

# **Tangled, Hesitated and Joining: Japan's Strategic Orientation under the “Belt and Road” Initiative**

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**Keywords:** the “Belt and Road” Initiative; Japanese Government; Strategy; Change of Attitude; Geopolitics

**Abstract:** Since President Xi Jinping came up with the concept of the “Belt and Road” Multilateral Cooperation Initiative in September 2013, an increasing number of countries have joined the Initiative. Fueled by the easing of Sino-Japanese relations, Japan has continuously adjusted its foreign policy and actively responded to this conception. With reference to existing documents, theoretical perspectives and basic viewpoints, this paper explores the attitude and changes of the Japanese Government towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the official website documents of the Japanese Government. The Japanese Government's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative has changed from negative to indecisive, and then to positive response. The reasons for the change in Japanese Government's attitude include the need to develop its domestic economy and open up overseas markets, as well as the changes in international political structure and the U.S. trade protection policy. China and Japan should seize the cooperation opportunity of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and make contributions to the development and prosperity of China and Japan as well as the world.

## **1. Introduction**

In September 2013, President Xi Jinping came up with the conception of building a “New Silk Road Economic Belt” and a “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, collectively referred to as the conception of multilateral cooperation initiative of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. In May 2017 and April 2019, the “Belt and Road” International Cooperation Summit Forums were held respectively. More and more countries actively seek cooperation with China and participate in investment in the projects of the “Belt and Road”. Japan, China's neighboring country, has also continuously adjusted its foreign policy to cope with this trend. Fueled by the easing of Sino-Japanese relations, Japan's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative has changed tremendously as well. In May 2018, China and Japan entered into a “Memorandum of Understanding on Third-Party Market Cooperation between China and Japan” to boost cooperation between enterprises of the two countries in third parties. In October of the same year, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid an official visit to China after seven years. The two sides held the first “Third-Party Market Cooperation Forum” in Beijing, and China and Japan launched close cooperation under the framework of the “Belt and Road” framework. This paper principally explores the following issues: the Japanese Government's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the reasons for its change.

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Japan, China's neighboring country, has also continuously adjusted its foreign policy to cope with this trend. With the easing of Sino-Japanese relations, Japan's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative has also changed tremendously.

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Market Cooperation between China and Japan to boost cooperation between enterprises of the two countries in third parties. In October of the same year, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid an official visit to China after seven years. The two sides held the first “Third-Party Market Cooperation Forum” in Beijing, and China and Japan carried out close cooperation under the framework of the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

This paper principally explores the following issues: the Japanese Government's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the reasons for its change.

## 2. Literature Review

From the point of view of the Japanese Government's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the reasons for its change, the current study summarizes the theoretical perspective and basic viewpoints of the references as below.

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Michael D. Swaine (2015) illustrated from the economic, diplomatic, military and geopolitical points of view that the impact of the “Belt and Road” Initiative is not limited to the areas of economic growth and development, but affects China, Europe and underdeveloped countries[1]; William H. Overholt (2015) expounded from the points of view of economy, politics, national security, history and domestic and foreign markets that the “Belt and Road” Initiative is China's response to the problems in the new economic growth model; apart from that, the leadership and comprehensive national policies of China and the United States can push forward effective cooperation between the two sides and enhance the vicious circle of Sino-US relations[2]; Liu Weidong and Michael Dunford (2016) illustrated from the historical, economic and diplomatic points of view that China's “Belt and Road” Initiative not merely reflects China's need to rise as a global power, but serves as a basic framework for establishing open cooperation and new multilateral financial institutions[3]; Peter Ferdinand (2016), from the historical, diplomatic, economic and geopolitical points of view, explained that this paper puts a high premium on the movement to realize the “Chinese Dream” and pointed out that the “Belt and Road” Initiative serves as the foundation that the Chinese government attempts to lay for a more active long-term foreign policy[4]; Rumi Aoyama (2016), from diplomatic, economic, military, diplomatic and political points of view and by studying China's “Belt and Road” Initiative, stated that it is not merely a regional policy but a global strategy to realize the “Chinese Dream”[5]; Leonard K. Cheng (2016) mentioned from an economic and military point of view that only long-term win-win cooperation between China and Japan is the priority objective of economic cooperation in this Initiative[6].

