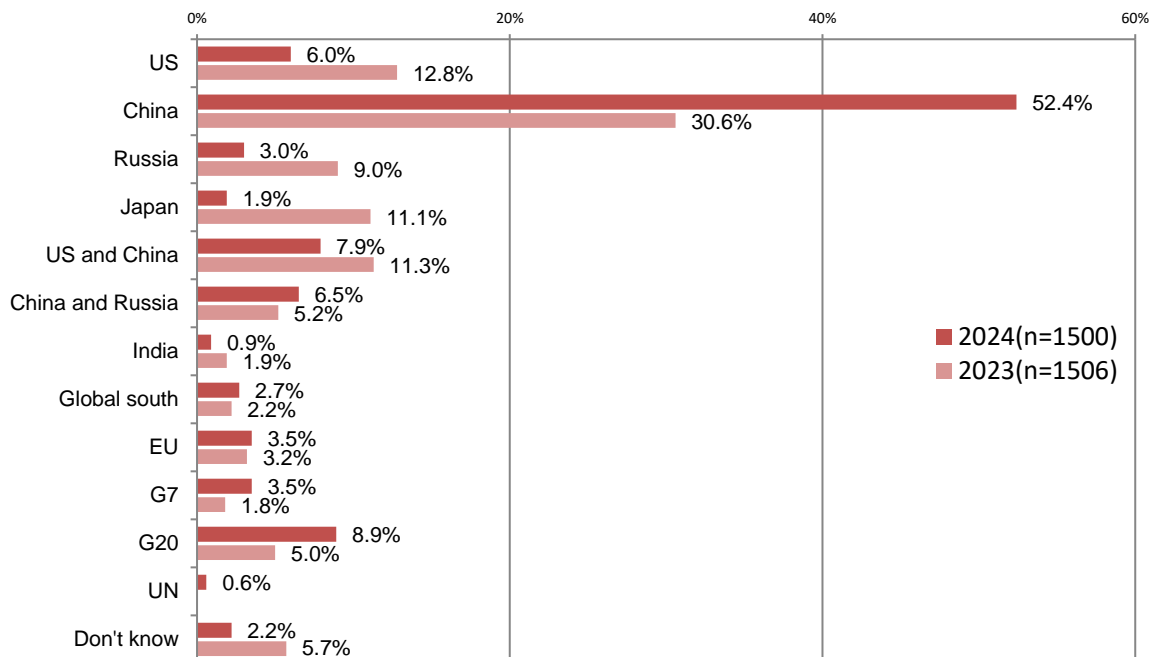
【Who do you think should be playing a more leading role in bringing stability to the increasingly unstable peaceful global economic order?】

Who do you think should be playing a more leading role in bringing stability to the increasingly unstable peaceful global economic order? 【Select one】

【Japanese Opinion】



【Chinese Opinion】



Chinese respondents selecting “US” dropped from 12.8% last year to 6%, and those who selected “Russia” dropped from 9% to 3%. There was a particularly sharp decrease in the percentage of those who selected “Japan,” which fell from 11.1% to 1.9%.

The biggest increase was seen in those who selected “China,” the number of which increased 21.8 points over the last year from 30.6% to 52.4%. Although global cooperation has become essential, Chinese respondents have lost faith in other countries being able to contribute.

The Japanese results show a sharp contrast here, with 34.8% selecting “Do not know” regarding who should exercise leadership in an unstable world, and 27.2% selecting “US,” a distribution that has remained unchanged each year.

Decline in perceived importance of Japan-China relations and in willingness to cooperate

Another major point revealed by this year’s survey is that while the public in both Japan and China share similar opinions about the challenges the world now faces, Chinese public perception of Japan has deteriorated significantly over the last year, and has done in terms of all aspects of their relationship.

