

China's Information Operations against Japan: The Case of the Takaichi-Taiwan Statement

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In an ever-evolving digital environment, information operations have become one of the main features of contemporary geopolitical competition. One active arena is the Indo-Pacific region, where China aspires to further its regional and geopolitical objectives, while another major player, Japan, aspires to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. China uses influence operations to advance its goals, and to "tell China's story well," particularly when its policies are challenged (China Media Project, 2021). This has been evident in cases such as Lithuania, where China used diplomatic retaliation, trade sanctions, and information operations following Vilnius' 2021 announcement of plans to open a Taiwanese representative office (Zeneli, 2025) (Janeliūnas & Boruta, 2022). It was also seen in Hong Kong during the pro-democracy protests, where information operations were used alongside the imposition of tighter control over the city (Conger, 2019) (Recorded Future/Insikt Group, 2020), and in Australia, where it engaged in the spread of disinformation while imposing trade restrictions and other measures after Canberra called for an independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19 (Townshend, 2020) (Hurst, 2020). One of the more recent targets has been Japan.

China's disinformation and propaganda frequently target Japan due to its promotion of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, its close alliance with the United States, and its close relations with Taiwan. However, the recent case involved a more intense information operation, characterised by state-linked messaging, and covert campaigns targeting Japanese political leadership and Japan's security posture regarding Taiwan.

This article discusses China's multi-layered campaign through the lens of strategic narrative theory. It analyses how coercive measures, diplomatic channels, state media and online influence operations have combined to advance a coherent set of narratives targeting Japan's international standing and domestic politics.

How It Began

At the November 7, 2025, parliamentary meeting, Prime Minister of Japan Sanae Takaichi was asked what circumstances surrounding Taiwan would count as a "survival-threatening" situation for Japan.

"If there are battleships and use of force, no matter how you think about it, it could constitute a survival-threatening situation," Takaichi answered (Ewe, 2025).

A “survival-threatening” situation is a concept under Japan's 2015 security legislation (Japanese Law Translation Database) (Kraska & Saito, 2020) that refers to a situation not only when an armed attack against Japan occurs, but "when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs, and as a result" it "threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness." It is noted that it stands when there is "no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan's survival" and protection of its people, and that use of force will be "limited to the minimum extent necessary" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan).

PM Takaichi later stated that her remarks were hypothetical and that she would refrain from making similar comments in parliament again (McCarthy, 2025).

China has used various measures against Japan, including the suspension of imports of Japanese seafood (Davidson, 2025), the prohibition of exports of dual-use items to 20 Japanese entities supplying Japan's military (Reuters, 2026), a warning to Chinese citizens against travelling to Japan (McCurry, 2025), advisories urging students to reconsider studying at Japanese universities, and the indefinite postponement of the release of Japanese animated films in Chinese cinemas. At the same time, according to Reuters sources, Beijing began dispatching "a higher than usual number of ships to the region after November 14, 2025, when it summoned Japan's ambassador to protest Takaichi's comments on Taiwan" (Lee & Blanchard, 2025).

The Narrative Dimension

These coercive measures were, however, only one dimension of a broader campaign that extended across diplomatic, state media and information channels, accompanied by threats, disinformation and propaganda targeting Japan's international standing. Chinese narratives mostly invoke Japan's World War II history as a frame of criticism directed at the country's current leadership, claiming that Japan is undermining regional peace through remilitarisation.

To analyse how these narratives function strategically, this article draws on strategic narrative theory (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2014). The framework distinguishes three levels: International

System Narratives, which describe the international order; National Narratives, which define a state's role and values; and Issue Narratives, which explain why a specific policy is needed. China's campaign against Japan operates across all three levels simultaneously: seeing it positioning itself as defender of the post-WWII international order while framing Japan as destabiliser of the international order (system); framing Japan as an unreformed militarist aggressor (national); and casting Prime Minister Takaichi's remarks as evidence of "remilitarisation which is dangerous to peace," so justifying Beijing's response (issue). The following sections examine how these narratives have been spread through diplomatic channels, state media and online influence operations.

Diplomatic Channels

Chinese diplomats and official figures have been among the main drivers of influence operations against PM Sanae Takaichi, seeking to undermine Japan's international image and normalise China's framing of the country.