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Rumi Aoyama(2016) illustrated from diplomatic, economic, military, diplomatic and political

points of view that by studying China's "Belt and Road" Initiative, it is not merely a regional policy but a global strategy to realize the "Chinese Dream".

Leonard K. Cheng (2016) illustrated from an economic and military point of view that long-term win-win cooperation between China and Japan is the priority objective of economic cooperation in this Initiative.

García-Herrero, Alicia and Xu Jianwei (2016), from the points of view of transportation and economy and with transportation routes are the main line, illustrated by means of simulation analysis that if China establishes a free trade area in the "Belt and Road" region, Asia will benefit the most[7]; Shen Laijin and Huang He (2017), from the economic, diplomatic and international relations and by exploring Japan's positive and negative understanding of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, enlightened that China still needs to further guide the international community to objectively understand the "Belt and Road" Initiative[8]. Shen Haitao and Yang Meichen (2017), from the political and historical points of view, explained Japan's ambivalence towards the "Belt and Road" Initiative, as well as the reasons from the perspective of diplomatic strategy and self, revealing that it is extremely significant to establish a strategic and mutually beneficial relationship between China and Japan[9]; Guo Limeng and Zhu Qichao (2017) concluded from the points of view of history, geopolitics, domestic and foreign, and national security that Japan's evolution from containing China to friendly diplomacy, as well as its advantages of Sino-US diplomacy, the "Belt and Road" Initiative and Japan's economic stagnation, have affected its participation in East Asian integration[10]; An Husen and Luan Qiulin (2017) explored the formation of a new pattern of division of labor in East Asia that the "Belt and Road" Initiative is conducive to enhancing China's influence and attaching importance to regional cooperation and development from the historical and domestic and international points of view[11]; Peter Cai (2017) analyzed from the angles of geopolitics and geo-economics that China's "Belt and Road" Initiative faces many obstacles such as slow strategic development, lack of trust among the "Belt and Road" countries, and over-cautious Chinese financial institutions[12]; Zhao Lianxue and Li Xuwei (2018) summarized from the perspective of geopolitics that the overall increase in the number of reports on the "Belt and Road" Initiative by Japan's mainstream newspaper media, the change in attitude from negative to positive, and the change in the focus of media attention during the period 2014-2017, which suggests that Sino-Japanese friendly exchanges are conducive to economic development and world stability and prosperity[13]; Lu Hao (2018) explored Japan's attitude to the "Belt and Road" Initiative from the points of view of history, diplomacy, geopolitics and international pattern. Out of its own benefit, Japan adopted such measures as "limited connection" and "multi-angle hedging".

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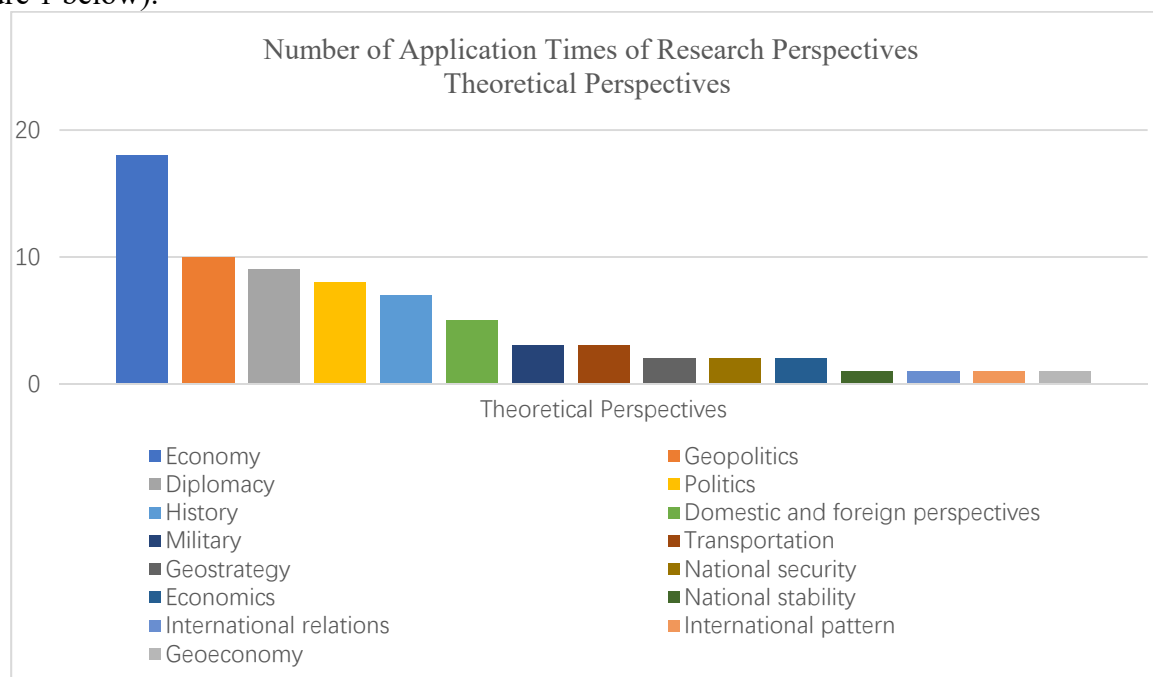


