China – Japan Détente

What is the issue?

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- After years of mistrust, China reaches out to Japan with high-level visits
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- Lately, China has been extending olive branches to all its strained neighbours, in what could be seen as its effort to shape the new world order.
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Why has tension been be the default tone of the relationship?

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- Japan and China have one of the most tense, yet economically intertwined relationships, which have moorings in their shared histories.
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- Beijing also believes Japan is yet to properly atone for its brutal invasion of China in the run-up to and during the 2nd World War (1931 and 1937).
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- Additionally, Japan has stood firm with the US camp in the post-War alignment, thereby pitting it as an adversary of China on several occasions.
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- Territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea is another pressure point in the Sino-Japanese ties.
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What are has Sino-Japanese cooperation panned till now?

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- Nonetheless, Japan played a vital role in China's economic rise, which saw the country transform from an agrarian to a manufacturing powerhouse.
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- Notably, China-Japan trade stands at about $350 billion (by comparison,

India-China trade is merely $84.44 billion).
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- China has overtaken Japan as the world's second largest economy and has also eclipsed it as a global geostrategic player.
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- The two countries also are competitors in the South East Asian theatre, as the region has emerged as an economically and strategically significant one.
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What are the recent developments in Sino-Japanese ties?

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- Recently, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang was in Japan on a three-day state visit, which was his first since taking office 5 years ago.
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- It was also the first top-level bilateral visit after the 2012 strain, which was caused over a chain of disputed islands that are claimed by both countries.
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- This thaw in was in the making for several months now, through multiple bilateral political and cultural engagements.
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- High level economic dialogue, which was stalled for over 8 years, has also been resumed, and a possible Beijing trip by the Japanese PM is on the cards.
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- The leaders are also said have engaged each other over the evolving dynamics in the Korean peninsula.
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What has changed now?

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- An unpredictable U.S., North Korea and business interests are said to be driving the present bonhomie between the historical enemies.
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- **Japan's Worry -** Trump's America First policy and the tariffs he has slapped on some $60 billion worth of Chinese products have also impacted Japan.
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- Notably, Japan hadn't managed to secure any concessions from US on the new duties on steel and aluminium imports despite being a strong ally.

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- Japan also hopes to seek China’s aid to influence North Korea’s temporal leadership of Japanese concerns.
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- Many Japanese businesses have also invested in China, which calls for bettering equations to ensure better economic prospects for all.
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- **China’s Case -** The idea of Japan’s leader asking for support on North Korea plays well domestically as an example of Beijing’s international clout.
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- Moreover, given the simmering possibility of a trade war with the U.S., better ties with economic heavyweight Japan are also in China’s interests.
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- In addition, China is keen on getting Japan to play ball with its signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
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What are the significant outcomes of the current détente?

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- Japan-backed Asian Development Bank (ADB) is exploring co-financing projects with the Beijing-led Asian Infrastructure Investment bank (AIIB).
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- **BRI -** Although initially reluctant to participate in the BRI, Tokyo has presently signalled that it is not completely averse to the initiative.
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- But Japan has stressed that projects must meet the criteria of being “open, transparent, fair and economically feasible” if it is to participate.
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- In this way Japan can keep on the right side of China without necessarily committing to participation.
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- **Uncertainty -** Despite all these, current China-Japan alignment can be seen only as a provisional affair that is rooted in the geo-political realities.
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- While it is akin to a pause rather than a resolution of conflict, it is a positive development nevertheless, which needs to be welcomed.
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Source: The Hindu

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