At the Munich Security Conference, Wang Yi, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, who in the past was the Chinese Ambassador to Japan, accused Japan of having the ambition to invade Taiwan. He claimed that Takaichi's "erroneous remarks on the Taiwan question expose Japan's unabated ambition to invade and colonise Taiwan, and its persistent intention to revive militarism... If it gambles once more, it will only face a swifter defeat and suffer a more disastrous loss" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026).

When China's claims are challenged, Chinese Ambassadors in different countries often rally and spread similar pro-Chinese narratives. One noteworthy remark came from the Chinese Ambassador to Australia, Xiao Qian. Qian stated that Japan's actions reflect the "refusal of Japan's right-wing forces to accept defeat in World War II," and their attempt to "revive militarism, break free from the international order and speed up remilitarisation" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Australia, 2026).

The Chinese Embassy in Australia also posted content targeting Japan and Takaichi. One video title states: "Japan is playing with fire with Taiwan; the West must not forget the hard lessons of World War II" (Chinese Embassy in Australia, 2025).

Wang Yi also repeated similar talking points on Japan, saying that "the 1.4 billion people of China will never allow anyone to justify colonialism or reverse history's verdict on aggression" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026a).

Xue Jian, China's Consul General in Osaka, even made threatening comments about PM Takaichi in a post on X. Xue shared a news article about Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan, and commented that "the dirty neck that sticks itself out must be cut off" (Geddie & Chen, 2025). Although the post was later deleted, the Chinese side defended the comments as a response to the Prime Minister's remarks.

China also used the United Nations' platform to spread its narrative. In November, China's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Fu Cong, wrote two letters to UN Secretary-General António Guterres to express protest against Prime Minister Takaichi's statements, in which the Chinese representative questioned whether Japan was "going to repeat its past mistakes of militarism" (United Nations, 2025). In December, he wrote a second letter to the UN Secretary-General with similar remarks, claiming that Japan's "ambitions" were "to overturn the post-war international order" (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 2025).

Across these diplomatic interventions, China consistently promoted the same national narrative — Japan as unreformed militarist aggressor — through multiple official voices simultaneously, reflecting the coordinated amplification of strategic narrative through diplomatic channels.

State Media Narratives

Chinese state media repeated narratives that Japan was threatening regional peace through remilitarisation, and focused on Japan's World War II history.

Key Chinese state-run media outlets, for example, China Daily, have published editorials, numerous articles and editorial cartoons targeting Japan and Sanae Takaichi (China Daily, 2025) (Jianping, 2026). These materials have included headlines such as "A revenant Japanese militarism leads Japan towards its grave" (China Daily, 2025a), "There is no room for WWII revisionist Takaichi" (Weihua, 2025), and "Japan takes axe to peace" (Chen, 2026), among many others.

Another interesting information narrative is about Okinawa. China's information warfare included Chinese state media questioning whether Okinawa is a legitimate part of Japan (Liu Xin, 2025). Considering Okinawa's location, it is also noteworthy that Okinawa has US military bases. China has long targeted Okinawa, and, in the current narrative, this focus is directed against Japan's stance on Taiwan

(Global Times, 2013). The Chinese state-run Global Times, in an editorial, called for further research on the Ryukyu island chain: "The geopolitical position, strategic choices and future trajectory of the Ryukyu Islands not only determine their own fate, but also profoundly affect the security concerns of neighbouring countries and regions" (Zhou, 2025). The targeting of Okinawa's status operates at the national narrative level, delegitimising Japan's sovereign claim to its own territory and the US military presence there.

In April, a group of Chinese naval vessels, including a destroyer, passed through a waterway between two islands administered by Okinawa (Reuters, 2026a). The transit followed the passage of a Japanese destroyer through the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate Japan's commitment to the principle of freedom of navigation under international law (Japan News, 2026), which Beijing stated was "deliberate provocation" (Reuters, 2026b).

Covert Influence operations

China has also engaged in covert influence operations targeting Japan and Sanae Takaichi in order to shape public narratives, discredit political leadership and promote Beijing's preferred framing of Japan.

In February, the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies stated that during Japan's election period, several dozen X accounts linked to a Chinese misinformation campaign attacked Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's views (Vicens, Suzuki, Sugiyama, 2026). Maria Riofrio, a researcher at the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies' Centre on Cyber and Technology Innovation, stated that the accounts suggested that the Prime Minister was a "reckless, cult-backed" leader driving Japan towards war.