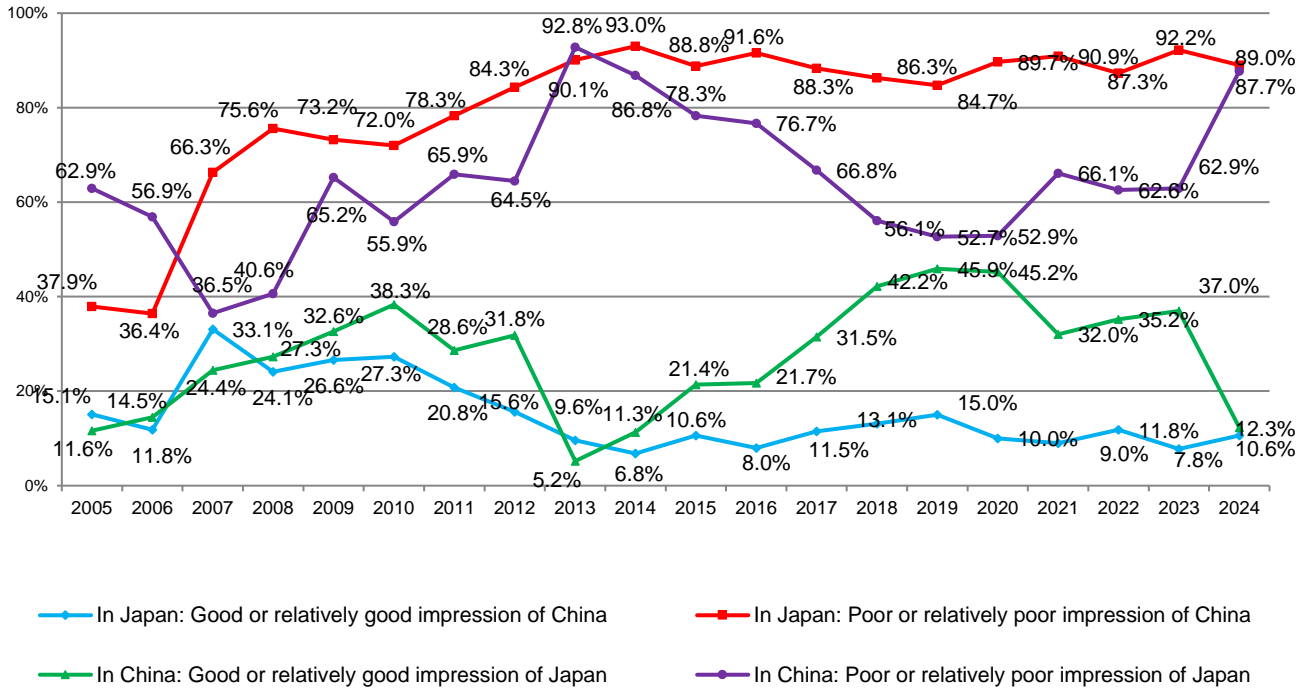
Over the last twenty years of surveys, the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands in 2013 also revealed a distinct deterioration in Chinese sentiment toward Japan, but this year’s survey has shown that this deterioration is not limited to sentiment only; we see a similar drop in feeling about Japan-China relations, and about Japan-China cooperation and private-sector exchanges, which had always enjoyed a high level of support from people in both countries.

We believe that there has been a complete change in people’s perception of Japan in China, in a way that has never been seen before.

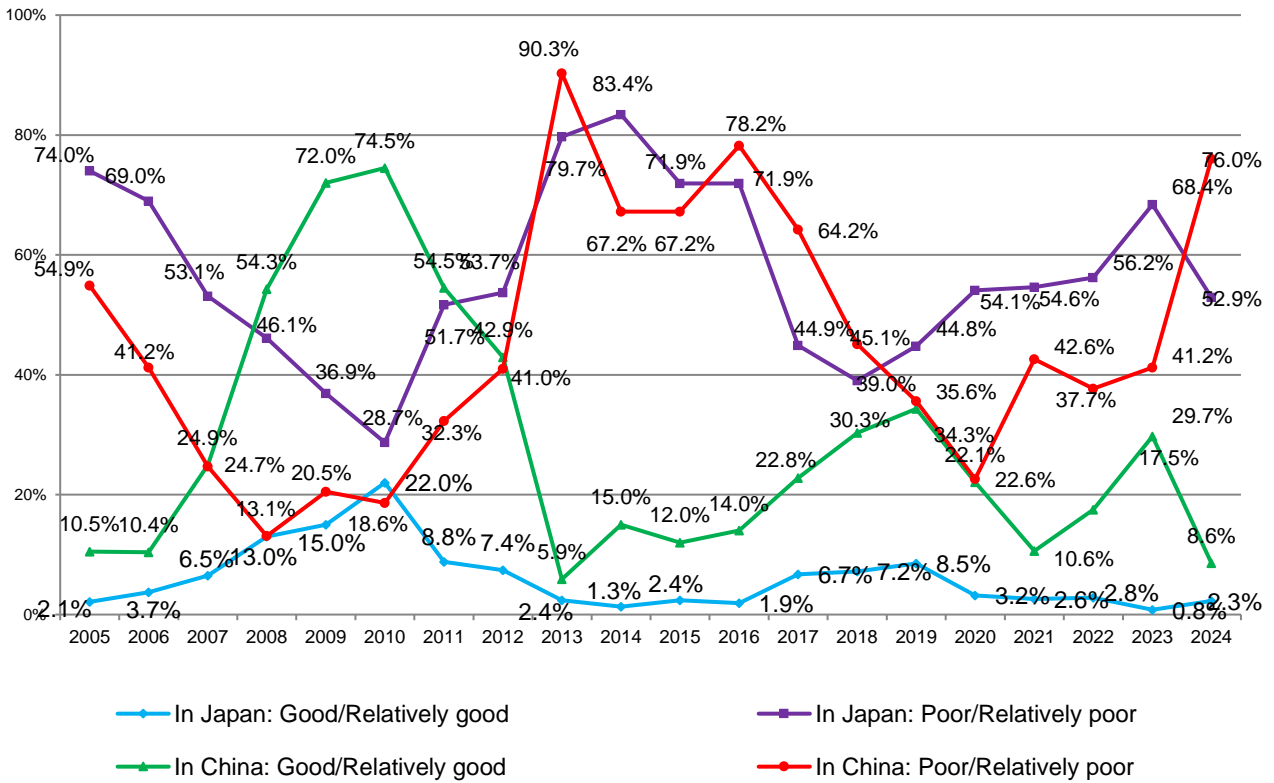
The rapidity of this change is evident when compared to the last twenty years of survey results. Chinese opinion stands in contrast with the trends in Japan, where opinions have improved slightly since last year. However, Chinese opinion has worsened across all categories. While there has been a not-insignificant decrease in the percentage of Japanese respondents who believe that Japan-China relations “Will worsen in the future” (from 39.7% last year to 32.9%), that same question saw an increase of 35 points in China (from 40.1% to 75%).