Figure 1 Number of Application Times of Research Perspectives

#### Theoretical Perspectives

As shown in the above figure and table, it can be clearly observed that most of the existing references have chosen to analyze from an economic point of view, and most of them have described the changes in Japan's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the points of view of international pattern, diplomacy and history. However, most of the references choose few theoretical perspectives, and few of them explain this issue from multiple points of view and are less comprehensive. Moreover, there is little explanation of Japan's attitude and views on the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the angle of the Japanese Government. Therefore, this paper will further analyze the Japanese Government's participation in the “Belt and Road” Initiative in view of this deficiency.

### 3. Research Methods

The current study collects the Japanese Government's views on the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the websites of Japan's Cabinet Office, Japanese Prime Minister's residence, Foreign Affairs

Network, House of Representatives and other websites of Japan's major news media. The deadline for collection is May 30, 2019, and the collected content is principally the attitudes of Japanese Prime Minister and government personnel towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative. The collected data are sorted out and the basic information is listed in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1 Response of Japanese Official Media to the “Belt and Road” Initiative

Time	News Media	Article Title	Main Content	Website • News Source
2015.4.24	House of Representatives	Minutes of Cabinet Meetings	There was no positive response to the “Belt and Road” Initiative, stressing Japan's emphasis on the principles of norms and transparency.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigirokua.nsf/html/kaigirokua/000518920150424008.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigirokua.nsf/html/kaigirokua/000518920150424008.htm</a>
2015.5.22	House of Representatives	Minutes of Cabinet Meetings	Considering that the “Belt and Road” Initiative put forward by China has not been explained in detail, and Japan will keep a close watch on it.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigirokua.nsf/html/kaigirokua/000518920150522012.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigirokua.nsf/html/kaigirokua/000518920150522012.htm</a>
2015.9.2	House of Representatives	Minutes of Cabinet Meetings	Considering that there are risks in China's “Belt and Road” Initiative, and Japan will continue to observe it.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigirokua.nsf/html/kaigirokua/009518920150902014.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigirokua.nsf/html/kaigirokua/009518920150902014.htm</a>
2016.10.26	Cabinet Office	Minutes of Cabinet Meetings	Indicating that Japan will continue to follow the developments of the “Belt and Road” Initiative	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519220161026002.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519220161026002.htm</a>
(29)2017.5.16	Cabinet Office	Key Points of Press Conference of Minister Extraordinary of Ishiwar Cabinet Office	Japanese cabinet officials have reservations about the future specific trend of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and its impact on Japan.	<a href="https://www.cao.go.jp/minister/1608_n_ishihara/kaiken/2017/0516kaiken.html">https://www.cao.go.jp/minister/1608_n_ishihara/kaiken/2017/0516kaiken.html</a>
2017.5.23	House of Representatives	House Member OS おおさかせいじ Proposes Japan's Response to China's conception of the “Belt and Road” Initiative for Silk Road Economic Circle-Statement of Defense	Member of House of Representatives おおさかせいじ expressed that Japan will continue to pay attention to China's concrete actions in the future, regardless of whether the “Belt and Road” Initiative is conducive to the sustainable development of the region.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_shitsumon.nsf/html/shitsumon/b193309.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_shitsumon.nsf/html/shitsumon/b193309.htm</a>
2017.6.5	Japanese Prime Minister's Official Residence	Speech by Prime Minister of Abe Cabinet at the “Asia's Future” Dinner of the 23rd International Exchange Conference	Prime Minister Abe Expressed Affirmative Attitude to the “Belt and Road” Initiative	<a href="https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/statement/2017/0605speech.html">https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/statement/2017/0605speech.html</a>
2017.6.6	Cabinet Office	Key Points of Press Conference of Minister Extraordinary from Yamamoto's Cabinet Office	The Japanese Prime Minister takes a positive attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative, while Japanese cabinet ministers consider it to be used by China as a special interest.	<a href="https://www.cao.go.jp/minister/1608_k3_yamamoto/kaiken/2017/0606kaiken.html">https://www.cao.go.jp/minister/1608_k3_yamamoto/kaiken/2017/0606kaiken.html</a> (Key Points of Press Conference of Minister Extraordinary from Yamamoto's Cabinet Office)
2017.11.20	House of	This Conference	Cabinet Prime Minister	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/</a>

