

# FRS – Japan Program

## Is there a “China challenge” for multilateral organizations?

Interview with Akio Takahara



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**Question 1: China has been very active to defend the principle of multilateralism. Do you think that the election of a new president in the United States will change China’s posture and discourse on the subject?**

I don’t think so. For China it is most important to improve and at least stabilize its relationship with the United States. The Chinese leaders understand that the Biden administration is inclined to multilateralism, and considers multilateral institutions as a platform to promote cooperation between the two countries. Therefore they will continue emphasizing the importance of multilateralism and invite the United States to join them.

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**Question 2: Some say that in Asia, the economy is “cold” and security is “hot”. Do you think there is a possibility of decoupling between the economy and security in Sino-Japanese relations?**

It is impossible to completely decouple those factors in Japan-China relations. In fact, all the factors are interrelated, including domestic politics and people’s emotions/perceptions about the other side. At the same time, strategic competition and economic cooperation will develop in their own ways. Therefore, we have no choice but to pursue a two-pronged approach to China, that is to compete on the security front and to cooperate on the economic, social and non-traditional security issues.

**Question 3: Can China and its initiatives like the Belt & Road play a stabilizing role at the regional and global levels?**

It is possible, and to some extent it has actually been playing that role in the economic realm for some time. We cannot deny that many economies were helped by the resilience of the Chinese economy after the eruption of the world financial crisis in 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Chinese foreign investment, if managed well, can contribute to the development of the recipient countries and regions. We should not be dazzled by China's discourse, for example their concept of the Belt & Road Initiative. I liken it to a constellation in the night sky that does not exist in reality – only the stars, *i.e.* the projects, are real. In addition, I have the impression that many media in Europe and North America have somehow misunderstood that the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) is a China-centred project. While competition with China cannot but intensify, we need to stay cool and make judgments based on objective observations and analyses.

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