This is the first time in the history of this survey that Chinese sentiment toward Japan has worsened in such a comprehensive and extensive fashion.

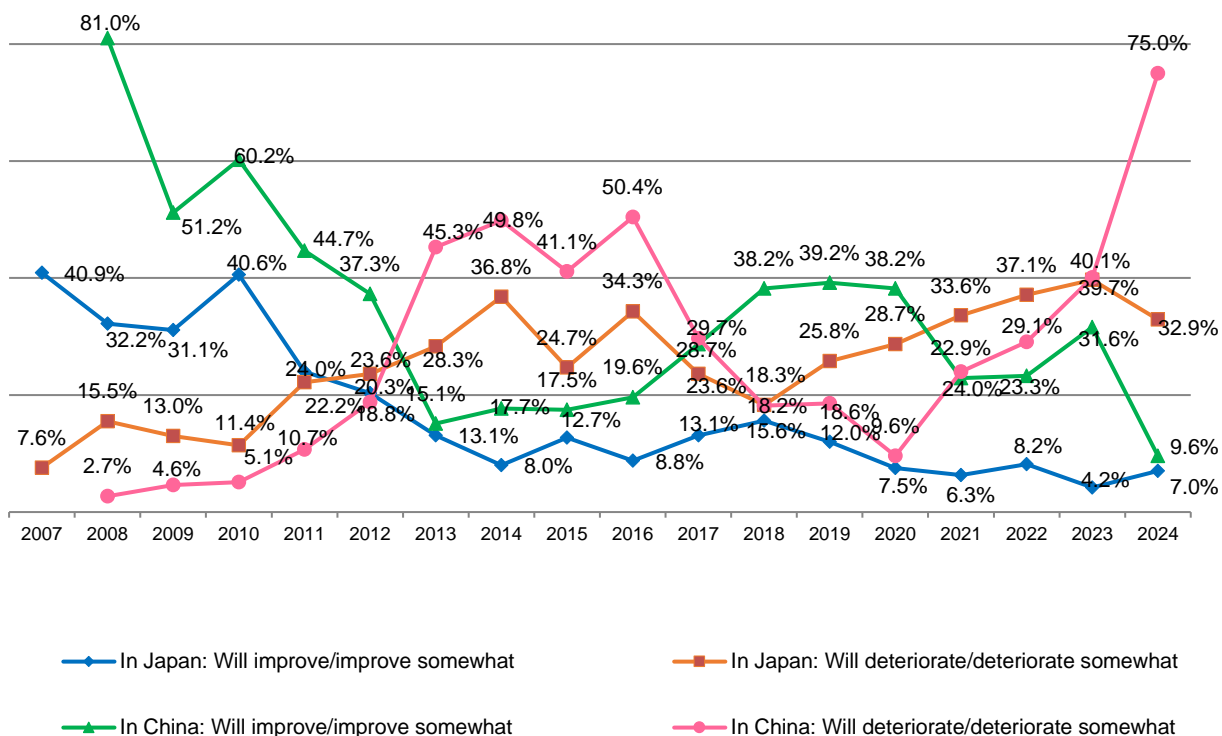
【Impression of the other country】



【The current state of Japan-China relations】

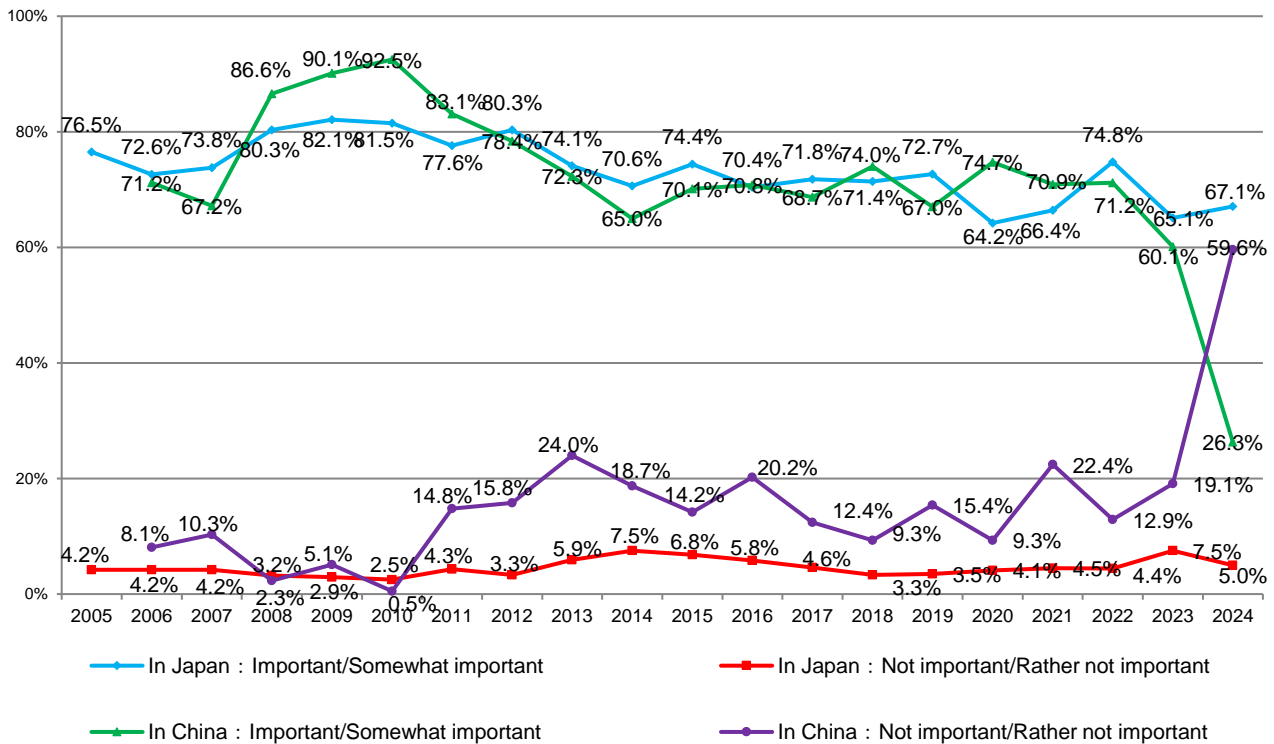


【Future Japan-China relations】



For those of us in Japan, our attention was particularly drawn towards the dramatic fall seen in the Chinese response to the question on the importance of Japan-China relations. In the last twenty years, regardless of how intense the inter-governmental conflict between the two countries grew, the percentage of respondents in both countries who felt the relationship is important never dropped below 60%. Even after the issues arose in 2013 over the Senkaku Islands, 72.3% of Chinese respondents and 74.1% of Japanese respondents answered that the relationship is important. However, in this year’s survey, only 26.3% of Chinese survey participants selected that response, with almost 59.6% selecting “The Japan-China relationship is not important.”

【Importance of Japan-China relations】



This is the first time such a response has been recorded.

Alongside the drastic decline in Chinese people believing that Japan is “important” to China, we are also seeing a drop in sentiment regarding questions about Japan-China cooperation, which previously had high levels of support.

First, 44.7% of Japanese respondents believe that Japan and China should find a new way to work together in tackling the difficult tasks of ensuring global peace and cooperation with 7.5% disagreeing, which is essentially unchanged over last year’s survey. In contrast, only 26.9% of Chinese respondents agree that the countries should cooperate, down from 49.2% last year, and there was a similar increase in those who disagree, up to 43.2% from 20.1% last year.