	Representatives	of the 195th Congress No. 5	Abe mentioned that Japan will support the “Belt and Road” Initiative that meets international standards	<a href="http://itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000119520171120005.htm">itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000119520171120005.htm</a>
2017.12.4	Japanese Prime Minister's Official Residence	Welcome Reception for the Third Dialogue between Chinese and Japanese Entrepreneurs and Former Government Officials (Summit of Japanese and Chinese CEOs and Others)	Prime Minister Abe explained the benefits of Sino-Japanese cooperation from the perspective of infrastructure construction and Sino-Japanese economic development, indicating Japan's support for the “Belt and Road” Initiative and its determination to improve Sino-Japanese relations.	<a href="https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/actions/201712/04taiwa_kangei.html">https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/actions/201712/04taiwa_kangei.html</a>
2017.12.6	House of Representatives	Foreign Affairs Committee of the 195th Congress No. 2	Foreign Minister Kono mentioned Japan will cooperate with China on the premise that the “Belt and Road” Initiative meets international standards.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519520171206002.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519520171206002.htm</a>
2018.1	House of Representatives	Developments in Matters Managed by All Committees- the 196th Congress	Japan proposes to make the “Belt and Road” Initiative more in line with international standards and Japan's positive attitude towards the Initiative.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_rchome.nsf/html/rchome/Shiryō/18doukou01.pdf/\$File/18doukou01.pdf#page=195">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_rchome.nsf/html/rchome/Shiryō/18doukou01.pdf/\$File/18doukou01.pdf#page=195</a>
(30)2018.1.18	Japanese Prime Minister's Official Residence	Summary of Policy Discussions at the Conference on Comprehensive Science and Technology Innovation	The conference showed that innovative systems are needed to deal with China's carbon emissions under the “Belt and Road” Initiative.	<a href="https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/gaiyō/yusikisha/180118giji.pdf">https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/gaiyō/yusikisha/180118giji.pdf</a>
2018.2.14	House of Representatives	Budget Committee of the 196th Congress No. 11	Cabinet Prime Minister Abe made it clear that Japan will cooperate with China's “Belt and Road” Initiative, which meets international standards	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/001819620180214011.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/001819620180214011.htm</a>
2018.2.23	House of Representatives	The Third Session of the Budget Committee of the 196th Congress No. 1	Minister Kono mentioned Japan's judgment criterion is whether all the projects included in the “Belt and Road” Initiative meet international standards.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/003319620180223001.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/003319620180223001.htm</a>
2018.3.24	House of Representatives	This Conference of the 196th Congress No. 2	Cabinet Prime Minister Abe mentioned that Japan will support the “Belt and Road” Initiative that meets international standards	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000119620180124002.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000119620180124002.htm</a>
2018.4.18	House of Representatives	Foreign Affairs Committee of the 196th Congress No. 9	Foreign Minister Kono mentioned Japan will support the “Belt and Road” Initiative that meets international standards.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519620180418009.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519620180418009.htm</a>
2018.5.11	House of Representatives	National Land Transportation Committee of the 196th Congress	A spokesman for Ishikawa government mentioned Japan expects China's “Belt and Road” Initiative,	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/009919620180511013.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/009919620180511013.htm</a>