In January, Japan Nexus Intelligence Inc. (JNI) head analyst Nasa Tatsuguchi stated that some foreign-language accounts had recently increased their posting in Japanese (Sanada, 2026). An X account with tens of thousands of followers, previously known for its pro-China narratives in English and Chinese, intensified its Japanese-language content from late November onwards. Tatsuguchi also stated that many of those new posts were critical of Sanae Takaichi.

A February survey by JNI found that around 3,000 X accounts posted or amplified criticism of Sanae Takaichi and Japanese policies from mid-January, prior to the start of official election campaigning (Japan News, 2026a). JNI identified reposting patterns, newly created accounts and recurring narratives aimed at sowing domestic division and undermining Japan's international standing, such as "The prime

minister has paved the way for military buildup and historical revisions" and "Young people will bear a growing burden from social security." Notably, they said, "some hashtags include simplified Chinese characters or unnatural Japanese" and a number of posts used images from Chinese blogs and state media.

One interesting example is the disinformation claiming that PM Takaichi's grandfather served as an Imperial Japanese Army officer during the invasion of China. The Taiwan FactCheck Centre stated that such disinformation was circulating on Taiwanese social media. Reportedly, 21 accounts, including 13 believed to be Chinese, were identified as misnaming Takaichi's grandfather and using an unrelated photo (Straits Times, 2026). Following Takaichi's remarks, such posts increased on X and Facebook in Taiwan, and spread rapidly. As these posts were also accessible in Japan, this demonstrates a multi-audience, cross-platform disinformation campaign against Takaichi.

The convergence between the narratives amplified by these covert accounts, and those promoted simultaneously through official diplomatic and state media channels, seems to show that the influence operations functioned as an extension of China's broader strategic narrative campaign, rather than as a separate or spontaneous activity.

Impact

Despite the scale and intensity of China's campaign, Japan's institutional and public response suggests a degree of resilience that Beijing may have underestimated.

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs is aware of foreign information manipulation and is "strengthening its information gathering, analysis and communication capabilities in response to information warfare through the cooperation of its information, policy and communication divisions" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025b). The Ministry also emphasises the importance of resilience in society, including the literacy of people, media, think tanks and NGOs.

A March 2026 opinion poll by Japan's Foreign Ministry shows that 68.0% of respondents feel that disinformation about international affairs is being spread online (Japan Times, 2026).

In February 2026, a speaker for Prime Minister Takaichi noted that her office was aware of suspicious foreign social media accounts that had posted content related to Japan's elections: "We consider this to be a national security threat that undermines the very foundations of democracy, including the fairness of

elections and freedom of the press. We believe that countermeasures must be urgently prioritised" (Asahi Shimbun, 2026b).

According to a public opinion poll conducted on November 22-23, 2025, approval of the Sanae Takaichi Cabinet stood at 75.2% (Japan Forward, 2025). Despite attempts by China to discredit Sanae Takaichi, she secured a supermajority in the snap election (Clayton & Jett, 2026).

A Kyodo News poll indicates that the Japanese public is divided over whether Japan should exercise its right to collective self-defence if China attacks Taiwan. However, 60.4% support Sanae Takaichi's plan to increase defence spending (Sugiyama, 2025).

Conclusion

China's response to Prime Minister of Japan Sanae Takaichi's remarks regarding what might constitute a "survival-threatening" situation for Japan demonstrates a coordinated, multi-layered campaign combining economic coercion, military signalling and strategic narrative amplification across diplomatic channels, state media and online influence operations. All reinforced the same core narrative: Japan as an unreformed militarist aggressor undermining regional stability.

The intensity of the campaign is consistent with established patterns: China has demonstrated similar behaviour towards other states when its core narratives and actions have been challenged. A People's Daily commentary republished by Xinhua on November 28 concluded that Takaichi's remarks "must be strongly countered and dealt with as a warning to others" (People's Daily, 2025).

Viewed through strategic narrative theory, China did not simply react to one politician's remarks, but used the episode to reinforce its pre-existing international system, and national and issue narratives about Japan, the post-WWII order, and Taiwan. Despite the campaign's scale and sophistication, its impact on Japanese public opinion was limited.

The broader significance of this case extends beyond Japan alone. The campaign's architecture — coordinated narrative dissemination through official, state media and covert channels, amplified in different countries — represents a template likely to be deployed not only against Indo-Pacific actors promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific or maintaining close ties with Taiwan, but against any actor advancing positions that challenge the Chinese Communist Party's worldview.

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