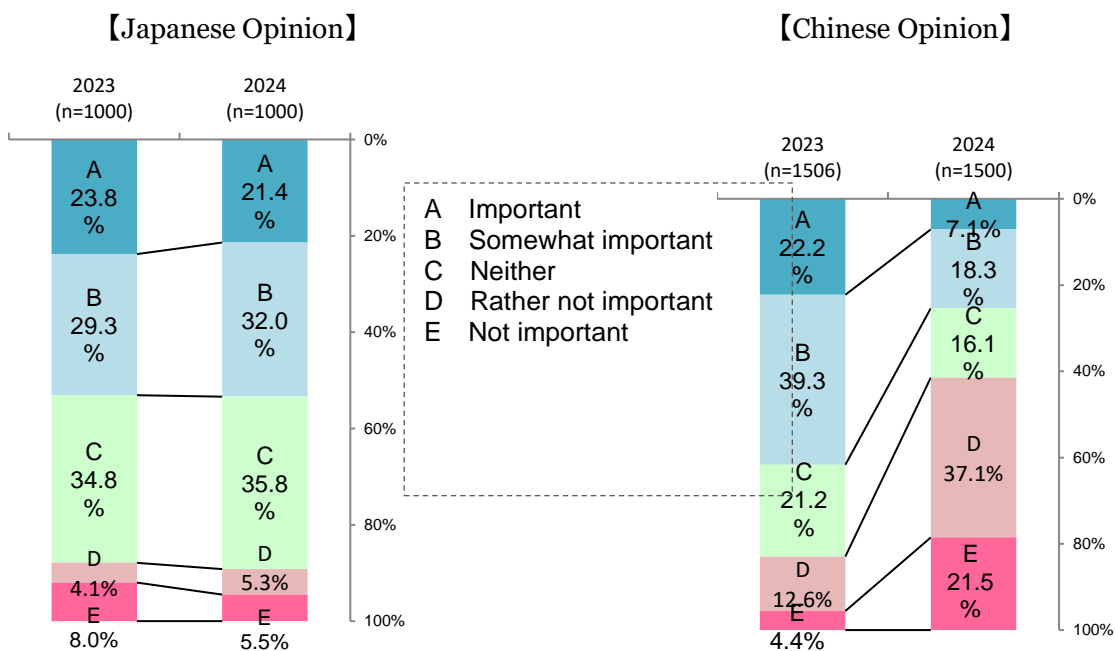
China is Japan’s largest trading partner, and Japan is China’s second largest trading partner after the US, but there was even a dramatic decline in the percentage of Chinese respondents who believe that economic cooperation with Japan is important for the future of their country, almost halving from 60.1% last year to 30.9% this year.

The attitude in Japan is unchanged with 65.3% percent of respondents believing economic cooperation with China is important.

There has also been a change in how respondents feel about the importance of private-sector exchanges between the countries. Up until this year, more than half of respondents in both countries deemed such exchanges as important.

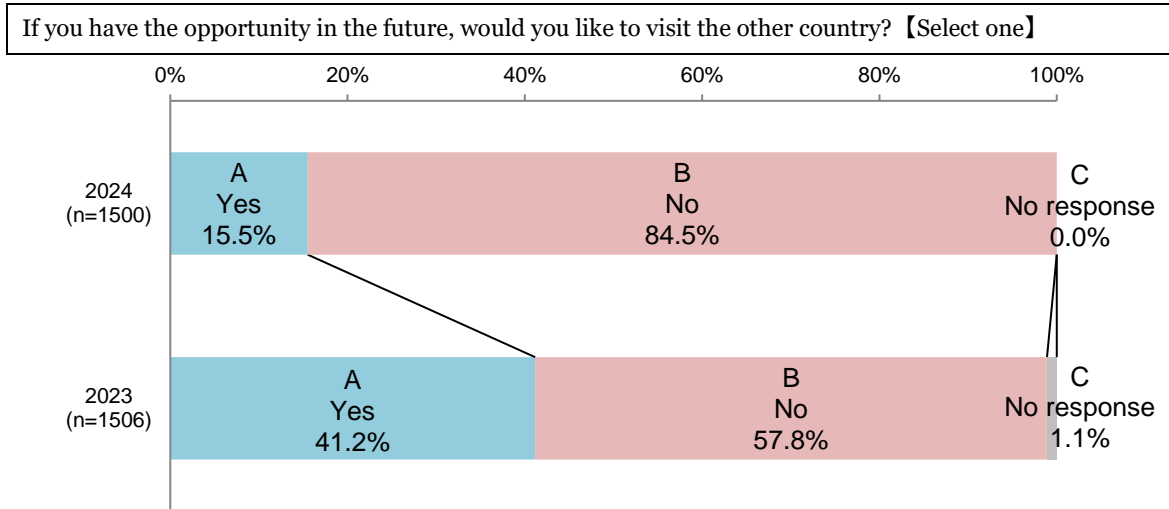
【Importance of private-sector exchanges between the countries】

Do you think that private-sector exchanges between Japan and China (study abroad, academic exchanges, arts and cultural exchanges, etc.) are important for improving and developing relations between the two countries? 【Select one】



Japanese respondents remain positive about private-sector exchanges, with 53.4% viewing them as important, but that number has fallen by more than half in China from 61.5% to 25.4%. In response to the question on whether respondents want to visit the other country if given the opportunity, 84.5% of Chinese participants responded in the negative (from 57.8% last year), the highest level seen in the last twenty years of surveys. In Japan, 76.3% answered that they do not want to visit China (down from 79.7%).