		No. 13	which meets international standards, to contribute to world peace and prosperity.	
2018.5.18	House of Representatives	Cabinet Committee of the 196th Congress No. 18	In response to China's "Belt and Road" Initiative, Japan's attitude is to turn to high-quality construction as much as possible and build high-quality free and fair trade rules.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000219620180518018.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000219620180518018.htm</a>
2018.5.30	House of Representatives	Cabinet Committee of the 196th Congress No. 13	The government's reference person responded to Japan's offer to cooperate with China on the basis that the "Belt and Road" Initiative can contribute to world peace and prosperity.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519620180530013.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519620180530013.htm</a>
2018.10.30	Foreign Affairs Network	Minutes of Foreign Minister Kono's Press Conference	In an interview on Japan-India relations, Minister Kono mentioned that he would vigorously promote Japan-India cooperation, but the cooperation on the "Belt and Road" Initiative between Japan and India was not very clear.	<a href="https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000765.html">https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000765.html</a>
2018.11.1	House of Representatives	Budget Committee of the 197th Congress No. 2	Prime Minister Abe's Cabinet stressed that meeting international standards is the criterion for the development of the "Belt and Road" Initiative.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/001819720181101002.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/001819720181101002.htm</a>
2018.11.21	House of Representatives	Foreign Affairs Committee of the 197th Congress No. 3	Minister Kono mentioned that China-Japan cooperation in the third-party market needs to ensure financial transparency of recipient countries, and that Japan will gradually improve Sino-Japanese relations.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519720181121003.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519720181121003.htm</a>
2018.12.5	House of Representatives	Foreign Affairs Committee of the 197th Congress No. 5	Suggesting that Japan does not agree to participate in the "Belt and Road" Initiative, and China and Japan have expanded their business cooperation in third countries.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519720181205005.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000519720181205005.htm</a>
2019.2.26	House of Representatives	Public Hearing of Budget Committee of the 198th Congress No. 1	Showing that Japan believes that China's "Belt and Road" Initiative has a lease strategy like that of colonial period.	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/003019820190226001.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/003019820190226001.htm</a>
2019.3.26	Foreign Affairs Network	Minutes of Foreign Minister Kono's Press Conference	Indicating that Japan will participate in China's "Belt and Road" Initiative that meets international standards	<a href="https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000810.html#topic4">https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000810.html#topic4</a>
2019.4.6	Foreign Affairs Network	Minutes of Foreign Minister	Considering that the connectivity of the "Belt	<a href="https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken6_000030.html">https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken6_000030.html</a>

		Kono's Temporary Press Conference	and Road” Initiative helps to close the financial gap among developing countries	
2019.4.14	Foreign Affairs Network	Minutes of Foreign Minister Kono's Temporary Press Conference	Minister Kono indicated that he has already had a direction on China's “Belt and Road” Initiative, wishing to cooperate with China.	<a href="https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000817.html">https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000817.html</a>
2019.5.5	Foreign Affairs Network	Minutes of Foreign Minister Kono's Temporary Press Conference	Minister Kono mentioned that he would pay close attention to China's view on loans to developing countries.	<a href="https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000825.html">https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken4_000825.html</a>
2019.5.15	House of Representatives	Cabinet Committee of the 198th Congress No. 16	Cabinet members believe that the “Belt and Road” Initiative is China's tool to control the world. Deputy Minister Abe held that Japan should establish friendly relations with China	<a href="http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000219820190515016.htm">http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigiroku/000219820190515016.htm</a>

Along with the passage of time, Japan's reports on the “Belt and Road” Initiative have increased, which reflects that Japan's attention to the “Belt and Road” Initiative has been raised. Similarly, Japan's major news media have also taken on an upward trend in their attention to the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

Table 2 Main Reports of Japan's Major News Media on Japan's Attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative

Time	News Media	Article Title	Main Content	Website • News Source
2015.10.26	Newsweek Yuanteng Yu	Prime Minister Abe Visited Central Asia and China's the “Belt and Road” Initiative	Viewing the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the perspective of Japan and China, as well as Japan's initial investment in consideration of its own interests.	<a href="https://www.newsweekjapan.jp/stories/world/2015/10/post-4029_3.php9">https://www.newsweekjapan.jp/stories/world/2015/10/post-4029_3.php9</a>
2015.12.18	BLOGOSYOSHI ZAKI Tatsuhiko	Special Series: the “Belt and Road” Initiative Conception and Japanese Response	Analyzing China's “Belt and Road” Initiative and showing from the aspects of non-governmental cooperation and information that Japan should not hesitate to participate in the Initiative.	<a href="https://blogos.com/article/150742/?p=2">https://blogos.com/article/150742/?p=2</a>
2017.5.16	NHK	Shen Tianzi Zhang Bo	Explaining the “Belt and Road” Initiative International Conference held in China to illustrate the Japanese government's wait-and-see attitude towards the Initiative.	<a href="https://www.nhk.or.jp/kaisetsu-blog/300/270760.html">https://www.nhk.or.jp/kaisetsu-blog/300/270760.html</a> (NHK commentator)
2017.6.6	Reuters	Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga: “cooperation where cooperation is possible”.	Chief of the secretariat Yoshihide Suga expressed that he would continue to pay attention to how the “Belt and Road” Initiative can further take concrete actions to maintain the sustainable development and stability of the region.	<a href="https://jp.reuters.com/article/one-belt-one-road-suga-idJPKBN18X06I">https://jp.reuters.com/article/one-belt-one-road-suga-idJPKBN18X06I</a>
2017.11.14	NHK, Japanese Prime Minister's Official Residence	Press Conferences at Home and Abroad for APEC Summit Conference and	Prime Minister Abe mentioned in his speech that he supports the “Belt and Road” Initiative to contribute to the development of the two countries and the stability of the world and the	<a href="https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/2017/1114kaiken.html">https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/2017/1114kaiken.html</a>



		ASEAN Summit Conference	cooperation between the two countries in third countries.	
2018.6.20	NKH NEWS, Journal of Politics	China and Japan Turn to Cooperation	The historical relationship between China and Japan and the competition in the Asia-Pacific region show that both countries will benefit from the Sino-Japanese cooperation initiated by the “Belt and Road” Initiative.	<a href="https://www.nhk.or.jp/politics/articles/feature/5612.html">https://www.nhk.or.jp/politics/articles/feature/5612.html</a>

Summing up the above relevant statements and reports of the Japanese Government on the “Belt and Road” Initiative, it can be found that the attitude of the Japanese Government towards this Initiative has changed obviously, presenting a negative trend in the early stage on the whole, with a reversal after 2015. The basic situation is shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.