【Do you want to visit Japan? (Chinese Opinion)】



Three factors related to the change in Chinese public sentiment

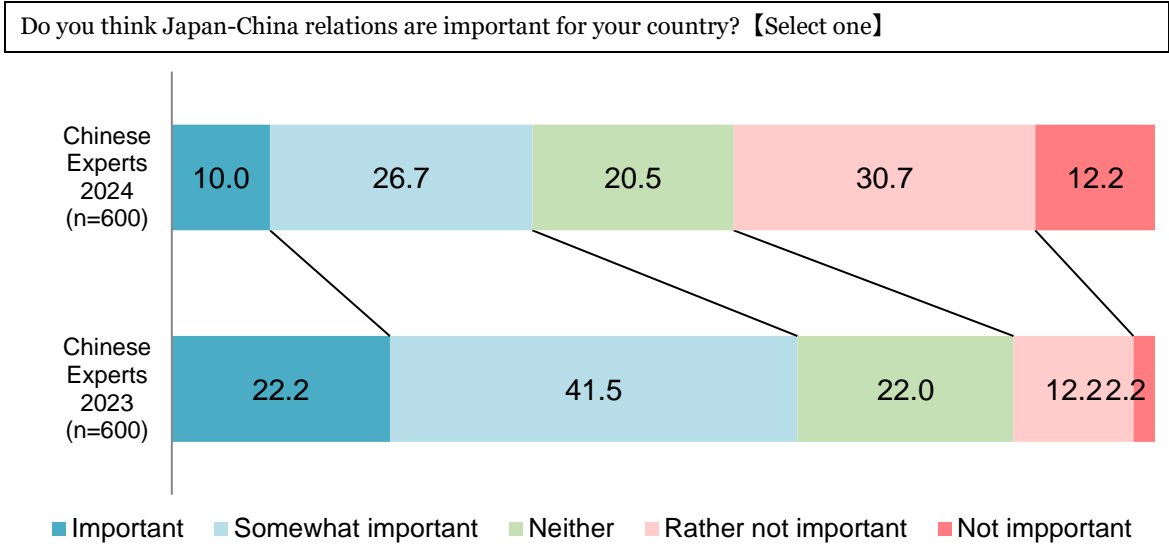
The change in attitudes in China are wide-ranging and can be seen in almost every question asked in this survey, though it would be dangerous to make any judgements about whether the changes are temporary or more fundamental in nature based on this single survey alone. However, we would like to explore some potential reasons for these changes.

Such significant changes may have been amplified by changes in methodology or in structural changes in Chinese public opinion. Meetings between our organization in Japan and the organization in China conducting the survey there have been held numerous times, and we have confirmed that the methodology of this year’s survey and the randomness of subject selection has remained unchanged over the last twenty years.

Worthy of note is that a similar change in sentiment towards Japan was also seen in the survey of experts (600 of whom responded) conducted simultaneously with the public opinion survey.

The expert survey is conducted each year to provide data to compare against public opinion, which tends to be more volatile. However, in this year’s survey, the percentage of Chinese experts who consider the Japan-China relationship to be important was revealed to have dropped in a comparable way to the public opinion survey, falling 27 points from last year’s 63.7% to 36.7%.

【Importance of Japan-China relations (Chinese Experts)】



In addition, while there were differences in the extent to which responses changed in many of the questions asked in the expert survey, there was a similarly negative trend to that seen in the public opinion survey. The deterioration in perception of Japan is clearly also spreading among Chinese academics, a group that has traditionally been considered more pro-Japanese.

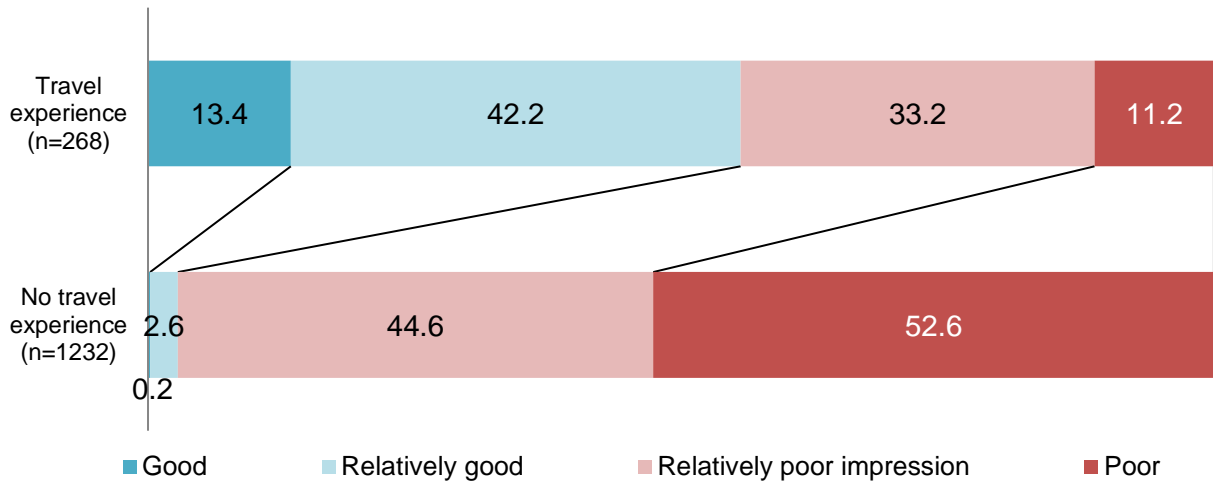
This begs the question: what has happened over the past year to cause such a change? We conducted a re-analysis of all the survey results, and focused on three factors that emerged from that.