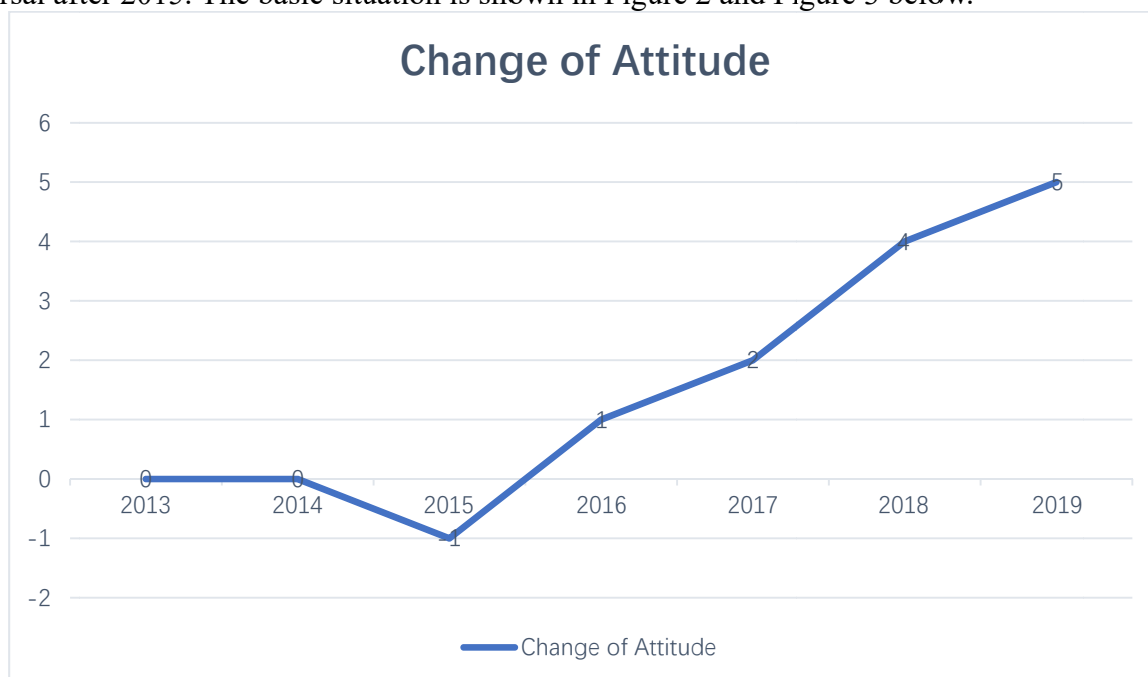


Figure 2 Changes in Japanese Government's Attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative

Note: -1 to 5 indicates that the degree of Japan's change of attitude takes on a progressive increase

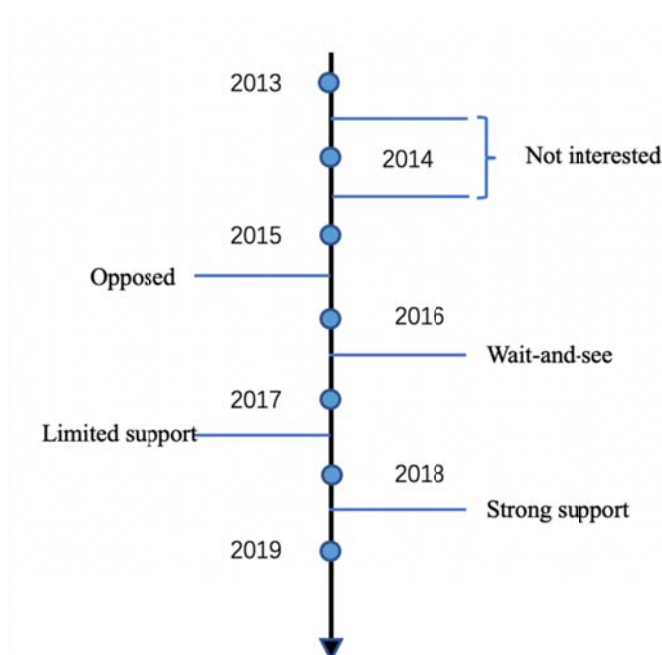


Figure 3 Changes in Japanese Government's Attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative

The current study adopts empirical research and theoretical research. It elaborates from various angles the causes and process of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and how China should deal with Japan's different attitudes. In theoretical research, it summarizes the existing research theories and analytical frameworks, and further proposes a comprehensive analytical framework; in empirical research, the current study analyzes Japan's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the perspectives of the Japanese Government and others, and analyzes the Japanese Government's views and significance on the “Belt and Road” Initiative in a more comprehensive and objective manner.

#### 4. Research Results

Viewing from the news media (as shown in Table 2), the news media response released by Japan is principally in the House of Representatives, and the news release of Japan's diplomatic network on Japan's attitude has increased to some degree since mid-2018. From the angle of time, the Japanese Government has steadily increased the number of government statements from indifference to gradual attention to participation. In 2013 and 2014, the Japanese Government's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative was relatively cold and the relevant reports were few; Beginning in 2015, Japan gradually responded to and paid attention to the “Belt and Road” Initiative. From 2017 to 2019, along with the advancement of China's “Belt and Road” Initiative, Japan's attention to the “Belt and Road” Initiative gradually increased, and the number of government statements gradually increased. Viewing from the title of the article, from the cabinet meeting and the speeches made by members of the House of Representatives to the statements made by Foreign Minister Kono and Prime Minister Abe, it reflects that the “Belt and Road” Initiative occupies a higher status in the formulation of government policies. As suggested in the content of the article, in 2013, 2014 and the early days of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, the Japanese Government believed that the “Belt and Road” Initiative is risky for Japan and even the global economic development, so Japan held a negative attitude; from 2015 to 2017, Japan took a wait-and-see attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative. During this period, as European countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Italy joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and lost to China in the bid for the Indonesia's Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway Project in the second half of 2015, Japan came to realize the sense of crisis and the importance of changing its foreign policy, and gradually recognized the beneficial effects and benefits of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, thus increasing its attention to the “Belt and Road” Initiative. After 2017, the Japanese Government changed its attitude to active cooperation and expressed that it would cooperate actively with China in the “Belt and Road” Initiative region on the premise of meeting international standards. Based on the theme of the response, from the Japanese Government's response to the “Belt and Road” Initiative from 2015 to 2019, it can be perceived that Japan's response to the “Belt and Road” Initiative ranges from the committee members' speeches to the positive responses of Japanese ministers and prime ministers. Thus, the Japanese Government's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative has changed from indifference to opposition, to reservations, to watching from afar, to silent attention and limited support, to strong support and participation in cooperation.

The above result reflects that there are numerous factors influencing Japan's change of attitude. From a domestic point of view, facing the stagnation of Japan's economy, Japan has fully taken into account its own economic interests and made changes to its political and foreign policy of “following the United States”. In the meanwhile, from the angle of international pattern, resulting from the change of East Asian pattern, the rise of China's international status and influence as well as the initial stage of the “Belt and Road” Initiative have also influenced Japan's change of attitude. Through analysis, it can be concluded that Japan's strategic orientation is primarily to ensure the country's own interests. Premised on careful and full consideration of Japan's economic development and its own interests, Japan gradually realizes the necessity and importance of participating in the “Belt and Road” Initiative, adjusts its foreign policy and gradually participates in the “Belt and Road” Initiative. Based on the analysis of a large number of studies, the current

study objectively analyzes the complicated process of Japan's attitude of entanglements and hesitation in facing the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the views of the Japanese Government and other people on this issue, and from the perspectives of politics, economy and changes in the country's status in the context of globalization. From a political point of view, Japan was influenced by the U.S. trade protection policy of the “Trump Regime”. The U.S. withdrew from PPT organization without notice, forcing Japan to adjust its foreign policy to follow the U.S. and to actively seek to enhance diplomatic relations with China as a way to prevent damage to its national interests. From an economic point of view, Japan's economy has been at a standstill for a long time. To meet Japan's demand for expanding overseas markets and to see the initial results of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, Japan decides to actively face the Initiative; viewing from the changes in Japan's status under the global cultural background, along with the changes in the situation in East Asia, Japan has gradually lost its dominant power. China's rising international status and economic strength have gradually posed a threat to Japan's status. Thus, Japan has decided to intensify its political influence in East and Southeast Asia in a bid to contain China by participating in the “Belt and Road” Initiative. Under the combined influence of the above factors, Japan has changed its attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative and resorted to active support.

## 5. Conclusion

From the Japanese Government's speech and other people's points of view, it can be seen that the Japanese Government's entanglement and hesitation with the “Belt and Road” Initiative has changed from initial opposition to watching from afar and finally to active support. Most of the existing studies have explored the changes in Japan's attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative from the objective angles such as economy, politics, diplomacy, etc. The current study collects a large amount of information about the Japanese Government's official position on this Initiative from the websites of the Japanese Cabinet Office, Foreign Affairs Network, House of Representatives, etc., and comprehensively analyzes the different attitudes and coping strategies of the Japanese Government in different periods.

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