People who travel to other countries usually hold a favorable impression of those countries, and a greater belief in their importance. Such positive impressions have also been held by people who have never visited other countries.

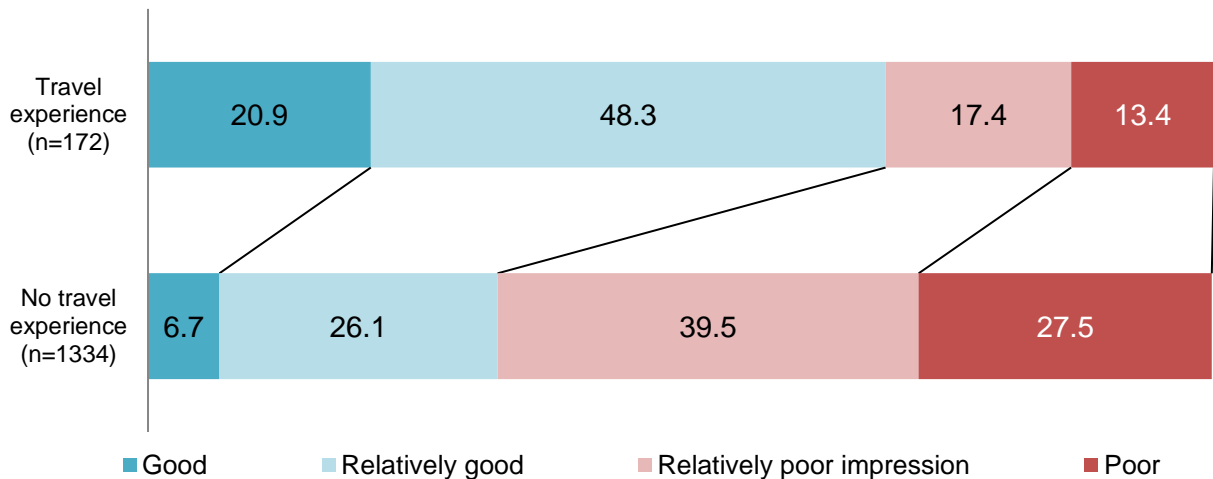
We noticed that in this year’s survey there was a difference in perception between those who have visited Japan and those who have not, finding that there has been a comprehensive deterioration in sentiment towards Japan among people, regardless of age, who have never visited.

【 Impressions of Japan based on travel experience (Chinese Opinion) 】

2024



2023

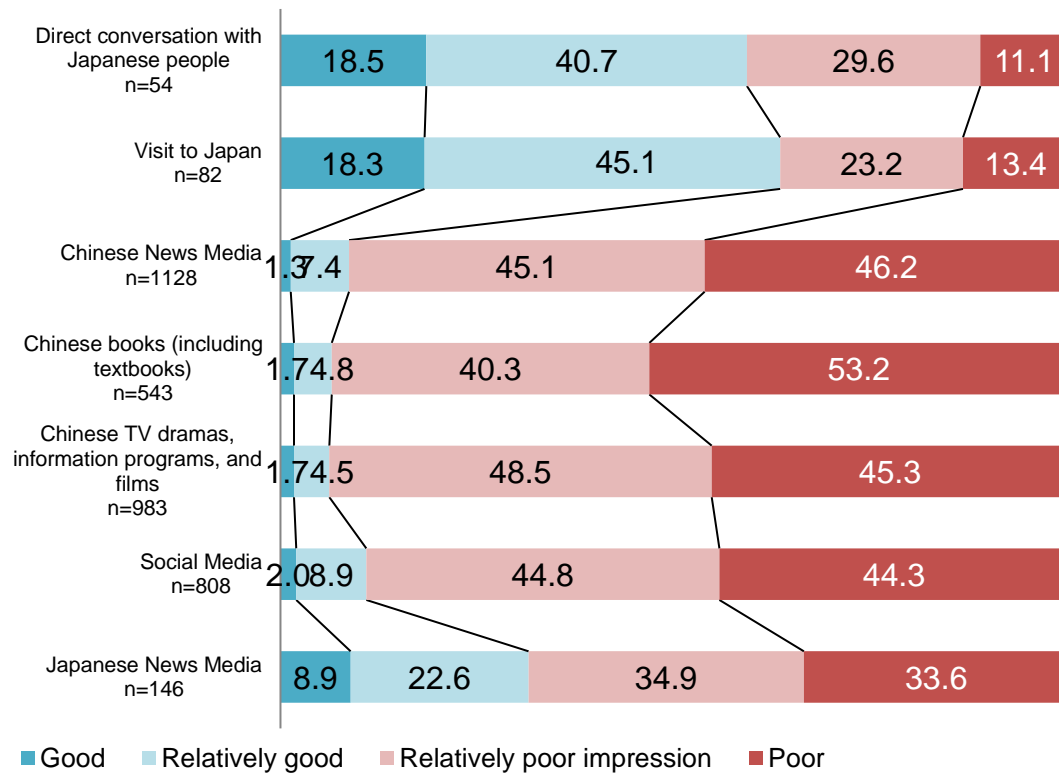


The above graphic shows the correlation between Chinese people’s impressions of Japan and whether or not they have visited the country. Even with the dramatic overall changes seen in this year’s survey, over half of those who have visited Japan maintain a positive impression of the country (55.6%). The number of people with a positive impression who have never visited saw a drastic decline from 32.8% last year to only 2.8%.

This gap may have arisen from the changing online environment in China with the increased popularity of social media. Those who have never visited Japan must rely on domestic media for information about it, and 90% of the overwhelming majority of Chinese

citizens who use domestic media for information have a negative impression of Japan, with their perception of Japan having grown increasingly negative on a wide range of topics.

【 Impressions of Japan by source (Chinese Opinion 2024) 】



There are already more than 1.1 billion internet users in China, where unlike Japan, traditional media outlets have a powerful influence on social media content, including those media outlets with government affiliations. However, this does not mean that Chinese belief in the importance of the Japan-China relationship and desire for Japan-China cooperation will disappear completely.

The last questions we focused on were those that showed the correlation between perceived importance of the Japan-China relationship and Japan-China cooperation.

After calculating the correlations between the questions related to these topics, we confirmed for all three that perceived importance of the Japan-China relationship among Chinese respondents and willingness to cooperate with Japan had fallen by more than one half over the last year.

Increased uncertainty in Japan and China about the mutually-beneficial strategic relationship

This year's survey showed an increase since last year in the percentage of Chinese respondents who point to the US as being the cause of the US-China conflict, in the percentage of those who believe that Japanese cooperation with the US in promoting economic security is harming Japan-China relations, and in those who see increased Japanese military power and stronger Japan-US relations as threats.

Respondents belonging to the above groups also showed a dramatic drop in those who see Japan-China relations as important.

The percentage of Chinese respondents who blame the US for its conflict with their country has doubled over the last year to 83.9%, and of those, the number who view Japan-China relations as important has dropped from 77.9% last year to 23.7%. In addition, among those who view Japan as a military threat, the percentage who believe in the importance of the Japan-China relationship has dropped from 70.7% to 36%, and that percentage has dropped from 60.3% to 27.8% among those who believe Japan's economic security policies are an obstacle to Japan-China economic relations and the relationship in general.

In other words, Japan is seen not as a country aiming to cooperate with China, but as one opposed to it, allied with the US and managing its relationship with China on its own. News on social media makes such assertions daily and to a comprehensive extent the board, which may have had considerable influence on public opinion.

There has been a struggle to get intergovernmental dialogues and other exchanges between the two countries off the ground, and the continuous, heated, inward-looking debate taking place on the internet over the last year may have contributed to the deterioration of public opinion towards Japan and may have even accelerated it.

This is the most plausible theory that explains the results of this year's survey, but whether or not this reflects real changes in Japanese and Chinese public opinion will be confirmed in subsequent surveys from next year, with due consideration given to variations that occur over time.

A number of issues have been highlighted by this year's survey results. In environments with little interaction between peoples of different countries, public opinion will depend heavily on domestic media and online news sources, which may amplify the voices of the public in various ways. This is not an issue limited to China; it affects Japan as well, and we must consider what means will enable us to transform this type of structural influence on public opinion.

However, even as public opinion becomes increasingly driven by internet content, this survey has also shown that public dialogue and interaction remain decisive factors in obtaining mutual understanding.

Without such interactions, it becomes extremely difficult to correct “fake news” and resolve misunderstandings. Also, government actions have come under increasing public scrutiny, so it is more critical than ever before to make the effort to engage in intergovernmental dialogue.

Another issue that the results brought into question was the importance of the mutually-beneficial strategic relationship between Japan and China. A “strategic relationship” can be defined as one that overcomes differences to work together for the global common good, and this survey has shown that people from both countries believe there should be international cooperation on many issues, including Russia's actions in Ukraine, and on economic, environmental, and nuclear weaponry issues. However, while the people of Japan and China share the same opinion about such issues and have a common interest in resolving them, there is no desire to cooperate. If this current attitude is permanent, or if the conflict continues to grow in intensity, it could have a devastating impact on the future of both countries.

This year's results could be viewed as a warning to the future. At this year's November summit between Japan and China, the two countries agreed again to promote the mutually-beneficial strategic relationship in a comprehensive way. However, this strategic relationship can only be achieved if the people of both countries understand and trust one another. In this regard, we believe that the results of this year's survey send an extremely powerful message to the governments of both Japan and China.